

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/05
Coursework

There were too few candidates for us to be able to produce a meaningful report.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/12
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

For success in this examination, candidates need to:

- Read the question carefully and identify what they are asked to do
- Take due note of key words such as 'vividly', 'amusingly' or 'movingly' which are intended to elicit a personal response to the writing
- Plan their ideas either mentally or on paper in order to produce an organised answer
- Provide textual support for points made
- Probe the writing to explore how effects are achieved.

Some pitfalls to avoid are:

- Spending too much time establishing the biography of the writer
- Spending too much time on the historical context of the work
- Failing to number the question correctly
- Failing to focus on the extract in an extract question
- Relying on re-telling the story or paraphrasing the poem
- Listing stylistic features without considering their effects
- Quoting text without comment.

General comments

The revised specification seems now to be familiar to candidates and their teachers. There were hardly any rubric infringements and the vast majority of candidates appeared to be proportioning their time in the examination room appropriately, so that in most cases both responses were of roughly equal length. There was plenty of evidence of planning on many scripts, and most candidates had avoided the trap of allowing the detailed planning to eat significantly into the time available for the answer.

It should be noted that the order of the mark bands has been inverted from this series onwards, so that Band 8 represents work at the top of the mark range and Band 1 is at the bottom of the range.

The improvement in quality of response to poetry questions in particular which was noted last year has continued. However it is perhaps worth reinforcing a message which many teachers will give to their own candidates that although there is a wealth of secondary material available on the internet, its quality is at best inconsistent and sometime unreliable, and should be used with caution. Such material is no adequate substitute for the candidate's own response to the studied text.

There was some improvement in the use of textual reference to support arguments. Candidates who manage to embed relevant and appropriate textual detail into their own writing tend to achieve well; candidates who quote at length with little or no supporting comment of their own are not really answering the question. Some questions seemed to elicit largely narrative responses with little or no interpretative comment. Responses of this nature will seldom achieve more than a band 3 mark on the new scale. There was also continuing evidence of the tendency for candidates to explain the text they had chosen to respond to rather than to explore it. Responses of this nature tend to strand themselves in bands 4 or, at best, 5 because they usually fail to examine the deeper implications of the text in question.

There is still a tendency for candidates to introduce their answers with a paragraph or more of biographical detail about the writer. Where this is relevant, it is all well and good. However, although it could have helped in considering Spender's poem in **Question 1**, or perhaps Amanda Chong in **Question 4**, it was not

necessary for candidates to inform the examiner that George Eliot was, in fact, a woman, or to explain the reasons for the pseudonym.

It was pleasing to note that the trends noted in last March for candidates to avoid answering the discursive question using the extract set as an alternative or to treat the extract as an 'unseen' were continued in this session. Virtually all candidates were clearly answering questions on texts that they had studied.

There were many scripts which demonstrated a high level of engagement on the part of candidates, and offered clear evidence of very effective teaching. There were some scripts which suggested that the candidates were working at an academic level well beyond IGCSE which were a privilege to read. Conversely, there were very few at the other end of the spectrum: most candidates displayed clear evidence that they had benefitted from the study of their chosen set texts, whatever their level of achievement.

The most popular texts were *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*, *Stories of Ourselves* and *Silas Marner*.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 – Explore how Spender conveys his feelings about his childhood in *My Parents*.

The majority of candidates who attempted this question worked through the poem in a broadly explanatory way, examining the imagery which Spender uses to depict the 'children who were rough'. Many had clearly been given background biographical information about Spender's childhood infirmities and his parents' desire to protect their son. Stronger answers used this knowledge to inform their exploration of the poem. Less secure answers paraded these biographical facts without linking them to the actual words of the poem. Of the answers which worked through the images explaining them, few went on to explore what this revealed about Spender's feelings, and very few probed the ambivalences of the final stanza. Few noted the phrase 'pretending to smile', or recognised that he was looking the other way. This led to some misinterpretation of the final stanza. Some accomplished responses noted that the speaker's parents were mentioned only in the title and first line of the poem, and went on to consider what that revealed about his feelings about his parents' treatment of him as a child. Most, however, confined their considerations to his feelings about the other children.

Question 2 – How does Browning vividly communicate a sense of excitement in *Meeting At Night*?

This question was often handled well by those candidates who attempted it. Most worked through the poem in a linear manner, an approach which suited the question, demonstrating the ways in which the sense of excitement builds through the course of the journey and reaches fulfilment in the final phrase of the poem. Most candidates explored at least some of the imagery used by Browning to address the 'vividly' of the question, although there were some unconvincing attempts to deal with the colour imagery of the first two lines. There were some very sharp comments on the sounds of the language, particularly in the last part of the first stanza, as well as some ingenious interpretations of the significance of the rhyme scheme of the poem. As with **Question 1**, irrelevant biographical details were imposed on the poem by some candidates, leading in some instances to long digressions about Browning's courtship of Elizabeth which led away from any consideration of the text.

Question 3 – How does Lochhead's writing vividly convey her feelings about her grandmother growing old in *For My Grandmother Knitting*?

This was the most popular question on the entire paper, and there were some strong responses. However, there were many candidates who gave an account of the poem without really addressing the question of 'her feelings'. The majority picked up on the repetition of 'no need', and some went on to consider the implications of the phrase. Some recognised the recurrent motif of hands, although few went on to consider the implications of this. Many pointed to the contrast between the grandmother's past as a young woman and a mother, and the present. There were some significant misreadings. Some assumed that 'they' were in some way angry that the grandmother still knitted and ascribed the same feelings to the speaker, presumably Lochhead. Some thought that as a young girl the grandmother had caught the fish she was gutting. Only a minority went on explicitly to consider what the speaker's feelings actually were beyond, in most cases, a sense of admiration. However, the strongest answers responded fully to the poem, exploring what they understood to be the speaker's feelings and evaluating how they were communicated.

Question 4 – Explore the ways in which Chong uses vivid images in *lion heart*.

This, too, was a very popular option. Most candidates worked through the poem, offering an explanation of the evolution of Singapore. There was a good display of knowledge of the significance of the merlion, and of the country's history. However, this was a question which led many candidates to stick at explanation, so that, for example, the phrase 'seeds arrived' was explained as standing for the early settlers, but very few went on to consider the effect of the image or to say why it is vivid. Similarly, the final lines of the poem were recognised as describing the flag of Singapore without commenting on what the lines were there for. Most recognised the poem's overall purpose of celebrating the country. Higher achieving answers went on to link the vivid images with that purpose of celebration.

Question 5 – How does Clarke vividly convey the feelings of the baby-sitter towards the child in *Baby-sitting*?

