

# WORLD LITERATURE

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Paper 0408/01  
Portfolio

## **Key messages**

Teachers should refer to the 0408 Syllabus and Coursework Handbook during the planning stages of the course.

Set clear tasks which allow candidates to meet requirements of both the syllabus and band descriptors: ensure the task is written, in full, at the start of all assignments.

Support the moderation process with focused ticking and careful annotation of the written assignments' strengths and weaknesses using comments from the band descriptors.

Carry out a clerical check of the transcription of marks to the Individual Record Card, the Coursework Assessment Summary Forms and Mark Sheets.

## **General comments**

The observations in this general report should be read alongside the individual report to the centre.

### **The Critical Essay**

For candidates to be able to meet the assessment criteria in their writing, effective tasks must be set. Examples of appropriately challenging tasks for both the critical and empathic tasks can be found in the 0408 *Coursework Handbook*.

Work was submitted on a wide range of challenging texts, some based on the list of suggestions in the syllabus itself, as well as other suitable well-known works. Successful essays focused closely on a well-formulated task encouraging engagement with both theme and character, demonstrating depth of critical analysis and understanding of the writer at work. Candidates wrote confidently about a particular theme presented in their selected text, often showing an impressive level of knowledge and understanding. The best were able to support ideas with much well-selected and integrated reference and quotation, analysing sensitively the ways writers achieved their effects. There is no requirement to compare poems or short stories where these are used as a set text, and the best responses dealt with each poem or short story in turn, offering sustained analysis; when candidates did attempt to compare, these often felt strained or restrictive.

There were still many examples of the use of author biographical material in essays which detracted from the focus of the task, often leaving fewer opportunities for candidates to engage with the actual texts. Weaker responses resulted from less structured tasks where candidates tended to narrate the text rather than explore specific themes or characters. These responses frequently used lengthy quotations with no analysis of the text, or made sweeping generalisations and unsubstantiated assertions. Weaker responses were also self-penalising where only one poem or short story was referred to.

### **The Empathic Response**

A feature of the best responses was a clear indication, at the top of the response, of the character and the chosen moment in the text. This allows readers to assess the success of the response as they read through it and prevents lapses into narrative and speculation. The strongest responses demonstrated candidates' skill in capturing a convincingly authentic voice for the chosen character and moment, thereby demonstrating an appreciation of characterisation, themes, language and structure. These responses were firmly rooted in the text. Weaker responses were not always written in first person narrative and became creative and speculative with little understanding or 'voice' of the chosen character conveyed.

Teachers are reminded that the choice of minor characters; use of diary entries, drama scripts or letter writing, becomes creative and does not enable candidates to capture a character's 'voice', firmly rooted to the text. The coursework handbook, available on School Support, contains guidance about how to formulate an appropriate title for this assignment.

### **The Recorded Conversation**

The opportunity for many candidates to discuss their chosen text(s) in their conversation demonstrated their enthusiasm for their reading with some insightful and well-supported personal responses to texts. The strongest responses focused on the ways in which the writers present the chosen character or theme, encouraged by some adroit questioning by teachers to keep candidates on task and encouraging students to continue their conversations. Weaker responses lacked focus on the key aspect of the task 'how the writer presents' and tended to retell plot and character behaviour. Teachers should endeavour not to ask questions that lead candidates away from their chosen theme and/or character. Some candidates are still delivering a rehearsed talk, with little or no input from the teacher, which fail to meet the criteria of a 'conversation'.

The upper limit of seven minutes for a recording is not mandatory; some candidates were able to demonstrate skills in the higher bands without extending the conversation to a full seven minutes. Teachers are reminded that recordings should be stopped after the seven minute limit has been reached. However recordings which are significantly shorter than this may not allow candidates to demonstrate the skills required to reach the upper bands, and be self-penalising as a result.

### **Teacher annotation**

Teachers are reminded that all assignments should show evidence of having been marked to assist the moderation process. Focused ticking of salient points, supported by brief reference to the band descriptors in marginal annotation and a detailed summative comment are a prerequisite for all written assignments. These annotations allow external moderators to see the rationale for the final mark awarded. It is also important that any marks which are changed during the internal moderation process are justified with an additional comment, explaining the reason for the change.

### **Administration**

Rigorous clerical checks should be carried out by the centre to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged by any transcription errors made by the person entering marks on individual record cards, coursework assessment summary forms and mark sheets. To facilitate final checking by the moderator, candidates should be listed in the same order as the MS1s and not in class groups. Care should be taken over the presentation of the portfolios. The Individual Record Card should be fastened securely (e.g. by a treasury tag or staple) to the written assignments (and not placed in plastic wallets or cardboard folders) to ensure ease of access. Assignments should be organised in the order presented on the Individual Record Card. Individual tracks for the recorded conversations should be named with both candidate number and name and checks made that oral responses for all candidates in the sample are sent. It would be helpful for oral recordings to be suitably protected to avoid damage or breakage during postage.

# WORLD LITERATURE

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Paper 0408/21  
Paper 2 Unseen

## Key messages

Thinking and planning are essential preparatory stages to writing. Candidates are advised to spend about 20 minutes reading the question paper and planning their answer.

Essay openers that begin with an overview of key ideas in the text, firmly rooted in its specific content and clearly related to the question proved most successful.

Overly-long conclusions that simply repeat earlier points are not an efficient use of candidates' time.

## General comments

There was a range of ideas and responses to the texts offered by candidates; thoughtful, emotionally engaged writing was the norm, regardless of ability or levels of achievement.

Candidates are advised to spend about 20 minutes reading the question paper and planning their answer. This is time well-invested to ensure that the right choice of text has been made for the individual candidate, and to allow for the text to be re-read for a more secure understanding before writing begins. It was obvious from some of the poetry responses this year that some candidates had only a half-formed grasp of the poem before they began their essays.

Good responses came out of careful reading, particularly of poetry texts where meaning is often condensed and couched in figurative language or symbolism that is not always easy to absorb on a first reading. Prose texts are, for some, more accessible, but the best responses were those that demonstrated the ability not only to micro-analyse at word or even sound level, but that were able also to 'stand back' from the text and comment on overarching structural features like building tension through rising action, or repeated patterns of motifs or language.

There was a fairly even divide between poetry and prose responses. Candidates should be discouraged from thinking that the poetry option is 'easier' because it is shorter and there is therefore less to read: as stated above, meaning in poetry is often very condensed and takes developed reading skills to deconstruct. The prose passage, though itself containing much in the way of crafted language, may be worth the investment of time for some candidates.

Whichever option candidates choose, the key to success is a good, solid grasp of a text's surface meaning, and the willingness to dig down to consider deeper implications and how these are achieved. Those that begin with an overview of key ideas in the text, firmly rooted in its specific content and clearly related to the question proved most successful. This generally means addressing the 'What?' part of the question first, where the candidate should be asking *What am I being asked to focus on?* (e.g. *the poet's thoughts and feelings, the challenges faced by the boys, tension in this extract*). Only once the poet's thoughts and feelings, say, have been clearly identified (nostalgia, fond memory for times past, the loss of the carefree joy of youth) and perhaps the situation has been outlined (an older man looking back at himself in a black and white photograph, a woman waking up terrified after a recurring nightmare) should the candidate then turn their attention to the How?, looking at *how* these ideas/situations are conveyed through the writing. Beginning to creep back into candidates' responses, sadly, were rather empty introductions that simply repeated the question and bullets and provided a list of literary techniques that often included juxtaposition, caesura and enjambment. This type of opener often led to an arid search for these features in the writing with little sense of overview of the writer's intentions in the piece as a whole.

Similarly, over-lengthy conclusions that ate into precious time and that simply repeated what had already been said proved to be of little value for some candidates, and many lost out on perhaps edging into the band above because coverage of the text or depth of analysis had been abandoned in favour of making time to include these inefficient conclusions. If students can write a brief final thought – and a well-considered

single sentence is enough here – on the text and its impact, then that will suffice as a means of bringing their essay to a close. If they cannot, or if they run out of time, they would be well advised to miss off a formal conclusion and simply bring their last point to a fully developed close.

### Comments on specific questions

#### Question 1

*Not Love Perhaps*

#### How does the poet strikingly convey his thought and feelings?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the poet's own ideas about love
- the words and images he uses to portray the lovers' needs
- how he conveys the benefits of their love.

Many candidates cited the word *Perhaps* in the title as suggesting the poet's uncertainty about his 'definition' of love, and this certainly captured the exploratory mood of the poem. Some spotted that this word is again used twice in the opening stanza and recognised that this repetition of *perhaps*, along with the use of the vague *something* in the stanza's final line, clearly establishes an air of the poet's uncertainty about what love actually 'is'. If this idea about the poet's hesitant approach to defining love was grasped, then candidates were off to a good start.

