

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/01

Paper 1

General comments

Examiners found that all tasks differentiated well, offering something to all, but at the same time giving the opportunity for the more able to demonstrate an insightful grasp of the issues raised by the task in relation to the text. Some very accomplished and sensitive work was produced at the top of the range. (There was some particularly impressive empathic work.) However, certain questions seemed to attract more than their fair share of limited responses from candidates who did not study the question wording with due care. This was most noticeable in the Poetry section. In **Question 20**, for example, quite a few clearly saw only the apparent invitation to convey their excitement about a poem and did not notice that the question spelled out the paramount need to engage with the poem's *words*. Even more surprising were the significant number of candidates who mis-read **Question 17**, thinking that it was an invitation to write on Richard's corruption rather than on those around him. Elsewhere, parts of the question which required close engagement with the detail of the text and its literary language were overlooked by many. As in previous sessions, Examiners felt that there was sometimes a failure to realise the centrality to many tasks of words such as *vividly*, *memorable*, *shocking*, *terrifying*, and *amusing*. It is worth stressing that these words in effect require the candidate to show a detailed and personal response to the writer's craft, crucial to the achievement of marks in the higher bands.

Sometimes there was little sense given of appreciating drama as something performed in a theatre in front of an audience. Hence, for instance, stage directions were treated as if they were part of a novel and indeed sometimes in drama answers it seemed telling (rather than a mere slip of the pen) that the word *novel* was used so often in referring to a set text.

While it was reassuring to find more candidates are attempting to address questions directly rather than wasting time on irrelevancies, Examiners noted that some are still writing quite lengthy preambles which do little more than go through the details of the task and then finish with a summary of what has already been said. Many, of course, did not waste time like this but plunged straight in, sometimes with some truly impressive responses to the task which were a pleasure to read.

In the passage-based (asterisked) tasks, it was obvious that candidates had been well prepared to engage with a passage's detail, although many answers just moved through the passage line by line, doing little more than describe and give basic explanation. More effective answers were usually those that provided some sort of meaningful context and then used the material of the extract to probe its meaning and effect.

Rubric infringements were extremely rare.

The most popular texts were *Lord of the Flies*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Crucible*, *Richard III* and the selection from *Songs of Ourselves*.

Comments on specific questions

A Small Family Business

Question 1

Most candidates grasped what was going on in this scene in its basics and were quite often able to respond in some degree to Hough's effrontery. However, not all were able to link it to the word *shocking*. As usual, difficulty was experienced in regard to the humour, of the way it becomes clear just how much Jack is out of his depth here.



Question 2

There was some good work submitted here. Candidates seemed to enjoy arguing out the possible responses to Jack that the drama offers. Others simply offered a character sketch with little engagement with dramatic detail.

Question 3

The relatively few empathic responses attempted here were generally quite successful at capturing Anita's voice and showing awareness of her likely attitudes at the end of the play.

A Raisin in the Sun

Question 4

Some strong work was seen from candidates who worked with the text and managed to bring out the salient features of Walter's feelings. However, the majority were less certain when it came to engaging with the dramatic power of Hansberry's writing.

Question 5

Not surprisingly the prime candidate for this task was Mama. There were few answers which were unable to bring out some of the reasons why the audience is encouraged to admire her; unfortunately, a number did this at arm's length from the detail of the dramatic role she has in the play. There were also some quite convincing arguments on behalf of Ruth and Beneatha and even Walter. Surprisingly, the latter produced some of the most strongly argued responses, perhaps because a case really had to be made, given his behaviour in much of the drama. A few did not seem to see the need for this and simply wrote a character sketch, which in the circumstances was hardly a convincing response to the task.

Question 6

There were some quite convincing assumptions of the character of Lindner. If there was a failing in some, it was that he had been taken far too much at face value and was made into a much too reasonable figure, devoid, for example, of racist opinions.

