

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41

Texts

Key Messages

Candidates who performed well on this paper:

- selected questions carefully, ensuring that both Sections of the paper were covered;
- read each chosen question thoroughly and defined the scope of their answer in an opening paragraph, stating what the question means and the approach to be taken;
- planned their answer carefully. The essay should consist of an introduction, several paragraphs developing the argument and presenting examples from the text and a final paragraph with a clear conclusion;
- kept their answer focused on the question being answered;
- avoided errors, such as writing the wrong names for characters or author, calling a play or poems *una novela* or putting the wrong question number;
- when answering Sección Primera option (a) questions, wrote brief responses of one or two sentences to parts (i) and (ii); most of the answer should be focused on part (iii);
- gave examples from the text specifically chosen to support an argument; avoided narration of the story.

General Comments

The vast majority of candidates had studied the texts in detail and were aware of the demands of the question paper. However, a significant number gave answers which were too generic, with pre-prepared introductions to the text and author and a lack of focus on the question chosen. Candidates should use all their knowledge and understanding of the text in answering the specific question. Examiners only give credit for material and quotations which are directly relevant.

Comments on Specific Questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Juan Rulfo: *Pedro Páramo*

- (a) (i) and (ii) required only brief responses. Candidates often gave too much narrative detail. Most were able to identify Damiana correctly. In (iii), the best answers considered the statement in the light of events in the village and particularly Pedro Páramo's character and words. Most discussed the idea of purgatory and saw this as not permanent, hence a sign of hope. Some successfully integrated the theme of '*la ilusión*' and the narrative structure – which by its nature does not have a clear way forward – into their answers.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this question, where candidates identified a number of elements such as the fragmented time line, the narrative structure, the use of dialogue, and succeeded in presenting a coherent argument.

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

- (a) Only a brief explanation was needed in (i), although some long narrative answers were offered. In (ii), although some candidates saw only the honour issue, there were good succinct responses including the *sueños/realidad* element. There were some very good answers in (iii) discussing issues of honour, '*obrar bien*', and often '*epifanía*'.
- (b) Candidates tended to produce less effective answers to this question as many interpreted the question in 21st century terms. Good answers defined '*la clase gobernante*' and wrote about Basilio, Astolfo and Clotaldo, with some including Segismundo as the King he became.

Question 3 Jorge Luis Borges: *Ficciones*

- (a) These questions were generally answered clearly and candidates knew the text well. In (iii), some candidates were able to discern themes which are developed further.
- (b) This was a popular choice. The success of the answers depended to some extent on the choice of stories. Many listed the '*argumentos*' and the best were able to show how these stood out because they were expressed through distinctive characters.

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

- (a) Questions (i) and (ii) were answered clearly and briefly. There were some good answers to (iii) where candidates used the text well to compare and contrast the two characters.
- (b) The best essays here began by explaining the concept of '*sufrir para progresar*' in the context of the play. Most focused on David and showed how he began to change attitudes to benefit those in the future.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) The question required an analysis of the degree to which Andrea changed, compared with other characters in the novel. The most successful answers explained what constituted a change and how it could be demonstrated, rather than simply listing possible examples.
- (b) In answering this question well, candidates were able to analyse what the '*abuela*' represented, in terms of her role within the family and in wider society in the post-war period. Her physical description and involvement in events in the novel are significant but are not sufficient without evaluation.

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

- (a) This was a popular option. The most effective arguments linked the '*retrato ... de familia*' and '*comentario político*', showing the importance of both themes. Many candidates listed references to each separately, and often missed '*comentario*', only mentioning political parties or incidents.
- (b) There were answers of varied quality to this question. The best considered the nature of Jaime and Amanda's relationship and compared and contrasted this to others in the novel, and analysed interpretations of '*el amor*' in different contexts.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

- (a) This was a very popular choice. Very good answers showed how the apparently simple setting of an Andalusian village depicted universal themes, and went on to analyse these. Those who focused on the issue of '*un drama*' were not able to develop the argument extensively. A number of answers indicated that some candidates were not familiar with the term '*campesinos andaluces*'.
- (b) There were some very competent responses to this question. These candidates analysed the monologue in detail and expressed its frightening effect on the audience at that point in the play. Many essays did not go on to show how the poetic expression and the action in the play were inextricably linked.

