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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

<p>Paper 8695/02 Composition</p>

General comments

There was, as usual, some very enjoyable and thoughtful work on display. Candidates produced some excellent imaginative writing and perceptive, structured and cogent discursive essays. Some need to ensure that the accuracy of their writing is checked, especially the switching from present to past to present tense in the first section of the paper. Some have also drifted towards offering rather clichéd endings by finishing with 'it was all a dream and I woke up.' A number of candidates need to check the rubric more carefully, especially when it comes to word limits. The guide is 600-900 words for each composition but some candidates are losing potential marks because they write brief responses, sometimes too brief. On occasions, it seemed that a few candidates were writing out essays that they had practised but which did not really meet the requirements of the set question – perhaps another trend to guard against. On the whole, this paper continues to elicit some genuinely excellent work.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There was some excellent science fiction material here because the nature of the genre was understood; futuristic worlds full of new inventions and new terminology were conveyed extremely well in the higher ranges. The question also produced some enjoyable historical novel openings, capturing a sense of setting, period and dialogue convincingly. However, some candidates produced factual biographies rather than pieces of fiction. Rubric requirements, candidates should be informed, need careful attention.

Question 2

There were some well structured and effective pieces here which clearly focused on the idea of contrast. Figures ranged from football players to pop stars and politicians. The sense of different points of view was communicated clearly in most cases. Some candidates only covered one biography and this proved to be a limitation. The better answers blended background, upbringing and examples of performance and behaviour skilfully but also with a good degree of information.

Question 3

This was not such a popular choice but there were some effective and thoughtful responses, especially where the device of a narrator was used with imagination. There were some effective twists and rendering of the inner thought processes. Less secure answers tended to focus on plot and narrative at the expense of characterisation and motive.

Question 4

There were often excellent answers here, especially where candidates used the medium centrally rather than simply mentioning a letter or email as part of the narrative. Some more imaginative use of planning here could have helped less successful answers: some storylines were rather limited by simply relying on broken romances or similar well-worn territory.

Section B**Question 5**

This proved to be a popular and quite provocative question, producing some excellent, thoughtful material. Candidates argued with genuine passion and interest. The best responses blended personal viewpoints with supporting examples which were not based on generalisations. Some took a different approach than the implicit gender issue and took 'man' to mean humans or a world in which machines had replaced humanity.

Question 6

This was handled really well for the most part. There was a clear understanding of newspaper style and how to offer a balanced viewpoint. Candidates blended background, quotations from interviewees and other information into structured and relevant paragraphs. Candidates had been taught how to structure and plan for material of this kind and it is to Centres' credit that they performed so well on the whole.

Question 7

This was a popular choice. Candidates argued forcefully and, again, with a degree of passion which was pleasing to see. There was good use of supporting examples and, on the whole, sustained argument which drew on national and international illustrations. There was a strong belief that the media do have too much power but perhaps an acceptance that this is the way the world is going and that we have to learn to adjust to it.

Question 8

There were some very effective answers from candidates who felt strongly that they wished to make the world a better place. Issues ranged from the return of the death penalty to the age for provisional driving licences. There were some well-constructed pieces and very few relied on ranting or abusive opinions. Again, it is evident that Centres are encouraging candidates to focus on planning in these kinds of essays – perhaps something some candidates could do a little more in **Section A**.

<p>Paper 8695/09</p>

<p>Poetry, Prose and Drama</p>

General comments

Examiners in this session saw much very pleasing and accomplished writing from candidates able to blend precise textual reference within a secure answer to the set question. While the great majority of Centres had chosen to study Blake and Achebe, there were very good answers offered on all the texts on the paper. Candidates continue to write responsively on the poems in *Touched with Fire*, while there were strong answers on *North and South* and on **8695/09**, there was some sensitive writing on *The Glass Menagerie*.

One issue which is worth stressing again is the passage-based **(b)** question on each text. Such questions are designed to give candidates the opportunity to write closely about language and technique, so it is disappointing when candidates overlook an instruction to 'Comment in detail...' and instead write a general essay with little or no reference to the extract printed on the question paper. In this session, this was a particular concern with **Question 4 (b)**, as will be detailed below. It is interesting to note that while many candidates find the discussion of poetry comparatively difficult, the **(b)** questions on poetry tend to be answered with appropriate concentration on the language, imagery, form and structure of the poem on the question paper. Examiners are hoping that candidates will apply the same skills to the prose passages, and on **8695/09**, to the extracts from drama.

However, the session elicited much good work from an increasing candidature. In general, the knowledge of texts, the appreciation of the context in which the texts were written and in particular the personal response of candidates to their reading, gave Examiners much pleasure when marking the scripts.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There was a good balance of answers between this question and the (b) option. The more successful answers achieved a clear focus on social institutions such as the church, the family and the government, and through these were able to discuss sexual and imaginative repression. While some less successful answers did not identify particular institutions, being as a result vague and unfocused, many candidates discussed the issues well and used a good range of poems as reference. Most choices came naturally from *Songs of Experience*, such as 'London', 'The Garden of Love' and 'The Chimney Sweeper'. Many answers used contextual knowledge effectively.
- (b) Answers to this question were interestingly varied, as candidates took and argued quite different interpretations of the poem. Some candidates viewed 'Holy Thursday' as entirely ironic, a poem where Blake attacks poverty, hypocrisy and regimentation enforced by the beadles with fierce wands, to those who considered it to be a typical *Innocence* poem, where the sanctity of the beadles is indicated by the pure white of their wands. A significant number of answers chose a balanced view, seeing it as an 'innocent' poem with ambiguous suggestions of 'experience'. The most successful answers considered Blake's concerns in the light of the methods he uses to communicate them. The question required some reference to other poems in order to say 'how far it reflects' features of Blake's verse. Some candidates focused entirely on the set poem and missed this part of the question.

