

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41

Texts

Key messages

Candidates who performed well on this paper:

- showed detailed knowledge and understanding of their three chosen texts;
- had read the questions carefully and defined the terms they were using;
- answered the whole question as set on the question paper;
- constructed an argument and supported it with relevant quotations;
- came to a clear conclusion;
- ensured the main focus of **(a)** questions in *Sección Primera* was on part **(iii)**; answers to parts **(i)** and **(ii)** should be brief and to the point;
- avoided careless errors such as giving a character the wrong name;
- did not simply tell the story or use very long quotations.

General comments

Many candidates achieved satisfactory or good results, but few were very good or outstanding. The key points above indicate some of the issues identified by Examiners, and further details are provided below under the individual questions. In addition, some candidates did not appear to be familiar with the rubric and thought that in **Questions 1(a), 2(a), 3(a) and 4(a)** parts **(i), (ii)** and **(iii)** were alternatives to one another. Others answered only two questions in total or answered two questions on the same text. The number of candidates who infringed the rubric was relatively small, but it is essential that all are fully aware of the requirements of the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a)** This was a very popular choice. The best answers gave brief responses to parts **(i)** and **(ii)**, picking out a few details from the extract. Part **(iii)** required candidates to identify Castel's sense of superiority to and disdain of '*los amigos de la pintura*' and his feeling that they did not understand him, and to relate this to his relationship with others in general. María, of course, is the exception, as he believes she does understand him and therefore becomes the focus of his obsession.
- (b)** This option was one where candidates needed to define their terms by explaining the key phrase '*árida intensidad*' in the question. There are a number of possible interpretations; some considered *intensidad* to mean 'gripping'; others felt it referred to the way in which the opening line prefigures the tragic ending or the fact that the whole novel is a biased account from Castel's own point of view. The reference to *árida* pointed to the prose style, and Castel's personality. There were also some good answers, which argued that it was not *árida*, and presented a convincing case.

Question 2 Calderón de la Barca: *La vida es sueño*

- (a)** Most candidates gave brief and focused answers to parts **(i)** and **(ii)**. In part **(iii)**, there was often insufficient reference to the play as a whole, but candidates showed good understanding of the themes.

- (b) The best answers responded to the reference to the '*injusticia inicial*' with a detailed argument showing how the individuals overcame this and resolved the initial injustice in different ways. Weaker essays were too focused on narrating the story and did not spot the word *inicial* in the question.

Question 3 Luis Sepúlveda: *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*

- (a) Candidates generally knew the text well and responded positively to it. Part (iii) required candidates to identify key themes in the extract and relate these to the novel as a whole. Examiners read essays that expressed the isolation of the old man and the challenge of the natural environment. He uses novels as a form of escape and a way to open up the rest of the world to him. Some answers mistakenly indicated that he had visited the cities mentioned. There was considerable scope for interpretation of the importance of the extract but all answers must begin with the issues in the extract itself – it is not permissible to state that the extract does not help the reader to understand the text and simply write an essay about something else of the candidate's choosing.
- (b) This was well answered in general as candidates were aware of the ecological theme in the novel. The best answers gave precise examples and were able to analyse the effects on the indigenous population and the natural world without diverting to a more general discussion of issues outside the scope of the novel.

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

- (a) This question was answered well and candidates correctly identified the cause of the conflict evident in the extract and were able to discuss the tragic consequences of it.
- (b) This option was less popular than (a) but was very accessible to those candidates who had studied the importance of the subtitle.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) There were some good answers where candidates discussed how Román controlled the household, and that excluding contact with the outside world was part of this. The best essays then analysed how the motives for his suicide could be understood.
- (b) This gave rise to some interesting and perceptive responses. Ena was seen as a complex character who was generous and welcoming to Andrea, but also seemed to be motivated by darker forces and could be accused of using others for her own ends. Analysis of her relationship with her mother and her reasons for approaching Román gave depth to the argument.

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

- (a) Many candidates chose this question. The best answers began by explaining the phrase in the question: '*la necesidad de un cambio político*'. It was important to refer to the need for political change and not simply relate the changes that occurred. This required knowledge of the situation before and after political change, and the timeline in the novel. Some pointed out that changes are always necessary from someone's point of view, which was a valid interpretation. A number of essays showed that candidates were not really aware of the different political stances in the novel.
- (b) This was another popular question. Candidates mostly identified the appropriate characters and the best answers analysed the significance of the names and showed how they were linked to one another and to the overall theme of the novel. Some essays remained too descriptive as candidates gave character studies or wrote about the role of women in general. As has been mentioned before, it is imperative that candidates answer the question as it is set.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

García Lorca is a popular author in this examination and candidates clearly know a lot about Lorca's life. However, they are advised that biographical detail is rarely required in answering a question on his work. Background research is valuable in itself, but candidates do not have time or space to give a general introduction to the essay, which is not directly focused on the point of the question.

- (a) The best answers used the quotation as a way into discussion on oppression by social norms. Others were unsure of the context of the play and answers tended to be too general. Most essays were well supported by reference to the text.
- (b) One of the determining factors for attaining a good outcome here was attention to the detail in the question. Candidates were asked to consider the conflict caused by '*querer y necesitar*'. As mentioned above in the key messages, definition of terms, in this case by explaining the difference between the meaning of the two verbs, was a feature of the best essays. Good essays discussed how these words not only relate to *Yerma* herself, but also to her relationships with Víctor and Juan, and the other women in the village. Those who decided that other conflicts were more central to the play without considering the question as it was set did not fulfil the assessment criteria. It is also advisable to avoid narration and giving long quotations.