Stanza one outlines the poet's basic argument or stance: this (i.e. his own love) is not the stereotypical notion of passionate, undying, all-consuming love often represented in popular culture, but something quieter, softer, more *especially our own*. Candidates who were able recognise this opening premise were in a good position to move through the rest of the poem confidently, seeing the following two stanzas as an expansion on the ideas of intimacy and partnership in love.

Some excellent responses to this opening stanza were offered, displaying real emotional maturity from candidates who, at their age, are by definition perhaps only on the verge of discovering what romantic love is themselves. One candidate – a Shakespeare fan – got to grips with the poet's view of love as follows:

*... it is not like the love that 'lays down its life', hinting that he is not talking of romantic love, the kind of love that made Romeo and Juliet 'lay down their lives' for each other. His love is not defined by strong burning feelings. Rather, it is something real – something tangible.*

Another thoughtful candidate in a succinct summary of the whole poem noted that:

*To the poet, love isn't a perfect fairytale; it's the real feelings between two people and the idea that they can lean on each other through thick and thin ...*

And comments like the following displayed an impressive ability to quickly grasp the essence of the poem's central idea:

*The poet distinguishes his own relationship from the standard perceptions of love which is demanding and unsatisfying just like a thirst 'that many waters cannot quench'.  
It does not need harsh sacrifices; it is unique and personal to the poet and his partner.*

Reminding ourselves of the question (How does the poet strikingly convey *his thoughts and feelings?*), we see in the responses above a clear willingness to engage with the poet's *thoughts and feelings* from the very start of the essay; the candidate responses above were all drawn from the introduction or very early on in the response. Having thus established *what* the poet's thoughts and feelings are, these candidates then went on to address the *How ... strikingly* part of the question, in a practical analysis of exactly how these thoughts and feelings are conveyed throughout the sequential unfolding of the poem. This approach of addressing *What?* is being conveyed first, followed by *How?* it is conveyed proved to be a solid framework for a successful essay.

Less successful were responses that began by addressing the *How?* part of the question first. These tended to open with sentences along the lines of: *The poet strikingly conveys his thoughts and feelings through his*

*use of language, anaphora, imagery and punctuation.* Answers like these (which didn't identify exactly what these 'thoughts and feelings' are) typically went on to search out individual and often disconnected examples of the techniques stated in the introduction with little sense of an overview of the poem or the poet's overall intentions. Similarly, candidates who were uneasy about engaging with an overview of meaning in the poem often resorted to a more concrete statement about its form and structure, beginning their essays with sentences like :

*'Not love perhaps' is a three stanza poem followed by the rhyme scheme: ABCDEFGGHHIIJKLLMM.*

Having established the technical structure of the poem, this type of opening was typically followed by comments on how the poet's thoughts and feelings were conveyed by his use of caesura that allowed the reader to pause and think about what he was saying, or his employment of enjambment that allowed his thoughts to flow freely. Punctuation was often seen as a powerful tool in conveying meaning, with observations like:

*These semi-colons and commas help the poet convey his thoughts as they give the poem more tension and detail.*

The one thing that these type of responses inevitably had in common was the absence of any reference to the content of the poem itself, either through engagement with its ideas or through direct quotation that might at least have provided some sort of illustration of this use of caesura, enjambment or punctuation under discussion. Often, however, this 'analysis' was presented in a free-standing paragraph – often running to half a page or even a whole page – with comments so disconnected from the content and meaning of the poem that they could almost have been applied to *any* poem; this type of content often proved time-consuming and fruitless for the candidate.

Teachers are, therefore, advised to encourage their learners to get to grips with *meaning* in a text as an opening response to a question and to discourage overly-technical analyses of stanza and line length, number of syllables, rhyme schemes, use of caesura and enjambment, etc. which are often used as a crutch by less confident candidates to replace genuine engagement with the text.

The imagery in stanza one proved to be something of a discriminator in that successful answers saw the poet's use of melodrama in a *Love* (with a rather pretentious capital L) that would *lay down its life* and that was so overwhelmingly powerful that it could not be quenched by flood waters. The comparison with the imagery of *lighter ink* and *lower tone* in the poet's reflection on his own more gentle, intimate love was often noted:

*The fact that the poet has also made reference to 'ink' suggests that the love, despite not being as dramatic as others is still evident and permanent, much like ink – ink that signs the marriage certificate.*

However, some candidates struggled to separate out these two ideas, asserting that the poet's love was both all-consuming and passionate *and* soft and gentle. Other candidates recognised the poet's uncertainty about love, but then took this as doubt about his own relationship, doubting whether he is actually in love or doubting the 'longevity' of his love.

It seemed that most candidates felt safer once they had reached the 'needs' section. Many discussed the repetition, the rhyming - particularly the fact that the couplets mirror the lovers' togetherness - and the metaphors, especially when contrasted structurally with the first section which doesn't rhyme, and doesn't contain images of the lovers, walking, talking, meeting, etc. They pointed out that being together and walking and talking together signified the need for lovers to share, to be united and communicative, and most candidates understood that the message in the imagery from line 9 onward could be summarised as the need for lovers to be united against the *hard times* of life, *those who would speak against them*, the *tough times of life that everyone faces*, finding comfort, solace and support from each other so that they find a sense of belonging to each other in an *alien land*.

Stronger responses could point out that 'maps' and 'discoveries', 'halts' and 'islands' suggested that love was a journey, and that the poet was saying that the journey of love, taken together, created a bond stronger than the notions of romantic Love questioned in the first stanza. One candidate succinctly summed up the extended metaphor of travel in the following observation:

*The poet portrays to the reader how love and being lovers opens up one's life and heals the pain of navigating life.*



Some good answers also picked up on the poet's use of military imagery in *alliance* and *maps* to suggest a sense of the lovers battling together against difficulties represented by the *nightmare faces* and *whisperers at the corner of the street*. Some, however, came unstuck by using these references as a basis for inventing a 'back story' for the lovers who were sometimes seen as conducting an illicit love affair that was frowned on by their friends and family. Whilst this interpretation is not completely at odds with individual elements of the poem read in isolation, in the context of the poem as a whole, there is little solid evidence to support it. Learners should be advised, therefore, to take care to avoid drifting into invented imaginings about the lives of characters met in texts that have no solid foundation in the writing itself.

On the subject of reading in context, it was apparent that quite a few candidates appeared to be reading the poem line by line and trying to draw meaning from each line in turn (often despite their knowledge of 'enjambment' in the poem). Thus, the opening line *This is not Love, perhaps* was often cited as suggesting that the poet did not feel that he was in love, or that he had had a lovers' tiff, or that he was still searching for his ideal love *that many waters cannot quench*. If read carefully, however, it can be seen that the opening stanza is one complete sentence that sets out the poet's argument: This is not... (one thing) ... But (another thing). Similarly, the line from stanza two *And then finding we can walk* was regularly quoted and followed with observations like *This shows that the lovers spend time walking together*. This is fine as a surface reading of the text, but the key to a meaningful reading of this section of the poem lies on the following line: *finding we can walk / More firmly*. If these words had been quoted instead of the single line, the candidate would then have been able to focus on an analysis of the effects created by *More firmly*, taking their response to a higher level. There was a split between those who were able to comprehend the basic thrust of the poet's message and imagery, and those who had the abilities to dissect and respond further.

Centres might consider, therefore, time spent on reading skills in poetry a worthwhile investment as a means of raising their candidates' performance in the Unseen paper: as important - if not more so - than essay writing skills. Training learners to read to a full stop before pausing to consider what meaning is being conveyed would go a long way to improving their grasp of overall meaning. Knowing that lines 'run on' and using this knowledge to read for meaning would be more beneficial for candidate performance than the use of 'throwaway' comments about how enjambement makes the poem 'flow better'.

As a final note on performance as a whole on the poetry question, it was very satisfying for examiners to see all candidates without exception give of their best in their responses, regardless of their ability or of where they were in their learning trajectory. Comments like the following were a real pleasure to read and are a reminder of why we teach literature:

*(The poem) emphasises the theme of 'What love is' and encourages the reader to think in an alternative way which is the aim of a poet. It makes love living instead of a hypothetical concept which makes it more intriguing for the reader.*

## Question 2

### *The Door*

**In what ways does the writer powerfully convey tension in this extract?**

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the description of the dream itself
- how the writer presents the narrator's surroundings after waking
- how the writer conveys the narrator's thoughts and feelings

Many candidates focused well on the creation of tension in the extract, keeping this at the forefront of their discussions. Basic responses focused on the situation the old woman finds herself in, commenting on the recurring nature of the dream that seems inescapable and how she wakes up in a terrified state. Generally, answers progressed through the passage in sequence, which is always a good idea when the task is to track tension and its cumulative growth. Observations about the growth of tension were supported with an appropriate selection of quotations from the text, noting that she wakes *bathed in sweat* after being *confronted repeatedly with horrors*. Feelings of being trapped were seen in the *reinforced shatterproof* door and her inability to turn the lock, and in her frustration at being unable to communicate with the paramedics outside because she was *mouthling vacantly, like a fish* having lost the power of speech. For some candidates, this was as far as they were able to go with supported comment, and often the second part of

the passage was simply paraphrased in a narrative recount, sometimes missing off the last section altogether.

