

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9695/31**  
**Poetry and Prose**

## Key messages

- Questions ask candidates to consider ways in which writers treat particular concerns, successful responses will focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these might have on a reader or audience.
- Responses which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary are not successful.
- Detailed references and quotations are needed to support points in essays.
- Candidates need to focus on the specific question in order to select the most appropriate poems, stories or episodes from texts.
- Answers to **(b)** passage-based questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

## General comments

In this session examiners were pleased to see examples of vigorous, thoughtful and discriminating writing on most of the texts offered for study. *The Namesake* appeared for the first time this session and proved very popular; Lahiri's novel attracted not only a high number of responses, but also some very careful, sophisticated writing, demonstrating appreciation and enjoyment as well as intelligent understanding. On many of the texts there were some very confident answers to **(a)** questions, where candidates selected their own material and constructed a carefully argued case from detailed knowledge and thoughtful evaluation.

Many answers on poetry showed candidates' knowledge of poetic techniques, but were hampered by a narrow focus, selecting words, phrases and poetic methods in a way which did not support their context within the poem. This made it difficult for candidates to show how such techniques developed the poem's meaning. It is very important for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the whole poem, the direction and development of its meaning, and to show how the writer's choices of language, imagery and structure shape this meaning for the reader.

## Comments on specific questions

### 1. **Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems***

- (a)** Markedly fewer candidates attempted this question than the accompanying question on '*Harvest Moon*'. In a large number of cases, candidates did not pay enough attention to the phrase 'sensitive, detailed observation' and wrote more generally about Hughes's poetry, usually focusing on ferocity, cruelty and violence. More careful candidates recognised an opportunity to show their knowledge and understanding of a broader range of Hughes's poetry, witting about such poems as '*Snowdrop*', '*A Cranefly in September*', '*Full Moon and Little Frieda*' as well as '*Pike*', '*Thrushes*' and '*Thistles*'. Depending on the choice of poem, candidates were able to explore an unexpected tenderness in the observations, Hughes's use of precise metaphors or his surprising but apt language to highlight particular aspects of his subjects.
- (b)** There was some confusion about 'harvest' and a 'harvest moon' in candidate answers, some suggesting that the poem describes the moon in eclipse or even the sun. Others picked out a number of the interesting features of the poem, such as the 'gold doubloon' and the moon 'sinking upwards', without considering how these phrases present the appearance of the moon in the poem. More successful answers demonstrated that the image which Hughes creates develops during the poem, at times playful with the 'balloon' image, at times paradoxical, like the 'sinking upwards', both images suggesting the movement of the moon through the sky. Some candidates

also explored the aural imagery in the second stanza which gives the moon's presence a strong impact. Others also effectively considered how the connection between the moon and earth is conveyed in the way that the 'earth replies all night'. There were many, very sensitive responses to the poem's final reverential tone and its mood of awe and wonderment, which was interpreted spiritually.

## 2. Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) A successful response to this question depended to a large degree on the appropriate choice of poems. A number of candidates fell back on Owen's more traditional war poetry without careful consideration of whether the poems provided suitable material to respond to the specific question. '*Dulce et Decorum Est*', for example, used by many candidates, was not a relevant choice; similarly, '*Anthem to Doomed Youth*' provided a limited range of material for candidates to discuss in specific reference to the question. More suitable material used by candidates included '*The Letter*', '*Disabled*' and '*Mental Cases*', while there were also interesting discussions of '*The Send-Off*' and '*The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*'.
- (b) '*The Sentry*' was the more popular option; however, a surprising number of candidates were unclear on the actual narrative of the poem, with misunderstandings around the sentry himself – sometimes understood as a gun, and uncertainty about the 'old Boche dugout' these fundamental misunderstandings severely restrict the success of an answer. Some successful responses started with the irony of the sentry – he who stands on guard – being the one wounded, and progressed to thoughtful discussion of the poem's recreation of a wartime experience. Candidates often picked up the details in the poem which exemplify the soldiers' discomfort amongst the mud, wet, smells and incessant noise with comment on fear, shock and subsequent nightmares. They also commented on small details such as 'forgetting' the casualty in the fast-paced action, where a man's destiny changes in an instant, amongst the activities of calling for a stretcher and arranging a duty rota. There were some very sensitive comments about the almost childlike 'O sir! my eyes –' line, with an understanding of how young the soldiers might be. This kind of alert response often also noted the familial tone in the relationships between soldiers and officers, the narrator speaking 'coaxingly' for example. Several candidates commented on the detail of having to 'beg' a stretcher, showing the stretched resources. The use of dialogue, repetition, onomatopoeia and the metaphor of the final image of lights were all explored in strong answers. Weaker responses suggested that candidates had not studied or revised the poem before the examination and it is never a good idea to respond to the selected poem as an unseen exercise.

## 3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) The poems in the selection offer a wide range of significant experiences, but most candidates who responded to this question chose to write about love and unrequited love in particular. '*I Grieve and Dare Not Show My Discontent*' was a very popular choice, followed closely by '*They Flee from Me*'. Most responses discussed the experiences themselves, but often paid less attention to ways in which those experiences were explored through the poems; focus on the language and methods used by the poets was key to successful responses. Successful answers looked carefully at the poetic shaping of the experiences and the poets' choices, made to highlight particular aspects for the reader. Answers which moved beyond love considered poems such as '*Weep You No More*', '*Written the Night Before His Execution*', '*When I Was Fair and Young*' and '*Litany in Time of Plague*' amongst others.
- (b) There were a number of misinterpretations of '*Sonnet 31*' and in consequence, these limited a number of essays. At the other end of the range, a number of candidates acknowledged that the poem is part of a longer sequence and were able to discuss its form intelligently. Most essays showed an understanding that the speaker of the poem projects his own unhappiness in love onto the moon and sees in the moon's 'wan' face a reflection of his own unhappiness. Some candidates argued that this perspective effectively conveys the self-absorption of the lover who sees his pain in everything, and effectively analysed the use of rhetorical questions to demonstrate the anguish and confusion of unrequited love. Candidates made similar points about Cupid's 'sharp arrows'. Successful responses explored how the poem's ideas are developed through the sonnet and while several candidates noted the moon's traditional association with romance, few acknowledged its traditional association with chastity.

## 4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) The question on marriage was very successful, producing many carefully judged and organised responses. While there were answers which summarised key marriages in the novel, many candidates recognised an opportunity to discuss how Lahiri creates contrasts between marriages and questions certain assumptions about them. Most answers began with an exploration of the marriage between Ashoke and Ashima, noting that this arranged marriage with an apparent lack of intimacy proves to be the benchmark of love and fidelity in the novel. Telling details were often noted, such as Ashima trying on Ashoke's shoes, the fact that she never uses his name, his comforting her after the death of her father and his regular phonecalls home when away. Candidates recognised that by the use of such details Lahiri presents an undemonstrative relationship which is nevertheless solid and loving. This marriage was often contrasted with the Ratcliffs, as an ideal example of an American marriage; sophisticated and relaxed and to which Gogol aspires; a further comparison was often drawn between Gogol and Moushumi, a hybrid Bengali-American marriage based on passion but which eventually fails through infidelity.
- (b) Most candidates wrote with understanding about this passage, considering the depiction of Gogol's loneliness and, from later in the excerpt, his awareness of strangers in their house with 'no trace' of his family left behind. Some weak responses only offered paraphrase of the extract, often without any quotation at all. Lahiri's use of listing for emphasis, and the repetition of 'no' and 'nothing' were often noted in more successful responses. Observant essays recognised this passage as a moment of epiphany for Gogol, who finally realises that he has not understood his parents' lives and how much they missed their culture. The references to the overcoat were seen as important, as was the setting of a train station, as trains and journeys are used by the writer in symbolic ways throughout the novel. Some judicious reference to the wider text was often very useful to develop some candidates' responses.

## 5. **Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth***

- (a) Some less secure responses to this question opted for character study, summarising Selden's involvement in the novel without paying due attention to the wording of the question. A large number of candidates also showed good knowledge of the character and some appreciation of his role in Wharton's text, without actually considering his potential status as an 'ironic observer'. Stronger answers looked at Wharton's portrayal of Selden as a character both inside and outside of New York society. While not one of the very wealthy social set, he moves freely within it and, particularly to Lily, offers his judgements of that social world. Some capable responses sought to challenge the question's premise, arguing that Selden likes to consider himself ironically detached, but in fact is shown to very much enjoy the moneyed world and has indulged in an affair with Bertha Dorset. Confident responses were supported with careful, detailed reference to the novel and with key quotations.
- (b) Many candidates engaged enthusiastically with this passage, though some did not read the question closely enough and wrote about Lily rather than about the 'social world' revealed in the passage. More successfully focused responses looked at ways in which the extract shows the hierarchy of money in New York, with Judy Trenor patronising Lily through 'refurbished splendour' and Lily patronising Gerty and her 'cases'. Many candidates saw the irony of Lily looking down on girls who were 'employed' whereas she has nothing that is really her own, many too, were aware of the ironic foreshadowing of Lily's position at the end of the novel. There were some thoughtful comments on the idea of a 'façade', picking out the significance of Lily wanting a cloak and a dressing case to mask reality and create an impression for society. Equally, her shopping for showy articles was contrasted with Gerty's seeking to have her watch repaired and Gerty's charitable work was compared with the thoughtlessness of most of New York society. A large number of candidates picked up and discussed such details successfully; fewer were able to discuss Wharton's narrative tone and language with equal conviction.

## 6. **Stories of Ourselves**

- (a) This question on sympathetic responses to characters produced some interesting, personal answers; these were very successful when supported by detailed knowledge and understanding of the author's presentation of those characters and the structure of the stories in which they appear. Ella in 'Five-Twenty', the narrator in 'The Yellow Wall Paper', the boy in 'Secrets', the victim in 'The Lemon Orchard' and Ravi in 'Games at Twilight' were among the popular characters chosen. Approaches to the discussion varied, with some answers considering the varied effects of third and first person narration, while others looked at the portrayal of other characters who oppress the

central character. Some candidates discussed the changing relationship between reader and character as the story developed, revealing more and more about the situation. In these ways, successful answers analysed narrative mode, characterisation and structure and were therefore much more successful than those responses which relied on narrative summary.

- (b) Several responses to this question showed a lack of understanding of the kind of village life described in the story and were not alert to the social satire implicit in this society. However, the majority of responses demonstrated a lively appreciation of the humour and the careful depiction of the class strata of English society. Mr Metcalfe's apparently self-deprecating aspirations were often noted, with his conscious limiting of his land acquisition, while yearning for his home's importance to be recognised. The villagers' comic appellation of it as 'Grumps' was noted as undermining his pretensions, while the attitude of Colonel Hodge, who accepts dinner invitations but refers to Metcalfe as 'the cotton-wallah' was seen to show his sense of superiority. In an impressive alertness to detail, a number of candidates noted the effect of the 'of course' accompanying the observation that Lord Brakehurst is 'a class apart'. The passage repaid careful reading and it was pleasing to see how many candidates responded to it with both enthusiasm and appreciation.

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- (b) Some weak responses only offered paraphrase of the extract, often without any quotation at all, but most candidates wrote with understanding about this passage, considering the depiction of Gogol's loneliness and, from later in the excerpt, his awareness of strangers in their house with 'no trace' of his family left behind. Lahiri's use of listing for emphasis, and the repetition of 'no' and 'nothing' were often noted by candidates. Observant essays recognised this passage as a moment of epiphany for Gogol, who finally realises that he has not understood his parents' lives and how much they missed their culture. The references to the overcoat were seen as important, as was the setting of a train station, as trains and journeys are used by the writer in symbolic ways throughout the novel. Here judicious reference to the wider text was often very useful to develop points.

#### 5. **Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth***

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- (b) Several responses to this question showed a lack of understanding of the kind of village life described in the story and were not alert to the social satire. These led to rather mystified narrative accounts of the passage. However, there were far more which demonstrated a lively appreciation of the humour and the careful depiction of the class strata of English society. Mr Metcalfe's apparently self-deprecating aspirations were often noted, with his conscious limiting of his land acquisition, while yearning for his home's importance to be recognised. The villagers' comic appellation of it as 'Grumps' was noted as undermining his pretensions, while the attitude of Colonel Hodge, who accepts dinner invitations but refers to Metcalfe as 'the cotton-wallah' was seen to show his sense of superiority. In an impressive alertness to detail, a number of candidates noted the effect of the 'of course' accompanying the observation that Lord Brakehurst is 'a class apart'. The passage repaid careful reading and it was pleasing to see how many candidates responded to it with both enthusiasm and appreciation.



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Many answers on poetry showed candidates' knowledge of poetic techniques, but were hampered by a narrow focus, selecting words, phrases and poetic methods in a way which did not support their context within the poem. This made it difficult for candidates to show how such techniques developed the poem's meaning. It is very important for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the whole poem, the direction and development of its meaning, and to show how the writer's choices of language, imagery and structure shape this meaning for the reader.

## Comments on specific questions

### 1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** This was a question which allowed candidates to re-examine some of the preconceptions about Hughes's poetry and explore some poems beyond the usual limits of ferocity in the natural world. Some of the most successful essays discussed poems such as '*Pike*', '*The Harvest Moon*', '*A March Calf*' and '*Full Moon and Little Frieda*', while some candidates forced the question towards savage beauty and considered poems like '*Hawk Roosting*', '*Thrushes*' and '*The Jaguar*'. On the whole, candidates who were able to refer to the poems closely, with quotations, were able to comment on the effects of Hughes' choices of vocabulary and imagery; far fewer were able to discuss structure effectively.
- (b)** '*Crow Hill*' was a popular choice, though this poem was a clear case where many candidates tended to comment on individual words or phrases without considering an overview of the whole poem and its meaning. On the whole, though, candidates responded well to the depiction of landscape, presented as treacherous with 'sheer sides' and 'sodden moors'. This landscape was seen as difficult to farm as 'farmers make a little heat', while their cows have 'bony' backs and the pigs struggle to survive with 'delicate feet' that 'hold off the sky'. The difficulty of human survival in

such a world was recognised, Hughes portraying humankind's powerlessness but also endurance in a land where human beings and animals are levelled and in awe equally.

**2. Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems***

- (a) The strongest responses to this question discussed poems which contain glimpses of the soldiers before the war: the formerly 'stout lad' that becomes the 'dead-beat'; the now disabled ex-footballer; the stone-cold dead, farm lad that used to wake to the sun. In this way the question's focus on 'personal consequences' was directly approached, more successfully than in those essays which just recounted the horrors or warfare depicted in Owen's poems. There were also effective comments on Owen's depiction of his personal experiences which haunt his own dreams, as well as his guilt at being unable to help his own men. Here poems such as '*The Sentry*' and '*Inspection*' were used effectively. Examiners also saw successful essays on poems such as '*Disabled*', '*Mental Cases*', '*Anthem for Doomed Youth*' and '*The Letter*', with candidates showing secure awareness of Owen's use of shifting perspectives and voices.
- (b) '*Wild With All Regrets*' attracted a large number of answers however, it seemed to be a poem with which many candidates were not confident and there was particular confusion with the second stanza. More confident candidates were able to discuss the degree to which the monologue traces the regrets through shifting moods within a stanza structure which echoes a declining grip on life. The persona's attitudes alter gradually, as a result of emotional struggles and physical trauma, rather than as a sudden epiphany. The de-glorification of a desire for heroic death lies at the core of the poem and indeed some responses sensed that the poem transgressed a taboo. Those who were able to deal successfully with the second stanza showed understanding of the speaker's preference for any life, even a lowly one, rather than facing oncoming death in a bed which has already become a 'coffin'.

**3. *Songs of Ourselves***

- (a) There are many poems in the selection which explore personal distress of one kind or another, so candidates had plenty of material to choose from in dealing with this question. Most opted for love's anguish or death, with poems such as '*When I was Fair and Young*', '*I Grieve, and Dare Not Show My Discontent*', '*What Thing Is Love?*', '*Weep You No More, Sad Fountains*', '*Written the Night Before his Execution*' and Wroth's '*Sonnet 19*'. Less successful answers tended to explore the nature of the distress rather than its poetic expression. More confident candidates were able to make precise references and support their answers with well-selected quotations and in this way examined the poets' choices of language, imagery and structure. There was some particularly effective discussion of poets' use of the sonnet.
- (b) A number of less successful responses to this poem offered little beyond summary and paraphrase and many candidates took '*Come Live with me, and be my Love*' literally, discussing Marlowe's attempts to gain the affections of a woman. Relatively few answers showed an awareness of the pastoral tradition and the crafting of such poems as examples of pastoral art. Nevertheless, there were some interesting and thoughtful responses. There were well argued essays that considered the speaker as an aristocrat with wealth and material goods, among the shepherds that he so clearly controls and uses for his own amusement; noting that the rustic pleasures are to mirror court life, with 'madrigals'. In a similar way, some candidates argued from a feminist perspective, suggesting that the speaker intends to control his beloved's response and gives her no space for reply, no voice of her own. Some were alert to structure, picking up on the repetition of 'Come live...' and that the regular rhythm and rhyme asserts confidence and clarity in the argument.

**4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake***

- (a) Candidates took a number of different approaches to this question, most often comparing Ashoke's and Ashima's solid relationship with its fidelity, with Gogol's sequence of failed relationships. Others focused on Gogol himself, examining the contrasts between his relationships with Ruth, Maxine and Moushumi, often using these as staging posts on his own search for identity. Either approach worked equally well; the discrimination lay in whether candidates merely recounted the relationships, or looked carefully at how Lahiri presents them and contrasts them within the structure of the novel.

- (b) There were many sensitive and thoughtful responses to this passage. Candidates often commented closely on the writing and looked both forwards and backwards in the novel to show how Ashima's feelings had been shaped by her past experiences, and how this is a turning point in her life with a different future ahead of her. The writing of the passage offered plenty of scope, with essays noting the variation of verb tenses, triple emphasis, stream of consciousness, flashbacks, adjectival choices and the novel's shifting notion of place/home, all of which gave candidates an opportunity to display their skills and knowledge. The robe itself was seen as an important symbol of the marriage, offering 'warmth and comfort' despite not quite fitting. Most also acknowledged that the passage presents a moment when Ashima tries to assimilate all aspects of her life and recognises that Pemberton Road is a home 'nevertheless'.

**5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth***

- (a) Many candidates showed good knowledge of Selden's character, though a number struggled to see how he might be considered a 'victim'. Some opted to write about Lily instead, which was not an appropriate response. Others recognised Selden as being a 'victim' in the sense of being trapped in a state of passivity through the novel, unable to act on his feelings for Lily, constrained both by her attitude and that of society. Better responses discussed Wharton's interpretations of the male predicament as well as social satire with thoughtful sensitivity.

- (b) Candidates made much of the 'artistic' presentation of Lily at the start, as if she is posing for a romantic painting, yet still noted that she is in no hurry to join the charmed 'circle about the tea table' which might suggest some ambivalence. Lily was often judged harshly, for her plans to get Gryce to spend lavishly on her (the words 'system' and 'game' were noted), her belief that her beauty will carry her through everything and her eagerness to pay off old scores. Some brought in the wider text to show how Lily had 'suffered' various slights and humiliations at the hands of this 'brutal' crowd and used this to make some allowances for her current state of self-congratulation; seeing the 'relief' that went with it. The most effective responses showed a keen understanding of the subtleties seen in Wharton's writing.

