

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8695/21
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Candidates need to allocate a set amount of time to: identifying factors for writing; planning to write; writing; proofreading.
- When reading the questions, candidates should concentrate on the instructions and should carefully deconstruct the question, perhaps underlining key instructions. For example, in **Question 1** the key instruction is to 'write a story', creating a sense of 'suspense and drama'.
- Effective planning, following on from successful interpretation of the question (as above), leads to better crafted and well-shaped responses, therefore minimising irrelevant detail and generic content.
- During the planning stage, candidates should consider the following: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed *form* and *audience* as well as the most appropriate *voice* or *persona* to adopt, the *mood* and *tone* that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable *structure* to employ.
- One key aspect of the most successful and effective writing in **Section A** is a convincing and credible narrator/persona. Key aspects of the most successful and effective writing in **Section B** are a clearly developed, logically sequenced structure, together with an authentic sense of voice.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow easily in long, rambling sentences.
- Candidates must also be aware of the need for correct spelling and paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- In preparing for **Section A**: Imaginative writing, candidates should develop skills in differentiating between 'showing' versus 'telling', to improve both descriptive and narrative skills.
- When preparing for **Section B**: Writing for an audience, candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of newspaper and magazine articles as background preparation. Candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of these texts, as well as of speeches and voiceover scripts.

General comments

Technical accuracy tended to be more secure in **Section B** than in **Section A**, where tense errors and confusions often caused problems. **Section B** responses were also often structured more effectively than **Section A**. It may, therefore, be appropriate to advise candidates to attempt their chosen **Section B** task before their **Section A** task.

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some essays were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Responses that either fall short of the minimum word limit or exceed the maximum are unlikely to form full, well-rounded pieces, or to meet Mark Scheme criteria relating to structure. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to feel a sense of suspense and drama in the story in **Question 1**; appreciate the contrasting perspectives of the two diary entries in **Question 2**; or visualise the light, colour and sound in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to issues related to structural control (for example, an entire piece written as one paragraph), or to the use of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**. Candidates should be encouraged to utilise one main tense in their stories.

The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Elements that could be improved in weaker responses are the use of the conventions of different forms, the ability to establish a mature, credible voice, and the development of a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *As the boat got closer, I recognised his face.* In your writing, create a sense of suspense and drama.

Many stronger candidates wrote stories with a coherent cyclical structure that linked the opening and ending effectively. They often cast the passenger as a long-lost relative or friend who the narrator barely knew. Both suspense and drama were facilitated through the passenger's unknown intentions or motive and how the narrator's fate was inextricably bound up with his/her ensuing actions. Stronger candidates generated drama and suspense by skilfully establishing character and setting right from the opening of the story, for example: 'As the boat got closer, I recognised his face, beaming with happiness and as radiant as the brilliant sunlight. Yet his eyes. They say the eyes are windows onto one's soul. His were obsidian black.' They were usually focused on maintaining suspense and drama and many relished the opportunity to use graphic but appropriate language to instil fear, such as: 'It was the face of a monster, the face of a murderer, the face of death'.

Weaker candidates tended not to make clear what circumstances lay behind the opening sentence and sometimes fell into describing gratuitous violence. At times, candidates took the prompt to create a sense of suspense and drama as an opportunity for descriptive writing rather than narrative, highlighting the importance of paying close attention to the requirements stipulated in the question. Weaker stories often centred on a character being followed without the purpose of the following being identified; these candidates therefore struggled to control a coherent narrative as they explained why the character had become lost. Candidates need to think carefully about their choices of language and the suitability of vocabulary they use. Most candidates wrote complete stories; some wrote story openings, again highlighting the need to read the question carefully.

Question 2 – Contrasting diary entries

Write two contrasting diary entries (300–450 words each) about a public event: the first by an important politician attending this event; and the second by the politician's bodyguard. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere and place to help your reader imagine the scene.

Stronger candidates provided a clear contrast between the two diary entries, while providing a close parallel of the sequence of events that both characters could reflect on. The politician was often focused on how he/she might appear to the public and the bodyguard was understandably more obsessed with security. This was handled insightfully by some candidates, who stressed the ironic contrast between the egotistical ambition of the politician, oblivious to the dangers of violence and even assassination, and the fears of the bodyguard, fully aware of these dangers threatening both himself and his client. In one response, the president's diary entry included: 'I seized every chance I got to press the flesh, demonstrating to all present that I am a man of great respect who will certainly someday be the leader of our great country'. Meanwhile the bodyguard had a different viewpoint: 'Although I was honoured to be selected to serve on the elite security detail, I kept my mind clear and composure cool. To do otherwise would only endanger the life of the President'. Another stronger candidate portrayed a ruthless, uncaring presidential candidate protected by a

security man who saw the politician for what he was and despised him, but conscientiously carried out his nerve-racking duties and even hoped to be retained when his client claimed the presidency.

Weaker candidates struggled where they had little knowledge of what a political event might entail and showed difficulty recreating the atmosphere of such a meeting. Candidates needed to go beyond producing a report of the events of the day, heeding the instruction to create a sense of atmosphere and place. They should also take care not to stretch credibility by including direct contradictions between the two diary entries. The role of the bodyguard seemed sometimes to be seen as an invitation to include violence; where so, this violence needed to suitably fit the events the candidates had outlined and the atmosphere they had created in the rest of their diary entry.

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

Write a descriptive piece called *The Old House*, about an abandoned house in the countryside. In your writing, focus on light, colour and sound to help your reader imagine the scene.

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

Stronger candidates successfully created mood and atmosphere, such as in this example: 'Alone. I was completely alone. There was not a soul to be seen in kilometres. It was like a fairytale, perfect, untouched, eternal.' Many stronger candidates focused their descriptions on a few selected rooms and structured their responses around some key ideas, such as the presence of family photos. One dramatised contrasts in light: 'As you walk into the house, you are hit with a sudden burst of darkness, and light becomes a past thought. As your eyes adjust to the darkness of the house, the snowy white cobwebs that engulf the inside of the house become visible.' Another candidate went further than recording the slow rotting and destruction of the house to evoke the life of the family who once occupied it, with a poignant extra layer of nostalgia and compassion: 'On the floor there was a pale-yellow paper. It read "They came looking for us. Now, no looking back..." The note was written in black ink with child-like letters. It ended with "Family Winston, February 13th 1998."' Another interesting and original approach described the house from the narrative point of view of a dog.

Some weaker candidates went through the prompts in a pedestrian manner, first writing about light, then colour and finally sound. Other weaker answers gave brief descriptions of every room in the house, listing adjectives extensively to produce dry catalogues of colours and sounds. A number of weaker candidates had attempted to enhance the descriptive quality of their writing by using fragmented sentences; in fact, appropriate sentence demarcation would have been a much more effective aid in achieving the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. Candidates should be wary of overusing the continuous present tense, which can result in non-standard, often unclear sentence construction.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Review

You recently visited a local tourist attraction for the first time. Write a review of the tourist attraction, which will be published in your school magazine.