By some distance the more popular option on this text, this question was generally well-handled. Candidates responded with understanding to the baby-sitter's relationship with the child and there was some detailed exploration of the language of the poem. Most recognised the way in which the imagery in the second stanza is conveyed with telling effect. A few misread 'She will hate me' as expressing the speaker's feelings about the baby, and there were some sweeping generalisations about motherhood and about adults' attitudes to babies, but most responses had a good grasp of the situation. Some more accomplished answers wrote movingly about the imagery in the second stanza and considered the effect of the repetition in the final line.

Question 6 – Explore the ways in which Clarke strikingly conveys her thoughts about the woman's skeleton in *Lunchtime Lecture*.

This was not a popular choice, and candidates seemed to struggle with the meaning of the poem. There were some valiant attempts to engage with some of the images, but there was also a good deal of misreading of detail.

Section B

Question 7 – How does Achebe make this a revealing and significant conversation?

This was quite a popular question and was often quite well handled. Most candidates were able to establish the context securely, and to point up the contrasts between Joseph's man of the world attitudes and Obi's idealism. The discussion of bride-price was explored reasonably well, although some candidates took Obi's comments about his elder sisters' marriages as serious rather than a joke. There was also some misunderstanding about Joseph's house-boy, Mark, who was seen by some as a slave. Likewise, the term 'colonial mentality' cropped up fairly frequently, but with varying meanings: for some, it was the mentality of the English colonisers; for others, it was the mentality of the colonised Nigerians, while for a third group, it was the mentality of those returning from a European education. Most candidates attempted to deal with both strands of the question, seeing it as revealing the contrasting attitudes of European-educated Nigerians and those of their native culture, and significant through foreshadowing some of the things that would befall Obi.

Question 8 – Does Achebe's depiction of Lagos persuade you that it is an attractive city – or a dangerous one?

This was significantly the minority choice on this text, and was seldom done well. A major drawback for some candidates was a failure to distinguish between Lagos and Nigeria, so that their responses contained a good deal of irrelevant comment on Umuofia or on the traffic police extracting bribes on the road. Candidates who identified Lagos tended to dwell on the dangers of traffic, theft and bribery, although a few took a more balanced approach and recognised the attractions of the lively nightlife, or the higher standard of living that was available to a few, such as high ranking officials.

Question 9 – How does Austen vividly convey Fanny’s feelings about her surroundings at Mansfield Park at this moment in the novel?

Most candidates recognised the context of this extract, shortly after Fanny first arrived at Mansfield Park as a young child. There was general recognition of her unhappiness and feeling of dislocation in her new surroundings, and some listing of the things which contributed to those feelings, and in some cases, a recognition that Edmund’s attention to his cousin was in some way a turning-point for Fanny. What was lacking in all but a few very accomplished answers was any real consideration of the writing in the extract. For example, Edmund’s essential goodness was acknowledged, but the ways in which Austen communicates that to us were not explored. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to see a significant take-up for Austen, and to read answers which communicated enjoyment as well as knowledge.

Question 10 – To what extent does Austen make you pity Mr Rushworth?

This was nearly as popular a choice as the extract based alternative, and was also generally tackled successfully by many of the candidates who attempted it. For most candidates, Maria’s behaviour in the park at Sotherton, the shenanigans during rehearsals of Lovers’ Vows and Maria’s subsequent elopement with Crawford formed the basis of a response which outlined reasons to pity Mr Rushworth. Better answers went beyond merely asserting that he was ridiculous and considered some of the ways in which Austen describes him and his behaviour to try to temper the pity his situation elicits. As with the extract alternative, there was considerable evidence that students had enjoyed studying this text.

Question 11

There were so few answers on this text that it is not possible to make meaningful comment.

Question 12

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Question 13 – How does Eliot make this such a moving moment in the novel?

This was one of the most popular texts on the paper. Both questions, however, were not answered as well as they might have been. There was a tendency to narrate events and, in many cases, to leave it at that, as though the events spoke for themselves. Candidates were generally well aware that Molly was Godfrey Cass’s secret wife, and that she was a drug addict. Some were aware of the context of the party at the Red House, and recognised what Eppie was doing. What was lacking in many answers was any consideration of Eliot’s writing, or evaluation of the contrasts between Molly’s hopelessness and the hope for Silas and Eppie.

Question 14 – In what ways does Eliot make the theft of his money such a turning point for Silas?

This was the more popular option on this text, but even more than its alternative it brought forth screeds of narrative often of very little relevance to the question. Several candidates retold the story of the rivalry of the Cass brothers, explaining Dunstan’s need for money, or went into considerable detail about the circumstances which led to Silas leaving Lantern Yard. They also went way beyond the theft to talk about the arrival of Eppie and the effect that had on Silas. Stronger responses focused on the theft and its immediate aftermath, leading to his greater acceptance in Raveloe, and in particular at the Rainbow, and consequent changes of attitude on the parts of both Silas and the villagers. However, such responses were rather thin on the ground.

Question 15 – How does Frayn make this such an entertaining moment in the novel?

Although not a particularly popular option, there were candidates who had studied this text. In general, candidates were aware that Stephen's naiveté was a source of entertainment to the reader, and were able to find examples in the extract. There was some understanding of Barbara Berrill, and an awareness of the way in which she discomfited Stephen, but limited consideration of the ways in which Frayn conveys these impressions through his writing. Consequently, although there were generally adequate answers, there were few which moved beyond this into the higher reaches of the mark range.

Question 16 – Explore the ways in which Frayn creates tension in one moment in the novel.

This was the less appealing task on this text. It is pleasing to report that candidates obeyed the instruction to avoid using the **Question 15** extract, thus avoiding self-penalising. However, most answers were rather hazy in identifying a particular moment, and instead wrote in more general terms about how tension is created in the novel. Particular details which did emerge were the exploration of the tunnel and the bayonet threat, both of which were treated in a broadly narrative manner.

Question 17 – How does Grenville make this moment in the novel so sad?

A small number of candidates had studied this text, and this was the popular option for them. Most appreciated the sadness of the situation in the deaths of the two Middletons and the consequences for William and Sal, but few went on to consider the ways in which Grenville communicated the sadness through her writing. This was another example of a text where biographical information was offered with limited bearing on the actual question.

Question 18

Too few answers were seen to make meaningful comment.

Question 19 – How does Narayan effectively convey Krishna's state of mind at this early moment in the novel?

This question was often handled competently. The context was usually established effectively, and there was for the most part recognition of Krishna's resolution on a new regime for his own life. The interaction between Krishna and his colleagues, and his estimation of them, were taken into account, as was the alarm clock and what it represented. Some candidates also considered what the significance of this extract foreshadowed of subsequent events in the novel. In general, as with Austen, candidates who wrote on this text conveyed a sense of enjoyment derived from its study.

Question 20 – What impressions does Narayan's writing give you of Susila before her illness?

