

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41

Texts

Key Messages

- Candidates must read the question carefully and clarify exactly what they are being asked to write about. It may help to copy out the key words or phrases before starting to plan an answer.
- It is good practice to define terms in the opening paragraph to show understanding of the question and an indication of the way the response will be presented. Key words or phrases from the question can be used effectively here.
- Ensure all answers are numbered correctly, also indicating option **(a)** or **(b)** clearly.
- Candidates should focus only on writing about the text with relevance to the question being answered, without including general background information on the author or the text.
- Candidates must use the appropriate term when referring to a text (novel, play, poem) and refer to the title of the text and names of characters in full, not abbreviating them to initials. It is important to ensure that correct names are used.
- Quotations are valuable in supporting the argument, but should be brief and directly relevant.
- Handwriting must be legible.

General Comments

Overall, candidates were well prepared and the standard was good. Candidates were familiar with the lay-out of the Paper and the vast majority followed the instructions correctly, submitting the correct number of answers without rubric infringement. Candidates had studied the texts carefully. The best answers combined a focused response to the question supported by relevant references to the text without general pre-prepared introductions. In *Sección Primera*, candidates are reminded to give brief answers to option **(a)(i)** and **(ii)**, comprising only a fraction of the main essay, which is a response to **(iii)**. When referring to the historical or social context of the work, the information must be factually accurate and relevant to the question.

Comments on Specific Questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Juan Rulfo: *Pedro Páramo*

- (a)** This was a popular text, with many answers on both options. In this case, most candidates identified the speakers correctly as Pedro Páramo and his mother and showed how the author used natural images to convey the woman's deep sorrow. The theme of the passage was interpreted in a number of ways – violence, death, sadness – and was generally analysed well, with reference to the text as a whole.
- (b)** The large number of candidates who chose this option showed good knowledge of the text and the events surrounding Susana San Juan. There was a tendency to narrate, and candidates are always advised to analyse rather than tell the story. The best essays focussed on the relationship between Susana and Pedro, and the different side of his personality which emerged through his feelings for her, as well as the resulting effect on Comala.

Question 2 Lope de Vega: *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*

- (a)** This was the less popular of the options on the text. The essays were generally satisfactory and would have benefited from more analysis of the whole text in relation to **(iii)**. Candidates tended to focus too much on the printed extract rather than widen the discussion.

- (b) Some very good answers discussed how the author presented different aspects of love in the play and analysed how these combined to underline the themes. Many also mentioned the more original aspect in the presentation of love between two lowly characters on the social scale and how this informed the wider moral view.

Question 3 Jorge Luis Borges: *Ficciones*

- (a) There was a small number of essays on this option, which makes an overall assessment of performance limited. Candidates were able to express understanding of Borges' work and to appreciate its originality of thought.
- (b) Although this option attracted more answers, the numbers were still relatively small. Candidates were able to choose any two *ficciones* to illustrate their own interpretation of the originality in the work. There were some interesting interpretations with good use of references from the text to support the argument.

Question 4 Antonio Buero Vallejo: *El concierto de San Ovidio*

- (a) Candidates knew the text well and understood the essence of the questions. In (iii), the best answers showed the difference between the characters in terms of perception and insight. This was generally lacking in Valindin, who was motivated by selfishness, but seen in Valentín, the only person to share David's vision. Some candidates were also able to include relevant analysis of the characters in terms of the play as a social satire on the Franco regime.
- (b) Most answers concentrated on the relationships between Adriana, David and Valindin, which was probably the most fruitful approach. A few included Donato instead of David. There was a degree of narration and the best essays kept that to a minimum, concentrating instead on the changes seen in Adriana and to an extent in David as their relationship developed. This then led to wider consideration of the themes.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escribe*

- (a) This question was very popular and generally well done. The best answers began by defining the concept of '*soledad*', which appears in a number of guises in the novel. Most concentrated on the colonel and his wife and the effect of poverty, and abandonment, but there were many other aspects including the loneliness of Sabas and his wife, in a loveless marriage, where money did not buy happiness, and in the town and country in a wider context. In all cases, good essays keep a clear plan and argument and use references to the text judiciously.
- (b) There were fewer answers to this question than option (a). The time scale in the narrative has a variable focus, and it is often difficult to interpret. Time also seems to move at a different rate dependent on the character at the centre of attention. It was important to consider the effect of this rather than attempt to determine a time line (how long had the colonel been waiting?) References to magic realism were relevant also.