Stronger candidates demonstrated a confident first-person voice and a good understanding of the form of a review. They focused on suitably local attractions and took into account that they were writing for a school magazine, interweaving description and comments of interest to the audience, such as opinions, criticisms and hints for other travellers. They used a range of rhetorical devices such as direct address and anecdotes and often began the review in an engaging way, such as in this example: 'As summer approaches, hundreds and thousands of families will come to spend time at Orlando's famous attraction: Disney World. Considering the high ticket price, is it worth it?' One candidate described an old, historic part of the town that had interesting buildings and restaurants and a cemetery: 'It is almost as if you can feel the historic weight of the place. Statues of angels and heroes and weeping women hover beside you as you wander around'. Another described a tour along a scenic road: 'The stretch through North Carolina is particularly beautiful. The villages are visibly blue and the air crisp, almost as if filled with the scent of spice. The locals are most often kind and helpful, so it's perfect for finding other locations to visit while nearby.'

Weaker candidates tended to recount visits rather than reviewing the attraction, writing a narrative about their day at an amusement park, or listing elements of the attraction without linking or commenting on them. Many weaker candidates wrote in detail about the food available, then the pricing, at times without including

other details about the attraction which would have brought the piece to fulfil the format of a review. Many candidates missed the focus of the question on local attractions, often flying to another country or a different continent.

Question 5 – Contrasting speeches

Two students are going to take part in a debate on whether healthcare should be free for everyone. One of the students supports this idea, and the other student disagrees with it. Write the texts of their speeches (300–450 words each).

The requirement to write two contrasting speeches was met by candidates across the ability range. Weaker candidates struggled where they had little knowledge of how healthcare systems work.

Stronger candidates assumed an authoritative stance and maintained the appropriate form. They used a range of rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, statistics, different sentence structures, direct address and powerful vocabulary. The best responses were formal in tone and convincing, challenging others' opinions in an incisive, yet polite, manner. One candidate started in rhetorical style: 'I stand here in front of you all, an American citizen. I stand here with my constitutional rights like life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But what is life when you are bound to a bed or had to lose a foot because you could not afford healthcare or the medication?' Another asked the audience to use their imagination: 'One second you're driving to work and the next you're being transported by ambulance while the front of your car is in a tree. Yet the only thing you can think of is how you will pay.'

Weaker candidates often wrote their speeches in the form of essays, which resulted in the loss of immediacy that the speeches required. Candidates should be careful not to repeat ideas – or indeed whole sentences – across both parts of the task, varying only the stance. Candidates should ensure that they employ effective paragraphing in their writing, as this will aid the organisation of ideas and arguments. Where candidates ran out of ideas for a viewpoint, there was a tendency to become repetitive and therefore thin on content; effective planning can be used to remedy this, as well as developing the skill of supporting an idea fully rather than relying on a list of lightly supported ideas. Some responses were characterised by a convincing first speech, but a shorter, underdeveloped second speech; this is likely to be remedied by a focus on time management in the exam context.

Question 6 – Voiceover

Write the voiceover script for a TV news report about the problems caused by the amount of traffic in towns and cities. In your writing, create a sense of the scale of the problem and the need for action.

Stronger candidates had a good grasp of what a voiceover should sound like, skilfully combining the description of each of the video shots with the voiceover that accompanied it. They focused closely on certain aspects of the problem of traffic and avoided the potential trap of being too general in their approach. They presented a detailed visual illustration of the hypothetical footage, which was then well supported by the verbal component of the voiceover text. One candidate contrasted traffic control in Germany and Peru, recognising how traffic impacts on developing countries 'and acts as a barrier against social and economic growth.'

The format of a 'voiceover' was something weaker candidates seemed underprepared for, which often led to responses not being fully appropriate to the task; candidates need to have a good level of familiarity with the format and purpose of all text types that can come up in this Paper in order to be able to use appropriate form and content clearly. For example, some candidates wrote an article about traffic in cities, listing problems and possible resolutions rather than producing content fitting for a voiceover script.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story opening

Write the opening of a story called *Setting Off*, about an expedition which has taken many months to prepare for. In your writing, create a sense of excitement and anticipation.

The word ‘expedition’ was understood by the majority of candidates, although a small number interpreted this as ‘exhibition’ and wrote about preparing to exhibit artwork at a gallery.

Stronger candidates produced some lively pieces of writing, choosing to write about expeditions ranging from trips into space and mountain climbing to tracing a family tree. Some showed a sense of enjoyment as they planned for a gap year with friends, sometimes focusing their attention on a strong opening by communicating immediately a sense of purpose: ‘Months and months of gruelling hard work and planning has finally come to pass. The exhilaration and excitement thrumming through my veins promises an experience for the books. It will be an adventure of a lifetime.’

Weaker candidates often wrote about a normal holiday rather than specifically about an exhibition. Some candidates over-emphasised the preparation aspect of the question, never quite communicating a sense of excitement. For example, they often produced accounts of packing for a holiday and going to the airport, needing to provide more of an insight into the narrator’s emotions. Where others demonstrated that they had a good story they wanted to tell, they needed to make sure that they linked their story solidly to the question.

Question 2 – Contrasting diary entries

Write two contrasting diary entries (300–450 words each): the first by a teacher on his first day of work; and the second by the same teacher on his last day of work before retirement. In your writing, create a sense of outlook and mood.

In most cases contrast in voice and tone was managed well. Stronger candidates produced some very realistic and sympathetic portrayals of a teacher’s life and of the irritating sets of behaviours exhibited by students. They often communicated a positive and heart-warming image of the teaching profession and a fondness for their teachers. They also used a more mature voice in the second diary entry, to provide contrast. One candidate created a clear sense of mood in the second diary entry: ‘I thought about how much I had changed as a person. From an impatient, nervous and timid teacher I turned into a confident, assertive and patient person. As I walked out of the gate for the last time, my journey as a teacher came to an end.’ One of the most striking retirement day entries achieved a sense of outlook and mood through symbolism: ‘The classroom seemed dull. My desk had lost its shine over the past thirty years [...]. The lesson bell rang for one last time.’ Another strong candidate used subtle observations to highlight the passage of time: he had been held up on his way to school on his first morning by an anti-apartheid demonstration and had later been given directions to his classroom by a tall blonde colleague. On his last day the woman he bumped into in the corridor now had grey hairs amongst the blond ones and was his wife; his favourite student, who was helping him to pack up his possessions, was a girl who would not have been permitted to enter the school at the time of the demonstration which had delayed him on his first day.

Weaker candidates dwelt too much on going through morning preparations in the first entry, and sometimes the second as well. Typically the young teachers were full of high hopes of moulding their students into upright citizens; they were apprehensive on their first day, and met with some disobedience and hostility in the classroom; then on the last day the retiree was sad to leave the school, had become deeply attached to the students, and was given a fond farewell by both students and colleagues. Candidates should note that work in the top two bands of the Mark Scheme will be 'imaginative', and 'possibly original' in the very top band.

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

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

Most candidates were able to picture the required sound, movement and colour effects. Many candidates used a narrative frame or a single person's perspective, which worked well in cases where the focus of the piece remained descriptive.