Much less popular than its alternative, this question nevertheless produced some good responses. Much was made of her sweetness of disposition and her spontaneity. The quarrel over the disposal of Krishna's alarm clock was considered, and her association with the scent of jasmine featured in some responses. Sadly, one or two candidates went on to write about her behaviour during her illness, for which little reward could be given under the terms of the question.

Question 21 – How does Townsend Warner amusingly portray human nature here?

Far and away the most popular question in this section of the paper, the responses to it exemplified the importance of reading the whole question. Far too many candidates saw the phrase 'human nature' and produced rather strait laced denunciations of Mr Poldero in particular, and Mr Ramkin and the rest of the human race in general. This led them to concentrate on the behaviour of Mr Poldero and of the crowd in general, seeing Mr Poldero's attempts to age the phoenix as thoroughly reprehensible. For some, the interpretation offered was of a presentation of man (Mr Poldero) versus nature (the phoenix). The minority who acknowledged the word 'amusingly' in the question generally fared rather better, finding humour in increasingly ridiculous attempts to encourage the phoenix to resurrect itself, in particular standing in front of its cage to abuse and jeer at it. Unfortunately, in some cases this led to candidates narrating the end of the story at the expense of a focus on the extract. Mr Poldero's comment on insuring the Archbishop of Canterbury was recognised to be comic, and some candidates identified the humour as 'dark' in places, demonstrating some critical evaluation. The few who discussed in some detail the conversation between Poldero and Ramkin about how to age the phoenix generally produced strong responses.

Similarly, the few who looked in some detail at Townsend Warner's writing produced some good answers. Interestingly, those who picked up on 'amusingly' related their amusement to 'human nature', rather than just writing about what is amusing in the extract.

Question 22 – How does Marshall movingly convey what a life-changing experience the visit to Da-duh is for the narrator in *To Da-duh, In Memoriam*?

Significantly less popular than the alternative, there were nevertheless quite a few candidates who attempted this option. There was a strong narrative tendency among responses, with most recognising that the visit was life-changing, and why that was the case. The contrasts between New York and Barbados were pointed up, as was the effect on Da-duh of the narrator's educating her about the city. The profound and lasting effect on the narrator of Da-duh's death was generally recognised. Only a few responses dealt well with the 'movingly' of the question, with the consequence that although there were plenty of adequate and even good responses, there were few that moved into the upper reaches of the mark range.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/22
Drama

Key messages

The strongest answers begin by addressing the question, maintain a firm focus on it throughout, and arrive at a reasoned conclusion at the end.

In good answers, points made are always supported with evidence from the text.

Good answers avoid a narrative approach.

Successful answers show awareness of the playwright's use of features of the drama genre, and of audience response.

Candidates need to respond in detail to the language the writers use.

General comments

Most candidates showed a sound knowledge of their set texts and it was clear that they often enjoyed them and engaged with the characters. For example, many candidates gave a strong personal response to Portia's role in the passage question on *The Merchant of Venice*. Both *A View from the Bridge* and *An Inspector Calls* were popular, with some accomplished answers which focused on the language in the passages. On the remaining texts, candidates often chose to answer the discursive questions on how dramatists portrayed particular aspects of characters: Hornbeck in *Inherit the Wind* and Henry in *Henry V*. All questions required candidates to consider the text on stage. Strong answers thus showed awareness of the writer's methods and intentions, and the audience's response to what was heard and seen on stage.

Answers to passage-based questions were successful when they addressed the question at the start, quoted short selections from the passage, and considered the language used and its effects on characters on stage and on the audience. This session, some answers were restricted to an explanation of the passage, rather than an analysis of its dramatic impact. Some candidates spent too long giving background information on the author or a summary of the plot.

Answers to discursive questions were successful when they addressed the question at the start and made a reasoned argument over a range of points, supported by brief but apt references to the text. Reference was most useful when it was learned quotation and when candidates showed how the reference supported the point. Some candidates used quoted text, but left the examiner to make a link to the question. Strong answers also maintained a focus throughout on the key terms of the question. Some responses spent too long relating narrative or giving biographical details of the author's life. There were also some responses where candidates attempted to answer the discursive question by relating it to the passage question, which resulted in confused answers. Candidates need to know that discursive questions are separate from passage-based questions.

Good answers paid attention to key terms used in the question, such as: 'powerfully... vividly... revealing'. They considered the language and action in the drama, and the audience's response to it. **Question 6** followed a common format in requiring candidates to select and explore two moments in the play. The moments needed to be short enough to be explored in some detail, using quoted text where possible to comment on the writer's methods and intentions and the audience's response. Some candidates adopted a narrative approach or used general material from throughout the play. Such answers were unable to address the question in enough detail.

The most useful introductions were those which immediately focused on the question and avoided lengthy narrative, biographical details of the authors, or cultural or historical background. The most successful answers continued to focus throughout on the key terms of the question and ensured that it was fully answered by the end.

It should be noted that the order of the mark bands has been inverted from this series onwards, so that Band 8 represents work at the top of the mark range and Band 1 is at the bottom of the range.

Comments on specific questions

J LAWRENCE AND R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind*

Question 1

Most candidates identified the collapse of Brady as the most dramatic part of the passage. Good answers considered how this is portrayed by analysing the action on stage, such as the suspense created as Brady leans and then slowly topples forward – towards the audience for maximum effect. Some answers usefully related Brady's physical collapse to the collapse of his fundamentalist views. Candidates who kept a focus on the terms of the question – 'powerfully dramatic' – explored how Brady's immense physical effort is conveyed in his physical appearance: '*red-faced ... larynx taut ... eyes start from his head*' and how his desperation in his failure is made clear as he goes from '*roaring*' to '*silence*'. Strong answers considered how the reactions of other characters contributed to the drama: Radio Man's indifference, the emotional screams of Mrs Brady, the ineffective praying of Mrs McLain, Drummond and Hornbeck's passive watching, like the audience. Candidates who used the whole passage explored the drama of Brady spouting unused inaugural speeches, Hornbeck's analysis of him as an '*Also-Ran*', and of Cates being uncertain of the outcome of the trial. Weak answers ignored the question and often wrote generally about evolution or creation theories, or the Scopes trial.

Question 2

There were some excellent individual answers to this question on Hornbeck. They covered a range and balance of points, selected much apt textual detail and gave a considered personal response to how far they found Hornbeck entertaining. Most answers commented well on Hornbeck's humour and witty language, often with aptly selected quotation in support, such as when he calls a monkey 'Grandpa', or when he chooses a hot-dog over a Bible. Stronger answers focused on how he entertains the audience on stage: his dramatic and entertaining entrance, his liveliness, and the speed of his dialogue. Balance was provided as some candidates considered his insensitive conversation with Rachel or his negative stance against Hillsboro. Some thought he was as biased and one-sided as Brady, although better informed, and his attempts at an epitaph for Brady were often judged by candidates as crass. Weaker answers often struggled to support points with detailed textual reference, or merely explained Hornbeck's job as newspaper columnist or his views on Hillsboro's fundamentalist stance, rather than addressing the question.