Question 6 Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) This question attracted fewer answers than option (b). The question focuses on the political bias, if any, of the novel. Candidates wrote about Esteban Trueba in the main, but some also referred to Pedro Tercero and Jaime. The best answers set out a clear argument and then used references to the text to support this. Some candidates tried to cover as many political references as possible without finding a way of presenting a direct response to the question. Most felt that the role of women in society was presented as a political issue.
- (b) Very many candidates chose this question. There were several interpretations of the question, and the candidate's views were not always clear unless they had defined their understanding of the task in the introduction. All knew the text well and were able to make many references to the female characters. The question asked whether the presentation was always positive – most found that there was a balance with some negative interpretation of the actions of some individuals. Success depended to a great extent on the organisation of the argument and well-chosen references.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

- (a) This was a very popular text and a great many candidates chose this option. Most candidates achieved a satisfactory standard or above. They showed good knowledge of the text and had studied the '*cuchillo*' as a symbol and were able to express that. Differentiation between responses relied greatly on the focus and construction of the argument.
- (b) This was also a popular option. Candidates needed to focus on the elements of poetry in the text and especially the characters and events in the final Act. Once again, the best essays began by defining the focus in the introduction and then found a clear line of argument, supported by brief references. There was a temptation in this question to copy long passages from the lullaby, for example. Candidates often tend to want to write about Lorca's life and experiences, and this can be detrimental to the overall outcome of the essay as it is generally not relevant.

Question 8 Rosalía de Castro: *En las orillas del Sar*

- (a) As a new text to the specification, there were relatively few responses to the poems. Candidates who chose this question had studied the themes and the techniques in the poetry and were able to express this effectively.
- (b) This option gave candidates many opportunities to choose those poems which best addressed the focus of their response. Most agreed with the statement in the question but some also found some positive aspects. Examiners looked for a personal response, with a solid understanding of the poems and the ability to select and analyse effectively. The poems selected varied from candidate to candidate, which is what was intended, and were generally well tackled.



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Comments on Specific Questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Juan Rulfo: *Pedro Páramo*

- (a)** This was less popular than option **(b)**. Some good essays identified the '*padre*' correctly as Rentería and showed how Rulfo used natural images and weather to create the unique landscape in the novel.
- (b)** There were many answers to this question. Candidates are asked to analyse Pedro Páramo as an individual and as a man of his time. The first part was well answered and the best candidates studied his role as *cacique* and his involvement in the Mexican Revolution as well, opening up the whole of the range of marks.

Question 2 Lope de Vega: *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*

- (a)** Many candidates chose this question. Answers to **(i)** and **(ii)** were often too long, narrating the plot. In **(iii)**, the best answers analysed Casilda's role in the play in relation to the themes of loyalty, '*honor*' and '*honra*' bringing another perspective on these.
- (b)** Some very good answers discussed how the characters were opposing representatives of classes who also displayed individual human strengths and weaknesses. Lope de Vega gave voice to

those from all strata of society and they were judged equally. The sense of individual responsibility, as well as the overall need for harmony in society, were expressed clearly.

Question 3 Jorge Luis Borges: *Ficciones*

- (a) Parts (i) and (ii) did not present any problems. Part (iii) was answered well by those who analysed the ideas of circles and repetition and the circular references to literature and related it to this and other *ficciones*. A small number of candidates referred to the paradox in the last line of the extract. A significant number of candidates summarised the story without analysis.
- (b) Fewer candidates chose this option. Essays were competent with candidates able to refer to at least two *ficciones* and most interpreted the presentation of the '*biblioteca*' as a metaphor for the universe. The discussion developed into consideration of design, predictability, repetition and the idea of seeking a hidden key to the pattern.