Stronger candidates often wrote from their own experience and were able to write evocatively about the crowd at a sporting event, a music festival, a train station, a national celebration or a protest. Stronger candidates focused on specific people within the crowd, incorporating the elements of sound, movement and colour in a subtle way, producing an effective descriptive piece. One candidate described the crowd at a music festival, giving the crowd a sense of identity: 'The noise of the crowd was deafening. It was like watching an angry ocean in a violent storm. The lights flickered furiously in a mix of colours.' Others took an imaginative approach such as a musician looking out at the crowd, or a bird's eye view of lunch time in a school cafeteria, with the focus on a student attempting to navigate his way through a queue in an attempt to get food.

Weaker candidates often descended into narrative about going to an event, and lost focus on the crowd by describing the event itself. Others utilised fictional sources such as zombie apocalypse films, fantasy or medieval battles and were often plot-driven rather than a deliberate presentation of apt descriptive details. A number of weaker candidates had attempted to enhance the descriptive quality of their writing by using fragmented sentences; in fact, appropriate sentence demarcation would have been a much more effective aid in achieving the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. Candidates should be wary of overusing the continuous present tense, which can result in non-standard, often unclear sentence construction.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Article for school website

In class, you have been discussing whether it is a good idea to take a year off from formal education before going to university. Write an article for your school website about the pros and cons of taking a 'gap year'.

This question produced many responses which showed clear engagement with the topic. Cultural influences made a big difference to what people thought, as in some countries it seems to be an indication of failure, as you may only have a gap year if you need to improve your exam marks. In other countries there was a big fear of being a year behind their contemporaries. Others considered a gap year as an opportunity to mature and gain life experience that helps people to be confidently independent and to focus on their studies once they start university.

Stronger candidates used a wide range of rhetorical devices and some showed cleverness with headings, thus really focusing attention on the school website audience. Effective sub-headings included: 'The Brain Break', 'You jumped off the train', 'Zero Funding' and 'The Nothing Gap'. Many responses were lively and entertaining and often took into account the differing views of teachers, peers and parents. Such responses had a good sense of the audience for this task, adopting an appropriately informal style, often with an effective opening, such as in this example: 'Seven years of primary school, plus five years of high school, then four years of university, then work until retirement. This is the way society has structured our lives. What if you could choose to slow life down to catch your breath before whizzing on to the next chapter? Enter the gap year.'

Weaker candidates mainly listed pros and cons and often needed more balance in their approach. Many had an extreme take on the cons of taking a gap year, with visions of candidates falling into organised crime and generally dissolute behaviour; such views were difficult to support.

Question 5 – Contrasting reviews

A new luxury hotel has recently been built in an old part of your town. Write two contrasting reviews (300–450 words each) of the hotel: one praising it, and the other criticising it.

Stronger candidates clearly focused on a review form, providing personal comment on the hotel and its amenities. Where candidates connected the location of the new building being in the old part of the town, it gave them more to say, both negatively (for example, the new business was ruining existing local businesses), and positively (for example, this would be a boost to the local economy). There were two different and equally valid approaches to this question: first, the alleged advantages of resurrecting an old and stagnant area with new energy and employment for locals, as against the discrepancy between a posh and tasteless edifice totally out of keeping with the old but culturally rich area where it was situated, driving out local businesses and staffed by outsiders; second, details of a stay by a guest and what each experienced. Some stronger candidates mixed both elements. One candidate enthused: 'Oh what joy it brings me to see new life injected back into this old town! We have not had a new building or new infrastructure set up in our humble town for years!' Another writer was less than impressed: 'The receptionists greet you with a distant glare with a hint of glee. Not to mention the tantalizing array of breakfast choices; a beige semi-fluid with a white blob floating is supposed to be the early morning drink to keep the gears turning.'

Weaker candidates adopted a list-like approach, providing a tour of the hotel, sometimes after a lengthy prologue detailing travel to the hotel. A significant number of weaker candidates wrote essays, rather than reviews, thus falling short of the requirements of the question. Elements that one would expect to be incorporated into a review include mention of the hotel facilities and comment on them, and offering advice to readers.

Question 6 – Speech

Your headteacher has asked you to give a speech to your year group about a free-time activity that you are very good at. Write the text of the speech. In your writing, create a sense of enthusiasm for the activity and a desire to share this enthusiasm with others.

Candidates who selected this question dealt with a wide variety of activities, from belly dancing, surfing, fishing, baking and yoga to reading, acting, singing and listening to music.

Stronger candidates used a range of rhetorical devices to engage the audience, many beginning their responses with a rhetorical question. They adopted a motivational tone with suitably emotive language; they thoughtfully explained how the activity helped them get through stressful study for exams or difficulty in forming friendships and were very encouraging towards others wanting to take up the interest. Better responses outlined, for example, the benefits of eating healthily, challenging oneself and persevering in difficult situations. They also provided relevant information to reinforce their arguments with claims about improvement in mental health and academic achievement. Many of these stronger candidates wrote from experience, which gave their speeches an authentic feeling. One candidate wrote about drumming: 'It is a fantastic form of catharsis and can help to relieve stress and anxiety. The drums can speak when you cannot.' For another, who had suffered a number of personal problems, running was a fix-all cure. Others wrote about volunteering, with strong conviction: 'Through my free time activity I am able to have a social, economical and environmental impact to the people living in various communities. Do we not want to be the reason for change? Do we not want to help others in need? Do we not want to be proud of something we have achieved?'

Weaker speeches needed more structural attention. They often gave long lists of necessary equipment or wrote about the minutiae of the rules of the game. In many cases it was apparent that candidates would have done better to have written about an activity they were familiar with. For example, cooking was a popular choice, but where candidates made little reference to the process of cooking their speech became less persuasive.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *The door opened slowly and silently, and he knew he had just one chance to escape.* In your writing, create a sense of suspense and drama.

Stronger candidates were successful in creating suspense and drama and incorporated the prompt successfully, through the use of intense moments developed through descriptive details. Many stories immediately plunged the reader into a menacing atmosphere, often where a character had been trapped, either in a building or as a prisoner. For example, one candidate continued the story thus: 'His legs ached as the mellow chime of his ankle chains echoed throughout the hallway, their heavy metal pulling him back in a beckoning call to return.' One well-told story was about a black slave escaping from a cotton-picking plantation, against a background of cruelty and abuse. Another told of an attempt to escape from a Nazi concentration camp; this response managed to include flashbacks of the man's past and family history. One very imaginative response was written from the point of view of a dog which had been locked up and was now free, with the character's voice becoming gradually apparent during the narrative.

Weaker responses were often characterised by over-complicated storylines which were not controlled. Some candidates needed a stronger link between their story and the line quoted in the question. Stories often would have benefitted from a better sense of an ending or resolution; such stories tended to go from one minor climax to another, which compromised the building of suspense. Most candidates wrote complete stories, although some were only story openings, highlighting the need for candidates to read the question thoroughly.