**6. *Stories of Ourselves***

- (a) There were few responses to this question as 6b proved so popular. Among those essays focused on the question of changing responses to characters, '*The Yellow Wall Paper*', '*The Signalman*', '*Games at Twilight*', '*Secrets*', '*The Village Saint*', '*Meteor*' and Grace's '*Journey*' were favoured stories. A good answer required detailed knowledge of the story in order to demonstrate the development and changes and this sometimes led to answers which did not offer a great deal more than plot summary. Stronger work showed appreciation of ways in which the authors presented characters in order to encourage differing responses from readers at different stages of the story. Candidates often wrote very well, for example, on the changes in tone in the first person narrative of '*The Yellow Wall Paper*', showing how the narrator's situation and mental state is gradually revealed. The Aunt in '*Secrets*' was also discussed sensitively as candidates noted her sympathetic and kindly relationship with the boy in the early stages of the story, compared with her shocking 'You are dirt' speech later. Here the comparison of the tone of dialogue often led to subtle and successful writing.

- (b) There were very many responses to the question on the passage from '*The Lemon Orchard*' and la Guma's writing provoked some thoughtful, detailed and sensitive writing. While there were some responses which worked through the passage offering paraphrase, there were few candidates who could not find something to say about how the language of the extract conveys threat. There were several different areas of focus: the night-time setting, the noises in the distance, the effects of the descriptions of the light at different points, the anonymity of the characters, the harsh language used in the dialogue, the insight into the mind of the victim, the brutal treatment of the unnamed man and the ambiguity of the intention, which remains until the end of the story. Candidates did not have to cover all of these areas to write a strong essay and Examiners saw strong personal responses driving individual candidates' choices of focus, which produced a range of interesting answers. Some made very subtle points, such as noting the references to 'the men' and 'the man', before the specific, slightly different focus on 'This man', who then becomes the poorly dressed 'coloured man'. Others noted the references to 'darkness', 'silhouette', 'shadowed' and 'half-light' until the full light illuminates 'the rest of the party' when the threat becomes most clear. Similarly, general references to the 'shotgun' and the 'sjambok' carried by each man were developed as 'the leader brought the muzzle of the shotgun down, pressing it hard into the small of the man's back' at the end of the passage, bringing the nature of the threat sharply into focus.



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## Comments on specific questions

### 1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** This question allowed candidates a wide range of poems and attracted some good answers on poems such as '*Hawk Roosting*', '*Pike*', '*Thrushes*', '*October Dawn*' and '*Snowdrop*'. Candidates were most successful when they chose contrasting poems which helped to create a structure to their essay. This allowed them to consider Hughes' focus on the powerful and brutal as well as looking at responses of awe and wonderment, or a focus on beauty and delicacy.
- (b)** The imagery of '*Wind*' prevents a literal paraphrase and some candidates were puzzled by 'Blade-light', 'mad eye' and 'green goblet'. On the other hand, there were some lively responses to the poem and its depiction of the ferocity of wind through Hughes' characteristic language and imagery. The suggestions of the house's instability through being 'far out at sea', the force of 'crashing' and 'stampeding', the vulnerability of the 'quivering' fields and the stones which 'cry out' were all noted in confident answers.

**2 Wilfred Owen: Selected Poems**

- (a) Some candidates' answers to this question were hampered by their choice of poems, as it required prudent selection. Some considered the purveyors of 'the old lie' in *'Dulce et Decorum Est'* though perhaps some of the most thoughtful essays were based on *'The Send-Off'*, *'The Letter'* and *'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young'*. In this way, candidates were able to consider a variety of people who were not directly involved in the war, including Jessie Pope, politicians, retired generals, parents and loved ones, and this helped to create some thoughtful essays.
- (b) There were some developed and sensitive responses to *'Mental Cases'*, usually beginning logically with the opening questions. The dehumanisation of 'Who are these?' was often noted and gave a platform for further consideration of the poem's frank and often horrific language and imagery. Essays often picked up the idea of hell from the end of the first stanza and developed a view of the poem as a hell on earth for the suffering patients, and an indictment of the war that has reduced them to this state.

**3. Songs of Ourselves**

- (a) A number of candidates clearly wanted to write about discontent rather than content. More logical essays looked most often at the extract from Jonson's *'Underwoods'*, Carew's *'A Song'*, Nashe's *'Spring'*, Greene's *'A Mind Content'* and Shakespeare's *'Sonnet 18'*. Successful essays considered not only the feelings of content and the situations that produced feelings of happiness and satisfaction, but carefully explored the language, imagery and structure used by poets to express it.
- (b) The use of paradoxes and oppositions in the first stanzas of Queen Elizabeth's poem *'They Flee From Me, That Sometime Did Me Seek'* enabled many candidates to analyse form and structure, which often continued into consideration of the pattern of the stanzas and the effects of the final couplets. There was also some careful discussion of the images of the shadow and the snow. Although many essays which listed rhyme scheme, numbers of lines and rhythms these were noted, without relating these to the meaning of the poem which consequently, did not support candidates' understanding. It is very important for candidates to consider the effects of such metrical and technical practices and how they convey meaning.

**4. Jhumpa Lahiri: The Namesake**

- (a) The precise focus of the wording of this question evaded some candidates, who showed themselves adept at the discussion of relationships, but less able to deal with their ending. Most answers looked exclusively at Gogol's relationships with his girlfriends, discussing the ends of his affairs with Ruth, Maxine and Moushumi. These answers often considered the causes of the break-up of the relationships, less often the ways in which Lahiri narrates them. Some essays took a broader view and looked at the death of Ashoke creating a very different end to the relationship between Gogol's parents. This, when compared with the end of one or two of Gogol's relationships, provided a thoughtful contrast.
- (b) More candidates chose this question, the passage from the end of the novel, which draws together several strands. Wider textual knowledge was used well here as candidates made pertinent references to issues of Gogol's name and the story of 'The Overcoat'. Essays often noted both freedom and loneliness for Gogol in these paragraphs as he now faces a full opportunity to define himself and his identity; emphasised with the reference to his full name and the Bengali vocabulary in the first paragraph. The detail of Nikolai Gogol emphasises how he has neglected this interest, and, therefore a part of his father in the past, creating pathos. Few candidates were able to discuss Lahiri's shift to the future tense with confidence. Those who did noted that the effect isolates Gogol at the moment that he begins read 'The Overcoat'. The section prior to that is narrated in the past, and as he turns to the story the tense shifts to the future, leaving Gogol reading the story in an unnarrated present tense. Some candidates applied some sophisticated, careful thinking to this tense change.

**5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth***

- (a) There were few answers to this question, but among them were some very perceptive responses which showed detailed knowledge of the text and ability to write intelligently about Lily's and Selden's respective places in the society of 1900s New York, with focus on the pathos of the ending of the novel. Selden's fluctuating emotions were ably dealt with in most cases, together with his judgements of, and advice to, Lily at various points of the novel.
- (b) There were also a limited number of responses to this question, but candidates answering the question showed understanding of the situation and the characters. The relatively high proportion of dialogue in the passage gave candidates who favoured writing about characters plenty to work with; though many would have benefited from greater focus on the authorial asides and Wharton's use of irony. Most essays noted the key details of Lily's calculated moves on Percy Gryce and some of the clear pointers towards his characterisation, particularly in the details of his response to Lily. The detail of the tea – 'nectar' to Percy but 'railway brew' to Lily – was widely appreciated.

**6. *Stories of Ourselves***

- (a) Some candidates seemed to relish the opportunity to discuss characters they disliked, with John, the husband in '*The Yellow Wall Paper*', being subject to particular opprobrium, though Royal in '*Five-Twenty*' was a close competitor. Essays explored ways in which these characters are shown to oppress their wives and the ways the stories show the results of this oppression. There was also some politically-aware discussion of the group of men in '*The Lemon Orchard*', the ignorance of the human beings compared with the idealism of the aliens in '*Meteor*', the shift in character of the Aunt in '*Secrets*' and the bullying, hypocritical Mma-Mompati in '*The Village Saint*'. Strong answers needed not only a detailed knowledge of the stories to supply key references and quotations, but also an understanding of ways in which authors shaped the characters to create critical responses from readers.
- (b) Some essays betrayed candidates' uncertainty in their understanding of this passage from '*Journey*' but most were very responsive to the author's ways of creating the phantasmagorical atmosphere of the opening of the story. Candidates looked at the structure of the extract, beginning with the nightmare images which set the unnerving mood before understanding the location of the girl on the bus. The discomfort of the bus journey, being described with language such as, 'jolted', 'reckless rush', 'wounded shriek' and 'frenzy' was seen to add to the unease, where fellow passengers offer no comfort, separated from each other with 'eyes marshalled inwards'. Candidates wrote well on the girl's feelings of alienation as she walks among the comfortable houses after disembarking, houses from which she feels excluded. Good answers often used knowledge of the rest of the story to compare the comfort of these houses and 'fenced-in gardens' and families with 'daily meals' with the girl's own family situation and her own isolation and hunger.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Drama

## Key messages

- Candidates should be careful not to fall into narration or paraphrase, particularly when dealing with (b) passage-based questions.
- Candidates who consider these texts as plays which are performed do better.
- Making use of detailed analysis of language and action is key to achieving higher levels.

## General comments

It is always fascinating to see how candidates interpret questions. In the best responses there is imaginative personal response which is also carefully anchored into detailed analysis of particular moments in the text. In these responses, knowledge goes far beyond simply being able to give an account of what happens, or writing character studies. Rather, the responses see that a dramatist's work is to engage an audience (rather than a reader) through language and action in order to bring situations alive. At their very best responses offer coherent, original and thought-provoking insights into the plays under consideration.

Proficient and competent answers are more mixed. Knowledge of the texts is always sound and there is usually close attention to detail. The terms of the question are both understood and kept firmly in view throughout. Intelligent points are made and there is some sense of the candidates responding personally to the text, often through unusual examples or through close analysis of the language or structure of the text. There is a clear recognition in these responses that the text is something that has life as a performed, not merely a written text.

Answers in the 'basic' and 'solid' areas often show much knowledge of what is going on in a text without enough consideration of how such knowledge can be manipulated in order to provide a coherent response to the question. At this level, answers often resort to paraphrase or summary. Points are made, but there is a lack of an overall direction to the answers which means that the arguments do not develop, or are hard to follow. With both (a) and (b) questions it is, in the majority of cases, unhelpful to take a principally chronological view of a question; as this almost inevitably leads to either narrative or to the candidate running out of time. It is important therefore that candidates recognise that they need a strategic view of the question before beginning to write. Basic answers often show some confusion, either in terms of knowledge or communication. Knowledge at this level is often plot-centred.

Candidates need to answer the question they have been asked, not the question they would *like* to have been asked. This means that they need to be familiar with the precise requirements of terms such as 'dramatic presentation', 'dramatic significance' or 'dramatic effects.' Attention to such matters is often a key indicator that a candidate is moving from 'solid' towards 'competent' in terms of the mark scheme.

Some candidates can get very involved in contextual information (the divorce background to *A Man for All Seasons* for example) or in discussing critical readings. Although these aspects can support readings, candidates need to ensure that they start their arguments from the detail of their own, personal, experience of the text.

It is important that candidates do not confuse quality with quantity. Shorter, more disciplined essays are vastly preferable to longer pieces that try to cover all aspects of a question and thus do not accurately focus, or fail to get close to the detail needed.



### Comments on specific questions

#### Question 1

##### **AMA ATA AIDOO: *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa***

- (a) The best responses here showed an intelligent understanding of the issue of childless marriages, with an awareness of relevant cultural issues. The contrast between deliberate childlessness in the *Dilemma of a Ghost* was well contrasted to the difficulties of Anowa and Kofi. In some responses, dramatic methods unfortunately took second place to psychoanalysis of characters. With slightly less successful answers, details of language and action were usually carefully chosen in order to support a case but there was sometimes a lack of consistency about referring accurately to the text. Responses in the 'basic' and 'solid' levels of the mark scheme showed knowledge of both plot and issue, but this was often narrative-based and lacking in focus on the form, structure and language.
- (b) In all responses there was clear understanding of the issue of tension between generations. There was often useful discussion of tradition versus modernity, community versus the individual, family versus the individual or old versus young. However, even the best answers did not always fully explore the text as a piece of drama. Responses in the middle of the mark scheme tended to explore the more obvious aspects of the conflicts, with some well-selected quotation to back up points. At the lower levels, there was often recourse to recounting the plot and an inconsistent focus on the passage.

#### Question 2

##### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

- (a) All but the most basic of responses were able to identify and explore clear contrasts between the woods and Athens. Better responses moved away from simple matters of topography and took a strategic view about contrasts of law and imagination and order and chaos. A number of responses developed responses by examining the issue of the treatment and status of women in both locations. Very good essays often noted that the world of the play uses a mirroring structure where issues created in one place are reflected and distorted in the other. Responses at the lower end often identified the issues but were not consistently focused on clear demonstration of how they are dramatised through the language and action. Engagement with the issue of the mechanicals often led to puzzlement rather than illumination. Better responses were able to see that they link the worlds and provide a commentary on both the Athenian and the fairy aristocracy.
- (b) Basic responses to this question gave an account of the passage with little reflection on the particular terms of the question. Better answers soon saw and explored in detail, the fact that Puck's error leads on to a wide range of other mistakes of mutual misunderstanding. Competent and proficient answers were able to look clearly at dramatic effects, often by analysing Hermia's overwrought language. There was also often exploration of tension between Oberon and Puck. The best responses saw how the plot trick of the magic potion leads to revelations about human nature and the nature of love in the play. These essays were always carefully argued and made close reference to the detail of the passage, whilst at the same time drawing parallels with action elsewhere in the play.

#### Question 3

##### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra***

- (a) The majority of responses here showed an awareness that Enobarbus plays a major role in the play as a chorus and as a means of giving an audience perspective on the action, whilst only a small number of responses saw this question only in character study terms. Less convincing discussions noted his various interventions in the play without much analysis. The most engaging discussions often centred on his lengthy speech describing Cleopatra and on his disillusionment with both Antony and Cleopatra as the play's action proceeds. There was often discussion of his divided loyalties between his duty to Rome and his fascination with Egypt.
- (b) Candidates responded well in identifying Cleopatra's inconsistency and her 'infinite variety.' Better responses were able to look carefully at the way she articulates how she 'caught' Antony in the first

place. These answers were also able to look at the ways in which Cleopatra displays her volatility, her egocentricity ('I...I...I,' lines 11–16), her manipulation of others, and her nervousness about her relationship with Antony in the ways that she interrupts the messenger, talks across him, and dominates the exchange. The best answers often suggested that the scene might provide elements of comedy for an audience too. The violence of the ending of the extract was also usefully explored as a sign of Cleopatra's instability or anxiety. Weaker answers tended to track the action of the passage without offering support or close analysis to back up assertions.

#### Question 4

##### ROBERT BOLT: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) All candidates were able to identify examples of political ambition in the play. The focus was usually clearly placed on the presentation of Richard Rich or Thomas Cromwell. Some responses dealt with King's political ambition to be rid of his wife and how it corrupts others in the play. Better responses included More himself, seeing him as a counterweight and as someone who does not seek power in its own right or for personal gain. This contrast, when explored in detail and with careful reference to particular moments, provided access to the complexity of the issues presented dramatically.
- (b) For the most part, responses showed a clear understanding of what happens in the scene. Better responses moved directly to the tone of what More says and to his critique of the corruption that surrounds him once he is free to speak. More's sense of irony ('with pain and amusement' or his 'sly smile') was often commented on, as was his ability to remain lawyer-like to the end, by pointing out the irregularities of his trial. The best responses often made reference to the imagery, both here and elsewhere in the play. More narrative approaches often spent too much time on the first half of the passage and gave rather scant consideration to the change of tone in the scene and to what More says in a tone of polite, but searing disappointment after line 45.

#### Question 5

##### ALAN AYCKBOURN: *Absurd Person Singular*

- (a) A focus on the Hopcrofts was, of course, central to this question. Candidates were able to chart their upward mobility over the three acts of the play. At the lower end of the mark scheme, this often involved description rather than analysis. Better responses noted that the relationship between the two characters changes and that hints of Sidney's bullying of both Jane and other characters turns into the horrifying dance of the final act. There were often references to the other couples too: initially seen as worthy of respect by the Hopcrofts, their failings and fall were seen as a counterbalance to Sidney's all-consuming ambition. Top level responses were able to anchor the issue through close reference to the text and they saw that the dramatic ironies and satire of the text enables Ayckbourn to mix both the comic and the tragic in the play.
- (b) Responses at the lower end tended to focus entirely on Eva without ever giving consideration to the role that Sidney plays in the scene. There was much discussion of Eva's feelings of entrapment, and parallels were sometimes made with the dog locked in the car. Some candidates focused on her pill-popping and then sought to bring pop psychology to bear on her plight by talking about the exploitation of women or the oppressiveness of marriage. Better answers did this with more subtlety and paid full attention to both language and action, seeing the humour in her distraction when she puts the glass in the bin- not merely a sign that she is deranged. The best candidates saw that Eva's psychosis is also closely linked to her desire to be the centre of attention and to her capacity for self-dramatisation.

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## Key messages

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- Making use of detailed analysis of language and action is key to achieving higher levels.

## General comments

It is always fascinating to see how candidates interpret questions. In the best responses there is imaginative personal response which is also carefully anchored into detailed analysis of particular moments in the text. In these responses, knowledge goes far beyond simply being able to give an account of what happens, or writing character studies. Rather, the responses see that a dramatist's work is to engage an audience (rather than a reader) through language and action in order to bring situations alive. At their very best responses offer coherent, original and thought-provoking insights into the plays under consideration.

Proficient and competent answers are more mixed. Knowledge of the texts is always sound and there is usually close attention to detail. The terms of the question are both understood and kept firmly in view throughout. Intelligent points are made and there is some sense of the candidates responding personally to the text, often through unusual examples or through close analysis of the language or structure of the text. There is a clear recognition in these responses that the text is something that has life as a performed, not merely a written text.

Answers in the 'basic' and 'solid' areas often show much knowledge of what is going on in a text without enough consideration of how such knowledge can be manipulated in order to provide a coherent response to the question. At this level, answers often resort to paraphrase or summary. Points are made, but there is a lack of an overall direction to the answers which means that the arguments do not develop, or are hard to follow. With both (a) and (b) questions it is, in the majority of cases, unhelpful to take a principally chronological view of a question; as this almost inevitably leads to either narrative or to the candidate running out of time. It is important therefore that candidates recognise that they need a strategic view of the question before beginning to write. Basic answers often show some confusion, either in terms of knowledge or communication. Knowledge at this level is often plot-centred.

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Some candidates can get very involved in contextual information (the divorce background to *A Man for All Seasons* for example) or in discussing critical readings. Although these aspects can support readings, candidates need to ensure that they start their arguments from the detail of their own, personal, experience of the text.