Question 4 Antonio Buero Vallejo: *El concierto de San Ovidio*

- (a) Candidates knew the text well and understood the motivation of the characters and the themes discussed. There were some very good responses where candidates identified the different groups of characters and were able to contrast them well and related them to the theme. Other answers tended to be too narrative in (i) and (ii) and although names were mentioned, the presentation was descriptive rather than analytic.
- (b) Success in this response meant careful reading of the question. Candidates were asked to what extent the playwright celebrated the power of an individual, therefore a detailed resume of strong characters without showing how their contribution to society was a force for good, is not a full answer. This was a case where the historical context was important in assessing the degree and effect of a strong individual and candidates needed to analyse more than one. Some only wrote about Valindin, and it was difficult to address the concept of '*celebra*' in that the playwright's attitude to him was not positive.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escribe*

- (a) This question was very popular and generally well done by candidates who addressed the whole question. The essence of the question lies in the relationship between the colonel and his wife, in light of the comment quoted. Defining terms in the introduction by explaining what is meant by '*te falta carácter*' provided a good starting point. Candidates needed to compare and contrast the personalities of the individuals by analysing how they responded to events, and assess whether the colonel's wife was correct in saying that he lacked character, always within the context of their marriage. Many saw considerable strength of character in both, and mutual respect.
- (b) There were many answers to this question. All essays needed to analyse the '*realidad*' shown in the text, and a definition of this in the opening paragraph would have given a clear focus. There were essentially three realities – the colonel's, his wife's and the socio/political picture of Latin America portrayed in the book. This does not mean that García Márquez is simply presenting an historical account of events in Colombia. References to magic realism were relevant in showing the literary techniques used by the author. Weaker answers tended to try to relate points to current reality and responded to the text as a factual rather than a literary and imaginative piece of writing.

Question 6 Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) This question attracted many answers. The wording of the task asks candidates to show to what extent the concept in the quotation '*La vida es injusta*' is central to the work as a whole. The most successful essays analysed how characters faced the consequences of their actions. Many focussed on Esteban Trueba and others analysed the fate of women in the novel to good effect. Weaker essays tended to list incidents which they interpreted as unfair, without a clear argument.
- (b) Fewer candidates chose this option, but there were some good responses. Many showed empathy for Esteban Trueba, as he struggled to overcome his own problems to establish a stable life, seek '*normalidad*' and maintain it. Defining this normality – for him – was essential, and the best responses then compared this with the lesson he learnt at the end of his life.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

- (a) This was the most popular question on the paper. The question's focus required candidates to analyse the concept of '*la irracionalidad y la sinrazón*' in the era of the play, and show how this led to the tragedy. The most successful answers understood the context of the play and judged the character's actions and the consequences accordingly. Some felt that society was irrational, others that the characters behaved in an irrational manner. The best were clear that the view of society at that time was one interpretation of what is irrational, and differs from what is accepted now, and appreciated what Lorca was almost certainly trying to say. These essays analysed the *novia*'s actions in a thoughtful way and understood the dilemma. Those candidates who presented a pre-learned essay on tragedy could not access the higher mark bands, especially those which dealt with the concept of tragedy as a literary device with little reference to the text. Candidates need to be wary of analysing the play in the light of modern views, or muddling literary techniques between texts studied.
- (b) A large number of candidates chose this question. Examiners saw some lively responses where candidates appreciated the theatricality of these aspects of the play, as well as the influence of the traditions and beliefs embodied in them. It was not enough to list the features without analysing their effect. Several essays were clearly prepared pieces on symbolism which had some overlap but were not clearly focussed on the question. It is always important to consider the play as it would appear on the stage, rather than simply a printed text.

Question 8 Rosalía de Castro: *En las orillas del Sar*

- (a) As a new text to the specification, there were relatively few responses to the poems. This, possibly the most familiar of the poems, was the most popular option. Candidates had prepared the theme and were able to analyse the language effectively. The best answers combine detailed commentary on the poem with a wider awareness of the writer's technique and approach.
- (b) This option gave candidates many opportunities to choose both poems and a theme and present a detailed analysis of the language used. Examiners looked for a personal response, with a solid understanding of the poems and the ability to select and analyse effectively. The poems selected varied from candidate to candidate, which is what was intended, and were generally well tackled.