ARTHUR MILLER: *A View from the Bridge*

Question 3

Most answers focused on Eddie's protectiveness towards Catherine and were able to select text from the passage to support this. They often identified Eddie's role here as being like a father, pointing out his criticisms of Catherine in the passage, such as her '*walking wavy*' or wearing a skirt '*too short*'. Not many considered the effects of use of language, such as the sensuousness suggested here in the alliterative '*walking wavy*'. A few developed their comments to explain that Eddie has a dislike of Catherine growing up and attracting the attention of possible suitors. One perceptive candidate commented that Eddie calls her both '*baby*' and '*big girl*' as evidence of how Miller conveys the confusion he feels. Sound responses also considered Catherine's viewpoint in the passage: her innocent lack of understanding of Eddie's disapproval, which upsets her. Lower achieving candidates retold later narrative at the expense of close examination of the passage, or only considered Eddie's views.

Question 4

The best answers here often put a limit on their sympathy for Beatrice and argued that while Eddie's love for Catherine is not Beatrice's fault, she is wrong to blame Catherine, as she appears to do when she tells her to cover herself up around Eddie, or to stop flirting with him. Some candidates thought her encouragement of Catherine to marry Rodolpho only inflamed Eddie further. Several thought Beatrice should have confronted Eddie about his feelings for Catherine much earlier. Strong answers evaluated how far Miller encourages sympathy for Beatrice and always supported their views with detailed reference to the text, often in the form of brief but apt quotation. Weaker answers focused more on Eddie, and often explained his relationship with Catherine throughout the play, with a mention of Beatrice as an afterthought. Some weaker answers needed to use more detailed textual support.

J B PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 5

Many candidates showed the basic understanding that Eric is revealed as the father of Eva's unborn baby and that he stole money from his father's business to give to Eva. Stronger answers considered what is revealed about the nature of Eric's relationship with his father as Eric says he can't go to him '*when he's in trouble*', and about Mr Birling's anger at Eric and attempts to blame him: '*you've been spoilt*'. Few candidates paid enough attention to the drama of the moment, which lies in Priestley's use of the Inspector to interrogate Eric, the pathos of Eric's admission that Eva refused marriage and his stolen money, the timing of Mrs Birling's re-entry, and both parents' shock; seemingly more so at Eric's stealing than by the death of Eva and their own grandchild. Some candidates used references to stage directions such as: '*angrily... miserably... savagely*' to help identify characters' dramatic attitudes towards others. The strongest answers explored the writing of the passage in detail to show what is both 'revealing' and 'dramatic', and showed an awareness of Priestley's intentions and audience response. The weakest answers narrated previous or subsequent events, sometimes inaccurately, and did not address the question directly.

Question 6

This question required candidates to select and explore two moments in the play. The moments needed to be short enough to be explored in some detail. Candidates needed to use quoted text where possible to comment on the writer's methods and intentions, and the audience's response. Some suitable shocking moments selected included the Inspector's entrance near the beginning, his exit near the end, Gerald's confession of his affair with Daisy, the Inspector's interrogation of Mrs Birling, and the ending of the play with the shocking phone call. Candidates needed to know their chosen moment very well in order to explore how Priestley's writing makes the moment shocking. Some candidates adopted a narrative approach and used general material, rather than exploring the writing in two defined moments. Such answers were unable to address the question in enough detail.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V*

Question 7

Candidates responded to both key terms, 'amusing' and 'serious'. Sound answers identified Fluellen's misinterpretation of Pistol's bravery as amusing, together with Fluellen's lengthy speech about Fortune. Stronger answers explored the comic use of language, such as Fluellen's classical references, his repetition and the over-dramatic evocation of Fortune. Pistol's bombastic language was also explored and found amusing, such as the clumsy alliterated phrases '*Fortune's furious fickle wheel*' or '*rolling restless stone*'. Many candidates found the context of the passage to be serious, with Bardolph about to be hanged for looting. Candidates tended to use Fluellen's determination to hang Bardolph for the reason that '*discipline ought to be used*' as evidence of the seriousness of life at war, though most candidates thought it unjust. Weaker answers limited comments to Pistol's comic character and Bardolph's execution, without exploring Shakespeare's use of language.

Question 8

This was a popular question well answered. Good responses covered a range of points showing Henry as a strong king, with detailed supporting text. Candidates chose a wide range of material, showing how Henry has transformed himself from Prince Hal into a formidable leader. Thus Henry's strength was often seen in such moments as his mocking response to the Dauphin's tennis balls, his lack of mercy for traitors, the capture of Harfleur, his insistence on discipline with the hanging of Bardolph, his patriotism the night before Agincourt, and the skilled oratory of the Agincourt speech. Stronger responses evaluated some of Shakespeare's language, such as Henry's skill as orator in the use of the idea of the '*band of brothers*' in the Agincourt speech. Some answers balanced out Henry's strong qualities with some of his weaker ones, such as his awkward wooing of Princess Katherine, and there were candidates who thought Henry's treatment of the traitors to be too harsh. Whatever a candidate's views, they needed to support them with material from the text. Some candidates selected apt supporting reference, but needed to show how it linked to the question.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 9

Many candidates explained that this passage is memorable because it is a major turning point in the play, as Shylock's plans to exact revenge on Antonio are thwarted. Stronger answers pinpointed how Portia achieves this by exploring her language with its precise legal definitions, repetitions and her insistence that Shylock shall have the justice he craves. Good answers often commented on Gratiano's gloating language as he mocks Shylock's initial praising of the judge. Strong responses often explored in detail how Shakespeare memorably presents the change in Shylock during the passage, from his confidence in a favourable judgement at the start to his meek acceptance of his defeat at the end. Perceptive candidates considered the dramatic irony of Balthazar's real identity coupled with the poetic justice delivered to Shylock. These candidates often explored the audience's likely enthralled response to the unexpected twists. There were also some strong personal responses to the harsh treatment of Shylock, as candidates considered whether he really receives justice from the Christians here: these needed to be firmly rooted in the text of the passage. A few answers considered the theme of justice or religion in the whole play, instead of focusing on the passage. Some weaker answers spent too long retelling the narrative of the play.