Question 2 – Contrasting descriptive pieces

Write two contrasting descriptive pieces (300–450 words each): the first about a beautiful remote beach; and the second about the same beach, ten years later, after it has been developed for tourism. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere and place.

Most candidates managed this quite well; sometimes an element of narrative was used effectively to structure the description and in the second piece many took an opportunity to make environmental points.

Stronger candidates provided a clear sense of contrasting atmosphere, with several recalling – with convincing nostalgia – a childhood family visit to 'their' beach and giving an appropriately heartfelt contrast in later years. One effective description described, 'the water glistening with an impossibly gorgeous white-blue, moves with the elegant grace of a ballet dancer.' The same candidate contrasted the atmosphere effectively in the second piece, beginning: 'And ten years later [...] there are throngs of people roaming the pier, looking about in wonder. Restaurants and stores line the board walk; lobster dinners, hoodies and caps; you name it, you can buy it.'

Weaker candidates struggled to write descriptively for the required three hundred words, sometimes descending into a narrative account of visits to the beach. Others needed to give more descriptive detail in

the first piece and repeated ideas in the second piece, struggling to develop their description beyond the sea being polluted and the beach being littered with plastic.

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

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

Stronger candidates successfully created a sense of atmosphere, such as in this example where the writer envisaged a kind of combat between the city and nature. Interspersed with descriptions of the sun as it was sinking were references to the indifferent city: 'Still the traffic bustled; everyone down there was unaware of the great display in the sky above. Still the city below denied Nature's call to rest. Like a heart it never stops beating even when the rest of the body wishes for stillness and rest.' Another candidate structured their response effectively by describing a city tour: 'Now you're on a bridge stretching from one bank of the river to another. It is dark; there are lights of all colours lighting up the river below.' Another effective approach visualised a rush hour scene which changed into an exciting night-time entertainment scene, with appropriate descriptions of the changing colour of the sun.

Weaker candidates tended to focus on the happenings in the city once the sun had set, rather than describing the effects that the moment of the sun setting had upon the city. For example, one candidate went to a great deal of trouble to describe the events in a nightclub, which took place after dark, when the sun had already set. The list-like approach to description made some responses seem a little laboured. A number of weaker candidates had attempted to enhance the descriptive quality of their writing by using fragmented sentences; in fact, appropriate sentence demarcation would have been a much more effective aid in achieving the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. Candidates should be wary of overusing the continuous present tense, which can result in non-standard, often unclear sentence construction. Over-elaborate language, descriptions filled with clashing imagery, and elaborate names for colour sometimes made it hard to visualise the scene being described.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Magazine article

In class, you have been discussing the importance of learning foreign languages. Write an article called *Let's Communicate*, which will be published in your school magazine. In your writing, create a sense of the benefits of being able to communicate in other languages.

This question produced many responses which showed a good level of knowledge about the topic and clear engagement with it. Most candidates wrote in an appropriate form and many used subheadings, utilised a positive tone of voice and used effective vocabulary to appeal to their audience.

Stronger candidates gave very good examples of how languages were useful to them, or could be in the future. Many examples seemed to come from real experience and this gave them substance. Several strong candidates mentioned the multinational nature of the school they attended and how important it was to try to welcome new arrivals from overseas with an attempt to greet them in their own language. A number of stronger candidates communicated quite passionate feelings about the importance of language and cultural awareness, as expressed clearly in this response: 'Not only does it aid you in communicating with other people but it also helps to bring people together. It breaks down the wall that separates people. It builds up a community where everyone can come together as a society.' Another candidate was more blunt, but had an effective tone: 'It makes you look cool! And appear as someone who is knowledgeable too. Who does not want that?'

Weaker responses were vague and lacked examples or relied on one or two anecdotes to support an argument. Others touched on some pertinent topics, such as language and culture, dying languages and the need to preserve them, or improved brain function; it is important to develop discussion of such topics rather than mention them fleetingly.

Question 5 – Contrasting letters

A local newspaper recently published an article about plans to build a road directly through the middle of a large park in your city. Readers were invited to write letters to respond to this article. Write two contrasting letters (300–450 words each): one supporting the plans; and the other opposing them.

Most candidates gave an equal commitment to both the positive and negative responses. Stronger candidates sometimes rose to the challenge of adding depth to the discussion by adopting personae from different backgrounds and age groups, who might be expected to take opposite views: for example, a student, an older resident or parent and an environmental campaigner. One objector to the scheme was horrified by the proposal, writing: 'Cornwell Park, enjoyed by all, no matter what age, culture or background, is a place where an individual seeks peace, satisfaction, relaxation and security in one of the few tranquil areas within our now sprawling metropolitan area.' Others decried the appalling traffic congestion, and welcomed the new road which would alleviate it. Questions about safety, the environment and conservation were also raised by many.

Weaker candidates often struggled to organise their letters for this discursive task, mirroring content in the two letters; this produced some differing perspective but needed to differ in voice as well.

Question 6 – Speech

A film director has used your school building to make a film, in which some students had minor acting roles. The film director wants to give a speech to thank the staff and students at the school. Write the text for the speech. In your writing, focus on the ways in which the school and students contributed to the success of the film.

Stronger candidates often placed people who had to be thanked in certain categories, where their efforts and contributions could be mentioned collectively before certain individuals were singled out. One particularly strong and imaginative response managed to show appreciation while barely using the word 'thanks': 'Accustomed as I am to working alongside Hollywood stars, the school made me think humbly of where every director starts – as just an ordinary person.' Cleaning staff were praised for uncomplainingly going beyond their normal duties in clearing up after a scene which had involved a food fight. Teaching staff were complimented for organising students who had undertaken minor roles and those students were shown appreciation by being told that their names would appear among the credits of the film. Some candidates used their knowledge of cinematography and drama, and were able to develop their speeches with detail and imagination.

Weaker candidates had difficulty focussing the thanks given, perhaps as a result of finding it hard to imagine the roles the school might have played in the film. Such speeches often consisted of giving thanks to a long list of individuals for their help in making the film, without providing relevant detail and therefore becoming repetitive.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or passage in considerable detail.

General comments

In its final appearance on the syllabus, the selected poems of Elizabeth Jennings attracted a limited number of answers, but all other texts had been studied widely and attracted a range of responses. The most successful answers to **(a)** questions used detailed knowledge of the texts to support their points, including secure references and apt quotations, to establish and develop a clear argument in response to the question. Successful responses to **(b)** questions looked in great detail at the writing of the selected passage or poem, considering the effects of the writers' choices of language, imagery and structure. Good answers often placed the extract within the context of the wider text in the cases of prose and drama, in order to inform the discussion of the passage. Candidates who relied on narrative summary and paraphrase indicated their knowledge of the content of texts and passages, but in order to achieve marks in the higher bands of the Mark Scheme they needed to demonstrate understating of the writers' methods.