Better answers were able to move beyond the tension to be found in the woman's situation to look more closely at how tension is heightened through the writing, addressing the 'In what ways ... powerfully convey...' part of the question. If less confident candidates understand that they have to make some response to the writer's methods, then some very simple comments on examples of repetition (*a vision that returns again and again*) or simile (*their swollen faces haloed like moons*) might bring them closer to analysis rather than simple narration or description of the text; finding something to say about these features of the writing would be a good way for them to lift their performance onto a more analytical level.

More successful answers did just this, looking closely at language and imagery in the passage and at how the writer's choices are designed to shape meaning and create effect. The choice of *bathed* in *bathed in sweat* was seen as an example of exaggeration or hyperbole to show how panicked the old woman is on waking from her nightmare. This was a good focus on language and showed an awareness of the effect created by the word. Those who could find a synonym for *bathed* did even better, talking of how she was *drenched* or *soaked* in sweat on waking and how this illustrated the extremely high level of her panic. Indeed, the use of synonyms when looking back at individual words in quotations is a very useful tool for candidates to demonstrate that they can 'pick apart' language and deconstruct exactly how it works; centres would do well in giving their learners plenty of practice in this skill. A nice focus on the phrase *drags me screaming from my sleep*, and in particular on the word *drags* was offered in the following response:

*This is powerful as it shows the helplessness and fear that the narrator feels and how there is some resistance to the nightmare's power, but it is not enough.*

The candidate's use of the word *resistance* here is a clear response to the idea of the dream's grip on the old woman and how she has to battle to release herself.

The second paragraph focused on the description of the dream itself and much attention was paid to this. The fact that the dream is *always the same* and *never-changing* was often picked out as showing that the woman was tortured by exactly the same dream every time, but not many candidates stood back to ask why the writer had used both of these expressions when they mean virtually the same thing. What is the effect of repeating the same idea in a slightly different way on the next line? Comment on how this structural repetition itself echoes the recurring nature of the dream could have lifted some good responses even higher. The *shimmering silhouettes* of the paramedics, with their *distorted* and *swollen faces haloed like moons* drew much comment, with one candidate observing:

*(The woman is) so filled with fear that she cannot comprehend what she sees and it takes the form of a possible monster that is out to get her.*

This was a good response to the presentation of the nightmarish paramedics, focusing on their monstrous appearance. To take this analysis further, however, the candidate could have gone back into some of the language for a closer look at the 'mechanics' of how it works. The hissing of the 'sh' and 's' sounds in *shimmering silhouettes* is sinister and unsettling, the word *distorted* makes them sound grotesque, their *swollen faces* make them seem large and monstrous, whilst *haloed like moons* lends them a supernatural air. (One candidate also noted the connotations of lunacy connected with *moon*, whilst another saw it differently, commenting on how the word *halo* presents them as angelic, saviours of sorts, come to rescue the patient.) The key point here is that candidates who show a 'clear' understanding of how meaning is achieved can lift their performance into a 'clear, critical' understanding if they show a willingness to explore language in a practical analysis of exactly how it achieves its effects.

The image of the old woman *mouthing vacantly, like a fish* also drew much comment from candidates who often stated that they could empathise with this feeling from their own experiences of nightmares, as I'm sure we all could. More probing responses looked at the image in more detail, noting how fish cannot 'breathe' in air and flounder in panic 'gasping' for water, much like the old woman who wakes *gasping for air*. This ability to 'pick apart' an image and then to hold it against its parallel image that the writer is aiming to convey is a skill that allows candidates to demonstrate a fuller understanding of how imagery works and therefore to access the higher bands.

The portraits hanging on the old woman's bedroom wall drew mixed responses. Some saw them simply as part of the *familiar furniture* and therefore as a comfort to the old woman on waking. Only a careful reading of the passage and of their description as *all-seeing, all-knowing* witnesses would have revealed what many noted them to be: an unwelcome, judgemental presence. Very good answers picked up on their *high starched collars* and formal dress from a previous age as symbolising their moral superiority and this ability

to look for visual symbols in a text that might convey a more abstract meaning stood some candidates in good stead. This sense of a moral judgement being executed on the old woman allowed candidates to then comment on her feelings of guilt and of how the past was now come to 'haunt' her present as the dream, it appears, is rooted in real events from her past. The old woman's 'hubris' in having seen herself as godlike in the past was seen as the root of her current punishment and the open-ended nature of the close of the passage as suggesting that this punishment – the dream – is not over.





# WORLD LITERATURE

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Paper 0408/22  
Paper 2 Unseen

## Key messages

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Similarly, over-lengthy conclusions that ate into precious time and that simply repeated what had already been said proved to be of little value for some candidates, and many lost out on perhaps edging into the band above because coverage of the text or depth of analysis had been abandoned in favour of making time to include these inefficient conclusions. If students can write a brief final thought – and a well-considered

single sentence is enough here – on the text and its impact, then that will suffice as a means of bringing their essay to a close. If they cannot, or if they run out of time, they would be well advised to miss off a formal conclusion and simply bring their last point to a fully developed close.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

##### *A Found Photo*

#### **How does the writer movingly convey his thoughts and feelings in this poem?**

To help you answer, you might consider:

- his description of the river and the weather in the photograph
- how he portrays the people in the photograph
- how he conveys the effect the photograph has on him.

Candidates responded well to the poem. Regardless of ability and skill level, all candidates seemed able to make an emotional connection with the persona – an older man looking fondly back at an image of himself and two friends in their carefree youth. The best answers showed a firm grasp of the ‘situation’ of the older man looking at a black and white photo which has captured a colourful moment from his youth and reflecting on the passage of time that has drawn him further and further away from that day. Good answers tended to follow the suggested approach in the bullet points to structure their response and were able to analyse how the writer’s use of poetic techniques contributed to overall meaning. The rather quirky image of the poet’s younger self looking back out from the photo to discern the shadowed form of his current self looking in proved evasive for many, but those who did attempt to comment on it did so with a surprising level of understanding and empathy.

Responses that began with a clear focus on the poet’s ‘thoughts and feelings’ rather than on the ‘How’ part of the question tended to produce more successful introductions. These identified feelings of fond reminiscence for a lost, joyful youth or wistful memories of a colourful adolescence prompted by the discovery of the photo, perhaps tinged with some sadness but ultimately accepting of the passage of time. Having succinctly summed up an overview of the poet’s thoughts and feelings, often in no more than a sentence, these responses went on to work through the poem in sequence, analysing ‘How’ these thoughts and feelings were ‘movingly’ portrayed. A solid opening, providing a clear summary of the poet’s thoughts and feelings was the following:

*In ‘A Found Photo’, the writer conveys his remembrance of a moment and the way he grasps onto his childhood innocence. He portrays the youth, naivety and happiness of the children and the photo allows him to visualise and feel the joyfulness of his past.*

Less successful were introductions that simply repeated the question and bullet points:

*The writer movingly conveys his thoughts and feelings in this poem through his description of the river and the weather, how he portrays the people and how he conveys the effect the photograph has on him.*

This is a sluggish start to an answer and can attract no reward from the examiner, as there is no actual contact with the poem itself, only an almost verbatim copy of the question. Similarly, introductions that began by addressing the ‘How’ part of the question were also generally ineffective as they invariably produced a list of terminology that was completely disconnected from the poem:

*The writer movingly conveys his thoughts and feelings in this poem through his use of language, juxtaposition, caesura and punctuation.*

Again, it is difficult for an examiner to find anything to reward here, as there is no connection with the text itself. This type of response often went on to identify the number of lines and stanzas, the rhyme scheme (or lack of) and how the writer’s use of enjambment makes the poem ‘flow’. An examiner might read through two or three paragraphs of this type of comment before eventually finding some meaningful comment on the poet’s ‘thoughts and feelings’, which was the main thrust of the question. Whilst it is understandable that candidates might want to comment on the structural features of a poem, a dry, numerical analysis set out in a separate paragraph that is completely disconnected from any engagement with the poem’s mood and

meaning cannot be highly rewarded. Centres are therefore advised to discourage students from adopting this approach and instead aim for a sharp engagement with the poem's key ideas and mood from the very start of their answer. Comments on form and structure are best 'drip fed' into the discussion, making them an integral part of an analysis that is firmly rooted in the text.