Question 10

Successful answers explored whether Shakespeare presents money as more important than love in a range of situations from the play. Often candidates' answers depended on their view of Bassanio's ambiguous motives for marrying Portia: his love for her or his desire for her wealth – there is textual evidence to support either view. Strong answers made a coherent argument for candidates' opinions using detailed and precise textual support, often in the form of brief quotation, and they arrived at a reasoned answer. Often candidates balanced their response with some consideration of the opposite view and what textual support there was for it. Most candidates selected relevant material from the play, such as Bassanio's choice of Portia as wife, the casket challenge, Shylock's attitude to his daughter, Jessica and Lorenzo's relationship, and Antonio and Bassanio's relationship. There were some interesting thoughts on how Shakespeare uses the setting of Belmont and Venice to emphasise qualities of love and money. Some answers considered the importance of money and love separately, but without answering the question. Other candidates made sweeping assertions without making an argument or using evidence from the text in support. The weakest answers tended to retell what happens in the play.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/32
Drama (Open Text)

Key messages

The strongest answers begin by addressing the question, maintain a firm focus on it throughout, and arrive at a reasoned conclusion at the end.

In good answers, points made are always supported with evidence from the text.

Good answers avoid a narrative approach.

Successful answers show awareness of the playwright's use of features of the drama genre, and of audience response.

Candidates need to respond in detail to the language the writers use.

General comments

Most candidates showed a sound knowledge of their set texts and it was clear that they often enjoyed them and engaged with the characters. For example, many candidates gave a strong personal response to Portia's role in the passage question on *The Merchant of Venice*. Both *A View from the Bridge* and *An Inspector Calls* were popular, with some accomplished answers which focused on the language in the passages. On the remaining texts, candidates often chose to answer the discursive questions on how dramatists portrayed particular aspects of characters: Hornbeck in *Inherit the Wind* and Henry in *Henry V*. All questions required candidates to consider the text on stage. Strong answers thus showed awareness of the writer's methods and intentions, and the audience's response to what was heard and seen on stage.

Answers to passage-based questions were successful when they addressed the question at the start, quoted short selections from the passage, and considered the language used and its effects on characters on stage and on the audience. This session, some answers were restricted to an explanation of the passage, rather than an analysis of its dramatic impact. Some candidates spent too long giving background information on the author or a summary of the plot.

Answers to discursive questions were successful when they addressed the question at the start and made a reasoned argument over a range of points, supported by brief but apt references to the text. Reference was most useful when it was learned quotation and when candidates showed how the reference supported the point. Some candidates used quoted text, but left the examiner to make a link to the question. Strong answers also maintained a focus throughout on the key terms of the question. Some responses spent too long relating narrative or giving biographical details of the author's life. There were also some responses where candidates attempted to answer the discursive question by relating it to the passage question, which resulted in confused answers. Candidates need to know that discursive questions are separate from passage-based questions.

Good answers paid attention to key terms used in the question, such as: 'powerfully... vividly... revealing'. They considered the language and action in the drama, and the audience's response to it. **Question 6** followed a common format in requiring candidates to select and explore two moments in the play. The moments needed to be short enough to be explored in some detail, using quoted text where possible to comment on the writer's methods and intentions and the audience's response. Some candidates adopted a narrative approach or used general material from throughout the play. Such answers were unable to address the question in enough detail.

The most useful introductions were those which immediately focused on the question and avoided lengthy narrative, biographical details of the authors, or cultural or historical background. The most successful answers continued to focus throughout on the key terms of the question and ensured that it was fully answered by the end.

It should be noted that the order of the mark bands has been inverted from this series onwards, so that Band 8 represents work at the top of the mark range and Band 1 is at the bottom of the range.

Comments on specific questions

J LAWRENCE AND R E LEE: *Inherit the Wind*

Question 1

Most candidates identified the collapse of Brady as the most dramatic part of the passage. Good answers considered how this is portrayed by analysing the action on stage, such as the suspense created as Brady leans and then slowly topples forward – towards the audience for maximum effect. Some answers usefully related Brady's physical collapse to the collapse of his fundamentalist views. Candidates who kept a focus on the terms of the question – 'powerfully dramatic' – explored how Brady's immense physical effort is conveyed in his physical appearance: '*red-faced ... larynx taut ... eyes start from his head*' and how his desperation in his failure is made clear as he goes from '*roaring*' to '*silence*'. Strong answers considered how the reactions of other characters contributed to the drama: Radio Man's indifference, the emotional screams of Mrs Brady, the ineffective praying of Mrs McLain, Drummond and Hornbeck's passive watching, like the audience. Candidates who used the whole passage explored the drama of Brady spouting unused inaugural speeches, Hornbeck's analysis of him as an '*Also-Ran*', and of Cates being uncertain of the outcome of the trial. Weak answers ignored the question and often wrote generally about evolution or creation theories, or the Scopes trial.

Question 2

There were some excellent individual answers to this question on Hornbeck. They covered a range and balance of points, selected much apt textual detail and gave a considered personal response to how far they found Hornbeck entertaining. Most answers commented well on Hornbeck's humour and witty language, often with aptly selected quotation in support, such as when he calls a monkey 'Grandpa', or when he chooses a hot-dog over a Bible. Stronger answers focused on how he entertains the audience on stage: his dramatic and entertaining entrance, his liveliness, and the speed of his dialogue. Balance was provided as some candidates considered his insensitive conversation with Rachel or his negative stance against Hillsboro. Some thought he was as biased and one-sided as Brady, although better informed, and his attempts at an epitaph for Brady were often judged by candidates as crass. Weaker answers often struggled to support points with detailed textual reference, or merely explained Hornbeck's job as newspaper columnist or his views on Hillsboro's fundamentalist stance, rather than addressing the question.

ARTHUR MILLER: *A View from the Bridge*

Question 3

Most answers focused on Eddie's protectiveness towards Catherine and were able to select text from the passage to support this. They often identified Eddie's role here as being like a father, pointing out his criticisms of Catherine in the passage, such as her '*walking wavy*' or wearing a skirt '*too short*'. Not many considered the effects of use of language, such as the sensuousness suggested here in the alliterative '*walking wavy*'. A few developed their comments to explain that Eddie has a dislike of Catherine growing up and attracting the attention of possible suitors. One perceptive candidate commented that Eddie calls her both '*baby*' and '*big girl*' as evidence of how Miller conveys the confusion he feels. Sound responses also considered Catherine's viewpoint in the passage: her innocent lack of understanding of Eddie's disapproval, which upsets her. Lower achieving candidates retold later narrative at the expense of close examination of the passage, or only considered Eddie's views.

Question 4

The best answers here often put a limit on their sympathy for Beatrice and argued that while Eddie's love for Catherine is not Beatrice's fault, she is wrong to blame Catherine, as she appears to do when she tells her to cover herself up around Eddie, or to stop flirting with him. Some candidates thought her encouragement of Catherine to marry Rodolpho only inflamed Eddie further. Several thought Beatrice should have confronted Eddie about his feelings for Catherine much earlier. Strong answers evaluated how far Miller encourages sympathy for Beatrice and always supported their views with detailed reference to the text, often in the form of brief but apt quotation. Weaker answers focused more on Eddie, and often explained his relationship with Catherine throughout the play, with a mention of Beatrice as an afterthought. Some weaker answers needed to use more detailed textual support.