Question specific comments

Question 1

Robert Frost: Selected Poems

- (a)** There were very few responses to the question on Frost's presentation of rural people; among these, poems such as 'The Ax-Helve', 'The Death of the Hired Man' and 'Mending Wall' were the most successfully explored. Some candidates focused on the characters themselves, their attitudes and actions, while more successful answers considered carefully how these aspects were communicated through Frost's choices of language, imagery and structure.
- (b)** There was a larger number of answers on 'The Wood-Pile', though candidates seemed to lack confidence in their approach and there was evidence of some uncertainty. Candidates tended to discuss the bird and the wood-pile itself, but for more insightful analyses they needed to pay more attention to the way the poem is structured. Some assumed that the wood had been left by

someone departing for war; the few candidates who considered the speaker's mention of 'Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks' – who had constructed the pile and left it – managed to pick up on Frost's philosophical conclusion about the unexpected discovery.

Question 2

Elizabeth Jennings: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Most candidates showed their understanding of the central concern of the poem and how the contrast between the speaker's age and that of the young people shaped this. Some essays demonstrated thoughtful consideration of how Jennings characterises the speaker but there was also some misunderstanding among less confident candidates of how she characterises herself in adolescence in comparison with the young people she observes, overlooking such language choices as 'huddled' and 'lop-sided'. Many candidates missed opportunities to analyse the structure of the poem, which offers examples of skilful use of caesura and enjambment, the caesuras emphasising the contrast between the 'young ones' and the speaker in stanza 2, for example.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) Candidates made some thoughtful selections of poems for the question on the presentation of family relationships, with most candidates choosing poems such as 'Song', 'On My First Daughter', 'The Forsaken Wife' and 'Sons, Departing'. Most demonstrated sound knowledge of their chosen poems and Examiners were pleased to see many essays which pursued a clear line of argument. Candidates often contrasted the forceful admonishment of the faithless husband in 'The Forsaken Wife' with the presentation of a more faithful, mutual relationship in one of the others. The strongest responses demonstrated that the candidates knew the poems well enough to support points with quotations, which were then used for analytical comment.
- (b) Fewer candidates opted to respond to the question on Charlotte Mew's poem 'Rooms' and many of those who did clearly found it a challenging poem. Some candidates noted the different locations of the rooms and descriptions of them, particularly the 'little damp room with the seaweed smell'. Many took the idea of death literally and interpreted the poem as the speaker's lament for all the lovers in different places who have died; candidates would have done well to show recognition of the poem's treatment of time, the changing nature of relationships and the movement towards eventual literal death.

Question 4

E.M. Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) There were few responses to this question. While a number of candidates explored women in general, and there was some acknowledgement of the question of social progress, fewer tackled this directly and purposefully, needing a higher degree of engagement with the cue quotation. Consideration of this would have led answers in a productive direction and could have shaped a response with appropriate references to aspects of the novel.
- (b) In exploring the presentation of Mr Wilcox in this passage, not many candidates showed a clear understanding of the context and subject of the extract. Surprisingly few essays mentioned Leonard Bast, which limited the scope of the discussion. While candidates often selected details from the passage which were relevant to the question, they often needed to take a clearer direction. Essays included some comments on Mr Wilcox's thoughts and dialogue, but seldom discussion of the final paragraph meant that many essays overlooked what was potentially the richest section of the excerpt in the light of the Question. A small number of candidates were able to examine Forster's authorial intrusion and its effects on the reader's understanding of Mr Wilcox.

Question 5

Andrea Levy: *Small Island*

- (a) Examiners saw some sound responses to this question, which explored the contrast between the immigrants' expectations and the reality of England effectively. Some essays contained detailed references to Hortense's imagined picture of England and several noted the irony of the term 'mother country'. Several episodes from the novel were used to support the idea of the immigrants' eventual disillusionment, including Gilbert's role as a driver and his difficulty in gaining employment, while many essays referred to Hortense's experience in the Education Office. Some responses also drew useful distinction between the voices of Hortense and Gilbert in how they voice their attitudes to England, commenting on Hortense's early snobbery and Gilbert's weary acceptance.
- (b) Candidates who were not certain about the identity of the passage's narrator, or where the passage is set, struggled to respond successfully to this question. More confident responses recognised Bernard's experience in India and some wrote well about the imagery of the passage and the way it presents the unstoppable force of the riot. Others commented on the racism of the narrative, and some strong work was occasionally seen on the distinctive shaping of Bernard's narrative voice, with its clipped sentences and sense of uncertainty.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) Responses to this question, using stories such as 'The Hollow of the Three Hills', 'How It Happened', 'Sandpiper' and 'The Rain Horse', were often limited to description of the settings of the chosen stories. More confident answers focused clearly on how those settings are presented, through the tone of the narration or the main characters' responses to them, so that, for example, the way real settings merge into metaphor was discussed with 'Sandpiper' and 'The Rain Horse'. Other essays considered the role the setting had to play in the development of the story, considering aspects such as the gothic supernatural qualities of 'The Hollow of the Three Hills' and the focus on technology with the setting of 'How It Happened' being a new and powerful motor car.
- (b) Most answers to this task demonstrated secure focus on the question and passage, usually with balanced treatment of the narrator and Mr Wills. Knowledge of the wider story was deployed usefully to show how the characters are presented here in contrast to earlier in the story. There was focus on the narrator's bravery and his respectful approach to Mr Wills despite his earlier fear, while candidates also picked up on the softening of Mr Wills' character, with his 'hand on my shoulder' and the repetition of 'Both to blame'. Many essays commented thoughtfully on the narrative viewpoint and paid close attention to the language and structure of dialogue in the passage. Some also looked at the narrator's response to Willadean and her symbolic function in the story.

Question 7

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

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) Nearly all candidates answering on Shakespeare chose this question and most recognised the parallel created between Falstaff and King Henry in their relationships with Prince Hal. Some essays explored Falstaff's comic version of a fatherly role, showing irresponsibility but affection for the Prince, while also looking at Shakespeare's presentation of a more distant, dutiful relationship between Hal and his real father. Most noted the way that the contrast is resolved at the end of the play, with the Prince responding to his royal duties and rejecting Falstaff after his father's death. Answers which were able to draw on details from the play and use quotation to support their points were much more successful than those which relied on summaries of characters.

- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 9

Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) There were few responses to this question and not many were very successful. While candidates were able to state what Gar's hopes and doubts about the future are, fewer were able to discuss ways in which those are presented by Friel. Some candidates wrote appropriately about Public and Private Gar, with Private challenging some of Public's optimism. Many candidates missed the opportunity to consider the songs, role plays and responses to other characters.
- (b) The passage question was very popular. Candidates choosing it showed their awareness of the importance of Kate and Gar's relationship with her in the play. Most focused on the contrast between Public's 'sweet Katie Doogan' and Private's 'Aul bitch', which highlights Gar's mixed emotions. Fewer were clear about Friel's introduction of the memory scene as a flashback, but there was some observant writing on the contrast between Public's and Kate's dialogue, with Public's hyperbolic romance in 'I'm mad about you!' and Kate's practical 'We could never live on that. [...] Be sensible.' A few looked at the scene in more detail, picking out some of the stage directions, with 'softly' and 'They stop and kiss' creating the romantic tone, combined with Public's refusal to acknowledge Kate's doubts with repeated 'Mmmm'. The importance to the final stage direction, emphasising the difference between the two characters with Public's attempts to kiss Kate, but she 'avoid[ing] him' was often noted.