My Mother Said I Never Should

There was only a very limited amount of work on this play. The answers generally showed knowledge of the text and some response to situation and character, but some had very little material that was pertinent to the task and there was quite often confusion as to the precise relationship between the characters, particularly in **Question 9**, the empathic task.

The Crucible

Question 10

This was an immensely popular question and was quite often done well. Higher-scoring candidates involved themselves enthusiastically with the mounting drama, capturing the way the intensity of the scene developed by looking in detail at the dialogue and action. However, in this respect (and as in some previous sessions) Examiners noted excessive reliance on Miller's stage directions, with candidates continuing to treat them as if an audience would be aware of them and that they would be part of their dramatic experience as written. There were also instances of near total misunderstanding of Miller's fundamental purposes. To suggest that it is horrifying that the Devil is present in Salem is to miss a central point; what is really horrifying here is that adults are caught up in a hysteria based upon at best self-delusion and at worst blatant fabrication.

Question 11

Though this task was, by contrast, far less popular, most answers showed some reasonable knowledge of Danforth. However, not very many managed really to engage with him as a terrifying dramatic character. For instance, few made his twisted logic a focus for the answer. Too often, if there was detail, it was offered simply as undeveloped quotation and reference in which the dramatic effect of what he says and does was not really explored.



Question 12

In general most candidates had a reasonable grasp of the general situation. However, a rather hazy grasp of the context quite often emerged and it was difficult for some to capture an authentic voice. Elizabeth was made to sound on occasions like Abigail.

As You Like It

Question 13

There were some good answers to this question, but more often candidates who tackled it were unable to grasp the tone and meaning of the word-play and hence they often quite misread the relationship between Audrey and Touchstone.

Question 14

This task was better done. Most candidates showed a basic knowledge of the relationship. However, many answers developed into a simple narrative and did not deliver anything meaningful in regard to the relationship's dramatic significance. A few did not even advance beyond the opening scene.

Question 15

This was not very popular but generally was quite well done. The situation was usually understood and Duke Senior's benevolence was often quite well captured.

Richard III

Question 16

This was a very popular question, attempted with varying success. Often the soliloquy was seen simply as further evidence of Richard's villainy and occasionally there was even lack of knowledge of the context. Some candidates thought that Lady Anne had still to be persuaded into matrimony. Conversely, there were some notable answers which responded with relish to Richard's amazement at his success, to his irony and to his wit, making great play of the way he is making the audience complicit to his thoughts. These candidates were at all times exploring with evident pleasure the detail of the language.

Question 17

There were a few who wrote convincingly about such figures as Buckingham, Hastings, Stanley, Catesby, Lady Anne, and Tyrrel. Overall, though, this task was rather poorly done, usually because the question wording was ignored. On the face of it, it is difficult to see how the task can be translated as an invitation to write about Richard himself – but a number did precisely that, sometimes hardly even mentioning other characters. Perhaps those with a hazy knowledge of anything beyond the central figure tended to choose this task, determined to offload prepared material at any cost.

Question 18

Stanley's voice is not particularly developed in the play but his equivocal role and situation is clear enough – of a man between a rock and a hard place – and most caught that well. Some answers made too much of his supposed allegiance to Richmond. At Bosworth he awaits the outcome, though some might argue that is because of his son. Some thought wrongly that at this stage his son has already been taken as a hostage. In fact, it happens after he delivers the news.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 19

The majority of the poetry answers were on this question. Few candidates failed to deliver the basic point of the poem. In fact, there was often quite a strong response to Shelley's message. Quite a few went far beyond that, doing what the question asked in laying out in detail the poet's feelings, stanza by stanza. (A significant number inappropriately used the word 'paragraph' instead of 'stanza' or 'verse'.) The best answers saw the figures of speech and explored them in detail; in weaker answers, phrases such as *stingless drones* tended simply to be noted. The strongest answers charted the changes of tone throughout



the poem. They saw the significant shift at the poem's end, how the tone shifts to something almost like derision of the downtrodden's apparent acceptance of their servile state.