J B PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls*

Question 5

Many candidates showed the basic understanding that Eric is revealed as the father of Eva's unborn baby and that he stole money from his father's business to give to Eva. Stronger answers considered what is revealed about the nature of Eric's relationship with his father as Eric says he can't go to him '*when he's in trouble*', and about Mr Birling's anger at Eric and attempts to blame him: '*you've been spoilt*'. Few candidates paid enough attention to the drama of the moment, which lies in Priestley's use of the Inspector to interrogate Eric, the pathos of Eric's admission that Eva refused marriage and his stolen money, the timing of Mrs Birling's re-entry, and both parents' shock; seemingly more so at Eric's stealing than by the death of Eva and their own grandchild. Some candidates used references to stage directions such as: '*angrily... miserably... savagely*' to help identify characters' dramatic attitudes towards others. The strongest answers explored the writing of the passage in detail to show what is both 'revealing' and 'dramatic', and showed an awareness of Priestley's intentions and audience response. The weakest answers narrated previous or subsequent events, sometimes inaccurately, and did not address the question directly.

Question 6

This question required candidates to select and explore two moments in the play. The moments needed to be short enough to be explored in some detail. Candidates needed to use quoted text where possible to comment on the writer's methods and intentions, and the audience's response. Some suitable shocking moments selected included the Inspector's entrance near the beginning, his exit near the end, Gerald's confession of his affair with Daisy, the Inspector's interrogation of Mrs Birling, and the ending of the play with the shocking phone call. Candidates needed to know their chosen moment very well in order to explore how Priestley's writing makes the moment shocking. Some candidates adopted a narrative approach and used general material, rather than exploring the writing in two defined moments. Such answers were unable to address the question in enough detail.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V*

Question 7

Candidates responded to both key terms, 'amusing' and 'serious'. Sound answers identified Fluellen's misinterpretation of Pistol's bravery as amusing, together with Fluellen's lengthy speech about Fortune. Stronger answers explored the comic use of language, such as Fluellen's classical references, his repetition and the over-dramatic evocation of Fortune. Pistol's bombastic language was also explored and found amusing, such as the clumsy alliterated phrases '*Fortune's furious fickle wheel*' or '*rolling restless stone*'. Many candidates found the context of the passage to be serious, with Bardolph about to be hanged for looting. Candidates tended to use Fluellen's determination to hang Bardolph for the reason that '*discipline ought to be used*' as evidence of the seriousness of life at war, though most candidates thought it unjust. Weaker answers limited comments to Pistol's comic character and Bardolph's execution, without exploring Shakespeare's use of language.

Question 8

This was a popular question well answered. Good responses covered a range of points showing Henry as a strong king, with detailed supporting text. Candidates chose a wide range of material, showing how Henry has transformed himself from Prince Hal into a formidable leader. Thus Henry's strength was often seen in such moments as his mocking response to the Dauphin's tennis balls, his lack of mercy for traitors, the capture of Harfleur, his insistence on discipline with the hanging of Bardolph, his patriotism the night before Agincourt, and the skilled oratory of the Agincourt speech. Stronger responses evaluated some of Shakespeare's language, such as Henry's skill as orator in the use of the idea of the '*band of brothers*' in the Agincourt speech. Some answers balanced out Henry's strong qualities with some of his weaker ones, such as his awkward wooing of Princess Katherine, and there were candidates who thought Henry's treatment of the traitors to be too harsh. Whatever a candidate's views, they needed to support them with material from the text. Some candidates selected apt supporting reference, but needed to show how it linked to the question.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice*

Question 9

Many candidates explained that this passage is memorable because it is a major turning point in the play, as Shylock's plans to exact revenge on Antonio are thwarted. Stronger answers pinpointed how Portia achieves this by exploring her language with its precise legal definitions, repetitions and her insistence that Shylock shall have the justice he craves. Good answers often commented on Gratiano's gloating language as he mocks Shylock's initial praising of the judge. Strong responses often explored in detail how Shakespeare memorably presents the change in Shylock during the passage, from his confidence in a favourable judgement at the start to his meek acceptance of his defeat at the end. Perceptive candidates considered the dramatic irony of Balthazar's real identity coupled with the poetic justice delivered to Shylock. These candidates often explored the audience's likely enthralled response to the unexpected twists. There were also some strong personal responses to the harsh treatment of Shylock, as candidates considered whether he really receives justice from the Christians here: these needed to be firmly rooted in the text of the passage. A few answers considered the theme of justice or religion in the whole play, instead of focusing on the passage. Some weaker answers spent too long retelling the narrative of the play.

Question 10

Successful answers explored whether Shakespeare presents money as more important than love in a range of situations from the play. Often candidates' answers depended on their view of Bassanio's ambiguous motives for marrying Portia: his love for her or his desire for her wealth – there is textual evidence to support either view. Strong answers made a coherent argument for candidates' opinions using detailed and precise textual support, often in the form of brief quotation, and they arrived at a reasoned answer. Often candidates balanced their response with some consideration of the opposite view and what textual support there was for it. Most candidates selected relevant material from the play, such as Bassanio's choice of Portia as wife, the casket challenge, Shylock's attitude to his daughter, Jessica and Lorenzo's relationship, and Antonio and Bassanio's relationship. There were some interesting thoughts on how Shakespeare uses the setting of Belmont and Venice to emphasise qualities of love and money. Some answers considered the importance of money and love separately, but without answering the question. Other candidates made sweeping assertions without making an argument or using evidence from the text in support. The weakest answers tended to retell what happens in the play.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/42
Unseen

Key messages

The standard in this session is generally high, with good understanding of how to address the Assessment Objectives for the Unseen paper.

Many candidates engage with the details of the writing but need look at those details in the context of the whole text.

Candidates should consider the viewpoint from which a text is written, and not treat texts as autobiography.

Some candidates base their personal response upon conjecture rather than what is explicit in the passage: there is no need to move outside the passages in order to interpret them.

The final bullet point often proved the most demanding and candidates need to practise interpreting what the endings of text reveal about their meaning.