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Question specific comments 9695/32

Question 1

Robert Frost: Selected Poems

- (a)** While candidates often chose appropriate poems, such as 'The Sound of Trees', 'Mending Wall', 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening' and 'The Wood-Pile', they needed to pay attention to the question's focus on the presentation of landscape, rather than writing generally about the poems. Poem choices such as 'Home Burial' and 'The Ax-Helve', where landscape features fleetingly if at all, proved problematic in terms of producing a successful response to the question posed. Successful answers looked at Frost's presentation of hills, trees, undergrowth and the earth itself, and considered the response to those elements of landscape by the speaker of each poem.
- (b)** This proved to be a very popular question which prompted some very strong responses. The most successful answers moved from the physical experience of the camp to the spiritual with some

confidence and some precise selection of detail. While some insisted that the speaker is Frost himself, many wrote well on his creation of the speaker, a thoughtful, educated wanderer, noting his self-denigration in 'just a tramp'. Essays often showed some thoughtful focus on the language of the poem, including the presentation of the speaker's camp under the 'juniper' and its balance of comfort and discomfort. Many wrote well on the epiphany on seeing 'the largest firedrop' and his sense of superiority because he has seen it directly, not 'through a rusty screen'. There were a few comments on the epistolary form of the poem. Many responses would have been improved had they included discussion of the poem's structure. There was some thoughtful engagement with the way Frost characterises the speaker, with the occasional suggestion that both tramp and farmer are versions of Frost himself, the letter representing the poet's internal debate.

Question 2

Elizabeth Jennings: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Many candidates found this an accessible poem, most demonstrating sound understanding of the central concern with the relationship. Some essays showed sensitive appreciation of the presentation of the distance between father and son through the father's voice. Thoughtful candidates commented on the neutral quality of the word 'house', the simile of 'strangers' and the presence of 'Silence'. The image of the 'prodigal' was well understood and there was some subtle discussion of the use of the subjunctive in 'I would forgive him'. Some candidates grasped the nuances of the characterisation of the father in the second half of the poem, including the poignancy of the 'empty hand' in the penultimate line. A few candidates were able to discuss structure thoughtfully, often interpreting Jennings' tight regular stanzas as a method of indicating controlled emotion.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, with those candidates opting for it choosing such poems as 'The Uncles', 'The Migrant', 'On My First Daughter', 'The Forsaken Wife' and 'Death'. Where descriptions of the particular characters made for responses at the weaker end, stronger responses focused on presentation and showed how the poem's language and structure characterised the speaker or subject.
- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper and nearly all candidates found something interesting to say about the poem. The poem is not, in fact, about boys going off to war, but this reading was taken by many candidates and can be supported by careful interpretation of some of the poem's language and imagery. However, in many cases, the reading was simply imposed without looking at the poem for support, which led to limited and rather skewed essays. Stronger and more sensitive accounts of the poem read it as a description of a moment where a parent recognises that children will leave the safety and security of the family to make their own way in the world, and that part of being a parent is to accept that inevitable sense of loss. This led to some interesting comments on the emphasis on departure created by the comma in the title, on the 'hedges' representing both confinement and protection, and on the limitless and possibly dangerous possibilities of adulthood in the 'empty air', 'torn clouds' and 'Haphazard world'. The inevitability of departure was seen in 'the steadiness/of their retreating footfalls' and 'their walk was one-dimensional, and final'. Some thoughtful candidates suggested a sense of hope, in that the 'clear and blond' heads, suggestive of youth and innocence, become 'sunlit points' and a 'certain focus' – although the sons will leave to make their own life, they will remain in the parent's eye.

Question 4

E.M. Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) Responses to this question often showed evidence of detailed knowledge of the novel, with stronger essays considering a range of women, including Ruth Wilcox and Jacky, who provide interesting contrasts in role with the Schlegels. In different ways, these two characters are shown to accept the status quo for women, especially with regard to their relationships with men. Answers focusing just on Margaret and Helen often still demonstrated useful understanding of how Forster

creates comparisons and contrasts between the sisters. Candidates could have made more use of the cue quotation to shape the argument explicitly in response to the question.

- (b) There were many answers to the passage on Margaret's and Henry's marriage and they varied widely. On the one hand, some candidates wrote of the marriage as a perfect romantic union, missing the ironic tone of Forster's narrative; others railed against Margaret's abandonment of feminist principle in marrying Wilcox, again overlooking some of the subtleties of the extract. Many essays were thoughtful and focused on Forster's use of different perspectives in the extract. There were comments on the author's ironic presentation of 'our hero and heroine', while the presentation of the understated marriage ceremony was successfully explored by some candidates, focusing on its 'quiet' nature and as something Margaret had to 'go through'. The 'colourless refreshments', as well as the lack of music (which Margaret loved), were seen as lacklustre and the honeymoon, characterised by such language as 'reliable', 'failed' and 'disappointed', was also seen as uncharacteristic of this supposedly happy time. There were also thoughtful comments on Howard's End being used 'as a warehouse', showing a disconnection of values between Margaret and Henry. Some noted that the reasons for Helen's retreat become apparent later in the novel and those few candidates who focused on the details of the two paragraphs on Mr Wilcox at the end of the passage found much to discuss, often registering shock at the apparently subservient nature of Margaret, responding to his 'call' and 'ready to do what he wished'.

Question 5

Andrea Levy: *Small Island*

- (a) Most essays on this question showed a good knowledge of the novel and candidates were able to select suitable characters and episodes to illustrate the points made. Queenie was often seen as the key exception to general attitudes of the British towards immigrants, welcoming them into her lodgings and giving further welcome to Michael, though thoughtful responses pointed out that she still holds prejudiced views, noted in her early patronising of Hortense. Queenie was effectively contrasted with Bernard and Mr Todd, while other candidates referred to episodes with American soldiers and Gilbert's and Hortense's attempts to gain work, while many candidates noted the prevalence of racism is the reason for Queenie giving away her baby at the end of the novel.
- (b) More successful answers on the passage identified ways in which Levy creates a contrast in the first paragraph between before and after the bombing, specifically 'lulled drowsy' and 'kip in Armageddon'. Other candidates noted the use of dialogue to dramatise the effects of the bombing, picking out the warden's disorientation, and such metaphors as 'the displaced intestines of buildings', presenting the ravaged buildings as bodies. There were useful comments on the verbs used by Levy, such as 'Coughing', 'spewing', 'teetering', 'gushing', 'crunching', giving Queenie's narration its characteristic vigour. Some well-developed responses noted the passage's development, moving from the physically ruined city buildings to the lost and bereft people in the classroom, trying to negotiate their way through official bureaucracy while dispossessed of everything. Answers which relied on narrative summary or paraphrase showed knowledge of the content of the passage but missed the many opportunities to explore the details of Levy's writing in the excerpt.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) The most popular pairing of stories for this question was 'The Destroyers' with 'The Taste of Watermelon', though other stories used by candidates included 'How it Happened', 'The Rain Horse', 'The Hollow of Three Hills' and 'Elephant', though it has to be said that some of these latter choices lent themselves less successfully to fruitful discussion. 'The Destroyers' provided plenty of opportunity for candidates to explore the presentation of violent actions, which they achieved with care and meticulousness. This paired well with 'The Taste of Watermelon', as both stories explore the central characters' desire for acceptance within a peer group. Explicit descriptions of violent acts were closely discussed in some cases, with some essays analysing the boys' destruction of the watermelon as similar to the physical abuse of a human being with 'knife penetrated', meat muddled' and 'scattered seed'. The unconscious role of the lorry driver providing the *coup de grâce* after the boys' preparation in 'The Destroyers' was noted, while some candidates recalled the stages of the crashing vehicle in 'How it Happened' in impressive detail.