Question 20

There were occasions when a candidate had a clear grasp of the poem but neglected to use the material to bring out the character of the speaker, which the question required. Those who did read the question, however, often showed a detailed engagement with the voice of the poem and the words which create that voice. At times candidates became very muddled as to who was speaking in *Little Boy Crying*, some even trying to argue that the boy is the speaker throughout.

Question 21

This task was intended to stimulate candidates to engage with lines which had made the greatest impact upon them in two poems of their choice. Sometimes that was the result but more often it just led to general protestation of enthusiasm about a poem as a whole.

Keats, Selected Poems

This was a markedly less popular choice for the poetry section than the *Songs of Ourselves* selection. As with that, candidates fared best when they were able to explore effects of the poet's language in relation to the question, as opposed to stating unsupported generalities.

Question 22

There were a small number of effective responses which recognised Keats's ability to create atmosphere. By contrast, others simply paraphrased the extract, demonstrating little real understanding.

Question 23

Ode to a Nightingale was a more popular choice than *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. There were some pleasing responses along with a more significant number which simply ran through the chosen poem instead of engaging with the requirement to consider how Keats appeals to the reader's senses.

Question 24

Of those few who tackled this task, most referred to Keats's writing in general rather than to the set extract from *Endymion*.

Things Fall Apart

Question 25

Many answers gave some very good reasons why Okonkwo should be thought to be right to be full of hate. Sometimes this did not journey much beyond a simple list, but quite a number looked at the detail of the extract and made a very convincing argument. Conversely, a few answers paid little attention to the extract at all, simply writing a general attack upon racism and colonialism. Interestingly some who took this line seemed to think that the court messengers were white. It was also interesting to read thoughtful answers which suggested that right in the passage was not simply to be found with Okonkwo and his comrades.

Question 26

This was not a popular question and was seldom done well. Candidates had difficulty in providing a focus for their answers and tended to drift from one feature to another without much attempt to explore what made them memorable. If there was such an attempt, it was rarely questioning of the values implicit in tribal culture.

Question 27

This was probably the most successful empathic task on the paper. There were some very impressive assumptions which brought out in the voice all Okonkwo's contempt for his father's life and values and his determination to be quite different. His situation was not always fully grasped, though. Some failed to note that he had already made something of his life. Some kindly disposed candidates felt inappropriately that he must have some compassion for his father.



Pride and Prejudice

Question 28

Some candidates took delight in the way Austen sets off husband and wife against one another. Their answers brought many of the marvellous ironies to life. Conversely, those who struggled to appreciate the ironies tended just to describe the situation without being at all able to penetrate to the amusement it produces.

Question 29

There were some good answers to this. As usual, high reward only went to those who picked up on the particular features which, though often hidden, are the central reasons for Darcy's being worthy of Elizabeth's love. Some answers tended just to write a character sketch plotting their way through the novel, though curiously often not reaching Pemberley.

Question 30

This empathic task was highly popular and was often very well done. Lady Catherine's fury, her feelings of impotence and her hateful snobbery often fully emerged, as did her hauteur. Curiously, a few thought that at this stage she would probably accept the inevitable quite swiftly, welcome the pair at Rosings and visit Pemberley. This is not so, as the end of the novel makes plain.

The God Boy

There was far too little work submitted on this text for meaningful general comment to be made.

Games at Twilight and Other Stories

Question 34

The very few who attempted this task usually found some difficulty in relating to the artist and possible buyers.

Question 35

This was answered well by candidates who chose appropriate subjects for their 'weak-willed and unhappy' men. Some chose inappropriately, though, and hence found difficulty in justifying their choices.

Question 36

While this had a relatively small take-up, this task elicited some competent responses which caught David accurately.