It is important that candidates do not confuse quality with quantity. Shorter, more disciplined essays are vastly preferable to longer pieces that try to cover all aspects of a question and thus do not accurately focus, or fail to get close to the detail needed.

### Comments on specific questions

#### Question 1

##### **AMA ATA AIDOO: *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa***

- (a) Responses were often quick to see the tensions between members of families as presented in these two plays. Candidates had plainly thought hard about the ways in which clashes of culture and generations are considered in these plays. The best responses were carefully attentive to matters of drama; supporting arguments throughout with careful attention to specific moments. Less successful answers often showed understanding of the issues in the question, but tended towards either narrative, or a broader discussion of cultural backgrounds.
- (b) Virtually all candidates had a clear understanding of the situation confronted by Anowa and Kofi Ako. The key differentiator here was the level of detail adduced from the passage. Competent work (and above) was able to identify salient features such as the number of questions, the use of short sentences and phrases, the pauses, the use of 'but' and the use of 'I'. All of these add to the drama and are significant aspects of presentation in the extract. There was also interesting work on the level of misunderstanding between the two characters. Less satisfying responses often resorted to description rather than analysis. At all levels, deeper consideration of the stage directions would have been useful.

#### Question 2

##### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

- (a) Many responses showed an understanding of the question's concerns by describing the various romantic relationships in the play, often with considerable amounts of narrative. Better answers engaged with the idea that 'the course of true love never did run smooth' and with the complex portrayal of the tensions between romantic idealism and the reality of relationships; perhaps best seen in the tension between Oberon and Titania. The best responses were able to suggest that love is seen in many different ways during the course of the action, ranging from infatuation to the emotional surrender to one another. A few candidates usefully noted that the mechanicals' presentation of the Tragedy of Pyramus and Thisby serves as a form of dramatic irony to the rest of the play's action. There were some engaging discussions about the relationship between love and marriage in the play.
- (b) Discussion of Helena's presentation provided candidates with lots of opportunity to talk about the way she perceives herself, and, indeed, about the way that others treat her. Competent and proficient responses worked closely with the detail of the passage, locating precisely the confusion that Helena feels. In these answers there was a clear awareness of her sense of having been slighted by a spiteful 'confederacy.' Her feelings of betrayal by Hermia were often carefully evoked in terms of the rhetorical questions used. The best responses looked closely at the confusion of the situation at this point and saw what the contributions of Hermia and Lysander added to the whole. More limited responses fell back upon reporting what happens at this point in the play, often through tracking paraphrase.

#### Question 3

##### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra***

- (a) All responses were able to see the tension between Antony and Octavius Caesar. The best responses dealt ably with the complexity, locating the tension between them in either Octavius's envy of Antony, or in his unscrupulous ambition disguised as the good of Rome. The best answers were able to talk convincingly about the few scenes where the two are seen together and about the way both are mythologised to one another in their absence. One or two very convincing arguments discussed these characters' relationship through their fight over Cleopatra- a fertile area for discussion. Less convincing discussions simply catalogued their relationship as a series of events, with little sense of how the relationship is dramatically constructed.
- (b) Most answers were able to deal sensibly with the mixture of Cleopatra's skittish immaturity and envy often making good use of 'He cannot like her long' along with her imperious treatment of the messenger throughout the extract. Better responses also saw a subtlety in her characterisation by

exploring her insecurity- conveyed through the constant questions, the broken lines, and the triumphalism as each of Octavia's limitations is revealed to both her and the audience. Less successful responses tended simply to report what happens in the scene.

#### Question 4

##### **ROBERT BOLT: *A Man for All Seasons***

- (a) All answers saw that Rich and Cromwell are unscrupulous in both their desire for power and their use of it, once it is achieved. Better answers moved on to a consideration of the various ways in which the battle between these two polarities plays itself out within More himself. The best responses were able to look at specific moments- the trial scene was popular, as was the encounter with the King, in order to detail the progress of More's plight and his inability to escape from the pressures placed upon him by high office and his religious conscience being in conflict with each other. Less successful answers dealt with the facts of the matter without really getting close to dramatic presentation.
- (b) Responses here often paid careful attention to the various ways in which Cromwell manipulates More in this scene. The details of the scene such as his 'bustling' and Cromwell's use of Rich a scribe in their meeting were carefully explored; as was Cromwell's use of coercion which is often concealed as friendliness or sympathy '...drops paper. Sadly.' The best responses noted that although Cromwell technically, wins at the end; throughout both the extract and the play, the audience's sympathy is firmly with More, who is fully aware of what Cromwell is aiming to do.

#### Question 5

##### **ALAN AYCKBOURN: *Absurd Person Singular***

- (a) All candidates saw immediately that there is irony in placing the action at Christmas-time, a period where people are supposed to be happy. The responses also noted that the Christmas period provides the playwright with an ideal opportunity to present characters that are placed into uncomfortable situations with comparative strangers. Less successful answers tended to look at the action chronologically, although often correctly seeing ways in which the power dynamic between the characters shifts from year-to-year. The best answers were able to locate the pain of the festive season in particular moments, often dwelling on the triumph of the Hopcrofts in the final act with their insistence on presents and the dancing game which clearly demonstrates — much to an audience's discomfort — where the power now lies.
- (b) Responses here quickly warmed to the presentation of the Hopcrofts. There was awareness of the tension between the two characters, but also of the way that they work together for their mutual good. Some responses picked up on the business of the party games and saw that Sidney's innocent arrangements conceal a darker desire to make others bend to his will. A number of candidates were pre-occupied by discussing the role of women at this time, and were perhaps too singularly focused on Ayckbourn's presentation of Jane as house proud and lacking in social confidence.



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Centres should note that this component is taken by only a small number of candidates, and therefore the evidence base for observations may be somewhat restricted.

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Some candidates can get very involved in contextual information (the divorce background to *A Man for All Seasons* for example) or in discussing critical readings. Although these aspects can support readings, candidates need to ensure that they start their arguments from the detail of their own, personal, experience of the text.

It is important that candidates do not confuse quality with quantity. Shorter, more disciplined essays are vastly preferable to longer pieces that try to cover all aspects of a question and thus do not accurately focus, or fail to get close to the detail needed.

### Comments on specific questions

#### Question 1

##### **AMA ATA AIDOO: *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa***

- (a) Most responses were able to contrast the two marriages with some success. There was clear understanding of how the cross-cultural marriage in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* presents difficulties of understanding, both between the couple and in terms of the community in which they find themselves. Similarly, the marriage of Anowa and Kofi Ako was clearly understood in terms of the changing power relationships in modern marriages, often a linking theme for the question as a whole. Answers did not always address issues of dramatic presentation and of how the issues might be presented to an audience in the theatre.
- (b) Candidates were able to see that food is a particularly loaded cultural form, as are attitudes towards it. Thus Eulalie's fastidiousness breaks codes other than those simply of hunger and nourishment. Very few candidates noted that what Esi Kom says has to be translated and interpreted to Eulalie by her husband. More could also have been said about Ato's incomprehension of Eulalie's cultural myopia. On both sides, there is unwillingness to compromise. On the whole, candidates understood the general movement of the scene but found it hard to make coherent points about the way that the scene is divided into different sections, each of which explores aspects of cultural misunderstanding.

#### Question 2

##### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

- (a) The comic significance of the mechanicals was clearly seen by all candidates. What was less well noted was the significance of the play within a play as a means of giving an audience a perspective on the over-blown rhetoric of the various lovers in the main action. The clumsy aping of the mythical figures of Pyramus and Thisbe makes an audience very aware of how ridiculous what they have just witnessed it. Indeed, the Athenian court, in watching the entertainment, is having a mirror held up to its attitudes and values.
- (b) Most candidates were able to give an account of this scene in plot terms. Better responses quickly moved towards demonstrating how Puck's interventions in the human world are designed to make mischief and to place human considerations of valour and chivalry in perspective. Candidates were able to engage interestingly with the posturing of the human beings, issues of love's blindness and the ways in which the fairy world runs rings around them.

#### Question 3

##### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra***

- (a) All responses were able to see the tension between Antony and Octavius Caesar. The best responses dealt ably with the complexity, locating the tension between them in either Octavius's envy of Antony, or in his unscrupulous ambition disguised as the good of Rome. With better responses, understanding at this level quickly moved on to consideration of thematic matters and the various ways in which Shakespeare conveys their mutual antipathy. There were useful discussions of Cleopatra and sometimes Octavia as pawns in the game. Less convincing discussions simply catalogued their relationship over a series of incidents with little sense of their dramatic effects.
- (b) Responses to this question were often detailed and absolutely focused on the issue of how Cleopatra mythologises Antony in his absence. They also responded to the emotional vulnerability that she reveals at this point in the play. Some responses drew attention to her egocentricity and her unwillingness to let the truth of what Dolabella has to tell her break in upon her fantasy. Very few responses caught the change of tone at line 44 and the fact that Cleopatra is very much aware that the new world that is about to enter, dominated by Caesar, will be one of practicality, not poetry.

#### Question 4

##### **ROBERT BOLT: *A Man for All Seasons***

- (a) The small number of responses to this question were all able to trace the relationship between More and his wife, and most noted Alice's incomprehension in the face of More's intractability. Better responses were able to see that Bolt focuses on this relationship in order to demonstrate the sacrifices that More makes are deep and personal as he cuts himself off from his family in order to protect them.
- (b) Henry is paradoxically an ever-present absentee in the play. However, when he is presented he is surprisingly unsure of himself and perhaps more surprisingly, in awe of More's character. Many responses noted that Henry's presence here is in direct contrast to the image of him conveyed by others elsewhere in the play. There was warm response to the awkwardness between the two and to the way that they have nothing really to talk about. The best responses looked closely at the respect conveyed by More through his language and his realisation that Henry appears to be longing for his support and demonstrates genuine affection with- 'wooiingly' often being mentioned. The nuances of Henry's characterisation were also picked up on with his changeable mood and the barbed: 'Traitors! Mind it, Thomas!'

#### Question 5

##### **ALAN AYCKBOURN: *Absurd Person Singular***

- (a) All responses showed some understanding of the Jacksons and their unhappy marriage. Better responses were able to compare and contrast their relationship with that of the other two couples. Detailed discussion of particular moments revealed their weaknesses and also their roles as a measure of how far the Hopcrofts have climbed by the end of the play.
- (b) Many candidates resorted to giving an account of the action. Better responses were sensitive to the tone of what is going on, and discussed the various ways in which the characters reveal their own obsessions. The ludicrousness of what is going on was usually observed, but its farcical silliness proved more difficult to analyse, though some responses did note the absurdity of them covering Ronald with 'an assortment of laundry,' Sidney's understated 'He's in a state of shock,' and the general observations about the state of the laundry despite the crisis at hand. The role of the unseen dog trapping the characters went largely unnoticed by candidates.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9695/51**  
**Shakespeare and other Pre-Twentieth  
Century Texts**

## Key messages

1. Candidates should be fully aware of the rubric for the paper, including the changes in June 2016 that candidates must now answer at least one (b) passage-based question.
2. Candidates tackling option (b) passage questions need to be prepared to discuss the wider text in terms of the writer's methods and concerns as revealed in the given passage.

## General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. This was the first session with the new rubric, which requires candidates to tackle at least one option (b) passage question. This led to a slight increase in the number of rubric errors, though it was pleasing to see a reduction in the number of candidates with timing problems. The quality of expression was also acceptable in nearly every case, although there are some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to all of the questions set, and answers on each question were seen at each level of attainment. Some texts were very popular – *Othello*, *Emma* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* – with others remaining very much minority choices, particularly Eliot and Rossetti.

There are three specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Centres are reminded that the rubric for this paper changed from June 2016 and candidates now have to tackle at least one option (b) or passage-based question. They may do one passage (b) and one discursive (a) question or two passage (b) questions. They are however, no longer able to offer two discursive option (a) essays. Please see the 9695 2016–2018 syllabus for more details. Candidates should also be aware of the time limits for the paper. In this session it was clear that a small minority of candidates had mismanaged the time available so that the second essay was considerably shorter and therefore less developed than the first essay, with a consequent effect on the overall marks awarded.
2. Option (b) passage questions at this level will always require the candidate to discuss the work in question more widely than the narrow confines of the passage itself. Candidates tackling questions on a novel or Shakespeare play tended to refer to the wider text in terms of the characters or the narrative. They could usefully also consider the specific methods and concerns of the writer, revealed in the passage, and relate them to the wider text as well; perhaps focusing on specific aspects of style in the passage and showing how these are used elsewhere in the text. For poetry passages it is important that the candidates refer to the wider selection of poems and, if the passage is an extract from a longer poem, the rest of that poem. This enables the candidates to discuss the poet more generally in terms of the wider canon, as well as focusing on the specific details of the given passage.

## **MEASURE FOR MEASURE: William Shakespeare**

This was the minority choice in Section 'A' this session, with most candidates tackling the (b) passage option.

1. (a) Nearly all answers had at least a sound knowledge of the text. Weaker answers tended to narrate more or less relevant sections of the plot, with the overall success dependent on how well the material selected was shaped to the task. Better answers considered some of the themes of the

text. Some thought that both morality and justice were informed by his disguise and his deception. One candidate wondered '*Can we ever trust a ruler who sneaks about trying to put things right rather than revealing himself?*' For others the Duke is revealed through his deception – with some answers debating whether or not he does become more self-aware by the end of the play. Others saw him as static, a plot device, signalled by Isabella's lack of response to his marriage proposal. Candidates who considered how Jacobean and modern audience responses could be contrasted – '*Machiavel compared to a modern spin doctor*' as one answer suggested – often did well.

- (b) Most answers had some awareness of the context, which enabled them to evaluate the significance of this passage. Many answers contrasted the roles of Lucio and Isabella and there was some ambivalence towards Lucio – is he mocking her or genuine in his comments? Isabella's reaction to her brother's sin was noted by better answers and linked to her easy acceptance of Marianne's 'sacrifice' later. Better answers explored her desire to be a nun and the different attitudes to sex/ marriage/ the Duke revealed by this discussion. Answers which considered the structure of the play in the context of the Duke's 'removal' and this being part of the 'set-up' of the plot, often did well. Other answers which considered key elements of Shakespeare's methods here, such as language, imagery and setting also scored highly, particularly when these points were related to the wider text stylistically and thematically.

### OTHELLO: William Shakespeare

This was very popular text, especially the (b) passage option, which was the most popular question on the paper.

2. (a) Nearly all answers showed a secure knowledge of the text. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant parts of the plot, at times ignoring the supporting quotation from Iago, with a consequent loss of direction and focus. Many answers quoted the 'Green eyed monster', noting it destroys the individual from within; or brings out the latent personality of, for example, Iago and Othello. Trifles such as missing handkerchiefs and being overlooked for promotion were much discussed, but better answers saw how these 'confirmations' needed the other contexts which fate and/or Iago provide. For some candidates, others were also seen as jealous, especially Roderigo, Bianca and Brabantio. Iago's methods much discussed – explicit, gross and vulgar in speech to Brabantio and then to Othello, creating mental images of Desdemona for both characters that, as one candidate put it, '*haunt them and ultimately kill them with images though without substance and hence light as air.*' Better answers often linked the discussion to Othello as an outsider or his inner fears and inhibitions, either of which make 'trifles' very important to him because of his age/ race/ colour/ religion. Answers which considered how jealousy is presented, the imagery and language of poison and medicine, as well as the effects of Iago's soliloquies on the audience's view of the 'trifles', often did very well indeed.
- (b) Most candidates had a sound sense of the context of this passage, which was important in evaluating its tone and weighing up its significance. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the discussion, with some ignoring the song and the wider text. Better answers focused on the thematic and stylistic details with attitudes of women to men much discussed, in the context of Othello's now visible jealousy and the public humiliation of Desdemona. This was, for some, important to gauge the mood of this private conversation between abused women. Good answers explored the pathos of the 'Willow' song and the underlying tone of sadness or threat. The foreshadowing was often discussed, with many engaged personal responses to this touching scene, thoughtfully recognising how it also increases the pity the audience feels for her impending and inevitable murder. Other answers considered Desdemona's loyalty and, for some, continuing love for Othello. Very good answers were able to contrast the role of Emilia with her pragmatism to Desdemona's naiveté, but also highlighted Desdemona's honesty (and for some candidates Emilia's dishonesty over the handkerchief) and the irony of Othello's belief in her dishonesty.

### EMMA: Jane Austen

This was the most popular text in section B, with an even split between (a) and (b) answers.

- 3 (a) Most candidates had a secure knowledge of the text and were able to find relevant comments and examples. Weaker answers focused on retelling and summarising Harriet's narrative, with some able to develop this into considering how she helps Emma develop as a character. Better answers thought it important that it is Emma's view of Harriet, because it leads Emma into her misguided attempts at matchmaking, for as one answer suggested: '*In fact it is only Robert Martin who really*



*takes delight in Harriet, but it takes the whole novel before Emma realises this*. Some developed this by contrasting Emma's comment to Elton's more honest assessment of Harriet's position and Knightley's view of the fundamental 'wrongness' of Emma's influence on Harriet, for some symbolised by their differing attitudes to Robert Martin. Very good answers explored how Austen develops in the reader a 'sense of the inevitability that Knightley is correct in his judgements'. Answers which focused on Harriet's character often noted her eagerness to please Emma and her complicity in 'falling for different men at Emma's instigation', as one put it, which was seen as indicative of Harriet's lack of real depth, as was her returning to Martin at the end. Some, though, found a growing maturity in Harriet – 'her regard for Knightley that so surprised Emma, leading to her decision to return to Robert Martin's bosom'. Some excellent insights explored Emma's growing realisation of Harriet's actual position, together with the revelation of her real background as opposed to Emma's imaginary one, as indicative of Emma's growing maturity and readiness for her marriage to Knightley.

- (b) Weaker candidates were hampered by not knowing the context for this passage, important in gauging its significance and for understanding some of the detail of Emma's musings. Better answers considered the importance of social gatherings, especially in the context of Emma's original 'snobbish decision to be offended by the invitation', as one said, 'and her evident enjoyment of actually being there.' Many good answers explored the two antagonistic relationships – Emma and Jane and Knightley and Churchill. This was analysed as creating humour or intrigue and developing the plot. Very good answers used the context of the piano and Emma and Churchill's previous discussion to explore the irony and humour of the passage. Some answers were concerned about Churchill's character, expressing discontent at his duplicity in using Emma as a cloak to mask his true intentions and considering his enjoyment of the situation, witnessed by his comments on her dancing, as reprehensible. Others though saw Emma as a willing, if not fully aware participant, 'whose treatment of Harriet and Mr Elton fully deserves this unwitting role that Churchill gives her.' Some saw how Emma's obsession with the source of the piano signals her- as yet undiscovered- love for Knightley and perhaps, his more obvious regard for her. Better answers saw how Knightley was the reader's guide in censoring Churchill's selfishness (and at other times in the novel Emma's) and 'his irresponsible disposition'. Candidates who considered Austen's methods in detail, especially language and narrative techniques, relating their use here to the wider text often did very well.

#### THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE and TALE: Geoffrey Chaucer

This was the second most popular text in section B, though most candidates tackled question (a).