- (b) While Examiners saw a number of essays which presented a view that the father in 'The Fly in the Ointment' is a caring and sensitive parent, most focused clearly on his inconsistencies, with some detailed examination of his 'two faces'. Strong answers looked carefully at the ways in which Pritchett presents these two different sides of the father, noting the contrast between 'soft warm and [...] innocent' and 'shrewd, scared and hard'. They also noted the son's response, as he 'leaned back' when his father 'leaned forward' and many saw a self-destructiveness in the father's work ethic, greed and self-deception. Candidates who were alert to detail picked up how his deceptive appearance is emphasised by his 'smiling' 'waistcoat', 'easy coat' and 'legs', the image confirmed with the deceptive 'winks of light on the shining shoes'. Much attention was paid to the dialogue, considering the imperatives in the father's speech, his claims for himself and his denigration of his son.

Question 7

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

- (a) Among the small number of answers to this question were several which were built on a misunderstanding of the wording – some candidates wrote about Simon Pilkings's relationships with various other characters in the play, whereas the question was asking specifically about the presentation of the relationship between Simon Pilkings and his wife Jane Pilkings. Those essays which were correctly focused recognised the differentiation Soyinka makes in the characterisation of the two: Simon Pilkings is presented as a traditional, and rather ignorant, colonial officer, while his wife has a greater degree of understanding and respect for the indigenous people under her husband's jurisdiction. Both, however, lack full empathy and understanding, which Soyinka makes plain as the play develops. Strong answers were secure and well supported with appropriate references to different scenes.
- (b) In most, but not all, cases, candidates demonstrated an understanding and appreciation of the comedy of this scene, as well as the political points made in it. These responses were often lively and interesting in their engagement with the passage and there was some strong understanding of tone and of the way the girls mock Amusa (especially the 'Yessir!' moment), with some very apt references to the wider text to show more developed understanding of how well the girls grasp Amusa's role. There was appreciation of the description of him as 'a rather faithful ox' and perceptive appreciation of ways in which the girls' dialogue captures the diction and tone of the colonists, with phrases such as 'teeny-weeny', 'old chap' and 'by golly' while revealing their awareness of the racist attitudes of the English. Stronger answers looked at the change of mood towards the end of the extract and the strength of the girls as they drive Amusa from their territory with their assertive tone in lines 65–67.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) There were few answers to this question, usually focussing on the rebels. The characters were described, with some account of the grievances which make them disloyal. For higher reward, candidates needed to pay more sustained attention to Shakespeare's dramatic presentation.
- (b) The few responses to this question showed some knowledge of Falstaff's character and ways in which it is developed in the given scene. Candidates who were aware of the context commented on the easy nature of his capture of Colville, which he tries to aggrandise to Prince John. Most focused primarily on Falstaff's soliloquy, and his immediate dismissal of Prince John as a 'young sober-blooded boy' whose character is the antithesis of Falstaff's own. The details of his praise of 'sherris' would repay careful discussion, which along with close examination of the speech would make for a strong response. Weaker essays relied on loose summary and paraphrase.

Question 9

Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Candidates who chose this question clearly knew the play but often relied on listing the various attractions of America which Gar anticipates, rather than going into the details of the writing. The small number of candidates who paid attention to the 'in what ways and with what effects' part of the question wrote effectively about the interactions between Private and Public, the visit of Gar's

aunt and the role plays and songs which punctuate the play. A few sensitive responses also discussed ways in which Friel suggests that Gar has doubts about emigrating.

- (b) Candidates usually discussed this interaction between Private and Public successfully, analysing the depiction of Gar through the language of the dialogue and the stage directions. They noted the comic vengeance in the over-salting of the pollock and the energetic sequence of role plays shared between Public and Private. Several candidates noted the childishness of the pretences themselves, as well as the accompanying dialogue such as the machine gun imitation and 'Yip-eeeeee!' and 'Ya-hooooo!' Some thoughtful responses suggested that the sheer energy and playfulness of the scene are in themselves signs of Gar's doubts about emigration – a shield to cover his anxieties, more closely revealed in the final sketch of Public being questioned at the border post by Private, despite the jokes.

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Question specific comments 9695/33

Question 1

Robert Frost: Selected Poems

- (a)** There were plenty of poems to choose from to discuss Frost's presentation of rural life; candidates tended to opt for 'Mowing', 'Mending Wall', 'The Ax-Helve', 'The Death of the Hired Man', 'After Apple Picking' and 'Out, Out -'. Most candidates showed appropriate knowledge of the poems and there were some detailed responses, using well-selected quotations to support the points made. Some candidates looked at the work involved in rural life, examining Frost's depiction of the challenges and rewards of rural labour. Other candidates wrote on Frost's philosophy of living the rural life and on his biography, rather than the more successful approach of focussing on the details of the writing of the poems.

- (b) Although there were examples of confusion, with some candidates unable to identify the 'resurrected tree' as a pole supporting telephone wires, most candidates wrote with some understanding. Responses which explored Frost's methods in detail were very successful. For example, several noted the aimless quality of the speaker's wandering, suggested by the repetition of 'half' – 'half boring', 'half climbing', 'half looking'. They also noted the diction which suggests discomfort and difficulty, such as 'weary', 'overheated' and 'sorry'. Few went on to argue that the effort he takes emphasises the remoteness and inaccessibility of the location, which in turn makes the presence of the pole more surprising. A number of candidates drew attention to religious imagery in 'heaven' and 'resurrected' and the personification of the telegraph pole which presents it as something of a monster. Many argued that the speaker's responses demonstrate Frost's dissatisfaction with the development and ubiquity of new technology and its effect on the rural environment.