General comments

The standard of responses in this March session was generally high. Candidates almost all wrote with plenty of textual support to show knowledge and at least surface understanding of the text chosen. The question was usually directly addressed in the first paragraph, although sometimes forgotten thereafter, and the bullet points were generally used to give answers shape and direction, showing awareness of how the texts are structured and develop. Most candidates were aware of Assessment Objective 3 and the need to address the writing and its effect. There was a slight tendency in the lower and middle range of answers to search for features of the writing without really considering what they contributed to the poem or passage's meaning. There were also candidates who paid lip service to the AOs, but essentially wished to construct narratives of their own which were sometimes at odds with the language or atmosphere of the writing. These were personal responses, but not relevant to the literary nature of the texts. Although both texts were highly descriptive, which provided plenty of linguistic material for candidates to investigate, they depended for their effect on the uneasy encounter with other cultures for the protagonists. Without appreciating how description in literary writing can be highly subjective and may reveal more about the character from whose viewpoint we observe things than the place itself, a critical appreciation will lack clear overall understanding. There was also a tendency among mid-range candidates to write about the effect of individual words and phrases without fully understanding their meaning in the sentences from which they have been lifted.

The best advice for future candidates is to consider the text carefully as a whole, before dividing it into sections and writing in detail about particular descriptions, word or phrases. An overview needs to consider who is writing (the viewpoint of the speaker and narrator) and the writer's purpose and intended effect. The genre of the piece of writing will give an indication of the writer's purpose, and some help is usually given in the rubric before the question is printed in bold. For example, a novel will use description for a very different purpose from travel writing or autobiography/memoir. Similarly, a lyrical poem presents a particular mood or moment: it is not necessarily autobiography, even if we use the shorthand 'the poet' to describe the speaker. These are literary texts, and therefore readers should expect meaning to go beyond the literal and there may well be irony or an indication that the emotions and perceptions of the narrator or viewpoint presented are not entirely reliable. The ability to appreciate ironies, apparent contradictions, contrasts and implications is essential to access the higher marks.

Both texts present slightly awkward and ambiguous encounters with worlds which the principal characters find at the same time attractive and troubling, and the descriptions are therefore ambivalent and slightly contradictory. Stronger candidates were able to unpick this and explain what is revealed about underlying emotions and attitudes. They also picked up from the questions the need to explore the intended effect on the reader, as both are texts with many visual and aural elements, aimed to bring a scene to life and ask the reader to reflect on its meaning. In the prose, the passage is from early in a novel, and therefore clearly aims to present an unfinished encounter and develop tension and anticipation about what might happen next.

It is important not to make answers unduly speculative: the meaning of the text is contained in the implications of the extract, as long as it is read closely enough. Sometimes candidates imposed narratives of their own to try to explain what they did not wholly understand instead of looking at what the language revealed about those described in the passages.

The final bullet point is intended to help candidates draw conclusions about the whole text by evaluating the way in which it ends. It often tries to help candidates by pointing out where the final section of the writing ends or what its intended effect is meant to be. Candidates should try to use the reading time to gain an overall understanding of the text before they start writing about verbal details or literary devices, and express this overall understanding in their opening paragraphs. Likewise, they may use the suggestions of the final bullet point to reach overall conclusions about the tone of the writing and the mood it provokes in the reader. That could lead to wider evaluation of the success of the writing in meeting the purposes of the writer and the expectations of the reader, and some further reflection about the implicit meaning of the text. To repeat, the general standard was high, and most candidates showed good awareness of the requirements of a literary response, but more practice in structuring answers, and demonstrating the evaluative and interpretative qualities of a good essay would be most helpful in preparing for this paper, alongside reading a wide range of different kinds of poetry and prose. Close reading should be seen as a tool to draw out deeper intended meanings and a stronger reader response.

Poetry and Prose questions proved almost equally popular in this session.

It should be noted that the order of the mark bands has been inverted from this series onwards, so that Band 8 represents work at the top of the mark range and Band 1 is at the bottom of the range.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The poem, *A Walk on the Beach* by the Australian poet and environmental activist Margaret Scott, first appeared in her collection *The Black Swans* (1988). It describes the emotions of a young woman waiting for her lover on a remote beach. Enjoying the remote holiday experience of the untouched beach and its 'simple freedom', she appreciates its tranquil quiet sounds and sensuous appeal. She also anticipates with excitement the arrival of her lover, and wants to enjoy the pleasures of the moment without thinking of the price they may be paying for it, not literally but in terms of the exploitation of those less well-off and even of nature itself. The speaker protests a little too much that she does not want to hear about the unfairness of their privileges on this evening. At the same time that she insists that they should enjoy purely physical pleasures, she also can't help thinking of past conversations, in which they have expressed the view that the world 'must utterly change' if globalisation is not to be triumph through the deprivation of others. Moreover, the readers are reminded of the crabs in the final version of the poem, who become the victims of the lovers' selfish tread, leaving the reader with an ambiguous and disturbing final image. The poem may or may not be autobiographical and the poet's attitude to the young woman's viewpoint may or may not be ironic.

Many candidates took the emotions of the young woman at face value, without exploring irony, or the more global perspectives suggested in the second half of the poem. While some of them wrote very well about the sensual qualities of the description, they therefore did not show clear overall understanding or appreciation of the deeper implications of the text (AO2). This is partly because of over-literal reading, partly because of confusion (thinking for example that the lovers had been prisoners – hence 'simple freedom' – or were from Taiwan or the Philippines, instead of understanding how the references characterise them as privileged global travellers with consumer goods mass-produced by the global economy). However, it was primarily caused by reading the poem as a sequence of descriptive phrases removed from their context, instead of looking at it sentence by sentence and understanding its meaning before interpreting its detail. To understand the meanings of sentences it is often necessary to go to the ending. Suffering, deprivation and the need for change clearly does not apply to the lovers themselves but to the world that allows them these moments of content at the expense of others, and of their environment.

The lack of a clear overview of the poem on the part of a number of candidates, or appreciation of the undercurrent of guilt and selfishness beneath its surface pleasures – revealed by the ironic destruction of the settled calm by the ‘murderous barrage’ of the anticipated tread of the couple over the splintering crabs – made it harder for them to achieve the higher marks. They often wrote well about the first half of the poem, but less successfully about the second. Only the highest achieving were able to bring out the very different sound effects of the final lines, and how they undermine the surface smoothness and stillness of the poem’s earlier sections. Nevertheless the sensuous qualities of the descriptive writing were appreciated by many, who responded not just to the imagery and sound effects, but also to the enjambment and movement of the verse. The only sounds in the early part of the poem are soothing – ‘settling, breathing’ ‘scuff and flap’ – and most were able to understand the use of the future tense to convey the poet’s anticipation of sensual pleasure to come, ‘half-submerged in warmth’ and ready to ‘rise to meet you like a wave’. Many picked up the warmth of these images, the sensual expectation of physical pleasure and the blush of her blood compared in a simile to the natural movement of a wave. Human emotions and nature appear to be in perfect harmony in this section, although it only makes full sense in contrast to their dissonance in the final lines of the poem.