Question 8 Pablo Neruda: *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*

- (a) Candidates responded well to this and there were some good and very good essays. The best answers did not simply catalogue natural references but gave detailed analysis and all-round appreciation of the poem. These essays were able to deal with the technicalities of poetry in terms of choice of vocabulary, imagery and so on.
- (b) Most agreed with the statement in the question and were able to refer to three poems, with Poem 20 a good choice.

SPANISH LITERATURE

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- constructed an argument and supported it with relevant quotations;
- came to a clear conclusion;
- ensured the main focus of **(a)** questions in *Sección Primera* was on part **(iii)**; answers to parts **(i)** and **(ii)** should be brief and to the point;
- avoided careless errors such as giving a character the wrong name;
- did not simply tell the story or use very long quotations.

General comments

Many candidates achieved satisfactory or good results, but few were very good or outstanding. The key points above indicate some of the issues identified by Examiners, and further details are provided below under the individual questions. In addition, some candidates did not appear to be familiar with the rubric and thought that in **Questions 1(a), 2(a), 3(a) and 4(a)** parts **(i), (ii)** and **(iii)** were alternatives to one another. Others answered only two questions in total or answered two questions on the same text. The number of candidates who infringed the rubric was relatively small, but it is essential that all are fully aware of the requirements of the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a)** Essays on this question showed detailed knowledge of the text and the narrative in terms of locating the extract and answering parts **(i)** and **(ii)**. Part **(iii)** required analysis of the role of humour throughout the novel. Some stated that the novel was humourless and wrote on other aspects which they deemed important – this did not fulfil the assessment criteria. The best essays found examples of humour, often ironic or at Castel's expense, which lightened the tone of the novel and also gave insight into his personality. A good example was the episode in the post office where he demanded the return of the letter he had just posted. Similarly, other candidates began with the extract, where the reader is led to laugh at Mimí's pretentiousness and then went on to show how humour can be found in other contexts.
- (b)** This was an example of the need to read the question carefully and answer all aspects of it. Candidates were required to analyse the theme of isolation within the context of '*el mundo moderno*' as it is presented in the novel. The best answers showed how Castel is isolated from a society which he considers alien to him, and analysed how the social situations depicted in the novel help the reader to understand this situation.

Question 2 Calderón de la Barca: *La vida es sueño*

- (a) Candidates tended to focus too much on parts (i) and (ii), to the detriment of part (iii). Some were able to show how Basilio redeemed himself towards the end of the play.
- (b) This question was answered well. Candidates were able to trace and analyse how Segismundo was able to overcome his unfortunate circumstances by virtue of his own resources and ability to learn, and his relationship and empathy with others.

Question 3 Luis Sepúlveda: *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*

- (a) As in previous (a) questions, some candidates put too much emphasis on their answers to parts (i) and (ii). The incident in the extract was mostly well known, but many did not analyse the mayor's role in the novel as a whole in sufficient depth. Good essays considered what he represented – a white outsider from the city – and how his way of thinking was at odds with the inhabitants of the village as well as the indigenous people. This contrast was then analysed in terms of the themes presented.
- (b) This question was dealt with competently as candidates were able to express views on the ecological themes of the novel. It was essential to refer to specific events or situations and give concrete examples from the text rather than discuss the crisis in the Amazon in general terms. Good essays found some positive effects of progress, for example dental care, and the ambivalence of the launch in bringing benefits but also problems with it.

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

- (a) Candidates responded well to this question and were able to discuss to what extent justice was served in the outcome.
- (b) This question was chosen by few candidates. The problems of seemingly intractable attitudes, but the belief in hope for change, bolstered by the presence of committed individuals, was the essence of the argument.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) Candidates were able to empathise with Andrea and show how her emotional development, exposure to the wider world and greater self-confidence helped her to understand life better. Some essays analysed this in terms of her relationship with Román as well as that with Ena.
- (b) There were some interesting responses to this question, particularly those which paid full attention to the '*preguntas sin respuestas*'. The sense that individuals are never fully in control of their lives was dealt with perceptively.

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

- (a) This was the more popular of the two questions on this text, although the number of answers was still relatively small. Candidates tended to focus on Esteban Trueba, who was both impersonal in being an absent landowner much of the time but still vented personal power over his farmworkers and their families. There was reference to revenge and the cycle of violence. The more open attitude evident at the end of the novel was seen by some as a sign of hope.
- (b) There were few answers to this question. Candidates were aware of the variety of literary styles present, mostly concentrating on magical realism, but other aspects were dealt with.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

García Lorca is a popular author in this examination and candidates clearly know a lot about Lorca's life. However, they are advised that biographical detail is rarely required in answering a question on his work. Background research is valuable in itself, but candidates do not have time or space to give a general introduction to the essay, which is not directly focused on the point of the question.

- (a) Many candidates tackled this well. It was essential to deal with both parts of the question – the importance of the scene within the play itself, and the use of poetry. It was not necessary to narrate events, rather to show how these followed from earlier events and why, and to consider the characters' reactions in that light. The best answers analysed the use of poetry in detail, interpreting the images and showing how it contributed to the atmosphere and meaning of the play.
- (b) This question was also answered well. Candidates tended to describe Juan's point of view with emphasis on his interest in material wealth and security for Yerma. Those who considered his own problems related to his position in society and his background gave a more rounded analysis. Many essays empathised with Juan and found his situation as difficult as Yerma's, in a different way.

Question 8 Pablo Neruda: *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada*

- (a) This poet seems to appeal to candidates and there were some thoughtful responses. Candidates should not be tempted to answer this type of question unless they have had experience of commentary as it requires some background understanding of the use of poetic language and versification.
- (b) There were many examples to be found as a basis for this answer, and candidates have some freedom in interpretation of the chosen poems. Candidates must be sure to include the minimum number of poems, and it is better to focus on a few highly relevant examples, rather than be tempted to be too ambitious with a large number and lose detail and focus in the argument.