Question 2

Elizabeth Jennings: Selected Poems

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There was a small number of responses to this question, which showed some understanding of Jennings' suggestion that, however protected, children will encounter horrors and learn to cope with them. Answers showed some awareness of the imagery of childish fears in the first two stanzas – 'The ghost behind the stairs' and the 'long, uneven crack' in the 'ceiling', for example – and the contrast with the actual atrocities of 'Belsen and [...] tortures' in stanza 3. Fewer successfully tackled the ideas in the closing lines of the poem, 'the wish to kill' and the final couplet.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves Volume 2

- (a) There were few responses to this question, with a focus on peace and rest as a metaphor for death, looking at 'On My First Daughter' and 'Verses Written on her Death-bed'. The content of the poems was usually understood well, but fewer candidates really looked closely at their language and structure. Candidates who argued the metaphor thoroughly wrote more successful essays than those who asserted it. It was surprising that very few answers focused on such poems as 'Care-charmer Sleep', 'Soldier, Rest!' and 'To Sleep', as these lent themselves very well to the question.
- (b) 'The White House' was a very popular choice and produced some energetic and engaged responses which often combined empathy for the speaker's experience with a thoughtful analysis of the ways in which the views are communicated. Candidates often wrote about the door as symbolic of people being shut out of society, with successful responses developing this image to consider further images in the poem. There were sensitive comments on the speaker's containment of anger, seen in the 'tightened face', and appreciation of the aural and tactile image of 'sharp as steel'. Some of the most thoughtful responses argued for the superiority of the speaker over his critics, as he needs 'superhuman power' to contain his anger, despite it being justified and borne 'proudly and unbent'. The irony of McKay's use of the word 'savage' was often noted, and given as a reason why, despite being 'sore and raw', the speaker's anger must be restrained in order to rise above the 'potent poison' of racist views. A number of candidates too noted the irony of these ideas being presented in a sonnet, a form more often associated with traditional English love poetry.

Question 4

E.M. Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) Successful responses to this question often began by putting the cue quotation into context, showing how Ruth Wilcox's views contrast with those of the Schlegels and their friends, which led to a comparison of different attitudes explored in the novel. Most answers focused primarily on Margaret, Helen and Ruth, looking at ways in which Forster's characterisation of the Schlegel sisters presents them as emancipated, educated women, while Ruth Wilcox fulfils a more traditional role. Subtle answers showed how Ruth nevertheless has power in the Wilcox household and Margaret in some ways is initially subservient to Henry Wilcox following their marriage. The role of Helen was often seen as pivotal, while more wide-ranging answers also included Dolly and

Jacky Bast. Less successful essays focused more on characters themselves and had less to say about Forster's characterisation of them.

- (b) Strong responses to this passage question focused very clearly on the presentation of the characters and found much to support their responses. They picked up several suggestions in the passage which show that Henry is self-dramatising, with his defensive dialogue and phrases such as 'He laughed bitterly' and 'He swaggered up to it tragically'. This was compared with Margaret's calm and control, apparent in her own speeches and in her helping 'herself to the breakfast dishes', turning 'out the spirit lamp' and pouring 'herself out some coffee' while Henry postures. A small number of candidates was carefully aware of the narrative voice in the passage, particularly in the final paragraph, though it was surprising to see how few candidates commented on the final sentence of the extract. Essays which were restricted to an account of the passage and description of the characters' attitudes were much less successful than those which looked analytically at Forster's writing.

Question 5

Andrea Levy: *Small Island*

- (a) While some candidates struggled to recall enough relevant detail to respond fully to this question, others presented arguments to the effect that the American soldiers in the novel present a more direct level of racism that was yet to fully reveal itself in British society. They sometimes linked this to the historical context of segregation and Jim Crow laws being part of life in America. Gilbert's experience of US soldiers, particularly on his visit to the US base, and the cinema incident featured strongly in most of the responses.
- (b) This was a very popular question, which appealed to candidates of all levels of achievement. Most saw the point of the long tale about Blackie and the gecko and were able to recognise the metaphor for the ensuing scene. Some observant candidates noted that the episode about the rose introduced a sense of otherness and alienation as the Jamaicans walked through the village as a preparation for the reaction of the villagers, while nearly all candidates noted the change in mood as Gilbert realises that the whole village has come out to view them. In looking at some of the details of the writing, many candidates commented on the feelings of guilt apparent in the metaphor 'thieves caught in a sunbeam' and Gilbert's use of the term 'darkies'. A few essays picked up the irony of the British woman's assumption that the men are American, despite Jamaica being a British colony, but not many commented on Gilbert's characteristic humour as he eyes her 'pert and feminine' form. Several answers read this episode as an example of racist hostility, showing a lack of awareness of the context; more successful responses were able to comment that the English here see the Jamaicans as strange, but fascinating and interesting, and that this encounter is largely friendly and jocular, in comparison with other encounters in the novel.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) There were a few answers to this question, but among those seen, stories used included 'The Door in the Wall', 'How it Happened', 'The Happy Prince', 'The Hollow of the Three Hills' and 'The Rain Horse'. A small number of candidates chose stories not selected as set texts for the current version of the syllabus, and which could therefore attract no marks. Candidates appreciated the supernatural or fantasy elements of the stories; where such appreciation focussed on the detail of the writing and analysis of how these elements are presented by the writers, essays were much more successful than those that took a narrative approach.
- (b) A surprising number of responses to this question was unaware of, or confused by, Wodehouse's characteristic humour, and Examiners saw some strongly condemnatory essays about Lord Emsworth's failings as a father. Some candidates were more in tune with the tone of the passage and appreciated the contrasting presentations of Freddie and his father, noting the implications of Wodehouse's metaphorical descriptions of the two as a 'beaming sheep' and an 'elderly leopard' respectively. Although some candidates were hesitant in assessing Lord Emsworth's character because of the contrasting language of the passage – describing him at different points as 'fluffy-minded and amiable' and 'sour and hostile' – most candidates insightfully explored this contrast in terms of the father/son relationship. Many focused on the humorous hyperbolic descriptions of Freddie as 'white and shining', 'jaunty' and 'prancing', contrasting with his father as 'seething with

anguish and fury'. Some candidates shrewdly pointed out that in his presentation of Lord Emsworth – with his low boredom threshold and dilettante attitude to life's pleasures – the writer is suggesting that he had more in common with his son than he realises. A number of candidates developed their answer with knowledge of the rest of the story, which lends a retrospective irony to this extract and Lord Emsworth's attitude to the 'female' in whose embrace Freddie is 'entangled'.

Question 7

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

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 9

Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Candidates wrote with some knowledge of the time shifts in the play, noting that as Gar looks forward to his future in America, he keeps going back to memories which reveal his discontent with his life in Ireland. Essays referred to scenes with Kate, which show his failed love affair, and the scene with Lizzy and Con, which sows the seeds of his aspiration to go to America. A number of essays referred to the motif of the 'blue boat', the memory of which becomes symbolic of the lost relationship between Gar and his father. Many essays would have been improved with greater focus on the points at which Friel places the time shifts, in order to discuss both their significance and their dramatic effects.
- (b) Many candidates commented on Boyle's encouragement to Gar, coupled with his self-aggrandising claims of being 'offered a big post in Boston', punctured by Private's sardonic comments. Many were alert to Boyle's self regard and noted his barbed comment to Gar that he is 'of average intelligence'. However, at the same time, a good number of essays showed some subtle appreciation of the tone of the extract, noting a level of pathos in the subtext of the dialogue, as Boyle regrets his own missed opportunities and Gar attempts to reach the secrets of his dead mother's younger life. Such answers noted the ambiguity of Boyle's gift, both generous and another act of self-promotion.