Some found dissonant notes even in the earlier descriptive lines, such as the ‘littered shells’ and the ‘dry, whiskery weed’, or contrasted the isolation of the poet with the ‘millions of tiny crabs’ to suggest that she is less in her element than she likes to think. Some thought that the ‘pale, flickering margin’ of the sea had an ominous quality. Those who did understand the development of the poem could see the insistent tone implicit in the repetitions of ‘don’t talk today – today at least...’ or ‘Let’s walk...Let’s smile’. Some suggested that she is trying to cover up her feelings of guilt or that the couple might be less in harmony than her fantasy of togetherness suggests. While her love and longing are clearly expressed, they have evidently had previous discussions about the ‘price’ of their privileges and happiness. ‘What we have, what we are’ is clearly not something she takes entirely for granted. To understand this sentiment, it was important to link it to the image of themselves ‘leisured, well-fed’ in contrast to those who go to bed hungry or are deprived, or pay the price of cheap labour. Some felt that the speaker was trying too hard in her insistent ‘No, not today’, emphatic through the use of an unusually short sentence, and medial caesura. Those who attended to the rhythms of the verse also noticed the awkwardness of the short line ‘must utterly change’ with its pause for reflection.

Candidates who paid detailed attention to both aspects of the poem, the descriptive and sensual and the reflective and political, were then able to see how carefully poised the final lines are. Although they appear to re-establish the soft tones and sensual sibilance of the first section, with mutual abandonment to physical pleasure, the sound effects of the crabs writhing beneath their feet are unsettling and interrupt the complacency of their reunion, drawing attention to its cost. The word ‘murderous’ is especially striking and unsettling. There were some accomplished responses which made the most of these contradictions and provocations, displaying the insight, critical evaluation and engaged sensitivity to detail expected of the very best candidates who attempt this paper.

Question 2

The prose extract from *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles is another complex, ambiguous and troubling encounter of a wealthy, privileged outsider with a world he finds obscurely appealing but does not fully understand. The difference is that he deliberately seeks his isolation, and several strong candidates correctly intuited that his state of mind is probably already unsettled and disturbed. The highest achieving answers came from those who realised how much we see the North African scene through Port’s eyes, and that he may be deliberately ignoring the menace and danger he is walking towards.

Many candidates noticed the way in which the writer personifies the elements of Port’s surroundings from the very beginning: ‘the streets had left off being paved’. It is as if this animated slum is already conspiring to draw him into a trap. Many commented on the obvious poverty of the streets and the children, and the violence of their animal-like screeching. There was analysis of how the stone-throwing incident appears to be a hostile act at first, even if it proves to be two groups of children in battle with each other. One or two commented that this nevertheless seems to be a warning to Port, or a protest that he is intruding where he is out of place. Several commented on the contrast between the animalistic spontaneity of the children, described with active participles like ‘screeching and scattering’, and Port’s more mechanistic movements: he ‘wheeled’ and his gait is ‘mechanical and rhythmical’.

Only the most accomplished answers saw the importance of the reference to the wind 'dry and warm'. Again this is personified to suggest that it is capable of independent agency. Some saw this as a transferred epithet: it seems to be in conflict with Port, or a pathetic fallacy to describe his own unsettled and undefined dissatisfactions. Several noticed that it comes up the street 'out of the blackness,' and the strongest responses noticed that it actually has the effect of luring him on. He sniffs at 'the fragments of mystery in it' as though they are palpable, and finds himself drawn away from the lights of relative civilisation, the play of the feral children and the patterns of the streets and towards the dark and unknown. Not many seemed to understand the phrase 'an unaccustomed exaltation': those who did appreciated that Port is excited, and perhaps even intoxicated by the promise of the desert, and the dark emptiness beyond the city.

Many wrote well about how the urban landscape gives way to the huts and hovels of a slum, and some saw the possibilities of symbolic significance here. They certainly appreciated that Port, as a tourist, is deliberately choosing to venture beyond his comfort zone. Most at this point were able to comment on the play of light and darkness, and many on what was implied about the moral uncertainty which lay beyond the boundaries of civilisation. Many noticed that the surroundings are again personified and appear, to Port at least, to be alive and conspiring together. More able candidates noticed the repeated references to the wind 'straight from the south', and some found a sinister or even sepulchral quality about the 'barren' mountains and 'curtains of dust'. Some noticed the short sentence which conveys how Port 'stood still' amid all this natural movement. Understandably, many candidates struggled to reconcile the unpleasant details of the 'garbage and rubble' and Port's desire to the rout down into 'the dimness below', but some were able to give these details a symbolic significance. Several commented on the contrasting 'faint white light' of the Milky Way, and how Port appears to be relishing the play of light and darkness here. Most noticed the silence of the scene, broken only by the sound of the motor-cycle and the 'occasional cock-crow'. While the details remained elusive to Port, some candidates connected the former sound with the idea that he is being followed, and others saw something ominous about the later, hearing echoes of death and betrayal. Certainly both are valid readings.

Most wrote effectively about the sensuous qualities of description in the final paragraph. Amid the dark news the smells are overpowering, and the touch of dust and 'fish skeletons' contribute further to an ominous and perhaps death-haunted atmosphere. Port sees nothing to reassure him when he lights a match. The appearance of the other figure received detailed attention from most candidates. Most noticed that it is not at first defined or identified, merely 'a figure' and 'it' – not even human. However the triplet that follows 'had seen him, had followed him, and knew' suggests his appearance is not accidental. Several noticed that Port chooses to see him as entirely alien at first; 'it' then 'an Arab' and only latterly 'a man'. This was rightly judged as reflecting his own attitude and sense of possible threat. The stranger is inscrutable and his motives unfathomable. Some felt that the cock crow was again a sinister signal, as if the man is in league with the more unsettling aspects of the environment, while others commented on how the 'fading parabola' of the match is another example of light extinguished by darkness.

Quite a number were puzzled by the fact that the man speaks French, unaware of how common this in North Africa. Accomplished responses noticed that this is the only dialogue in the whole passage and that it therefore has a shock effect, breaking the silence and Port's introspection. While many wrote about 'here's where the trouble begins' and appreciated that Port may be in a dangerous situation, fewer fully appreciated the next sentence: 'he did not move'. Although quite a number compared this to the short sentence 'He stood still', only a few commented on how unusual this is as a reaction to danger, or to being followed, or on how Port seems to be welcoming confrontation. However, these observant readers could also see that we had in fact been prepared for this, by his sniff of exaltation at the encroaching blackness, his still appreciation of the 'curtains of dust' and his willing descent into the pungent and dusty canyon of dimness in which he has now found himself.

Most candidates enjoyed exploring the effects of description, action and dialogue in creating a tense situation with hints of impending danger, and the highest achieving were adept in explaining the effects of the writing on the reader and the effectiveness with which a sense of foreboding is created. The strongest answers understood how the individual human being becomes isolated and vulnerable surrounded by the immensity of the darkness, the desert air and the Milky Way above.