4. (a) Most answers revealed at least a solid knowledge of the text and were able to shape the material relevantly to the task. Those answers referring to both the prologue and the tale did better, though most answers tended to focus mostly on Alison's revelations in the prologue. Many answers saw Alisoun as typical of women or more insightfully, what 'men such as Chaucer thought was typical of women'; noting her desire for sex, money, status and domination. Others saw her as a grotesque exaggeration to enable Chaucer to create humour, often supporting these ideas with detailed quotations. Better answers discussed her use of Bible authority to support her attitudes to men – some saw this as positive for Alisoun, whereas others saw Chaucer as mocking her (and therefore women in general) through her misuse of 'authorities'. Those who considered the Tale in detail – the knight's actions, the role of the Queen, the appropriateness of his quest and the role and characterisation of the 'loathly lady' (linking her to the Alisoun revealed in the Prologue) – often did very well.
- b Most recognised this as the opening to the tale. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or discuss Alisoun's revelations in the prologue in too much detail. Better answers saw the attitudes to the friars and 'limitours' as indicative of her attitude to authority generally – good answers often connected Jankyn's book and complaints. Some good answers saw the change in style from the prologue's 'revealing chattiness', contrasting Alisoun's tale and its language and tone with the more earthy and engaging 'confessional approach of the prologue'. Others saw this as the opening to a classic 'fairy tale', linked by some to the wish-fulfilling ending, or a tale of olden times, set in the mythical age of Arthur, but, for some candidates, curiously 'modern' in its feel and concerns. The rape was much discussed in terms of the overall themes and concerns of the text, linking to the violence and sex obsessions revealed in the prologue. Answers which explored the effects of Chaucer's choices in the passage and linked them to the wider text often did very well.

### THE MILL ON THE FLOSS: George Eliot

This was the least popular text on the paper with very few answers overall and most of them seen on question (b).

5. (a) The few candidates who tackled this option had a solid knowledge of the text. Most answers focused on the contrast of the Mill itself, with some awareness of the significance of the river; in terms of plot and thematic development. Better answers referred to the School and how its neutrality brought Philip and Maggie together, foreshadowing the meetings in the quarry and at the musical gatherings. Answers which considered how Eliot presented the settings and how the atmospheres of the different settings were revealed often did very well.
- (b) Most candidates had a sound knowledge of the passage, but the context was important in understanding its significance, especially what is being discussed (Maggie's clandestine relationship with Philip Wakem). This was linked to previous '*fall outs between them over rabbits and hair*'. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage and summarise the overall relationship between Tom and Maggie. Better answers were able to contrast Maggie's need for acceptance and Tom's independence and dominance. Some recognised Tom's acceptance of his duty to Maggie and, through her, his protection of the family's good name. The prescience of his 'led away to do anything' given the later 'elopement' with Stephen suggested to some how well he knows his sister, though others saw him as bullying and condescending. Good answers explored Maggie's rebelliousness and humiliation, often linked to the wider text, especially her rash hair-cutting, and many answers spotted her need to be loved as a key element in her characterisation and her tragedy. Very good answers considered her need for Tom's support and good opinion contrasted to his awareness of the difference in their dispositions in terms of the development of the text as a whole. Those who linked this to Eliot's use of free indirect discourse to reveal this, along with the shifting of the narrative focus in the passage, often did very well.

### Great Expectations

This was a popular choice of text, though a large majority chose the passage (b) option.

- 6 a Most candidates could discuss relevant material, with weaker answers tending to summarise Pip's childhood in detail, without necessarily considering attitudes. Better answers often contrasted Mrs Joe and Pumblechook with Joe in their attitudes to Pip; for some, humour was created by the hypocrisy of one and the ineffectiveness of the other. Some answers considered Joe's 'What larks!' as indicative of his own perpetual childhood. Other answers focused on Miss Havisham's attitude to Estella and '*the abuse through kindness*' as one saw it, linking this to Magwitch and Pip. Good answers contrasted the atmosphere of the forge and Satis House with the chaos of the Pockets' household. Others linked the desolation of Satis House and Estella's strange, for some, Gothic, upbringing to her strange behaviour in adulthood. Very good answers also discussed role reversal – for example '*Pip and Magwitch change roles with each other plus Pip's childhood fears grow into love for the reformed convict.*' Those who discussed Pip's narrative voice – his childhood seen through the eyes of an older Pip – and how Dickens slips in and out of the narrative voices to create his effects, often did very well.
- b Nearly all candidates were able to discuss this meeting between Pip and Miss Havisham in the context of their overall relationship. Those who remembered Pip's new expectations and the reason for his visit often did well in exploring how his relationship with Miss Havisham has taken on new meaning in his eyes – 'kneeling', kissing her hand and the Fairy Godmother symbol all cited as evidence. Better answers saw questions over her role – does she 'know' who Pip's benefactor is for example. For some she was certainly happy to have Sarah Pocket and perhaps Pip believe she is the benefactor. Good answers considered the role of Jaggers, noting Dickens's use of the coincidences, but telling ones, in terms of plot and characterisation. Very good answers considered the characterisation of Miss Havisham, seen as more humanised and less witch-like by some; others thought her manipulation of Pip as evil and abusive, citing her glee in Sarah's discomfort. The relationship between Pip and Miss Havisham was seen to be structured in a similar way to Pip's own development, reflecting the phases in his life story. A consideration of the narrative voice was very important here – Pip is remembering and thus shaping the story; those who remembered that Dickens is constructing his narrative and developing effects through this technique did well.

### SELECTED POEMS: John Keats

This was a popular choice though the large majority tackled the option **(b)** question. Weaker candidates on either option tended to spend too long on general biographical details at the expense of a more focused approach to the literary task.

7. **(a)** There were very few answers on this question. Nearly all had a sound knowledge of the text with the Odes being frequently referenced particularly '*To Autumn*' and '*Ode to a Nightingale*' however, '*The Eve of St Agnes*' and '*Bright Star!*' were also popular choices. Weaker answers tended to summarise their chosen poems, with the shaping of the summary to the specific task determining the answer's level of achievement. Better answers linked Keats' treatment of time in these poems to other concerns such as mortality and immortality, the permanence of art and the misery of the human condition. Those answers which explored Keats's presentation of time through his choice of language and imagery often did very well.
- (b)** This was a more popular choice. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the set poem '*Ode on Melancholy*' with little regard to the wider canon, with a few answers unsure of the meaning of some the details, Lethe and Psyche for example. Better answers saw the pains of love and life as main themes, here and elsewhere in the selection. Some good answers considered how Keats uses nature imagery and symbols – mournful images of beetles/ owls – to set the tone; those who linked this discussion to the wider text often did very well. Other very good answers explored details of the language and how it creates anguish and establishes mood. This was linked to Keats' key themes such as mortality and immortality and dying beauty and through these themes linked to other odes such as '*Ode to a Nightingale*' and '*Ode on a Grecian Urn*'.

### SELECTED POEMS: Christina Rossetti

This was less popular than the Keats, with only a few takers for option **(a)** in particular. As with Keats, weaker candidates on either option tended to spend too long on general biographical details at the expense of a more focused approach to the literary task.

8. **(a)** Nearly all answers were able to refer to three relevant poems in some detail. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poems, with the more or less relevance of the commentary determining the success of the answer. Other weaker answers tended to provide too much unrelated biographical detail. Better answers explored the topic, seeing a loss of earthly pleasures, human love and life as contrasted to loss of religious belief or spiritual certainty. Many referred to '*Cousin Kate*', noting the loss of a loved one, via the patriarchal society and woman's place in the hierarchy. Some linked this to '*Goblin Market*' and '*An Apple Gathering*'. Rossetti's attitude to social status was also considered, the 'great Lord' opposed to the 'cottages' for example. Others explored the loss of social prestige, noting the stigma of spurned lover and the contrast of Kate and the narrator. '*At Home*' was discussed in terms of loss of friendship and memory, through death, contrasted with the energy and optimism of the living. '*Despised and Rejected*' suggested the loss of faith, inability to respond to the plaintive calls and the loss also by God of a soul that might have been saved. Those answers which drew these ideas into a single structured argument often did very well.
- (b)** Most answers showed some understanding of the basics of the poem, with weaker answers offering a paraphrase of the ideas, though sometimes with dew specific links to the wider text. Better answers linked the poem '*A Better Resurrection*' to '*Shut Out*' and '*Good Friday*'. Other answers analysed the use of punctuation to suggest isolation; seen as a key theme along with loneliness and despair. Other candidates saw the lack of greenness as linked to lack of growth or spiritual renewal, though the title, for some, was suggestive of a new start and the need for religious hope and salvation. Very good answers noted the Biblical references to Psalms, linking this to the wider selection, with the effect of placing her concerns squarely in her religious doubts and despair. Other very good answers explored the nature references, seeing echoes of Shakespeare's sonnets. The effects created were often noted: the dying leaf indicative of her state of mind and linked for some to '*An Apple Gathering*'. Biographical details were linked usefully to the lack of bud and sap: for example, her childlessness and growing older.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9695/52**  
**Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth  
Century Texts**

## Key messages

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2. Candidates tackling option (b) passage questions need to be prepared to discuss the wider text in terms of the writer's methods and concerns as revealed in the given passage.

## General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. This was the first session with the new rubric, which requires candidates to tackle at least one option (b) passage question. This led to a slight increase in the number of rubric errors, though it was pleasing to see a reduction in the number of candidates with timing problems. The quality of expression was also acceptable in nearly every case, although there are some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

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There are three specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Centres are reminded that the rubric for this paper changed from June 2016 and candidates now have to tackle at least one option (b) or passage-based question. They may do one passage (b) and one discursive (a) question or two passage (b) questions. They are however, no longer able to offer two discursive option (a) essays. Please see the 9695 2016–2018 syllabus for more details. Candidates should also be aware of the time limits for the paper. In this session it was clear that a small minority of candidates had mismanaged the time available so that the second essay was considerably shorter and therefore less developed than the first essay, with a consequent effect on the overall marks awarded.
2. Option (b) passage questions at this level will always require the candidate to discuss the work in question more widely than the narrow confines of the passage itself. Candidates tackling questions on a novel or Shakespeare play tended to refer to the wider text in terms of the characters or the narrative. They could usefully also consider the specific methods and concerns of the writer, revealed in the passage, and relate them to the wider text as well; perhaps focusing on specific aspects of style in the passage and showing how these are used elsewhere in the text. For poetry passages it is important that the candidates refer to the wider selection of poems and, if the passage is an extract from a longer poem, the rest of that poem. This enables the candidates to discuss the poet more generally in terms of the wider canon, as well as focusing on the specific details of the given passage.

## **MEASURE FOR MEASURE: William Shakespeare**

This was the minority choice in this session, with most candidates tackling the (b) passage option.

1. (a) Nearly all candidates had a sound knowledge of the text and were able to discuss relevant ideas, with some textual support. Weaker answers tended to narrate more or less relevant sections of the plot, with the overall success dependent on how well the material selected was shaped to the task. Better answers tended to focus on the Duke and the Duke's disguise which as one candidate



suggested *'seems almost childish but reveals his manipulative character'*. Nearly all answers thought it heightens his mystery – for example, Lucio finds him *'fantastical'*, perhaps voicing the view of the common people. Others considered the Marianna and Isabella trick, with some finding this shocking that *'a would-be nun who wanted more restraint should agree that Marianna sacrifices her virginity to save Claudio, Isabella's brother, who ironically took Juliet's virginity and is condemned to death for it'*, as one candidate summarised it. Other answers considered the mutual deception of Angelo and Isabella, with both seen as reprehensible in their respective attitudes. Angelo's deception was seen as a surprise both to himself and others for, as one answer put it, *'he goes from snow blood to lustful demands in mere minutes'*. Very good answers explored how Shakespeare creates his dramatic effects, some seeing Ragozine's head as symbolic of the Duke's attitude to justice and his desire to *'cover things up'*, neatly linked to making Isabella believe that Claudio is dead. Those answers exploring such dramatic devices, as well as language and imagery, as Shakespeare's tools to create the effects, often did very well.

- (b) Most answers had some awareness of the context, which enabled them to evaluate the significance of this passage. Weaker answers often attempted a line-by-line paraphrase and commentary, which led to time problems in some essays so that Angelo's key soliloquy was not discussed. Better answers considered Isabella's passionate plea and Angelo's coldness and stern inflexibility in the light of the wider themes and concerns of the play; showing how it reveals the hypocrisy and duplicity in Angelo, bending the laws so he can do exactly what he has condemned Claudio for. Very good answers often looked at the dramatic techniques here to very good effect. For example, Angelo's attempt to leave and his later soliloquy with showing that *'he is a slave to his temptations and aware of his sin'*; as one suggested, though for others, *'He is weak and controlled by his desires'*. Nearly all good answers showed how this passage adds layers to his characterisation, with his asides also revealing a secretive side, one not for public display.

## OTHELLO: William Shakespeare

This was very popular, especially the (b) passage option, which was the most popular question on the paper.

2. (a) Nearly all answers showed a secure knowledge of the text. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant parts of the plot, at times ignoring the supporting quotation from Othello, with a consequent loss of direction and focus. Some more successful answers tended to give a summary of Othello's role with some attempt to discuss how he is presented. Better answers considered Othello as an outsider by birth, religion, colour or culture, seeing these as the root cause of his perplexity. For others, attitudes to *'cuckolding'* were central and whether Othello's is derived from his cultural or Venetian background was well debated in some essays. For other candidates, Othello mirrors Iago's own jealousy, with some excellent explorations of how this was put to telling dramatic effect. Some very good answers deconstructed the quote showing how his love is revealed (with much debate on why he considered it *'not wisely'*), how he is wrought, often exploring effectively the role of Iago and his own insecurities and how his perplexity is revealed in his fits, his language and of course in Desdemona's unjust murder and his final suicide.
- (b) Most candidates had a sound sense of the context of this passage, which was important in evaluating its tone and the significance. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the discussion with some reference to the wider text. Others saw this scene as a *'crisis for Iago's devilish plan'*. Better answers explored the language such as *'hearing'*, leading to the theme of listening and mishearing and misunderstanding, with some insightful analysis of Iago's mastery of words and every other character's language, until his final *'I never will speak word'*. Other answers explored the plot development, seeing Iago as tying up the loose ends, and killing Cassio as he promised. For some candidates this is where the role of Roderigo develops, through his courage and his challenge to Iago, with a number of different views on how audiences might respond to it, especially in the light of their knowledge of Iago's plans. Those answers exploring language and tone often did very well, for example many pointed out the change in Iago's tone, when Roderigo threatens to expose him to Desdemona: *'a crux point in their relationship which now he was revealed as a threat sealed Roderigo's fate and led to his stabbing by the "inhuman dog" soon after,'* as one candidate suggested, all signified by the, for some, sinister *'You have said now!'* Others noted the development of Roderigo from Iago's *'purse'* and a fool, into a true villain in his possible willingness to murder Cassio and linked this to his role in the drinking scene.



### EMMA: Jane Austen

This was the second most popular text in section B, with most candidates offering question **(b)** answers.

3. (a) Most candidates had a secure knowledge of the text and were able to find relevant comments and examples. Weaker answers focused on retelling and summarising Harriet and Jane's narratives separately, with some able to develop that into considering the effect on Emma's characterisation. Weaker answers also tended to treat them separately and then bring the comparison together in final paragraphs. Better answers integrated the comparisons throughout the essay, often considering the effects created by the narrative structures used by Austen. For some candidates, Harriet was naive, simple, innocent and not a lady, with Jane her opposite. Emma's characterisation was explored through her *'befriending Harriet whilst mocking and traducing Jane ironically to her secret lover,'* as one answer suggested. Some wondered if this is because Harriet is *'inferior to Emma in every way, whereas Jane might be seen as superior to her'*. Very good answers considered the novel's structure and how both characters are used to confuse Emma and Mr Knightley's match in different ways. Other very good answers noted the intricacy of the development: how the shock of Harriet's revelation caused by the shock of Frank and Jane's disclosure leads to Emma's realisation of her true feelings.
- (b) Nearly every candidate was able to place this passage in its context, post Box Hill. Some weaker answers were confused as to why Emma was going to the Bates's house, but most were able to consider Austen's characterisation of Emma and her state of mind with some understanding. Better answers revealed a wide range of observations and ideas with most noting the significance of this moment in terms of Emma's *'growth'*, as one candidate termed it. Others looking closely at the details used to discuss the chaotic nature of parts of the extract with one candidate suggesting that the use of listing to describe the *'bustle'* in lines 10–12 *'mimics the air of the Bates' home; a result of Emma's presence and by extension, the discomfort she had caused'*. There was some sensitive awareness of Miss Bates's character in the passage, for instance in recognising that she *'is not as cheerful as she normally is.'* One candidate referred to Miss Bates as a *'caricature'*, noting her role as *'comic relief'*, yet suggesting that her character is *'not unkind because of her naivety and gratitude.'* Other responses noted that her *'real anxiety for Jane'* is characteristic of her portrayal throughout the novel as someone who means well and whose treatment at Box Hill is consequently all the more painful, even to Emma herself. Very good answers referred to Mr Knightley as Emma's mentor in leading her to this moment, with some claiming that *'the reader can sense a foreshadowing of the soft romance between the two characters'* with Emma's eyes being *'towards Donwell as she walked.'* Those answers which developed this discussion of Emma and Miss Bates by exploring the methods, especially the narrative structures and language often did very well, especially when this was developed into considering Austen's critique of women's role in the novel more widely.

### THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE and TALE: Geoffrey Chaucer

This was a minority text in **section B**, with most candidates tackling option **(b)**.

4. (a) Most answers revealed at least a solid knowledge of the text and were able to shape the material relevantly to the task. Those answers referring to both the prologue and the tale did better, though most answers tended to focus mostly on Alisoun's revelations in the prologue. Better responses showed a good focus on the task and had a sufficient understanding of the text to be able to form at least competent arguments. Some competent answers were able to form a clear essay around three types of authority: authority in marriage, the patriarchal society and the authority of the church, often showing detailed knowledge of the text. Better answers placed an emphasis on the Wife's belief in experience over written authority, citing the battle with Jankyn over the book of wicked wives, suggesting that *'Chaucer reveals to us that the tactful wife is winning over the authority of male,'* as one candidate suggested. The Wife's misinterpretations of the Bible were also mentioned as contributing to the humour of the Prologue. Very good answers sometimes took an original approach to the task, for example basing arguments around the Wife's tampering with the *'natural order of life'* (referring to Aristotle and a God-Man-Woman-Beast structure). Other very good answers explored the significance of multiple voices within the structure of the text, with one calling Chaucer a *'radical iconoclast'* due to how the Wife *'destroys sacred beliefs'*. Other answers saw a Marxist approach to the text, looking at how the Wife challenges social structures. Candidates who linked these arguments to some consideration of Chaucer's poetic methods often did very well.