The opening eight lines of the poem corresponded with the first bullet: *his description of the river and the weather in the photograph*. Most candidates were able to recognise that, although the photo itself is black and white and static, the scene it depicts is colourful and full of life and energy. The contrast between the two was much commented on and supported with references to the *black and white* and *grey and inert* photo juxtaposed against the *full-leafed* trees, the *hot* air and the *carefree* light. Some even noticed that the photo itself is wavy-edged, echoing the flow of the river that it has captured. Problems arose where candidates had not fully grasped the distinction between the photograph and the scene that it depicts and read the weather as dull or rainy because it was *grey and inert*, having previously established that it was *hot* and *clearly summer*. Their only way out of this conundrum was to guess that the weather had turned nasty, but then had come out sunny again. More than a few candidates also struggled with the trees, which they saw as both *full-leafed* and *naked*, applying the word *naked* to the trees instead of to the trio. This, of course, was a problem with reading. Candidates who habitually read only a few words or short phrases at a time and then try to glean some meaning from them are particularly susceptible to this sort of misinterpretation. With a blinkered focus on only words in their search for meaning, punctuation cues are often missed. In this case, candidates read that *the trees / Stand full-leafed on the bank; and they're all but / Naked*. This reading would indeed suggest that the trees are both *full-leafed* and *naked*, but it misses the semi-colon after *on the bank* that indicates a pause before the following: *and they're all but / Naked, this trio, each with a paddle*. So, in fact, the trees are full-leafed and it's the trio who are all but naked. Candidates should be encouraged to approach an unseen poem reading to each semi-colon or full stop before pausing to consider meaning; this would improve their reading for meaning and thus possibly their performance in the final exam.

The central part of the poem containing the description of the trio was generally well grasped, as was the dynamic of their relationships. Many empathised with the poet's self-deprecation and his envy of the boy who was *cast in bronze*. There were some excellent responses to this image, seeing the *robust* boy as some sort of demi-god, looking like a statue of Adonis with his tanned, muscular body in comparison to the poet's *scrawny pale-faced kid*. The best answers analysed the writer's use of language closely, suggesting that the word *cast* immortalised the god-like boy forever, like a statue erected to be revered, or that being *scrawny* and *pale* suggested illness, weakness and under-development. Throw Janine into the mix and the element of a love triangle emerged for some candidates who saw the poet's envy of this boy as being heightened by his possible unrequited love for Janine who is patently 'out of his league' and unreachable. Janine's presentation as 'mature' was often supported with the word *Womanly*, though most candidates were rather shy of commenting on the suggestion of her burgeoning sexual power seen through her *arched* back and the fact that she is *in the clasp of a swimsuit*. A surprising number of candidates, however, skipped over this central section with little comment at all on the people in the photograph and how they are presented – more surprising given that the second bullet in the question guided them towards a close study of this element of the poem.

The final section of the poem drew a mixed response. Some candidates became bogged down in inventing 'back stories' for the poet, Janine and the bronzed boy. The poet was quite often seen as a sad and lonely old man, moving about in the grey shadows of his dull and meaningless life now that he had lost his friends who had gone off and got married, leaving him behind. Sometimes they had died. His yearning for the joy of his youth where the trio were *radiant in the dull* again suggested rather undeveloped reading skills where candidates simply ended their quotation because that is where the line ended, whereas a more practical application of their knowledge of run-on lines would have suggested *radiant in the dull / Print* as a more meaningful use of quotation. Similarly, *thickening time* was often cited as an example of alliteration, which it is not, as 'th' and 't' sounds are not the same. The alliteration lies in the first two words in *Through thickening time* and this needed to be clearly identified for any following comments about the effect achieved to be convincing. But there were many thoughtful, contemplative responses to this part of the poem that recognised the wistful nature of the poet's musings and the tone of happy reflection in the poet's use of *this delight* when looking at the trio captured in the photo. Many recognised that the writer had deliberately placed the last two words *Live on* separately on a line by themselves to draw attention to them. The best answers went on to reflect on the effect of this, seeing it as some kind of imperative to the trio to continue living on in their halcyon existence, suspended in time forever, or even seeing it as a benediction, a blessing from the adult poet to his younger self and friends.

In addition to moving through the poem in a sequential manner and reading closely for meaning, one skill that lifted several essays into a demonstration of higher-level understanding was the ability to 'stand back' from the poem and note patterns of repetition. Thus, the unity of the youngsters was noted in the poet's use

of *the three of us* in the opening line, followed by references to *this trio* and *these three* later on. The chatty, story-telling quality of the poet's 'voice' is heard in *One day the three of us out in this boat*, with its lack of finite verb, and again in *There you are, Janine* which sounds like a direct address from a speaking voice, the bracketed *me* in *The other (me) a scrawny pale-faced kid* gives the impression that the poet is speaking directly to us, perhaps pointing out himself in the photo and towards the end *But I'd / Say ...* has the clearly recognisable informality and spontaneity of the speaking voice. These, when noted, were examples of a sophisticated understanding of how a poem is structured and were much more effective in attracting reward than a dry analysis of line length, number of syllables and rhyme scheme.

Despite some weaknesses in approach to poetry analysis outlined above, there was an undeniable emotional engagement with the text from every candidate who responded to this poem and the essays were often a genuine pleasure to read.

## Question 2

### *The Surge Tank*

**Explore how the writing powerfully conveys the challenges faced by the boys.**

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the description of the early stages of the climb
- the portrayal of Ralph and Olaf during the climb
- how the writer conveys the increasing tension.

Although not quite so popular as the poetry option, it was pleasing to see so many candidates opting for the prose question this session, and to see such clear engagement with and enjoyment of the writing. The third bullet *how the writer conveys the increasing tension* was firmly grasped by virtually all who attempted this question and was kept at the forefront of responses. Strong scripts referred to the way that the writer contrasts aspects of the climb, from the very first 'easy' forty feet to the suddenly challenging 'parallel' climb on the goblet-like sides, tracking the movement of tension as the passage progresses. Some very observant readers, however, noted that before the *easy* early stages, the writer had introduced clues to the later difficulties the boys would face in Ralph's suggested reluctance to begin the climb as he *looked up again at the tank*, an action that might suggest hesitation on Ralph's part, or the looming presence of the tank towering over the boys. His *grunt* and the fact that he had to *hoist* himself onto the log even before setting foot on the ladder both were seen as suggesting physical exertion that might indicate that this climb held challenges not yet grasped by the boys themselves.

The image *Salt air pushed open Olaf's lungs* drew much attention, as did *His fingers were raw*. The shortness of these sentences was often identified as creating tension, but not many candidates were able to suggest why, or comment on the mechanics of how perhaps the regular pauses at the end of each sentence build a feeling of suspense for the reader who is waiting for the next 'snippet' of information to be fed through. The discomfort of breathing salt air was generally well grasped and seen as a 'challenge' for the climbers, though responses to the word *raw* were often less successful, seeing *raw* as meaning 'uncooked' rather than painfully cold and sore. Many candidates struggled to twist their perceptions of uncooked food such as sausages round to a meaningful comparison with Ralph's fingers and much time was spent attempting to do this; candidates should be reminded that they are not expected to respond to every single image in a passage.

The third paragraph was widely selected by candidates for comment. The 'easiness' of the early stages of the climb is clearly established here and Olaf's confidence was seen through the statements *He'd been up ladders before* and *The first forty feet were easy*. However, even though some candidates had rightly established that the whole narrative is seen through Olaf's perspective earlier in their essays (often in a detached overview of the writer's 'methods'), not many were able to apply this knowledge in a practical analysis of this choice of narrative viewpoint in the passage itself. Here, we see - on the surface at least - a third person omniscient narrator, but we clearly hear Olaf's own inner thoughts as if he were talking to himself, perhaps re-assuring himself that the climb would be a pushover? Is he trying to focus on the ease with which he - and his father - could climb ladders because he knows what is coming up ahead will not be so easy? It is good that candidates are able to identify narrative viewpoint in a prose text, though perhaps we could encourage learners to look more closely at clear examples of where it is applied by the writer for a specific purpose, and to consider the effects created.