Question 2

ed. Hydes: *Touched with Fire*

- (a) There were a number of good and sensitive answers to this question. A number of poems were used by candidates, the favourites being 'Cold in the Earth' and 'The Voice'. Others referred to included 'Mountain Lion', 'Porpoises', 'Thistles', 'Rising Five', 'The Early Purges' and 'The Pond'. Perhaps because it appeared on last session's paper, 'Ozymandias' also appeared frequently. Not all the choices were well handled by candidates, but most managed to sustain some level of comparison. The most successful were those who compared not only the perspective on death in the poem, but also the poetic treatment of death. Some answers were detailed in their awareness of language and poetic form and several offered fresh personal approaches.
- (b) 'Telephone Conversation' was the more popular option, and drew many very committed and detailed responses. Candidates registered their shock at the treatment of the narrator, but recognised the humour combined with both resignation and disbelief. Some pointed out that the narrator's facility with language – vocabulary, punning, varied grammatical structures – was in marked contrast to the landlady's limited verbal range, marking him out as intelligent and educated. Others noted that while he is the victim of the landlady's stereotype, he is also guilty of stereotyping her, making judgements about her appearance and manner. There were good comments on the use of ellipsis and the use of capitals for the landlady's speech. Examiners found much to enjoy and reward in these answers. There were some answers which relied on a paraphrase of the narrative of the poem, without real engagement with the language or form.

Question 3

Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) While there were comparatively few answers on Plath this session, the questions were usually answered reasonably well by those candidates who attempted them. Most candidates on this question chose effectively contrasting poems, often balancing a preoccupation with death with a celebration of new life, such as 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Morning Song', 'Daddy' and 'You're'. There was often an evident appreciation of Plath's language and imagery.

- (b) There were fewer answers on 'Poppies in July' and in general the question was less well done than (a). Comments were made on colour and language, but few answers looked at the form of the poem or made a great deal of its characteristic features shared with other poems in the collection. The most successful answers focused on the imagery of this poem and made clear cross-references to other poems in which flowers, blood, pain or desire for oblivion are evident.

Question 4

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

- (a) There were some excellent answers to this question from candidates who were able to make a number of secure references to the myths and legends which Achebe incorporates into the novel. Many answers, though, sidestepped the question and referred to customs and beliefs rather than myths or legends. Sometimes references to the customs and beliefs were linked to myth, and Examiners were as sympathetic to candidates' approaches as they could be within the terms of the question. However, some unsuccessful answers merely narrated Okonkwo's story because it revealed the importance of tradition in the life of the tribe.
- (b) Those answers to this question which looked at the extract in detail, considering it as an exemplification of the conflict between Ibo tradition and Christianity, then related this to the implications of the title of the novel, were very successful. It is often a feature of this report that comments are made about the importance of candidates writing closely about the passages in answering the (b) questions. It was disappointing, therefore, for Examiners to see so many answers to this question which made very little reference to the printed passage at all. General essays on the conflict, without close attention to the passage, could not be successful answers to the question set. A large proportion of candidates also showed errors in their reading of the passage, writing about the men at the stream whipping the *white* Christians, thus missing the essential conflict between the Ibo people. The successful answers were aware of this self-destructive conflict, noted the importance of the timing of the episode at Easter and were aware of Mr Kiaga's role. Some answers commented on the importance of the ceremonial bell-man announcing the exclusion of the Christian converts, Okoli's killing of the sacred python and his subsequent death.

Question 5

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) Answers on *North and South* generally demonstrated candidates' sound textual knowledge. While some candidates summarised the story of Frederick, better answers made perceptive comments about his role as foil to Margaret and to Thornton as well as his significance in various strands of the plot, such as Thornton's sighting of him at the station. Some recognised that his principled stand, which cost him his place in society, parallels that of his father.
- (b) Most candidates found Milton and Thornton clear focal points in this passage and managed to produce balanced answers dealing with both aspects. There were few answers which either paraphrased the passage or wrote general answers without reference to it. The most successful drew neat parallels between the changes in Milton and those in Thornton, illustrated with deft quotations from the extract.

Question 6

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) Candidates answering this question usually had a clear idea of Martha before and after she leaves home for the city and used that knowledge effectively. The more successful answers showed a perceptive awareness of how Martha sacrifices her idealistic notions and is influenced by others once she reaches the city, threatening her individuality and her ideals.

- (b)** Many candidates placed this passage into the wider context of Martha's relationship with her parents, and noted here her attempts to be more conciliatory while bristling at much of the discussion. Candidates noted the way she and her father are shown to clash in the passage, with the references to 'scornfully', 'resentment' and 'snapped'. While the irony of her parents both asking the same question about her marriage was noted by most candidates, surprisingly few were alert to the potential for humour for the reader.