- (b) Most candidates were able to give a clear context to the passage – the quest and reasons for it, plus the Knight’s despair of finding the answer to the question and discuss the significance of this meeting. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage, with some comments on the concerns, if not the methods. Better answers saw the significance of the passage in marking the end of the Knight’s quest and in moving the plot onto his pact with the ‘old hag’. This led to an exploration of the wider text, and the comparison between Alisoun and the ‘old hag’, in some cases at the expense of attention to the passage itself. Other answers considered female ‘soveraynetee’, with one candidate pointing to the closing of the extract as reinforcing the *‘power (the woman) now holds over the Knight, represented through the monosyllabic nature of the ending line.’* The presentation of magic was generally well noted too; some suggested that this gives the Wife *‘more freedom to speak about controversial topics such as female dominance and the Church.’* Others saw the magical elements of this passage as a way to build up suspense towards the climax of the revelation of what women want. Very good answers were often aware of Chaucer as the creator of Alisoun and explored the gender and marital politics under discussion here, through the themes of power, sovereignty and ‘maistrie’. Some saw the irony of the rapist sent on this particular quest, plus the irony of the ‘old hag’ having the answer. Those answers considering the methods such as language and dialogue in detail, with apt links to the wider text, often did very well.

### THE MILL ON THE FLOSS: George Eliot

This was a less popular text on the paper, with most answers choosing to tackle option (b).

- 5 a Most candidates showed a secure knowledge of the text and were able to find sufficient relevant material to present an argument. Weaker answers tended to summarise the text, often in great detail, the success determined by how well-shaped they were to the task, particularly the ‘different attitudes’ and ‘Eliot’s presentation’. Better answers linked the attitudes to childhood and key childhood experiences, as well as *‘the overarching conflict between Realism and Romanticism,’* as one candidate put it. Maggie’s actions of passion and then self-denial were seen by some as right from a feminist perspective, but Tom’s narrower more pragmatic view was also noted and seen as a positive counterbalance by some. Right and wrong was also linked to another key theme by some very good answers – the influence of society and family on the individual, with some developing this to explore the different views of the Tullivers and the Dodsons to family, work and especially money.
- b Most answers were able to place the passage in its context, though weaker answers were confused as to where in Mr Tulliver’s health problems this actually occurred. Other weaker answers tended to summarise all that happened previously, often in great detail, especially around the Tulliver/ Wakem ‘feud’. Better answers considered how the characters are all revealed by their reactions to Tulliver’s plight. For some, the emotional response, and revealing it, is what divides the sexes generally and here Tom and Maggie in particular. As one candidate puts it: *‘Maggie and Tom are in the same situation undergoing the same circumstance but are experiencing it very differently and it is evident in their reactions.’* Good answers noted Luke’s role as a worker and how it shows the inclusive attitudes of the Tullivers plus his loyalty is a positive in the reader’s view of Mr Tulliver. Very good answers explored the methods in detail – the discursive style, use of imagery – water especially – and the shifting narrative viewpoints were all much discussed. Where this was linked into a consideration of the themes – especially family ties and parent/ child relationships – more generally in the text, the answers did very well.

### GREAT EXPECTATIONS: Charles Dickens

This was a popular choice of text, though the majority chose the passage (b) option.

6. (a) Nearly every answer found relevant points to make about Estella. Weaker answers tended to summarise her entire story, with little reference to the supporting quotation, but often showing an engaged response to her character and, at times, her characterisation. Better answers also considered her role. For many, Estella *‘is the motivation for Pip’s desire to be a gentleman’*, as one put it. Others thought her characterisation was determined early on, by her arrogance and superiority as a child, watching Pip and Herbert fight for example. Some saw how this leads to her cold-heartedness as an adult and her marriage to Drummle, as one suggested: *‘Her distorted childhood causes her abnormal composure to grow’*. Good answers noted the structure and how after Paris, her self-knowledge – ‘I have no heart, no softness’ – contrasts with Pip’s unchanging love and heightens her sense of her unattainability. Very good answers noted how she often

referred to herself in the third person, contrasting this with Pip's first person narrative and exploring the effects of this. Other saw as a positive her attempts to warn Pip away from her and her recognition that she and Pip are being used by someone as a tool for revenge. Some saw her rebellion against Miss Havisham as verbal and practical, in marrying Drummle, perhaps indicative of her growth; as one suggested, *'tutored to hurt men, she marries a man she cannot hurt'*.

- (b) Knowledge of the context was crucial to exploring the full range of Dickens' methods and concerns in this passage. Weaker answers tended to summarise the passage and Pip's previous meeting with Magwitch, sometimes in too much detail and losing focus on the passage. Better answers were able to bring in Christmas and family and their connotations and see how they are juxtaposed with the reader's knowledge of Pip's predicament and Magwitch. Good answers explored the sense of tension and drama laced with humour and comedy, and in some cases how these effects were created by the writing. Very good answers often noted Pumblechook's characterisation and Dickens' use of telling detail such as exaggeration and melodramatic actions through Pip's narration. Very good answers also explored the narrative methods such as the first person narration and its effects, here and elsewhere in the novel. Those who saw different attitudes to Pip from the adults, contrasting Joe's affectionate inclusion of Pip with Mrs Joe's more hostile and grudging response, often did well. Very good answers also saw the development of dramatic tension, leading to Pip's flight and the arrival of the soldiers, and the irony that this saves Pip from discovery over the pie. Those answers that explored the telling detail, such as Pip gripping the table leg, and linked this to the humour and tension often did very well.

### SELECTED POEMS: John Keats

This was the most popular choice in **Section B**, though the large majority tackled the option (b) question. Weaker candidates on either option tended to spend too long on general biographical details at the expense of a more focused approach to the literary task.

7. (a) Most candidates were generally confident in their understanding of Keats and formed responses that were focused on the task. Weaker answers tend to discuss a series of poems in turn; the poems most used were *'Bright Star'*, *'Elgin Marbles'*, *'Ode to a Nightingale'*, *'Ode to a Grecian Urn'* and *'Ode on Melancholy'*. Some answers offered little more than a summary of each poem in turn, though others did consider the themes in terms of the given quotation. Better answers generally challenged the quotation in the question with most arguing for Keats' preference for emotion. Others saw this as a typical or main concern of his poetry: *'the search for permanence and immortality'* as one put it. *'Ode on a Grecian Urn'* was much discussed, with better answers exploring its presentation of the permanence of art and the transience of life, but also how Keats reveals what art in its immutability lacks – passion, life and vitality. Good answers linked this to *'Ode to a Nightingale'* through the *'transience of this song contrasted with the seeming permanence of previous songs,'* as one suggested. Very good answers saw how Keats' reaction to it, whether defined as melancholy, joy or despair, takes shape out of the song, rather than created by it. Some very good answers also considered *'La Belle Dame sans Merci'*, noting the permanence of misery through rejection, the sense of loss and the fleeting nature of pleasure, contrasting with the everlasting regrets it brings.
- (b) A number of answers did not refer to the rest of the poem *'The Eve of St Agnes'* in their answers, though most recognised this as the ending. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the extract, with little reference to the methods and concerns. Better answers referred to the wider text, especially the rest of this poem, in terms of the narrative, the language and the imagery. Good answers explored the methods in detail: imagery and language, with the religious, gothic, dark overtones and some answers also analysing the rhythm and its urgency. Others contrasted the internal silence and threat with external winds and freedom. Very good answers linked the themes of 'escapism', harshness of everyday life and the importance of dreams and immortality to the wider text, with many noting the end and the contrasting images of youthful hope and love and aged death and despair. Candidates also differed regarding the presentation of Porphyro, with some considering an *'underlying sinister and violated tone in the poem'*, exploring how Porphyri's words contrasted to his carnal intentions, whilst others saw only romance and the link to Keats's own relationship with Fanny.

### SELECTED POEMS: Christina Rossetti

This was the least popular text in **section B**, with only a few takers for option **(a)** in particular. As with Keats, weaker candidates on either option tended to spend too long on general biographical details at the expense of a more focused approach to the literary task.

8. (a) Most answers had some relevant material to discuss, with weaker answers paraphrasing more or less relevant poems, such as *'A Better Resurrection'*, *'Goblin Market'* and *'The Convent Threshold'*, often treated separately, with a more general linking paragraph as a conclusion. Better answers saw the links to Christian views on the afterlife/ resurrection and spiritual renewal. Some considered the quotation a defence of virginity or delayed gratification, whilst others saw the feeling of loss and regret, as well as the desire to be remembered and also to remember. Good answers explored Rossetti's use of pastoral imagery and symbolism in these poems, with very good work noting the effects, such as the paradoxes of hope in despair and renewal in decay. Sexual undertones in *'Goblin Market'* and *'The Convent Threshold'* were also explored, through analysis of Rossetti's use of language, imagery and tone, with some interesting debate as to whether this was conscious or unconscious on Rossetti's part.
- (b) Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, with some apparently tackling it as an unseen and struggling to show understanding of the methods or concerns. Some answers at this level took the garden literally, seeing it as indicative of Rossetti's attitude to nature generally. Better answers noted her sense of loss and otherness, leading to her characteristic despair. Other candidates linked the concerns to the garden of Eden, and the eating of the fruit, developed metaphorically into a lament for mankind following the fall. This, in very good answers, was developed into considering such poems as *'Remember Me'*, *'Cobwebs'* and *'Song (When I am dead, my dearest)'* Those who explored the language and imagery in detail often did very well, the door and wall symbols and imagery were often thoughtfully analysed: *'doors open but walls do not,'* as one put it. Such analyses when linked to her metaphorical working of her religious doubt and despair, as well as her sense of unworthiness, often did very well.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9695/53**  
**Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth  
Century Texts**

## Key messages

1. Candidates should be fully aware of the rubric for the paper, including the changes in June 2016 that candidates must now answer at least one (b) passage-based question.
2. Candidates tackling option (b) passage questions need to be prepared to discuss the wider text in terms of the writer's methods and concerns as revealed in the given passage.

## General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. This was the first session with the new rubric, which requires candidates to tackle at least one option (b) passage question. This led to a slight increase in the number of rubric errors, though it was pleasing to see a reduction in the number of candidates with timing problems. The quality of expression was also acceptable in nearly every case, although there are some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to all of the questions set, and answers on each question were seen at each level of attainment. Some texts were very popular – *Othello*, *Emma* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* – with others remaining very much minority choices, particularly Eliot and Rossetti.

There are three specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Centres are reminded that the rubric for this paper changed from June 2016 and candidates now have to tackle at least one option (b) or passage-based question. They may do one passage (b) and one discursive (a) question or two passage (b) questions. They are however, no longer able to offer two discursive option (a) essays. Please see the 9695 2016–2018 syllabus for more details. Candidates should also be aware of the time limits for the paper. In this session it was clear that a small minority of candidates had mismanaged the time available so that the second essay was considerably shorter and therefore less developed than the first essay, with a consequent effect on the overall marks awarded.
2. Option (b) passage questions at this level will always require the candidate to discuss the work in question more widely than the narrow confines of the passage itself. Candidates tackling questions on a novel or Shakespeare play tended to refer to the wider text in terms of the characters or the narrative. They could usefully also consider the specific methods and concerns of the writer, revealed in the passage, and relate them to the wider text as well; perhaps focusing on specific aspects of style in the passage and showing how these are used elsewhere in the text. For poetry passages it is important that the candidates refer to the wider selection of poems and, if the passage is an extract from a longer poem, the rest of that poem. This enables the candidates to discuss the poet more generally in terms of the wider canon, as well as focusing on the specific details of the given passage.

## **MEASURE FOR MEASURE: William Shakespeare**

This was the minority choice of text in Section A in this session, with few candidates tackling either option.

1. (a) Weaker answers tended to summarise the Duke and his role generally, with little mention of his disguise as a Friar. Better answers considered the disguise in terms of the plot and the Duke's



characterisation, noting also what it contributes to the play's rather dark and disturbing atmosphere, as well as the general themes of deception and disguise and the presentation of religion.

- (b) The few candidates tackling this passage had a clear sense of the context and were able to explore the effects on an audience with some understanding. Most concentrated on the audience's view of Angelo, with few showing *'much understanding of his wickedness and depravity'*. Others explored Isabella's situation, noting the effect of her soliloquy in terms of the audience's sympathy towards her, as well as how her expectations of her brother are destined to be disappointed. Good answers saw how the themes of justice and chastity are developed here in terms of the rest of the play.

### OTHELLO: William Shakespeare

This was a very popular text choice, especially the (b) passage option, which was the most popular question on the paper.

2. (a) Nearly all answers showed a secure knowledge of the text. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant parts of the plot, often treating Cassio and Roderigo separately. Those who contrasted them by their relationships with Iago and Desdemona often did well. Better answers often commented on Roderigo's desire to be what Cassio is accused of and how the 'proof' of Desdemona's guilt was more in Roderigo's pursuit of her than in Cassio's innocent friendship to both her and Othello. Both were seen as gullible and naïve for succumbing to Iago, as both take advice from Iago on how to 'win a loved one', with disastrous results. Very good answers saw them in terms of the plot, with some wondering *'if they are even more than plot devices,'* as one put it. For others, Cassio was seen as the male equivalent of Desdemona in his *'unswerving love and loyalty to Othello'*, as one said and a few remembered his role as the 'go-between' in Othello and Desdemona's courtship.
- (b) Most candidates had a sound sense of the context of this passage, which was important in evaluating its tone and the significance. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the discussion and summarise the history of their relationship up to this point; often in too much detail and consequently losing focus on the passage itself. Better answers saw Othello as a simple soldier who *'sees the world in a binary way, good in a soldier perhaps, but not in his domestic life'*: – Iago is 'honest' until he is the 'devil', Cassio is 'good' until he is drunk and then he is 'cashiered' and here Desdemona so 'pure' and 'heavenly' before is now the opposite, a 'whore' and 'vile'. For some candidates 'Fair paper' was interpreted as white and linked to Othello's underlying insecurity as a result of the racism he has suffered. Very good answers noted the power of Iago's 'medicine', evidenced by Othello's language here reflecting Iago's influence: 'whore of Venice'. Good answers also explored Desdemona's panic and fear, noting her use of Christian words, emphasising her innocence. Some also noted her use of 'honest' and how *'it brings Iago's sinister presence into the room.'* Very good answers explored the unstable roots of a relationship begun by elopement seen here to result in this tragedy, because of Iago's manipulations. For some perceptive candidates this was a result of a lack of real communication: *'Othello refuses to listen to Desdemona, ironically reversing the start of the relationship when she secretly listened to his tales at her father's house'*, as one put it. Those who linked this to the audience's response here, for example to her innocent pleading and his refusal to listen often did well, especially when linked to Iago's intention to use her goodness as the 'net to enmesh them all'.

### EMMA: Jane Austen

This was the most popular text in **section B**, with an even split between (a) and (b) answers.

3. (a) Most candidates had a secure knowledge of the text and were able to find relevant comments and examples. Weaker answers focused on retelling and summarising Harriet's narrative, with some able to develop that into considering how she helps Emma develop as a character, largely ignoring the supporting quotation. Better answers noted that Knightley's view reflects that of the reader and that Harriet is treated like a 'pet' by Emma. Others considered that Harriet reflects Emma's immaturity and selfish attitude to other people [she is] *'A mirror that reflects Emma's own immaturity and subsequent growth back to her'*, as one suggested. More positive responses suggested that Emma's role as teacher and mentor revealed her underlying goodness as well as her elegance and poise. But for others she was herself too emotionally immature and inexperienced to offer Harriet real insight. Very good answers considered how the relationship also reflects Austen's view of *'the perils of changing the social boundaries between classes,'* as one said. For some, Emma knows these rules – the way she treats the Coles and the Martins for



example – but in breaking them for Harriet, she causes difficulties for herself, Harriet, and the society they live in.

- (b) This was a popular choice with most answers able to give a clear context to the passage. Weaker answers summarised the relationship between Elton and Emma, with some able to discuss the mutual misunderstandings, clearly revealed here. Better answers saw these arising out of the arrogance of each of the characters and explored how this is a step in Emma's characterisation and development, though not in Elton's. Other good answers explored how this scene develops the plot, with the ongoing resentment of Elton towards Harriet at the ball. Good answers also looked at the narrative structures, use of dialogue and Austen's clever use of free, indirect discourse and the comic, for some, and shocking, for others, effects created. Those who linked this to a consideration of Austen's development of themes such as status and attitudes to marriage, as well as gender issues, often did very well.

#### **THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE and TALE: Geoffrey Chaucer**

This was the third most popular text in **section B**, though most candidates tackled option (a).

4. (a) Most answers revealed at least a solid knowledge of the text and were able to shape the material relevantly to the task. Those answers referring to both the prologue and the tale did better, though most answers tended to focus mostly on Alisoun's revelations in the prologue, especially of her own desires and how she used sex to dominate her previous husbands. Better answers saw the different attitudes as revealed through the rape in the Tale, to be indicative of how men saw women, according to Alisoun at least. Others explored how the knight is 'punished', as well as the effect of the transformation of the 'old hag' at the end of the tale. For some this was all part of Alisoun's wish-fulfilment. Very good answers explored the effect of Chaucer's use of multiple narrators and the paradoxical attitudes these reveal about sexual relationships in particular and relationships between men and women in general.
- (b) Most recognised this as the opening to the relationship between Alisoun and Jankyn. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or just discuss this relationship in detail. Better answers explored specifics of language and tone and how Chaucer uses them to reveal Alisoun and Jankyn's characters and attitudes towards each other and to marriage. Very good answers were able to develop this into a more-wide ranging discussion on Chaucer's methods in the text, as well as considering how marriage, relationships and, for some, religion are presented more generally. Those who explored Alison's more earthy language with the extracts from Jankyn's book often did very well.

#### **THE MILL ON THE FLOSS: George Eliot**

There were no responses to this text in this session.

5. (a) No answers seen.  
(b) No answers seen.

#### **GREAT EXPECTATIONS: Charles Dickens**

This was a popular choice of text, with the majority choosing the passage (b) option.

6. (a) Weaker answers were able to give an often detailed summary of the relationship, though were rarely able to explore its significance to the text as a whole. Better answers explored the effect on Estella's characterisation and, for some subsequently on Pip's characterisation. Good answers also considered the effects on Miss Havisham and her role in Pip's life and disappointments, with some perceptive answers seeing connections between Pip and Miss Havisham as scorned lovers and how both used Estella to overcome their misery. Very good answers developed such arguments into considering Dickens' concerns more generally, considering family, love and relationships and revenge. Where this was linked into an exploration of the methods used to present the relationship- the imagery of Satis House for example and the use of Pip as a first person narrator, the answers often did very well.
- (b) Nearly all candidates were able to discuss this confrontation between Pip and Orlick in detail. Weaker answers tended to narrate the full background of Orlick and Pip's relationship, such as Mrs

Joe's 'murder' and his pursuit of Biddy, though few at this level were able to explore the details of the writing. Better answers considered Dickens's use of jealousy as a motive, mostly from Orlick but also perhaps Pip. There was a less secure grasp of the relationship with Compeyson and his role in the unravelling of the plot. Very good answers considered how Dickens builds tension and threat through his use of language and imagery, and his use of dialogue, as well as exploring the effects of Pip's narration and the use of narrative voice and structuring in the passage more widely in the novel.

### SELECTED POEMS: John Keats

This was a popular choice with the large majority tackled the option (b) question. Weaker candidates on either option tended to spend too long on general biographical details at the expense of a more focused approach to the literary task.