The fourth paragraph, with its description of the goblet-shaped tank, was picked out for comment by virtually all candidates, and rightly so as it is at the heart of the visual impact of the story. Most were able to give an account of its shape and of the way that Olaf hung parallel to the sea below, often integrating quotation quite deftly into their commentary. A descriptive approach like this demonstrates a grasp of the surface meaning of the text, which is fine, but, regardless of how well grasped the content of the narrative is and how well-integrated quotation appears to be, it is, on its own, not analysis. Only those candidates who showed a willingness to engage with the writer's methods and use of language here did really well. The writer's choice of *goblet* was understandable as a practical shorthand to describe the shape of the tank, but what about *flared*? What subtext is conveyed in this word? Why are its sides *jutting out*? What does *stretched* tell us about the efforts Olaf is making to hang onto the ladder and about the security of his position? Why is the sea described as *dark* and why are the waves not 'lapping' on the shore but *crashing*? What about the precise mathematical measurements used by the writer: *a thirty degree angle / a hundred feet below*? This was a very short paragraph, but dense in subtext to be explored, an opportunity missed by many candidates.

In general, then, although candidates were skilled in making a point and supporting it with textual evidence, there was a tendency to take the 'This shows ...' approach after quotation, making rather generalised statements about what is achieved by the material cited. Many candidates could have raised their performance by at least a band if they had been willing to re-visit their quotation and pick out a single word or phrase for further analysis, thus demonstrating a *clear understanding* of the text and a *developed response* to the way a writer achieves effects.

The remainder of the passage was largely well grasped, with the almost cinematic, thriller-style description of Olaf's flailing, dangling foot drawing much attention. Again, only those candidates who engaged with the language here avoided drifting into a narrative/descriptive response to this section of the story. The mention of Greta (who is Olaf's younger sister) is fleeting in the next one-sentence paragraph, and was passed over by most. This was fine, if that was the candidate's choice, but those who did pay it some attention were able to comment on its structural impact in the growth of tension and how it adds to the feeling that the boys are doing something they ought not to be doing, something too dangerous.

Ralph's laughing in the following paragraph was misinterpreted by some who took it at face value and felt that he was simply carefree and 'fooling around', missing the clues in the text that this was, in fact, uncontrolled hysterical laughter caused by gripping fear. Most, however, saw this and there was some good work done on the connotations of *screeched like a crow*. The following description of Ralph's body swaying out *like a cupboard door* was much mentioned and identified as an example of simile, though few were willing to explore it in more detail and examine what effects were achieved by this comparison: Ralph's rigidity and stiffness brought on by paralysing fear, perhaps. Good answers noted Olaf's wish to distance himself from Ralph's fear as if it were 'catching', and some excellent responses noted his repeated, plaintive denial of *It's not me* to the other boys, seen as a wish to maintain their perception of him as masculine and fearless.

The release of tension at the end of the passage evident in Ralph's fading laughter and in Olaf's optimism that *He knew he'd make it to the top* was used by skilled essay-writers as a means of bringing their response to a close. Sadly, rather too many candidates felt the need for a 'formal' conclusion that not only repeated the question, but repeated every key point they had made in the essay beforehand. This type of conclusion was often unnecessarily lengthy, leading to a curtailment of the amount of key points in the main body of the discussion itself as the candidate abandoned useful analysis for the sake of including it. Brief, single-sentence conclusions are often the most effective and, if a candidate finds themselves running out of time, finishing off on a well-developed final point with no conclusion whatsoever will gain more possibility of reward than abandoning the point to include an empty, repetitive conclusion.



# WORLD LITERATURE

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Paper 0408/23  
Paper 2 Unseen

## Key messages

Thinking and planning are essential preparatory stages to writing. Candidates are advised to spend about 20 minutes reading the question paper and planning their answer.

Essay openers that begin with an overview of key ideas in the text, firmly rooted in its specific content and clearly related to the question proved most successful.

Overly-long conclusions that simply repeat earlier points are not an efficient use of candidates' time.

## General comments

There was a range of ideas and responses to the texts offered by candidates; thoughtful, emotionally engaged writing was the norm, regardless of ability or levels of achievement.

Candidates are advised to spend about 20 minutes reading the question paper and planning their answer. This is time well-invested to ensure that the right choice of text has been made for the individual candidate, and to allow for the text to be re-read for a more secure understanding before writing begins. It was obvious from some of the poetry responses this year that some candidates had only a half-formed grasp of the poem before they began their essays.

Good responses came out of careful reading, particularly of poetry texts where meaning is often condensed and couched in figurative language or symbolism that is not always easy to absorb on a first reading. Prose texts are, for some, more accessible, but the best responses were those that demonstrated the ability not only to micro-analyse at word or even sound level, but that were able also to 'stand back' from the text and comment on overarching structural features like building tension through rising action, or repeated patterns of motifs or language.

There was a fairly even divide between poetry and prose responses. Candidates should be discouraged from thinking that the poetry option is 'easier' because it is shorter and there is therefore less to read: as stated above, meaning in poetry is often very condensed and takes developed reading skills to deconstruct. The prose passage, though itself containing much in the way of crafted language, may be worth the investment of time for some candidates.

Whichever option candidates choose, the key to success is a good, solid grasp of a text's surface meaning, and the willingness to dig down to consider deeper implications and how these are achieved. Those that begin with an overview of key ideas in the text, firmly rooted in its specific content and clearly related to the question proved most successful. This generally means addressing the 'What?' part of the question first, where the candidate should be asking *What am I being asked to focus on?* (e.g. *the poet's thoughts and feelings, the challenges faced by the boys, tension in this extract*). Only once the poet's thoughts and feelings, say, have been clearly identified (nostalgia, fond memory for times past, the loss of the carefree joy of youth) and perhaps the situation has been outlined (an older man looking back at himself in a black and white photograph, a woman waking up terrified after a recurring nightmare) should the candidate then turn their attention to the How?, looking at *how* these ideas/situations are conveyed through the writing. Beginning to creep back into candidates' responses, sadly, were rather empty introductions that simply repeated the question and bullets and provided a list of literary techniques that often included juxtaposition, caesura and enjambment. This type of opener often led to an arid search for these features in the writing with little sense of overview of the writer's intentions in the piece as a whole.

Similarly, over-lengthy conclusions that ate into precious time and that simply repeated what had already been said proved to be of little value for some candidates, and many lost out on perhaps edging into the band above because coverage of the text or depth of analysis had been abandoned in favour of making time to include these inefficient conclusions. If students can write a brief final thought – and a well-considered

single sentence is enough here – on the text and its impact, then that will suffice as a means of bringing their essay to a close. If they cannot, or if they run out of time, they would be well advised to miss off a formal conclusion and simply bring their last point to a fully developed close.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

*Not Love Perhaps*

#### **How does the poet strikingly convey his thought and feelings?**

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the poet's own ideas about love
- the words and images he uses to portray the lovers' needs
- how he conveys the benefits of their love.

Many candidates cited the word *Perhaps* in the title as suggesting the poet's uncertainty about his 'definition' of love, and this certainly captured the exploratory mood of the poem. Some spotted that this word is again used twice in the opening stanza and recognised that this repetition of *perhaps*, along with the use of the vague *something* in the stanza's final line, clearly establishes an air of the poet's uncertainty about what love actually 'is'. If this idea about the poet's hesitant approach to defining love was grasped, then candidates were off to a good start.

Stanza one outlines the poet's basic argument or stance: this (i.e. his own love) is not the stereotypical notion of passionate, undying, all-consuming love often represented in popular culture, but something quieter, softer, more *especially our own*. Candidates who were able recognise this opening premise were in a good position to move through the rest of the poem confidently, seeing the following two stanzas as an expansion on the ideas of intimacy and partnership in love.

Some excellent responses to this opening stanza were offered, displaying real emotional maturity from candidates who, at their age, are by definition perhaps only on the verge of discovering what romantic love is themselves. One candidate – a Shakespeare fan – got to grips with the poet's view of love as follows:

*... it is not like the love that 'lays down its life', hinting that he is not talking of romantic love, the kind of love that made Romeo and Juliet 'lay down their lives' for each other. His love is not defined by strong burning feelings. Rather, it is something real – something tangible.*

Another thoughtful candidate in a succinct summary of the whole poem noted that:

*To the poet, love isn't a perfect fairytale; it's the real feelings between two people and the idea that they can lean on each other through thick and thin ...*

And comments like the following displayed an impressive ability to quickly grasp the essence of the poem's central idea:

*The poet distinguishes his own relationship from the standard perceptions of love which is demanding and unsatisfying just like a thirst 'that many waters cannot quench'. It does not need harsh sacrifices; it is unique and personal to the poet and his partner.*

Reminding ourselves of the question (How does the poet strikingly convey *his thoughts and feelings?*), we see in the responses above a clear willingness to engage with the poet's *thoughts and feelings* from the very start of the essay; the candidate responses above were all drawn from the introduction or very early on in the response. Having thus established *what* the poet's thoughts and feelings are, these candidates then went on to address the *How ... strikingly* part of the question, in a practical analysis of exactly how these thoughts and feelings are conveyed throughout the sequential unfolding of the poem. This approach of addressing *What?* is being conveyed first, followed by *How?* it is conveyed proved to be a solid framework for a successful essay.