Lord of the Flies

Question 37

Some candidates did little more than make general comments without engaging with the detail of the writing, and a few surprisingly had little apparent sense of the context. Nevertheless, generally there was some really good work on this extract, notable for catching the way in which what is unspoken or that which Ralph does not wish to be articulated is what makes this moment in the novel so terrifying. Much emphasis was given to Roger's sharpening of the stick at both ends and of what that brought to mind in the reader.

Question 38

Candidates who had a detailed knowledge of the novel were able to tackle the approach demanded by the question. They were able to explore with precision the moments when Piggy's influence was at its greatest. There were, by contrast, many who simply wrote the history of Piggy which sometimes happened to impinge on Ralph. Some who clearly had a most uncertain grasp of the novel beyond its early pages made out Piggy's importance to be simply the object of Ralph's ridicule.



Question 39

This was another successful empathic task, though sometimes answers were not convincing. Most caught something of Jack's inherent attitudes and his confident arrogant voice. However, quite a few were not sufficiently attentive to the precise situation of the task. They made out Jack already to be in furious opposition to Ralph, which is not the case just after the exploration of the island. A few answers were so uncertain of the detail of the novel that they placed Jack at the moment when he first leads the choristers out of the jungle.

Far from the Madding Crowd

Question 40

Very few attempted this question. Many of those who did simply re-told what was in the passage, gaining only modest reward.

Question 41

This was the most popular of the three Hardy questions. Candidates at all levels of ability showed sympathy to Fanny in view of her harsh, unrelenting suffering.

Question 42

This was far less popular, but it elicited some convincing displays of Bathsheba's spirit and independence.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 43

There were some good attempts at this task, fully bringing out the developing drama of the moment. A pleasing number saw that a signal part of the drama was Scout's lack of understanding of the mortal danger in which the family find themselves. Conversely there were a number who paid little attention to the detail of Lee's writing and merely described the general situation, sometimes even getting that wrong by casting Scout in the role of knowledgeable rather than unwitting heroine.

Question 44

This was another one of those tasks which, for good reward, requires some detailed grasp of the novel throughout its length and the ability to create a line of argument supported by specific detail to show how Scout develops into a girl of understanding by the end of the book. Not very many seemed up to the task. Answers often simply listed a number of incidents in the novel which had something to do with Scout's character and maturation; these were usually loosely connected within an answer, and sometimes not even that.

Question 45

This produced many lively responses which captured much of Ewell's expectations of the trial, his rage, his thirst for blood and his detestation of Atticus. In many answers his tone of voice and crudity was captured well. Some candidates, however, seemed rather to hold back, giving him thoughts and expressions which were way above his intellectual capabilities.

Into the Wind

Question 46

Quite a few candidates responded well to this extract, in particular catching exactly the prying nature of the town and its stifling constrictions on women. However, an understanding of Lillian was harder to come by, perhaps because at times it is inferred rather than stated. Hence, only those accustomed to read with real attention succeeded. Quite a few did not grasp how some of this telling detail speaks of an independent, not to say spirited woman, not inclined to be ruled by the conventions of this small-minded town.



Question 47

Overall, the work on *The Lemon Orchard* was more successful than that on *Samphire*. For the former, most conveyed successfully the attitudes of the man's tormentors and some wrote with insight how even the setting intensifies this. Only the best candidates, however, saw how the victim's hate is communicated as well even in his silence. In *Samphire* most were able to chart just how detestable the husband was and to make some comment upon him being worthy of hate, but they often struggled to trace the way the author is constantly hinting at Molly being a character silently reaching the end of her tether.

Question 48

Some caught very well Tom's male chauvinist assumptions that he is entitled to the woman's attentions simply because he thinks he has been better behaved than his mates. They also caught his rage when the woman clearly does not see it his way and effectively humiliates him. In other answers candidates hit the wrong note, quite missing the offence he takes at the treatment he receives and making him into some romantic who has been rejected by the love of his life.