7. (a) There were very few answers on this question. Nearly all had a sound knowledge of the text with the Odes, especially 'Ode to Autumn' and 'Ode to a Nightingale' whilst 'The Eve of St Agnes' and 'Bright Star' were also popular choices for discussion. Weaker answers tended to summarise their chosen poems, with the shaping of the summary to the specific task determining the answer's level of achievement. Better answers considered the given quotation carefully, often agreeing with the contention and finding good supporting evidence from the selection. Those who considered how Keats creates this contrast through language, imagery and tone and were able to give precise, supporting examples often did very well.
- (b) This was often well done, with nearly all candidates able to explore the poem's themes and concerns. Weaker answers tended to offer paraphrases of the poem, but these were often interlaced with useful and relevant comment. Better answers linked the themes here, often seen as loneliness, death and attitudes to nature, art and poetry, with the wider selection, most often the great Odes. Those answers which explored Keats's use of language and imagery here, relating them to the wider selection often did very well.

This was less popular than the Keats, with no takers for option (a). As with Keats, weaker candidates tended to spend too long on general biographical details at the expense of a more focused approach to the literary task.

### SELECTED POEMS: Christina Rossetti

8. (a) No answers seen.
- (b) Most responses revealed some knowledge and understanding of the poem. Weaker answers tended to retell the story, though often with evident engagement. Few at this level were able to find links to the wider selection, though some did explore more or less relevant biographical details. Better answers explored this narrative of the scorned and abandoned lover with some aware of Rossetti's themes of love, loss, betrayal and hope. Good answers linked this discussion to the selection more generally, most usually to 'An Apple Gathering', 'Cousin Kate' and 'The Convent Threshold'. Very good answers developed these connections through analysis of the language, verse form and rhythm of this poem, showing how Rossetti creates her effects here and in the other poems mentioned.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9695/61  
1900 to the Present

## Key messages

- Successful candidates write strategically to the mark scheme.
- Candidates need to show more detailed knowledge of the texts, shaped to fit the specific terms of the questions, and make more effective use of pertinent quotations to show understanding of specific aspects of a writer's methods and concerns.
- The **(b)** questions continue to be, on the whole, the most popular options. Candidates must show evidence of close reading and appreciation of the effects of the writing in the given extract **and** make relevant links to the wider text.
- Candidates need to make more judicious use of contextual and critical material, so that these ideas inform a personal discussion and appreciation of the text itself.

## General comments

The paper was comparable in difficulty with previous sessions and there was enthusiastic take-up and response to the new novels: *Americanah* and *The White Tiger* one of which was usually offered with Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, overwhelmingly the most popular text choice. Examiners saw some sophisticated, lively, informed essays in which candidates sometimes displayed an impressive command of specific textual detail, real engagement with the complexities of the ideas and nuances of language. Successful candidates on both **(a)** and **(b)** questions wrote strategically: they deconstructed the questions carefully and wrote brief plans covering a range of ideas; they had critical frameworks and terminology to generate a coherent argument. They considered a variety of interpretations and opinions, aptly supported by pertinent textual references and quotations. These were analysed to show a detailed, perceptive understanding of the ways effects are generated within particular genres. In answers to the **(b)** questions the best essays showed impressive evidence of close reading and appreciation of the effects of the writing within the given extracts, combined with some specific references to the wider text to support intelligent observations on a writer's methods and concerns.

Candidates seemed to be more confident discussing narrative techniques and to varying degrees of competence, could cover the structure of the plot, character, point of view and tone, and symbolic motifs. Drama texts continue to challenge candidates: they usually have a good understanding of themes but need to develop critical frameworks and terminology that enable them to understand the play as being seen and appreciated by an audience, instead of relying on narrative summary and discussion of the characters as 'real people'. The poetry texts are occasionally very well done by those candidates who combine an informed understanding of the ideas with an ability to explore a range of poetic methods and effects, but generally speaking responses to poetry tend to be partial. The few who choose the **(a)** questions often tend to focus on ideas, offering summaries of poems while the majority who opt for the **(b)** question often restrict their answer to the given poem and – if they are doing the poem as an unseen – tend to focus on extracting the meaning or rely on paraphrase.

Some Centres have encouraged candidates to find relevant critical material and some of it on the prose texts and Miller was well used within the body of the essays to develop discussion and support alternative readings or views of the texts. In some cases candidates did not seem to be very aware of the need to consider how biographical, contextual or critical material might be made relevant to a particular question or to particular points within an answer. One of the discriminating assessment objectives at A level is 'O' and candidates did well when they presented their own or other critical opinions as part of a coherent exploration of ideas and methods, and showed evidence of personal judgement by being able to support or challenge

these views with detailed references to the text. Candidates can signal an awareness of ambiguity or complexity by using such phrases as ‘one way of reading this might be... but another would suggest...’ Less assured candidates tended to include potted versions of biography or rehearsed explanations of generic features as introductions, or to include over-lengthy explanations of contextual issues such as The American Dream, caste or gender issues and drift away from a focus on the text into more personal reflections and experiences.

Generally speaking the standard of written expression was good. There were some very interesting, well-structured, substantial responses to the questions across the paper. Even those who tended to write very generalised, review-style essays seemed to engage positively with the texts although perhaps these candidates would benefit from reading some model answers with the mark scheme to help them understand how to develop their discussions in greater depth. There were unfortunately some rubric errors with some candidates only offering one response. There were also a few answers that seemed to combine elements of the (a) question with the passage in ways that lead to a confused response.

### Question 1

#### **CHIMAMAMDA NGOZI ADICHIE: *Americanah***

This has proved to be a very popular text with both questions producing answers across the range. Candidates of all levels of ability engaged enthusiastically with the story and showed some grasp of the writer’s methods and concerns. More constructive use was made of the 2009 ‘TED talk’ given by Adichie than the various newspaper reviews of the novel.

- (a) The essay on Obinze was the more popular choice and usually done with evident knowledge of the relationship between him and Ifemelu. Sometimes that alone was the basis of the essay with little reference to the role that Obinze plays in the structure of the novel. The argument was that ‘love interest’ implies a casual liaison rather than the deep and enduring love shown to exist between him and Ifemelu. Those with detailed textual knowledge tended to give a narrative account of their relationship and make some comparisons with how Ifemelu felt about Curt and Blaine. More sophisticated responses examined his role and significance in the novel and included references to Obinze’s experience in England as a parallel to that of Ifemelu in the U.S. using specific details about employment, the use of names and the role of Obinze as an observer to show how this deepened an understanding of the issues and experience of migration. The best essays also included his role as a filter through which Adichie presents politics and gender issues in Nigeria and considered how Adichie shapes a reader’s response to his infidelity at the end. Less assured responses twisted the question to make it more about Ifemelu touching on Obinze and his mother’s role in her journey to self-fulfilment.
- (b) Most candidates were able to make some productive use of the material in the passage to comment on central concerns such as the use of the blog as a way of giving Ifemelu a voice and the significance of hair as a running motif in the novel. Most were able to show some relationship with the wider novel by commenting on the context, the failure of her relationship with Curt and her experience of relaxing her own hair. Some wrote partial answers. Having appreciated the passionate language used to describe ‘real deep romantic love’ in the blog, a few drifted away from the passage and compared her relationship with Curt and Obinze. Others used prompts within the passage such as hair as the ‘perfect metaphor for race in America’ to launch into more general discussions and personal experiences of racism or reactions to the material in the novel.

The more successful essays made specific references to the wider text but looked closely at the effects of the writing within the passage commenting, on the one hand, on the way feelings are presented through figurative language while, on the other, identity is asserted in the blogs through register and sentence structure. They looked at the satirical effects created by the rhetorical use of questions, the effects of parentheses, the variations on the verb ‘to do’ and references to real figures from the pop and political world. The best, not only showed an appreciation of Adichie’s technical control of tone and the way it shapes a reader’s response to the character, but also thoughtfully teased out the implications of ‘No, it’s not political’ in the context of the extract to assess the extent of Ifemelu’s self-knowledge and political awareness.

## Question 2

### **ARAVIND ADIGA: *The White Tiger***

This novel was also very popular with candidates who often showed impressive textual knowledge and obvious enjoyment in reading and discussing the text. The (a) question was marginally more popular and produced answers across the range. Some candidates were able to make productive use of critical essays by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and M.Q. Khan to consider the authenticity of Balram's voice and rebut the view that Balram's lack of education and class made the novel unrealistic.

- (a) Successful candidates paid attention to the terms of the question and offered a literary analysis of how Adiga presents the experience of being a servant. They focused on the way the social situation is filtered through Balram's epistolary narrative, using his own experience, his observations and other characters to look at the interdependence of the master/ servant relationship and the mutually exploitative elements. There were some insightful explorations of the development of the relationship between Balram and Ashok, its intimacies and indignities with some thoughtful, sometimes ambivalent responses to Ashok's murder. The best answers considered the structure of the novel, focusing on specific examples of mirroring, including the impact of Balram's appropriation of the name of Ashok and assessment of his role as master. They compared his reaction to his driver's road-death incident with his own employer's plan to let him take the fall for Pinky Madam's accident. They also brought out, through their use of pertinent quotations, Balram's tendency to philosophise and his trenchant disrespect for the ruling classes. Weaker essays tended to simply see the author's purpose as generally satirical and offer sociological descriptions with examples of lifestyles from the novel without reference to the way the social situation is filtered through Balram's narrative and the writer's more subtle considerations about morality and the human condition.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this passage. The best reflected on the conceit of the letters and the creation of an unreliable narrator whom we are asked to trust as our guide to all things Indian and yet mistrust as a murderer on the run given to cynicism and exaggeration. They explored the symbolism through the theme of darkness and light and interpreted the description of 'i' the lettering and numbering system in the colonies and the use of repetition in the description of the roads as symbolic of the chaotic nature of Indian society and development in general. Effective responses also appreciated specific examples of the use of language such as the incongruity of the elegant chandeliers being delivered not by a bullock cart but by a 'limousine powered by bulls'. More modest attempts tended to be plot based, and explained the significance of the material within the passage with links to the wider text focusing on Balram's early hatred of lizards, the truth behind India's economic miracle, and why Balram was not only on the run, but had no family. More limited responses were restricted to one idea, such as 'freedom' and supported by lengthy explanations of the 'Rooster coup'. These essays showed some clear knowledge and understanding of the significance of the details but seemed to lack any appreciation of the tone of humour, of Balram's amusement and ironic attitude towards the establishment of India as a paragon of entrepreneurial success. Better essays showed some awareness of this but only the best discussed the defensive distancing such an assumed tone implies.

## Question 3

### **ATHOL FUGARD: *The Road to Mecca* and *My Children! My Africa!***

This text was less popular and although candidates clearly understood the contexts and concerns, the approach on the whole, tended to be narrative.

- (a) Most candidates were able to consider the quotation and made some attempt at explaining how friendships between Isabel and Thami or Mr M. in *My Children! My Africa!* or in *The Road to Mecca* the relationships of Helen with Elsa and Marius being complicated by race, or age, or lack of trust. These answers tended to be dependent on the plot with some description of characters. Better answers also considered the idea of how the characters 'challenge' each other and were able to use specific scenes in both plays to discuss the dramatic presentation of conflict within friendship. So, for example, there were some quite detailed discussions of the scenes where Isabel refuses to discuss what might be troubling Thami with Mr M. or how she confronts Thami over his involvement in Mr M.'s murder. Candidates tended to be less forthcoming on *The Road to Mecca* and dealt generally with issues of trust and betrayal. The best answers came from those that recalled Elsa's explanation of why she made the effort to visit Helen: 'She challenges me into an awareness of



myself and of my life and of my responsibilities to both....' This was then used to tease out how the difficult moments in the friendship between the characters impacted on the individual characters and contributed to an audience's understanding of Fugard's concerns. More precise references to specific moments in the plays, with some quotations to show how Fugard conveys complex emotions in his dialogue would have helped to develop some depth to the discussion and raise many straightforward discussions of the relationships to a competent understanding of the texts as drama.

- (b) Most candidates attempting this question could relate the extract to the wider text and explain its significance in terms of the political context and the outcome of the play. There were some intelligent but partial answers which focused on the importance of 'words' in the play as a whole and some were able to link this to ideas about self-expression through art and eventually in speech for Helen in *The Road to Mecca*. Some answers focused on the relationship between Thami and Mr M., here and elsewhere in the text and commented on the disproportionate number of lines given to the characters, tracking the argument and the impact of the simplicity of Thami's rejection: 'lessons in whispering...teaching us to shout'. A few reflected on the tension between action and passivity, words and deeds, being loyal or a traitor and suggested that Mr M.'s inability to accept Thami's assertion of autonomy represented the character's tragic flaw. Not many had the confidence to examine Fugard's use of language in presenting Mr M. but some were able to comment on the use of various rhetorical devices, his tendency to speak in parables, and the use of repetition and sentence structure to generate emphasis and passion in his appeal to Thami and the wider audience.

#### Question 4

##### LIZ LOCHHEAD: *The Choosing*

This was the less popular of the two poetry texts but most candidates seemed to find the poems engaging and memorable and those who had the confidence to discuss poetic method, obviously relished Lochhead's language and tone. Candidates need to be careful to include poems from the list in the syllabus.

- (a) This was the less popular option but was often reasonably well done. Most candidates chose relevant poems to discuss 'choice' such as '*Poem for My Sister*', '*The Choosing*', '*After the Warrant Sale*' and '*Obituary*'. The most successful considered the theme and planned out the essay to generate a coherent argument about the various issues surrounding the idea of making choices: how conscious individuals are of taking decisions, how to avoid mistakes, how to deal with mistakes and regret. They also considered the use of memories of people and places and in their discussion of particular poems explored the effects created by the use of specific situations and circumstantial detail. In their analyses of particular poems they looked at the way repetition is used as a structural device and how choice of diction and sentence structure generate tone. Less assured essays offered quite detailed accounts of the poems showing clear understanding of the content and point of view but less appreciation of the poetic methods and effects.
- (b) This was the more popular choice and produced a wider range of answers. There were those who had clearly studied and discussed possible readings of the poem and could relate it to the wider text and others who seemed to be offering a rather tentative first reading and had little to say about how it might be characteristic of Lochhead's poetry. The best answers focused on all aspects of the question and incorporated within their detailed discussion of '*My Rival's House*' some interesting links to other poems. After discussing the suggestive impact of the focus on various 'surfaces' and the maintenance of the polite conventions in the formal situation, one candidate made an intelligent link to the more detached observation of an uncomfortable social scene and an unsatisfactory relationship in '*Fourth of July Fireworks*'. Another, having considered the significance and effect of 'Listen, I was always my own worst enemy' within the given poem linked the idea of jealousy and an ambivalent view of self with '*The Other Woman*'. Good candidates were able to make something of the form and commented on how the sentence structure and irregular length of lines cut across the regular rhyme scheme, adding to the sense of unease and discomfort at being trapped in the situation. Some contrasted this with the conventional use of the sonnet to encapsulate the experience of the liberating effects of taking a poem into prison. This ability to confidently move around the wider text to illuminate and develop ideas within the given poem or extract earns high marks. In working through the poem, most candidates carefully considered the relationship between the women. They commented on the point of view, the evidence of false composure and emotion beneath the surface, delighting in such details as the use of 'squirms', the witty double meaning in 'first blood to her' and the jarring effect of the diction and half-rhyme of: 'Deferential,



daughterly, I sip/ and thank her nicely for each bitter cup.' Even though less assured candidates puzzled over the meaning, for example in the penultimate stanza, most were able to address some aspects of the poetic methods and effects such as the metaphorical significance of the description of the house and were able to select and discuss specific phrases for their visual or aural effects. The weakest essays attempted to paraphrase or relied on narrative summary. At all levels of response to 'My Rival's House', lack of consideration of how the poem is characteristic of Lochhead's poetry had a limiting effect on the mark.

## Question 5

### KATHERINE MANSFIELD: *Selected Stories*

This was a less popular text this session but both questions produced answers across the range. The over-investment in details of Mansfield biography continues to be an issue for some candidates by overwhelming answers which might be better focused on the text itself.

- (a) This question provoked several answers which were well focused on a discussion of narrative viewpoint. The best essays showed a good understanding of Mansfield's modernist techniques and carefully selected stories to support their discussion of the 'inner life' characters. Effective use was made of 'A Married Man's Story', 'Je ne parle pas français', 'Bliss' and 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding'. The appropriate use of literary terms such as: stream of consciousness, first person viewpoint, omniscient narrator enabled discussion to be more tightly focused on the terms of the question. Successful essays were built around particular themes such as the presentation of the married woman's lot, the existential crisis of 'what is it all for?' or the extent to which characters had self-knowledge. There were apt textual allusions and quotations to reveal the extent to which the characters were aware of the contrast between their outer and inner selves, with some detailed discussion of the use of symbolism and moments of epiphany. Weaker answers tended to offer character portraits with quite a lot of contextual material. They often saw the inner life as a guilty secret and although they managed to give some sense of Millie's emotional life, they struggled with 'The Woman at the Store' and relied upon a narrative approach.
- (b) This was the more popular option. Most candidates seemed to find the given passage accessible and once again the discriminating factor was often the extent to which candidates were able to discuss its significance within the wider story as well as its characteristics in terms Mansfield's methods and concerns. Good essays were able to refer to the rest of the story – Mansfield's presentation of a series of encounters and shifts of point of view – to explore the characters' sense of entrapment and dissatisfaction here and elsewhere in the story and selection. They considered the use of dialogue and how the naturalistic speech rhythms, the accumulative effects of the repetition and the rather tragicomic effects of the imagery shape a reader's response to Jonathan. A few noted the deflationary effect of Linda's private view of her brother as being 'like a weed'. Some examined the effects created by the intrusion of the omniscient narrator at various points, particularly the shift from lyrical natural description via the inclusive second person pronoun and the images of the Last Judgement to Linda's contrastingly 'joyful' view of the scene. Less assured essays tended to deal with the passage in isolation and often relied on narrative summary. The best of these presented a character study of Jonathan with occasional insights into more obvious aspects particularly the effects of the comparison of himself to an insect and the irony of his giving Linda no time to answer his challenge to: 'Answer me that little sister.'

## Question 6

### ARTHUR MILLER: *Death of a Salesman*

This was the most popular text with the majority of candidates opting for the (b) question which was often very well done. Most referred to the context through ideas about the American Dream, to explain ideas about success and family life. Candidates found Miller's essay: 'Tragedy and the Common Man' helpful in developing discussion about Willy but there was a tendency for some to drop references to Charlene Fix's idea about the 'bankruptcy of Willy's legacy' without showing textual support for the quotation or how it illuminated their reading of *Death of a Salesman*.