Less successful were responses that began by addressing the *How?* part of the question first. These tended to open with sentences along the lines of: *The poet strikingly conveys his thoughts and feelings through his*

*use of language, anaphora, imagery and punctuation.* Answers like these (which didn't identify exactly what these 'thoughts and feelings' are) typically went on to search out individual and often disconnected examples of the techniques stated in the introduction with little sense of an overview of the poem or the poet's overall intentions. Similarly, candidates who were uneasy about engaging with an overview of meaning in the poem often resorted to a more concrete statement about its form and structure, beginning their essays with sentences like :

*'Not love perhaps' is a three stanza poem followed by the rhyme scheme: ABCDEFGGHHIIJKLLMM.*

Having established the technical structure of the poem, this type of opening was typically followed by comments on how the poet's thoughts and feelings were conveyed by his use of caesura that allowed the reader to pause and think about what he was saying, or his employment of enjambment that allowed his thoughts to flow freely. Punctuation was often seen as a powerful tool in conveying meaning, with observations like:

*These semi-colons and commas help the poet convey his thoughts as they give the poem more tension and detail.*

The one thing that these type of responses inevitably had in common was the absence of any reference to the content of the poem itself, either through engagement with its ideas or through direct quotation that might at least have provided some sort of illustration of this use of caesura, enjambment or punctuation under discussion. Often, however, this 'analysis' was presented in a free-standing paragraph – often running to half a page or even a whole page – with comments so disconnected from the content and meaning of the poem that they could almost have been applied to *any* poem; this type of content often proved time-consuming and fruitless for the candidate.

Teachers are, therefore, advised to encourage their learners to get to grips with *meaning* in a text as an opening response to a question and to discourage overly-technical analyses of stanza and line length, number of syllables, rhyme schemes, use of caesura and enjambment, etc. which are often used as a crutch by less confident candidates to replace genuine engagement with the text.

The imagery in stanza one proved to be something of a discriminator in that successful answers saw the poet's use of melodrama in a *Love* (with a rather pretentious capital L) that would *lay down its life* and that was so overwhelmingly powerful that it could not be quenched by flood waters. The comparison with the imagery of *lighter ink* and *lower tone* in the poet's reflection on his own more gentle, intimate love was often noted:

*The fact that the poet has also made reference to 'ink' suggests that the love, despite not being as dramatic as others is still evident and permanent, much like ink – ink that signs the marriage certificate.*

However, some candidates struggled to separate out these two ideas, asserting that the poet's love was both all-consuming and passionate *and* soft and gentle. Other candidates recognised the poet's uncertainty about love, but then took this as doubt about his own relationship, doubting whether he is actually in love or doubting the 'longevity' of his love.

It seemed that most candidates felt safer once they had reached the 'needs' section. Many discussed the repetition, the rhyming - particularly the fact that the couplets mirror the lovers' togetherness - and the metaphors, especially when contrasted structurally with the first section which doesn't rhyme, and doesn't contain images of the lovers, walking, talking, meeting, etc. They pointed out that being together and walking and talking together signified the need for lovers to share, to be united and communicative, and most candidates understood that the message in the imagery from line 9 onward could be summarised as the need for lovers to be united against the *hard times* of life, *those who would speak against them*, the *tough times of life that everyone faces*, finding comfort, solace and support from each other so that they find a sense of belonging to each other in an *alien land*.

Stronger responses could point out that 'maps' and 'discoveries', 'halts' and 'islands' suggested that love was a journey, and that the poet was saying that the journey of love, taken together, created a bond stronger than the notions of romantic Love questioned in the first stanza. One candidate succinctly summed up the extended metaphor of travel in the following observation:

*The poet portrays to the reader how love and being lovers opens up one's life and heals the pain of navigating life.*

Some good answers also picked up on the poet's use of military imagery in *alliance* and *maps* to suggest a sense of the lovers battling together against difficulties represented by the *nightmare faces* and *whisperers at the corner of the street*. Some, however, came unstuck by using these references as a basis for inventing a 'back story' for the lovers who were sometimes seen as conducting an illicit love affair that was frowned on by their friends and family. Whilst this interpretation is not completely at odds with individual elements of the poem read in isolation, in the context of the poem as a whole, there is little solid evidence to support it. Learners should be advised, therefore, to take care to avoid drifting into invented imaginings about the lives of characters met in texts that have no solid foundation in the writing itself.

On the subject of reading in context, it was apparent that quite a few candidates appeared to be reading the poem line by line and trying to draw meaning from each line in turn (often despite their knowledge of 'enjambment' in the poem). Thus, the opening line *This is not Love, perhaps* was often cited as suggesting that the poet did not feel that he was in love, or that he had had a lovers' tiff, or that he was still searching for his ideal love *that many waters cannot quench*. If read carefully, however, it can be seen that the opening stanza is one complete sentence that sets out the poet's argument: This is not... (one thing) ... But (another thing). Similarly, the line from stanza two *And then finding we can walk* was regularly quoted and followed with observations like *This shows that the lovers spend time walking together*. This is fine as a surface reading of the text, but the key to a meaningful reading of this section of the poem lies on the following line: *finding we can walk / More firmly*. If these words had been quoted instead of the single line, the candidate would then have been able to focus on an analysis of the effects created by *More firmly*, taking their response to a higher level. There was a split between those who were able to comprehend the basic thrust of the poet's message and imagery, and those who had the abilities to dissect and respond further.

Centres might consider, therefore, time spent on reading skills in poetry a worthwhile investment as a means of raising their candidates' performance in the Unseen paper: as important - if not more so - than essay writing skills. Training learners to read to a full stop before pausing to consider what meaning is being conveyed would go a long way to improving their grasp of overall meaning. Knowing that lines 'run on' and using this knowledge to read for meaning would be more beneficial for candidate performance than the use of 'throwaway' comments about how enjambement makes the poem 'flow better'.

As a final note on performance as a whole on the poetry question, it was very satisfying for examiners to see all candidates without exception give of their best in their responses, regardless of their ability or of where they were in their learning trajectory. Comments like the following were a real pleasure to read and are a reminder of why we teach literature:

*(The poem) emphasises the theme of 'What love is' and encourages the reader to think in an alternative way which is the aim of a poet. It makes love living instead of a hypothetical concept which makes it more intriguing for the reader.*

## Question 2

### *The Door*

**In what ways does the writer powerfully convey tension in this extract?**

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the description of the dream itself
- how the writer presents the narrator's surroundings after waking
- how the writer conveys the narrator's thoughts and feelings

Many candidates focused well on the creation of tension in the extract, keeping this at the forefront of their discussions. Basic responses focused on the situation the old woman finds herself in, commenting on the recurring nature of the dream that seems inescapable and how she wakes up in a terrified state. Generally, answers progressed through the passage in sequence, which is always a good idea when the task is to track tension and its cumulative growth. Observations about the growth of tension were supported with an appropriate selection of quotations from the text, noting that she wakes *bathed in sweat* after being *confronted repeatedly with horrors*. Feelings of being trapped were seen in the *reinforced shatterproof* door and her inability to turn the lock, and in her frustration at being unable to communicate with the paramedics outside because she was *mouthling vacantly, like a fish* having lost the power of speech. For some candidates, this was as far as they were able to go with supported comment, and often the second part of



the passage was simply paraphrased in a narrative recount, sometimes missing off the last section altogether.

Better answers were able to move beyond the tension to be found in the woman's situation to look more closely at how tension is heightened through the writing, addressing the 'In what ways ... powerfully convey...' part of the question. If less confident candidates understand that they have to make some response to the writer's methods, then some very simple comments on examples of repetition (*a vision that returns again and again*) or simile (*their swollen faces haloed like moons*) might bring them closer to analysis rather than simple narration or description of the text; finding something to say about these features of the writing would be a good way for them to lift their performance onto a more analytical level.

More successful answers did just this, looking closely at language and imagery in the passage and at how the writer's choices are designed to shape meaning and create effect. The choice of *bathed* in *bathed in sweat* was seen as an example of exaggeration or hyperbole to show how panicked the old woman is on waking from her nightmare. This was a good focus on language and showed an awareness of the effect created by the word. Those who could find a synonym for *bathed* did even better, talking of how she was *drenched* or *soaked* in sweat on waking and how this illustrated the extremely high level of her panic. Indeed, the use of synonyms when looking back at individual words in quotations is a very useful tool for candidates to demonstrate that they can 'pick apart' language and deconstruct exactly how it works; centres would do well in giving their learners plenty of practice in this skill. A nice focus on the phrase *drags me screaming from my sleep*, and in particular on the word *drags* was offered in the following response:

*This is powerful as it shows the helplessness and fear that the narrator feels and how there is some resistance to the nightmare's power, but it is not enough.*

The candidate's use of the word *resistance* here is a clear response to the idea of the dream's grip on the old woman and how she has to battle to release herself.