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

- (a) There were some very good answers, with interesting and even original appreciation of the poem and understanding of the themes. Candidates knew how to discuss poetic language and technique. It is important that candidates are aware of the difference between paraphrase and analysis – a number of responses were hampered by this, and the need to keep to the focus of the question.
- (b) Again, many thorough and thoughtful responses were seen. The precise interpretation of the question depended on the candidate's choice of three poems. Examiners encourage candidates to avoid pre-prepared general essays as these cannot achieve a high grade.

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General Comments

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Comments on Specific Questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Juan Rulfo: *Pedro Páramo*

- (a) Questions (i) and (ii) required only brief answers, about one sentence each, and the material was readily accessed from the extract. In (iii), candidates needed to explain the quotation and then discuss Pedro Páramo's character and behaviour, and the effect he had on the inhabitants of Comala. In (iii), candidates should consider the whole novel – some candidates tended to focus too much only on the printed extract and the event described there.
- (b) This question gave rise to some interesting debate. Some felt that the alternative title was more appropriate as it involved more points of view and helped create a sense of mystery, whilst others felt that Pedro Páramo was the correct choice as he influenced everything and everybody.

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

- (a) Candidates identified the context and were able to show how the use of questions and repetition, for example, underlined the message. In (iii), answers tended to focus on Segismundo, showing how he came to understand and accept his identity. The best essays also referred to Rosaura and examined how, ironically, she had to hide her identity in order to reclaim her sense of self, and how she helped Segismundo rethink and reconsider his destiny.
- (b) Successful responses began with a definition of 'caos/armonía' within the context of the play. The concept of stability and harmony depended on the King, but the people also have a voice, as can be seen when Segismundo's presence becomes known.

Question 3 Jorge Luis Borges: *Ficciones*

- (a) Questions (i) and (ii) were accessible to all: candidates need to be sure that the answers are brief. In (iii) most focused on the references to the 'laberinto' and developed this theme, but, as is the case with Borges in particular, other interpretations were valid.
- (b) The line of argument here depended entirely on the choice of *Ficciones*. Examiners accept the candidates' approach and interpretation, provided the text is used to substantiate the points made.

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

- (a) Candidates used the extract well to answer questions (i) and (ii) succinctly. There were some thoughtful responses to (iii). Most essays dealt with equality between the disabled, as exemplified by David and the other blind characters and the able-bodied. Others also mentioned the position of the poor and of women. Some had studied the text as a critical comment on Spanish society in the post-war period and made a good case.
- (b) This question was well answered with sensitive use of the text. Candidates were able to discuss the interpretations of 'ciego' with understanding.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) The best essays here were carefully planned. Candidates often referred to a number of characters, for example Ena, her mother and Román as well as Andrea and other members of her family, and were most effective when the threads were drawn together into an argument, showing the reasons for events seeming to repeat themselves.
- (b) Candidates succeeded here by beginning with a definition of the term 'desquilibrados', and considering each character discussed as an individual. Many referred to the effects of the Civil war and these were very apparent in the behaviour of some characters, but there were still differences between them. It was also valid to consider whether they were all 'desquilibrados', or showing natural reactions to exceptional events.

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

- (a) Most candidates found the quotation partly true and were able to show how some characters found vengeance or were avenged and others were not. There was a wide range of material to consider here. Esteban Trueba was the most frequently discussed and candidates generally used their detailed knowledge and understanding well.
- (b) This question gave rise to much discussion. Most saw Esteban as a very destructive person, driven by selfishness and ambition, but some recognised a degree of contrition and regret at the end of the novel and saw his relationship with Alba as a positive sign for the future.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

- (a) This question was well answered with reference to the individual as a member of society, recognising the pressures. The second part of the question needed to be given as much consideration as the first – and candidates were then expected to evaluate how these themes were presented and analyse this.
- (b) Candidates approached this question with a good degree of knowledge and understanding of the text. The irony of the title was discussed with reference to different interpretations of both '*bodas*' and '*sangre*', and the argument was generally well structured, with evaluation and a conclusion.

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

- (a) This question was well done by candidates who had been prepared in critical analysis. The theme of nature was appreciated but listing references was not sufficient – discussion and evaluation of the images and the effect created by the poet were also required.
- (b) This question gave candidates scope to shape their argument, depending on their choice of poems. In all cases both aspects of the question had to be addressed and then the relative importance evaluated. Candidates who only focused on one theme could not attain a very high mark.