- (a) Most candidates used the American Dream as the context to explain the pressure to compete and attain concrete examples of status and achievement. Successful essays focused on both elements of the question and considered the dramatic presentation of the way sport is seen as a means to wealth and glory, through the physical presentation of young Biff as the potential football star in

Willy's memories and Happy's idea of the Loman Line greeted enthusiastically by Willy as a way to 'lick the world'. There were some insightful discussions of Willy's competitive relationship with Charley, his stubborn refusal of a job, the pleasure he takes in the perception that Charley is 'liked but not well-liked' and his surprise at the extent of Bernard's success. A few candidates intelligently pointed out that his social and professional success is symbolised by his taking his tennis kit to play on a friend's private court. There were also some productive explorations of the presentation of Happy: the comic effects of his competition with Biff for Willy's attention when young and the language of competition used at key moments such as his sense of injustice at earning less and having to take orders from a manager he can 'outbox' and his determination to validate himself and Willy's dream of coming out 'the number-one man' in *The Requiem*. 'He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him'. A few candidates considered the moral implications of Uncle Ben's 'Never fight fair with a stranger, boy' to work up an argument about the way competition and the determination to succeed compromises moral values. Less assured answers tended to make a few valid general points about the themes but lacked specific textual references to support their assertions, or offered narrative accounts of some of the events with over-elaboration of the wider socio-political contexts such as the American Dream.

- (b) Most candidates were able to link the scene effectively to the rest of the play, discussing the significance of the affair, Biff's discovery of it and the dramatic effects of the motif of Linda darning her stockings. The discriminating factor here was the degree of attention paid to the subtle details in the text and the sophistication of the discussion. Some wrote very well on the dramaturgy and time overlaps, discussing the dramatic impact of having both women on stage at the same time and how this affects an audience's response to Willy. They commented on the disturbing visual and aural effects of the scrim, lighting and laughter and the specific details of language that mark the transition between the present 'reality' and Willy's enactment of a previous encounter. Some broadened the discussion to look at the way Miller dramatises Willy's emotional and mental state elsewhere in the text, for example where Willy is talking simultaneously to Charley and his brother Ben. The best essays confidently roamed around the wider text while also looking very closely at the language in the extract to discuss the ambiguity in the presentation of the characters. While recognising the irony in most of Linda's lines, they also saw her use of empty and inaccurate hyperbole as being either the action of a stereotypical loving wife; or a flawed woman whose refusal to confront and challenge her husband contributes to his demise. Some less effectively, pursued a psychological discussion of Willy's insecurities, seen to be caused by the early loss of his father and the disappearance of his brother which was used to explain his vanity in being 'picked'. Better essays noted how details of the scene with the woman are set up in Willy's opening speech and they contrasted his hypocritical treatment of Linda here as a 'pal' with the physicality of his behaviour with the Woman and the coarseness of his humour. More modest essays tended to offer simpler views of the characters with moralistic disapproval of Willy's 'cheating' on such a loving, supportive wife. Most noted the transactional nature of Willy's relationship with the Woman in her assurance that she would put him 'right through to the buyers' but this often prompted some candidates to over-invest in ideas about Miller's critique of the 'American Dream' and materialism.

## Question 7

### W.B.YEATS: *Selected Poems*

This text is seen to be challenging and was not a popular choice but some well-informed candidates did well. The (b) question was the more popular option and produced answers across the range, while the few who tackled the (a) question tended to show greater confidence in their understanding of the wider text.

- (a) There were several intelligent treatments of poems linked to contextual knowledge of Yeats's unrequited love for Maud Gonne and the way she represents his love of Ireland. The most successful essays focused on two shorter poems such as '*No Second Troy*' and '*He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*' which led to some impressive analysis of poetic language and effects. Some explored the way Yeats expresses love for the disdainful woman or contrasted the presentation of self in '*He Wishes..*' with the strange admiration and acceptance of 'what she is' in '*No Second Troy*'. Together with '*Adam's Curse*' these poems were considered within the context of traditional Renaissance love poetry, 'the old high way of love' and there was some sensitive appreciation of Yeats's use of mythology, natural imagery, variation of tone and form.
- (b) A few candidates had an informed understanding of what it was that Yeats was lamenting and were able to give a coherent reading of the poem with some impressive analysis of the effects of the poet's choice of language in the first stanza and the various ways he creates some ambiguity in the

presentation of the heroes as possibly useless and ineffectual. They considered the use of rhetorical questions and repetition of 'for this', the effect of the refrain and the significance of the reference to maddening effect of 'Some woman's yellow hair'. Relevant links were made to poems such as '*In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*' and '*Easter 1916*'. Others struggled to work out what it was Yeats was suggesting about materialism, religion, martyrdom, the past, emigration and his feelings about the changes. Less assured candidates could not get much beyond the general sense that people were too preoccupied with making money and saying their prayers. Many lacked adequate knowledge of the context of the writing. There were vague references to the 'rebellion' without any specific knowledge of what was particular to September 1913 and some confusion about the historical figures listed. Many said they were all poets and some confused them with the average people that Yeats addresses at the beginning of the poem. Without this knowledge some essays became very general with candidates making narrow and unjustified statements about the poem, and tenuous links to the wider text, for example via the 'wild geese' to '*The Wild Swans at Coole*'.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9695/62  
1900 to the Present

## Key messages

- Successful candidates write strategically to the mark scheme.
- Candidates need to show more detailed knowledge of the texts, shaped to fit the specific terms of the questions, and make more effective use of pertinent quotations to show understanding of specific aspects of a writer's methods and concerns.
- The **(b)** questions continue to be, on the whole, the most popular options. Candidates must show evidence of close reading and appreciation of the effects of the writing in the given extract **and** make relevant links to the wider text.
- Candidates need to make more judicious use of contextual and critical material, so that these ideas inform a personal discussion and appreciation of the text itself.

## General comments

The paper was comparable in difficulty with previous sessions and there was enthusiastic take-up and response to the new novels: *Americanah* and *The White Tiger* one of which was usually offered with Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, overwhelmingly the most popular text choice. Examiners saw some sophisticated, lively, informed essays in which candidates sometimes displayed an impressive command of specific textual detail, real engagement with the complexities of the ideas and nuances of language. Successful candidates on both **(a)** and **(b)** questions wrote strategically: they deconstructed the questions carefully and wrote brief plans covering a range of ideas; they had critical frameworks and terminology to generate a coherent argument. They considered a variety of interpretations and opinions, aptly supported by pertinent textual references and quotations. These were analysed to show a detailed, perceptive understanding of the ways effects are generated within particular genres. In answers to the **(b)** questions the best essays showed impressive evidence of close reading and appreciation of the effects of the writing within the given extracts, combined with some specific references to the wider text to support intelligent observations on a writer's methods and concerns.

Candidates seemed to be more confident discussing narrative techniques and to varying degrees of competence, could cover the structure of the plot, character, point of view and tone, and symbolic motifs. Drama texts continue to challenge candidates: they usually have a good understanding of themes but need to develop critical frameworks and terminology that enable them to understand the play as being seen and appreciated by an audience, instead of relying on narrative summary and discussion of the characters as 'real people'. The poetry texts are occasionally very well done by those candidates who combine an informed understanding of the ideas with an ability to explore a range of poetic methods and effects, but generally speaking responses to poetry tend to be partial. The few who choose the **(a)** questions often tend to focus on ideas, offering summaries of poems while the majority who opt for the **(b)** question often restrict their answer to the given poem and – if they are doing the poem as an unseen – tend to focus on extracting the meaning or rely on paraphrase.

Some Centres have encouraged candidates to find relevant critical material and some of it on the prose texts and Miller was well used within the body of the essays to develop discussion and support alternative readings or views of the texts. In some cases candidates did not seem to be very aware of the need to consider how biographical, contextual or critical material might be made relevant to a particular question or to particular points within an answer. One of the discriminating assessment objectives at A level is 'O' and candidates did well when they presented their own or other critical opinions as part of a coherent exploration of ideas and methods, and showed evidence of personal judgement by being able to support or challenge

these views with detailed references to the text. Candidates can signal an awareness of ambiguity or complexity by using such phrases as ‘one way of reading this might be... but another would suggest...’ Less assured candidates tended to include potted versions of biography or rehearsed explanations of generic features as introductions, or to include over-lengthy explanations of contextual issues such as The American Dream, caste or gender issues and drift away from a focus on the text into more personal reflections and experiences.

Generally speaking the standard of written expression was good. There were some very interesting, well-structured, substantial responses to the questions across the paper. Even those who tended to write very generalised, review-style essays seemed to engage positively with the texts although perhaps these candidates would benefit from reading some model answers with the mark scheme to help them understand how to develop their discussions in greater depth. There were unfortunately some rubric errors with some candidates only offering one response. There were also a few answers that seemed to combine elements of the (a) question with the passage in ways that lead to a confused response. Some candidates need to show more detailed knowledge of the texts, shaped to fit the specific terms of the questions, and to analyse pertinent quotations in more depth to bring out specific aspects of a writer’s methods and concerns.

The (b) questions continue to be the most popular options. To do well at this level, candidates must show evidence of close reading and appreciation of the effects of the writing in the given extract **and** make relevant links to the wider text.

Candidates need to make more judicious use of contextual and critical material, so that these ideas inform a personal discussion and appreciation of the text itself.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

#### **CHIMAMAMDA NGOZI ADICHIE: *Americanah***

This has proved to be a popular text with both questions producing answers across the range. Candidates of all levels of ability engaged enthusiastically with the story and showed a good grasp of the writer’s methods and concerns. More constructive use was made of the 2009 ‘TED talk’ given by Adichie than the various newspaper reviews of the novel, though occasional phrases from these helped candidates to develop their discussions.

- (a) The question on Obinze was the less popular choice but most candidates produced substantial essays covering a range of thematic and structural ideas. There was often reference to his experience in England as paralleling that of Ifemelu in the US and discussion of how this deepened an understanding of the issues and experience of migration. Candidates often had an impressive command of textual references and quotations to support some sensitive observations on the difficulties of maintaining a sense of identity and humanity in difficult circumstances. The best essays also included Obinze’s role as a filter through which Adichie broadens her satirical exposure of human frailty, and uses him as a moral compass to judge aspects of behaviour in the Nigerian Diaspora in London and political and gender issues in Nigeria. Most dealt adequately with his relationship with Ifemelu and as offering a means of closure to the novel. There were some sensitive discussions of how Adichie shapes a reader’s response to his infidelity at the end. Less assured responses either relied on narrative summary or tended to be intelligent in outline but lacking in substantial illustration which, in both cases, restricted appreciation of the effects of the writing. Some did not appear to have sufficient knowledge of the whole text; it was quite a common mistake to think that Obinze went to the US instead of England. Some essays were very narrow in their focus, over-investing in his life as a candidate and his role in introducing Ifemelu to American literature to make the point that ironically she managed to go there and he did not. Generally speaking though, the majority managed to produce essays which were often sophisticated and substantial.
- (b) There were some very effective responses to this question, the best tuning in to the range of voices in the passage and how they contribute to thematic concerns of class, identity and the politics of hair. Many analyses tended to pick out issues and develop them in relation to the wider text rather than respond to the effects of the writing within the passage. These sometimes offered substantial discussions of the difficulties of finding employment or the discussion of hair in the blogs. The best



essays looked closely at aspects of the passage, picking up on the sexual overtones in Curt's response to Ifemelu saying 'I don't know how to thank you', commenting on Ifemelu's 'small resentment' as a symptom of an almost self-destructive tendency and analysed the image of the 'pink balloon' in relation to her state of mind. They picked up on the effects of the Adichie's choice of language, her use of 'adventure', the significance of the qualifier in 'impossibly straight hair' and the contrast between the promise of 'gentleness' with the physicality of the imagery of pain and loss at the end. Less successful essays were either too general in their approach, or too narrowly focused on more obvious aspects such as the advantages of Ifemelu's relationship with the privileged Curt or her failure to recognise herself with the 'white-girl swing'.

## Question 2

### ARAVIND ADIGA: *The White Tiger*

This novel was the most popular prose text with candidates often showing impressive textual knowledge and obvious enjoyment in reading and discussing the novel. The (b) question was marginally more popular and both questions produced answers across the range with lots of personal engagement and insight.

- (a) Issues of social class were sometimes treated in a sociological, non-literary way, with some rather overlong explanations of political corruption and the restrictions of caste but the best essays covered a range of narrative methods. They were able to explore the effects of the biased narrator and made use of pertinent quotations which allowed some analysis of his language and tone, such as the description of the 'human spiders' at work, as well as lots of examples from Balram of the consequences of inequality and different lifestyles. Good responses also focused on the 'duality' in the structure of the novel whereby Adiga used parallel experiences to point out the injustices in society such as the contrast between the hospitals available to Balram's father and the Stork; or the advantages of privilege such as entrance to the mall and access to a genuinely fair prostitute. Most answers covered -with varying degrees of competence- the imagery of darkness and light, the use of animal imagery for the landlords, the significance of Balram's identification with the white tiger and the metaphor of the Rooster Coop. Less assured essays were more general, or more narrowly focused. They showed clear but rather exhaustive understanding of the theory of the Rooster Coop while better candidates illustrated its principles with lots of examples from the text of how the power of the rich and the exploitative manipulation of the poor combine to prevent an individual's self-determination and development. There were some insightful discussions of specific scenes on the way the upper classes exert power – such as Balram's humiliating hunt for a penny in the car; his anger at his treatment over Pinky Madam's road accident and how he behaves once he has become a member of the entrepreneurial class.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this passage with some insightful analyses of its effectiveness in introducing the concerns of the novel and the voice and character of the protagonist. The best essays considered the advantages of the epistolary form and responded to Balram's definition of identity in his letter heading, picking up on and pursuing the tone of mockery and detachment to explore Balram's presentation of himself and his implied criticism of India, China, and all world leaders. Some candidates were able to make productive use of critical essays by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and M.Q. Khan to consider the authenticity of Balram's voice and rebut the view that Balram's lack of education and class made the novel unrealistic. A focus on the language in the passage its robust colloquial diction and sentence structure; the natural speech rhythms and paragraphing show an appreciation of how the character of Balram is constructed. Balanced detailed examination of effects within the passage such as repeatedly referring to 'that thing which can only be said in English' without actually saying what it is, whilst also giving a wider discussion on the structure of the novel and the management of tension did well. Those that focused on character enjoyed the various ironies in the letter such as: 'In my way, I consider myself one of your kind,' and the savagely humorous significance of China as India's new bedfellow. Less assured essays did not provide a close enough reading of the given extract or appreciation of its language and tone, but moved rather quickly to the wider text to explain the significance of 'The White Tiger', how Balram's previous employer became 'late' and he himself became an entrepreneur.



### Question 3

#### **ATHOL FUGARD: *The Road to Mecca* and *My Children! My Africa!***

This was not a popular text this session. Those offering it were more comfortable discussing the themes and characters than aspects of dramatic method and effects.

- (a) There were some sound analyses of how friendship depends on trust and shared values by looking at Isabel's reaching out to Thami and Mr M. and the progress of Elsa and Helen's relationship in *The Road to Mecca*. Better responses detailed knowledge of specific scenes such as the tension created when Isabel attempts to mediate between Mr M. and Thami and what this reveals about her integrity and both of them. Others looked at Elsa's angry reaction to the truth about the fire but also how she comes to appreciate what Helen's free spirit means to her and how it 'challenges her' to be better than she is. There was occasionally some sensitive use of the context to explain the impact of Isabel's invitation of Thami and Mr M. to tea and the surprise revelation of Marius's love and concern for Helen. Generally speaking though, the essays tended to rely on description of characters and their friendships with sometimes little attempt to analyse how characters are used to reveal aspects of one another and to learn about them themselves.
- (b) This was the slightly more popular question with some candidates able to focus well on the way Helen discovers her voice. They discussed the significance of the candles, the reassertion of her childlike pleasure in them and in comparison to previous scenes, the clarity with which she rejects the application form for the 'Sunshine Home for the Aged'. The best responses also examined the way the language and action communicates Marius's sense of loss. The challenge for most candidates was how to appreciate the ways the writer creates dramatic effects on stage and shapes an audience's response to the characters here. Little attention was paid to the theatricality of this scene and its significance in the resolution of the play. There was occasionally, some thoughtful consideration of broader textual issues such as the way art gives freedom of expression and an affirmation of one's humanity and identity. Some discussion was also given to the significance of her Mecca and her sculptures but there was less awareness of this within the context of the narrow teachings of the Afrikaans branch of Christianity and her relationship with Marius. Less assured essays tended to give accounts of the situation and offered more general discussions of the characters and their relationships, picking up on details within the passage, such as the candles and explaining their significance to the plot.

### Question 4

#### **LIZ LOCHHEAD: *A Choosing***

This was a minority choice of text with almost all candidates opting for the (b) question.

- (a) There were very few responses to this question which invited candidates to consider how Lochhead uses specific situations to reflect on aspects of the human condition or relationships. Candidates could have selected moments of action such as rummaging through old clothes or photographs in '*Sorting Through*' and '*Some Old Photographs*', or moments of observation when she has some understanding of something outside herself. '*After a Warrant Sale*', '*Revelation*', '*The Fourth of July Fireworks*' and '*The Choosing*' would all have been relevant choices here.
- (b) This question was generally well done with many exploring wider connections to Lochhead's depiction of women, use of memories, the intimate tone and playful verse forms. Most focused, with varying degrees of competence, on the given poem. The best answers confidently discussed the poetic craftsmanship, the way the focus on the hands was used to link past and present; how the enjambment in the earlier stanzas reinforces the sense of practical skill and strength in the fluid movement of the hands; while the use of minor sentences and the interruptions to the rhythm caused by the full stops in the last stanza reinforces the painfulness of old age. Most responses noted the various uses of repetition and discussed the structural role and thematic implications of 'there is no need', 'there's no necessity'. There were some sensitive discussions of the contrasting points of view of the persona and other members of the family but less assured candidates tended to be confused by the tones and often wrote as though the poet's persona and the family voices were the same. Weaker responses attempted to summarise and feature spot, offering some discussion of the localised effects of imagery, alliteration and sentence structure but, without any reference to the wider text they found it difficult to generate a substantial discussion.

## Question 5

### KATHERINE MANSFIELD: *Selected Stories*

This was a slightly less popular text this session but candidates generally showed a detailed knowledge of the stories and some understanding of Mansfield's narrative methods and concerns.

- (a) This was a popular question and there were some interesting pairings which often helped to develop the discussion through points of comparison both in terms of treatment of the theme and narrative point of view. For example some looked at physical, emotional or social isolation by circumstance or choice, and paired 'The Woman at the Store' with 'Bliss' or 'Feuille d'Album', or 'Bliss' with 'A Married Man's Story' or 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding' or 'The Garden Party'. Sometimes the topic tended to steer towards the presentation of prepared material on feminism or social stratification but the answers were well-supported. The best essays had well-selected specific references to support informed and appreciative discussions on narrative point of view and the way that, even with a third person narrative, Mansfield's manipulation of language and sentence structure enabled her to communicate the characters' emotional state at specific moments. Less assured essays showed clear understanding of character and situation but were less confident writing about narrative methods and effects. Their approach tended to be more descriptive and reliant on pre-prepared explanations of symbolism.
- (b) There were some very accomplished discussions of the passage with some candidates confidently placing the extract into the context of the wider story, the social context of the lives and expectations of girls and also Mansfield's modernist methods. These included the use of indirect free discourse, multiple points of view and the unresolved ending. Essays which combined a detailed appreciation of the effects of the writing in the given passage for example, on the implications of 'far too quickly and airily' with judiciously selected references to other stories such as the ending of 'Bliss' or 'The Garden Party' or 'Frau Bechenmacher...' did very well. Most focused on the presentation of Beryl with varying degrees of competence, the use of symbolism, her awareness of her 'false self' and the inescapable nature of it, and examined how the sentence structure created the impression of her racing thoughts and emotional conflict. Good essays also considered the impact of Kezia's entrance. Some went beyond a discussion of Beryl's reactions and thought about the significance and effects of Kezia's moment with the cat and the top of the cream jar, which generated a discussion about innocence and experience: 'Girls have a lot to learn.' Less assured essays tended to be restricted to more obvious aspects for example, Beryl's situation of needing to find a husband and her self-disgust at her flirtatious behaviour towards Stanley. Some also picked up on Beryl's desire to live her own life and embarked on a more general essay about women's experience of marriage in the stories supported by some discussion of the social context and biographical details.