The second paragraph focused on the description of the dream itself and much attention was paid to this. The fact that the dream is *always the same* and *never-changing* was often picked out as showing that the woman was tortured by exactly the same dream every time, but not many candidates stood back to ask why the writer had used both of these expressions when they mean virtually the same thing. What is the effect of repeating the same idea in a slightly different way on the next line? Comment on how this structural repetition itself echoes the recurring nature of the dream could have lifted some good responses even higher. The *shimmering silhouettes* of the paramedics, with their *distorted* and *swollen faces haloed like moons* drew much comment, with one candidate observing:

*(The woman is) so filled with fear that she cannot comprehend what she sees and it takes the form of a possible monster that is out to get her.*

This was a good response to the presentation of the nightmarish paramedics, focusing on their monstrous appearance. To take this analysis further, however, the candidate could have gone back into some of the language for a closer look at the 'mechanics' of how it works. The hissing of the 'sh' and 's' sounds in *shimmering silhouettes* is sinister and unsettling, the word *distorted* makes them sound grotesque, their *swollen faces* make them seem large and monstrous, whilst *haloed like moons* lends them a supernatural air. (One candidate also noted the connotations of lunacy connected with *moon*, whilst another saw it differently, commenting on how the word *halo* presents them as angelic, saviours of sorts, come to rescue the patient.) The key point here is that candidates who show a 'clear' understanding of how meaning is achieved can lift their performance into a 'clear, critical' understanding if they show a willingness to explore language in a practical analysis of exactly how it achieves its effects.

The image of the old woman *mouthed vacantly, like a fish* also drew much comment from candidates who often stated that they could empathise with this feeling from their own experiences of nightmares, as I'm sure we all could. More probing responses looked at the image in more detail, noting how fish cannot 'breathe' in air and flounder in panic 'gasping' for water, much like the old woman who wakes *gasping for air*. This ability to 'pick apart' an image and then to hold it against its parallel image that the writer is aiming to convey is a skill that allows candidates to demonstrate a fuller understanding of how imagery works and therefore to access the higher bands.

The portraits hanging on the old woman's bedroom wall drew mixed responses. Some saw them simply as part of the *familiar furniture* and therefore as a comfort to the old woman on waking. Only a careful reading of the passage and of their description as *all-seeing, all-knowing* witnesses would have revealed what many noted them to be: an unwelcome, judgemental presence. Very good answers picked up on their *high starched collars* and formal dress from a previous age as symbolising their moral superiority and this ability



to look for visual symbols in a text that might convey a more abstract meaning stood some candidates in good stead. This sense of a moral judgement being executed on the old woman allowed candidates to then comment on her feelings of guilt and of how the past was now come to 'haunt' her present as the dream, it appears, is rooted in real events from her past. The old woman's 'hubris' in having seen herself as godlike in the past was seen as the root of her current punishment and the open-ended nature of the close of the passage as suggesting that this punishment – the dream – is not over.



# WORLD LITERATURE

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Paper 0408/31  
Paper 3 Set Text

## Key messages

Successful responses:

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Less successful responses:

- have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts
- introduce irrelevant material (including extraneous background material)
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- merely log or describe writers' techniques.

## General comments

There was much evidence of outstanding work this session, where candidates showed both sensitive engagement with, and enjoyment of, the texts they had studied. This work demonstrated insight and originality without relying on pre-learned approaches. There were very few rubric infringements, and the majority of candidates divided their time well across their two answers for the paper. The two most common problems arose from a lack of focus on the question set, and a lack of specific reference to support points in **Section B** essay questions.

The strongest answers showed an impressively detailed knowledge of the text, with candidates skilfully integrating concise quotation and textual references to support their ideas. For the extract-based questions on prose and drama texts, the most successful responses explored the writing in the extracts in considerable and sensitive detail; they also were able to provide some comment on the position of the extract within the wider text. Those who knew their texts well and who had learned some key quotations were better able to provide support for their **Section B** general essay. Without the necessary detail, candidates found it difficult to move beyond basic, at times overly assertive and unconvincing responses.

Words such as 'striking', 'memorable' and 'powerful' are used in IGCSE World Literature questions to elicit a personal response to qualities of the writing, and the most successful responses addressed key words such as these. Less successful responses sometimes made cursory reference to the key word before embarking on a character sketch or general commentary on themes with little regard to the particular thrust of the question. There were instances in responses to *Nervous Conditions* and *A Doll's House* of candidates making contextual points that took them away from the main focus of the question.

The strongest responses explored with some sensitivity and individuality the ways in which writers conveyed meanings and achieved effects. There was, however, an increase in the number of candidates who wrongly identified the literary form of the text: poetry, drama or prose fiction. Such errors indicate a lack of appreciation of an important aspect of a text. There were instances of *A Doll's House* being referred to as a 'book' rather than 'play', which led candidates to focus more on the issues of the text than the qualities of the text as a drama to be performed on the stage in front of an audience.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1: Dangarembga**

The most successful responses focused closely on 'disturbing', using the ominous opening sentence as a starting point. The language was explored closely, with many shocked that a father should threaten and call his daughter a 'whore'. Many worked through the extract looking at Nyasha's words and actions as she tries to move away from her father. Using 'Daddy' emphasised she was still a child about to be beaten by 'a hypocritical tyrant' who behind closed doors was described as a violent animal ('bellowed', 'snorted') who could kick and spit at his daughter. Many candidates criticised Chido and Maiguru for not having done more to stop the beating. Some of the more successful responses reserved most criticism for Tambu for seemingly accepting the patriarchal system with what they saw as a bland comment: 'Even heroes like Babamakuru did it'. Some reflected on the way his treatment of Nyasha foreshadows her mental breakdown later in the novel, citing her smoking as evidence of the emotional impact on her.

#### **Question 2: Ibsen**

Most candidates were able to contextualise the extract, understanding that it was a pivotal scene where Nora's criminal act of forgery was going to land her in serious trouble. The revelation of the loan is imminent and inevitable, with devastating consequences for the Helmers. The most successful responses explored the dramatic form with confidence, treating the text as a play intended for performance. Candidates considered carefully what stage directions revealed about Ibsen's presentation of character, for example, the menacing demeanour suggested by Krogstad's 'pace towards her' and the deliberately provocative act of Nora looking at Krogstad 'defiantly'. The strongest responses charted the dramatic build up as Krogstad interrogated her, leading her slowly into a trap; this was often compared to a court scene. Less successful responses tended to work through the extract, looking at surface meanings rather than analysing details closely and addressing the question directly.

#### **Question 3: Richardson**

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

#### **Question 4: Songs of Ourselves**

There was a wide range of responses to this question. The strongest responses explored in meticulous detail the cramped nature of the home, looking carefully at the precise effects created by the use of 'nine steps' and the imagery of the 'giant insect fretting in a jar' and of the prison-like window bars. The implications of the city growing taller and 'trampling underfoot' its citizens were considered in the most successful responses, which contained a clear appreciation of the ever-growing city blocking out light and life. The reference to the pigs was generally understood as a symbol of the city encroaching on the countryside. Less confident responses worked through the poem, often line by line, explaining ideas rather than exploring the vivid ways in which Chatterji conveys life in the poem.

#### **Question 5: Sophocles**

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

#### **Question 6: Stories of Ourselves**

Most candidates showed a clear understanding of Leila as a shy country girl and her feelings of excitement on attending her first ball. The strongest responses focused on the first impressions the reader is given of Leila's sense of innocence. There was much careful analysis of Mansfield's use of dialogue (of Leila and the other girls), language appealing to the senses and the language of dancing applied to 'waltzing lamp-posts' and the jet of gas 'dancing' and 'leaping'. Less successful responses worked through the extract in an explanatory way. There were examples of ineffective time management, where more was written, often at length, about the opening of the extract, which left no time to explore the ending of the extract.

## Section B

### Question 7: Dangarembga

There were some well-developed responses, covering a range of attitudes as seen through the portrayal of several characters, including Nhamo, Tambu, and their parents, Babamukuru and Maiguru. The most successful responses were able to explore how the various attitudes are conveyed from the perspective of Tambu, the first person narrator. Most candidates commented on her zeal for a formal education for herself and the dismissive attitudes to this from both her parents. There was often sympathetic comment on Maiguru who, as an educated woman, did not receive her pay and had to conform to cultural expectations of being a wife. Less successful responses tended to take an explanatory and overly assertive approach to wider cultural issues such as the oppressive attitudes towards the education of girls whereas stronger responses rooted their observations in the detail of the text.

### Question 8: Ibsen

Most candidates selected two suitable moments: e.g. the way Torvald talks to her at the start of the play dehumanising her and treating her like a child; the moment he turns on her when he reads the note about the IOU; when she is made to feel morally unfit to be a mother as Torvald talks about Krogstad's corrupting influence; when she realises Torvald does not really love her and selfishly focuses on his own reputation ('I'm saved'). There were also some sensitive responses to the way Ibsen depicts Torvald's unwanted advances towards Nora after she dances the Tarantella. Most candidates were able to support their chosen moments, explore at least some relevant details and explain why they felt sorry for Nora. In the least successful responses, the two moments lacked clear definition and there was a tendency to narrate rather than analyse dramatic impact.

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Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

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There were fewer responses to this poetry question than to **Question 4** where the poem is printed on the question paper. Generally, *The Migrant* was recalled and understood better than *The Enemies*. Only a minority of responses contained the necessary range of textual reference to support a close analysis of the poems' content and the poets' methods. Because of the lack of detailed knowledge, essays tended to describe and explain content, often at the level of surface meaning. Interpretations were sometimes offered through sustained and unsubstantiated assertion. For **Section B** questions, candidates must have a command of the detail of their text (whatever the literary form) if they are to achieve the higher bands.

### Question 11: Sophocles

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

### Question 12: Stories of Ourselves

Most candidates knew their chosen stories well. Popular choices of story for this question were *The Bath* (by Janet Frame) and *The Yellow Wallpaper* (by Charlotte Perkins Gilman). In the Frame story, candidates showed a clear understanding of the declining physical stamina and the loneliness of the old woman; in the Gilman story, they wrote, sometimes movingly, about the psychological suffering of the wife of a controlling husband. A detailed knowledge of the stories and a command of a wide range of textual reference enabled candidates to support their arguments. Less successful responses tended to narrate the stories and/or explain the suffering, focusing on surface meanings of more obvious elements of the stories.

# WORLD LITERATURE

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Paper 0408/32  
Paper 3 Set Text

## Key messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of texts studied
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- engage with the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have an insecure or limited knowledge of texts
- introduce irrelevant material (including extraneous background material)
- make assertions which are not substantiated
- merely log or describe writers' techniques.

## General comments

There was much evidence of outstanding work this session, where candidates showed both sensitive engagement with, and enjoyment of, the texts they had studied. This work demonstrated insight and originality without relying on pre-learned approaches. There were very few rubric infringements, and the majority of candidates divided their time well across their two answers for the paper. The two most common problems arose from a lack of focus on the question set and a lack of specific reference to support points in **Section B** essay questions.

The strongest answers showed an impressively detailed knowledge of the text, with candidates skilfully integrating concise quotation and indirect textual references to support their ideas. For the extract-based questions on prose and drama texts, the most successful responses explored the writing in the extracts in considerable and sensitive detail; they also were able to provide some comment on the position of the extract within the wider text. Those who knew their texts well and who had learned some key quotations were better able to provide support for their **Section B** general essay. Without the necessary detail, candidates found it difficult to move beyond basic, at times overly assertive and unconvincing responses.

Words such as 'striking', 'memorable' and 'powerful' are used in IGCSE World Literature questions to elicit a personal response to qualities of the writing, and the most successful responses addressed key words such as these. Less successful responses sometimes made cursory reference to the key word before embarking on a character sketch or general commentary on themes with little regard to the particular thrust of the question. There were instances in responses to *Nervous Conditions* and *A Doll's House* of candidates making contextual points that took them away from the main focus of the question.

The strongest responses explored with some sensitivity and individuality the ways in which writers conveyed meanings and achieved effects. There was, however, an increase in the number of candidates who wrongly identified the literary form of the text: poetry, drama or prose fiction. Such errors indicate a lack of appreciation of a fundamental and important aspect of a text. There were instances of *A Doll's House* being referred to as a 'book' rather than 'play', which led candidates focusing more on the issues of the text than the qualities of the text as a play to be performed on the stage in front of an audience.



## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1: Dangarembga**

There was generally a clear understanding of the ways in which Dangarembga portrayed Nhamo's arrogance and his treatment of Tambu. There was an appreciation of the ways in which the writing invited sympathy for Tambu's attitude towards her brother's death, and most answers included reference to the shocking first sentence of the extract (and novel). The most successful responses maintained a tight focus on the 'revealing' aspects of the extract: the reason for Tambu's feelings; the hints about the lives of Lucia, Maiguru and Nyasha; the gender inequality. They also explored in detail the effects of the writing, with some considering the impact of the first person narrative voice. Less successful responses tended to narrate or explain, offering character sketches of Tambu and Nhamo, rather than analysing the ways in which Dangarembga achieves her effects. Sometimes the focus on the detail of the extract was lost, and responses drifted to general assertions about colonialism or gender.

#### **Question 2: Ibsen**

There were many detailed, perceptive and convincing responses to dramatic effects such as language, what stage directions reveal about characters, the tension of the dance in the other room, the drama and significance of Kristine's decision to reveal the secret. Most candidates took the line that Krogstad was no longer the villain but a man who had suffered and, therefore, merited redemption once he showed guilt for having deposited the letter. The most successful responses grasped the intimacy of the conversation and explored the tension created by the dance in the other room and the implications of the metaphor of 'one wreck'. Many candidates recognised the contrast between the Torvalds' marriage based on lies and the future relationship of Kristine and Krogstad based on honesty. In some cases, this idea was pursued for its own sake at the expense both of exploring the detail of the extract and a sustained focus on the question.

#### **Question 3: Richardson**

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

#### **Question 4: Songs of Ourselves**

The most successful responses explored with confidence and insight the ways in which Yap uses language, structure and form to vivid effect in his presentation of the mother and son. There was close analysis of the unsettling and central description of the mother 'circling' and the boy 'cowering'. Although most candidates showed empathy for the son and an awareness of the title's irony, several did reflect on the mother's sacrifice, citing the cost to the weekly budget. Less successful responses worked through the poem in a laborious and mechanical way, commenting on every line or device. Unsurprisingly, this led to two outcomes: candidates offering explanation rather than a probing critical analysis of the writing; and a loss of focus on the key words of the question.

#### **Question 5: Sophocles**

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

#### **Question 6: Stories of Ourselves**

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

## **Section B**

### **Question 7: Dangarembga**

Responses to this question generally showed a sense of empathy, pity or outrage to Maiguru's situation. Many answers showed a clear understanding of not only the relationship but also the cultural context forcing Maiguru into her expected role as wife. Some argued persuasively that Babamukuru was as much a victim of expectations as Maiguru. The most successful responses were careful to root their comments in the detail of the text and Dangarembga's writing. Less successful responses often showed a sound understanding of the two characters but without focusing on the key words of the question: the ways in which Dangarembga 'strikingly depicts' their relationship. A few responses were seen that largely neglected the question by focusing in a general and overly assertive way on the theme of gender inequality. 'in those days'.

### **Question 8: Ibsen**

The strongest answers traced the relationship from the start of the play with the names Torvald calls Nora to her growing disillusionment with the man who she considers a 'stranger'. The symbolism of the Christmas tree, reflecting their relationship, and the macaroons, showing her lies and deceitful nature, were often fully explored. In the strongest answers Torvald's controlling nature and the staging – with the office his territory and the house/children hers – were explored with critical understanding of the text as a play intended for performance. Nora's growing awareness that she did not love this man or want to share her life with him any longer was almost universally approved of; Nora could now be free to live her life as she wanted. Many candidates had managed to learn much direct quotation that enabled them both to support their ideas and to explore the detail of Ibsen's writing. Less successful responses often unpacked the songbird/pet imagery at length, though at the expense of exploring other relevant aspects later in the play.

### **Question 9: Richardson**

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

### **Question 10: Songs of Ourselves**

There was a wide range in quality of answers to this question. The strongest responses focused explicitly on the key words 'memorably conveys', exploring in detail specific effects created by Jackson's use of language, structure and form. Interesting interpretations considered the bus journey as an allegory for life with its ups and downs and obstacles and difficulties or the bus journey as a metaphor for a quest for spiritual enlightenment, ideas that arose from her experience of being on a bus. The strongest responses were careful to use well-selected references to support their interpretations. Such references are necessary if responses are not to become explanatory and overly assertive. The least successful responses lacked a detailed knowledge of the poem.

### **Question 11: Sophocles**

Too few responses were seen to make meaningful comment.

### **Question 12: Stories of Ourselves**

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# WORLD LITERATURE

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Paper 0408/33  
Paper 3 Set Text

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## Section B

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