## Question 6

### ARTHUR MILLER : *Death of a Salesman*

This was the most popular text with the majority opting for the (b) question but both were often very well done. Most used ideas about the American Dream as context, and many candidates found Miller's essay 'Tragedy and the Common Man' helpful in developing discussion about Willy.

- (a) Many candidates produced substantial essays in response to this question. Good answers considered a range of dramatic methods – such as the effects of the set and the use of flashbacks and fantasies to support discussion about the ways ideas about success and the experience of failure are presented in the play. Very good answers had copious quotations, used to support ideas and also to bring out the shifts in tone in the play and the way Miller shapes an audience's response to characters by using humour, anger and pathos. Those who considered the relative success and failure of a range of characters comparing Willy to Charley and Ben, Bernard to Biff and Happy often generated broader, more nuanced answers than those who restricted their focus to Willy. There was a tendency to see him as a victim of the American Dream, a man who fell for the false values of a consumerist society, a man who had the wrong dreams. The best of these responses showed a detailed knowledge of specific scenes such as Willy's conversations with Bernard and Howard and discussed dramatic irony through such specific details as the final payment on the house or the story of Dave Singlemen. There was also some thoughtful

consideration of the way Willy sees success and failure in terms of being 'well-liked' and Biff's achievement – or lack of it. Less assured essays tended to discuss ideas more generally, restricting discussion to more obvious aspects. They sometimes showed partial understanding, thinking that Willy did not believe in hard work and some were confused by the time shifts berating him for the need to raise payments on consumer goods like the car and fridge while not recognising that the achievement of a loving family ought to be success enough.

- (b) This was the most popular question and often done well. The best essays explored the idea of Linda being a choric figure and many produced a sensitive analysis of how Miller's language throughout the extract, forces an audience to accept Willy's humanity. Most candidates had no difficulty making relevant links to the wider text: the discriminating factor was the degree to which they analysed the presentation of tension and emotion in the given extract. Many commented on the significance of Willy's 'hey Biff', the inadequacies of Happy's responses and the shock of his mother's truthful assessment of him. The effects of the language focused on were: the way the repetition and sentence structures help to generate her passionate appeal and the emotional impact of the diction in the foreshadowing 'He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog.' There was some insight shown on the effect of the passive in 'Attention must be paid' and the dramatic irony of her wondering why Willy and Biff had ceased to be 'such pals'. Less assured essays relied upon plot and more general discussions about the relationships – particularly Biff's view of Willy's treatment of his mother. Some ignored the effects of Linda's role and the dramatic revelation of her ignorance of the affair here, to pursue the argument that her support of Willy and refusal to confront him about his lack of earning power and hallucinations makes her responsible for his death.

### Question 7

#### W.B. YEATS: *Selected Poems*

This was not a popular choice of text with the majority of candidates opting for the (b) question.

- (a) There were few responses to this question. Candidates selected relevant poems to consider Yeats's love for an unattainable woman or for Ireland and her dead heroes, and produced detailed accounts of poems such as '*He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*', '*Adam's Curse*,' '*No Second Troy*', '*The Cold Heaven*', '*September 1913*' and '*In Memory of Robert Gregory*'. Those who considered Yeats' relationship with Maud Gonne were able to link a poem dealing with his unrequited love to his love of Ireland and a more political poem like '*Easter 1916*'. The best essays had enough detailed knowledge and appreciation of the details in their chosen poems to bring out the nuances of Yeats's feelings.
- (b) There were some very good answers on the given poem '*Sailing to Byzantium*' with some detailed reflections on the imagery and themes of art, immortality, age, and transience. Some reflected on Yeats's wider concerns with the past, the nature of time as a 'gyre' and his anxiety about the modern age of sensuality and greed as opposed to the eternal truths of art. There were some sensitive explorations of the various ways Yeats distances himself from the present: the impact of the impersonal use of 'That...' in the first line; the contempt in the visual and sound effects of the words 'paltry. A tattered coat upon a stick'; the significance of sailing the plural 'seas' to make his escape and a vision of himself as a 'hammered' work of art in gold. Some grappled with the ambiguities of 'the artifice of eternity' and the ending and if they did not always provide confident interpretations, showed thoughtful attention to detail and the effects of the language. Many thoroughly explored the simple artistry of 'Soul clap its hands and sing', the implications of the 'mosaic' and the resonance of the last line. Some responses also made apt connections to other poems about art and poetry such as '*Adam's Curse*' and '*Under Ben Bulbin*' or explored Yeats' dislike of change in '*September 1913*' and '*Easter 1916*.' Less assured essays were restricted to a tentative reading of the poem in an attempt to explain the ideas and paid less attention to the poetic methods and effects.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9695/63  
1900 to the Present

## Key messages

- Successful candidates write strategically to the mark scheme.
- Candidates need to show more detailed knowledge of the texts, shaped to fit the specific terms of the questions, and make more effective use of pertinent quotations to show understanding of specific aspects of a writer's methods and concerns.
- The **(b)** questions continue to be, on the whole, the most popular options. Candidates must show evidence of close reading and appreciation of the effects of the writing in the given extract **and** make relevant links to the wider text.
- Candidates need to make more judicious use of contextual and critical material, so that these ideas inform a personal discussion and appreciation of the text itself.

## General comments

The paper was comparable in difficulty with previous sessions and there was enthusiastic take-up and response to the new novels: *Americanah* and *The White Tiger* one of which was usually offered with Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, overwhelmingly the most popular text choice. Examiners saw some sophisticated, lively, informed essays in which candidates sometimes displayed an impressive command of specific textual detail, real engagement with the complexities of the ideas and nuances of language. Successful candidates on both **(a)** and **(b)** questions wrote strategically: they deconstructed the questions carefully and wrote brief plans covering a range of ideas; they had critical frameworks and terminology to generate a coherent argument. They considered a variety of interpretations and opinions, aptly supported by pertinent textual references and quotations. These were analysed to show a detailed, perceptive understanding of the ways effects are generated within particular genres. In answers to the **(b)** questions the best essays showed impressive evidence of close reading and appreciation of the effects of the writing within the given extracts, combined with some specific references to the wider text to support intelligent observations on a writer's methods and concerns.

Candidates seemed to be more confident discussing narrative techniques and to varying degrees of competence, could cover the structure of the plot, character, point of view and tone, and symbolic motifs. Drama texts continue to challenge candidates: they usually have a good understanding of themes but need to develop critical frameworks and terminology that enable them to understand the play as being seen and appreciated by an audience, instead of relying on narrative summary and discussion of the characters as 'real people'. The poetry texts are occasionally very well done by those candidates who combine an informed understanding of the ideas with an ability to explore a range of poetic methods and effects, but generally speaking responses to poetry tend to be partial. The few who choose the **(a)** questions often tend to focus on ideas, offering summaries of poems while the majority who opt for the **(b)** question often restrict their answer to the given poem and – if they are doing the poem as an unseen – tend to focus on extracting the meaning or rely on paraphrase.

Some Centres have encouraged candidates to find relevant critical material and some of it on the prose texts and Miller was well used within the body of the essays to develop discussion and support alternative readings or views of the texts. In some cases candidates did not seem to be very aware of the need to consider how biographical, contextual or critical material might be made relevant to a particular question or to particular points within an answer. One of the discriminating assessment objectives at A level is 'O' and candidates did well when they presented their own or other critical opinions as part of a coherent exploration of ideas and methods, and showed evidence of personal judgement by being able to support or challenge

these views with detailed references to the text. Candidates can signal an awareness of ambiguity or complexity by using such phrases as ‘one way of reading this might be... but another would suggest...’ Less assured candidates tended to include potted versions of biography or rehearsed explanations of generic features as introductions, or to include over-lengthy explanations of contextual issues such as The American Dream, caste or gender issues and drift away from a focus on the text into more personal reflections and experiences.

Generally speaking the standard of written expression was good. There were some very interesting, well-structured, substantial responses to the questions across the paper. Even those who tended to write very generalised, review-style essays seemed to engage positively with the texts although perhaps these candidates would benefit from reading some model answers with the mark scheme to help them understand how to develop their discussions in greater depth. There were unfortunately some rubric errors with some candidates only offering one response. There were also a few answers that seemed to combine elements of the (a) question with the passage in ways that lead to a confused response.

### Question 1

#### **CHIMAMAMDA NGOZI ADICHIE: *Americanah***

This has proved to be a very popular text with both questions producing answers across the range. Candidates of all levels of ability engaged enthusiastically with the story and showed some grasp of the writer’s methods and concerns. More constructive use was made of the 2009 ‘TED talk’ given by Adichie than the various newspaper reviews of the novel.

- (a) The essay on Obinze was the more popular choice and usually done with evident knowledge of the relationship between him and Ifemelu. Sometimes that alone was the basis of the essay with little reference to the role that Obinze plays in the structure of the novel. The argument was that ‘love interest’ implies a casual liaison rather than the deep and enduring love shown to exist between him and Ifemelu. Those with detailed textual knowledge tended to give a narrative account of their relationship and make some comparisons with how Ifemelu felt about Curt and Blaine. More sophisticated responses examined his role and significance in the novel and included references to Obinze’s experience in England as a parallel to that of Ifemelu in the U.S. using specific details about employment, the use of names and the role of Obinze as an observer to show how this deepened an understanding of the issues and experience of migration. The best essays also included his role as a filter through which Adichie presents politics and gender issues in Nigeria and considered how Adichie shapes a reader’s response to his infidelity at the end. Less assured responses twisted the question to make it more about Ifemelu touching on Obinze and his mother’s role in her journey to self-fulfilment.
- (b) Most candidates were able to make some productive use of the material in the passage to comment on central concerns such as the use of the blog as a way of giving Ifemelu a voice and the significance of hair as a running motif in the novel. Most were able to show some relationship with the wider novel by commenting on the context, the failure of her relationship with Curt and her experience of relaxing her own hair. Some wrote partial answers. Having appreciated the passionate language used to describe ‘real deep romantic love’ in the blog, a few drifted away from the passage and compared her relationship with Curt and Obinze. Others used prompts within the passage such as hair as the ‘perfect metaphor for race in America’ to launch into more general discussions and personal experiences of racism or reactions to the material in the novel.

The more successful essays made specific references to the wider text but looked closely at the effects of the writing within the passage commenting, on the one hand, on the way feelings are presented through figurative language while, on the other, identity is asserted in the blogs through register and sentence structure. They looked at the satirical effects created by the rhetorical use of questions, the effects of parentheses, the variations on the verb ‘to do’ and references to real figures from the pop and political world. The best, not only showed an appreciation of Adichie’s technical control of tone and the way it shapes a reader’s response to the character, but also thoughtfully teased out the implications of ‘No, it’s not political’ in the context of the extract to assess the extent of Ifemelu’s self-knowledge and political awareness.



## Question 2

### **ARAVIND ADIGA: *The White Tiger***

This novel was also very popular with candidates who often showed impressive textual knowledge and obvious enjoyment in reading and discussing the text. The (a) question was marginally more popular and produced answers across the range. Some candidates were able to make productive use of critical essays by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and M.Q. Khan to consider the authenticity of Balram's voice and rebut the view that Balram's lack of education and class made the novel unrealistic.

- (a) Successful candidates paid attention to the terms of the question and offered a literary analysis of how Adiga presents the experience of being a servant. They focused on the way the social situation is filtered through Balram's epistolary narrative, using his own experience, his observations and other characters to look at the interdependence of the master/ servant relationship and the mutually exploitative elements. There were some insightful explorations of the development of the relationship between Balram and Ashok, its intimacies and indignities with some thoughtful, sometimes ambivalent responses to Ashok's murder. The best answers considered the structure of the novel, focusing on specific examples of mirroring, including the impact of Balram's appropriation of the name of Ashok and assessment of his role as master. They compared his reaction to his driver's road-death incident with his own employer's plan to let him take the fall for Pinky Madam's accident. They also brought out, through their use of pertinent quotations, Balram's tendency to philosophise and his trenchant disrespect for the ruling classes. Weaker essays tended to simply see the author's purpose as generally satirical and offer sociological descriptions with examples of lifestyles from the novel without reference to the way the social situation is filtered through Balram's narrative and the writer's more subtle considerations about morality and the human condition.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this passage. The best reflected on the conceit of the letters and the creation of an unreliable narrator whom we are asked to trust as our guide to all things Indian and yet mistrust as a murderer on the run given to cynicism and exaggeration. They explored the symbolism through the theme of darkness and light and interpreted the description of 'i' the lettering and numbering system in the colonies and the use of repetition in the description of the roads as symbolic of the chaotic nature of Indian society and development in general. Effective responses also appreciated specific examples of the use of language such as the incongruity of the elegant chandeliers being delivered not by a bullock cart but by a 'limousine powered by bulls'. More modest attempts tended to be plot based, and explained the significance of the material within the passage with links to the wider text focusing on Balram's early hatred of lizards, the truth behind India's economic miracle, and why Balram was not only on the run, but had no family. More limited responses were restricted to one idea, such as 'freedom' and supported by lengthy explanations of the 'Rooster coup'. These essays showed some clear knowledge and understanding of the significance of the details but seemed to lack any appreciation of the tone of humour, of Balram's amusement and ironic attitude towards the establishment of India as a paragon of entrepreneurial success. Better essays showed some awareness of this but only the best discussed the defensive distancing such an assumed tone implies.

## Question 3

### **ATHOL FUGARD: *The Road to Mecca* and *My Children! My Africa!***

This text was less popular and although candidates clearly understood the contexts and concerns, the approach on the whole, tended to be narrative.

- (a) Most candidates were able to consider the quotation and made some attempt at explaining how friendships between Isabel and Thami or Mr M. in *My Children! My Africa!* or in *The Road to Mecca* the relationships of Helen with Elsa and Marius being complicated by race, or age, or lack of trust. These answers tended to be dependent on the plot with some description of characters. Better answers also considered the idea of how the characters 'challenge' each other and were able to use specific scenes in both plays to discuss the dramatic presentation of conflict within friendship. So, for example, there were some quite detailed discussions of the scenes where Isabel refuses to discuss what might be troubling Thami with Mr M. or how she confronts Thami over his involvement in Mr M.'s murder. Candidates tended to be less forthcoming on *The Road to Mecca* and dealt generally with issues of trust and betrayal. The best answers came from those that recalled Elsa's explanation of why she made the effort to visit Helen: 'She challenges me into an awareness of

myself and of my life and of my responsibilities to both....' This was then used to tease out how the difficult moments in the friendship between the characters impacted on the individual characters and contributed to an audience's understanding of Fugard's concerns. More precise references to specific moments in the plays, with some quotations to show how Fugard conveys complex emotions in his dialogue would have helped to develop some depth to the discussion and raise many straightforward discussions of the relationships to a competent understanding of the texts as drama.

- (b) Most candidates attempting this question could relate the extract to the wider text and explain its significance in terms of the political context and the outcome of the play. There were some intelligent but partial answers which focused on the importance of 'words' in the play as a whole and some were able to link this to ideas about self-expression through art and eventually in speech for Helen in *The Road to Mecca*. Some answers focused on the relationship between Thami and Mr M., here and elsewhere in the text and commented on the disproportionate number of lines given to the characters, tracking the argument and the impact of the simplicity of Thami's rejection: 'lessons in whispering...teaching us to shout'. A few reflected on the tension between action and passivity, words and deeds, being loyal or a traitor and suggested that Mr M.'s inability to accept Thami's assertion of autonomy represented the character's tragic flaw. Not many had the confidence to examine Fugard's use of language in presenting Mr M. but some were able to comment on the use of various rhetorical devices, his tendency to speak in parables, and the use of repetition and sentence structure to generate emphasis and passion in his appeal to Thami and the wider audience.

#### Question 4

##### LIZ LOCHHEAD: *The Choosing*

This was the less popular of the two poetry texts but most candidates seemed to find the poems engaging and memorable and those who had the confidence to discuss poetic method, obviously relished Lochhead's language and tone. Candidates need to be careful to include poems from the list in the syllabus.

- (a) This was the less popular option but was often reasonably well done. Most candidates chose relevant poems to discuss 'choice' such as '*Poem for My Sister*', '*The Choosing*', '*After the Warrant Sale*' and '*Obituary*'. The most successful considered the theme and planned out the essay to generate a coherent argument about the various issues surrounding the idea of making choices: how conscious individuals are of taking decisions, how to avoid mistakes, how to deal with mistakes and regret. They also considered the use of memories of people and places and in their discussion of particular poems explored the effects created by the use of specific situations and circumstantial detail. In their analyses of particular poems they looked at the way repetition is used as a structural device and how choice of diction and sentence structure generate tone. Less assured essays offered quite detailed accounts of the poems showing clear understanding of the content and point of view but less appreciation of the poetic methods and effects.
- (b) This was the more popular choice and produced a wider range of answers. There were those who had clearly studied and discussed possible readings of the poem and could relate it to the wider text and others who seemed to be offering a rather tentative first reading and had little to say about how it might be characteristic of Lochhead's poetry. The best answers focused on all aspects of the question and incorporated within their detailed discussion of '*My Rival's House*' some interesting links to other poems. After discussing the suggestive impact of the focus on various 'surfaces' and the maintenance of the polite conventions in the formal situation, one candidate made an intelligent link to the more detached observation of an uncomfortable social scene and an unsatisfactory relationship in '*Fourth of July Fireworks*'. Another, having considered the significance and effect of 'Listen, I was always my own worst enemy' within the given poem linked the idea of jealousy and an ambivalent view of self with '*The Other Woman*'. Good candidates were able to make something of the form and commented on how the sentence structure and irregular length of lines cut across the regular rhyme scheme, adding to the sense of unease and discomfort at being trapped in the situation. Some contrasted this with the conventional use of the sonnet to encapsulate the experience of the liberating effects of taking a poem into prison. This ability to confidently move around the wider text to illuminate and develop ideas within the given poem or extract earns high marks. In working through the poem, most candidates carefully considered the relationship between the women. They commented on the point of view, the evidence of false composure and emotion beneath the surface, delighting in such details as the use of 'squirms', the witty double meaning in 'first blood to her' and the jarring effect of the diction and half-rhyme of: 'Deferential,

daughterly, I sip/ and thank her nicely for each bitter cup.' Even though less assured candidates puzzled over the meaning, for example in the penultimate stanza, most were able to address some aspects of the poetic methods and effects such as the metaphorical significance of the description of the house and were able to select and discuss specific phrases for their visual or aural effects. The weakest essays attempted to paraphrase or relied on narrative summary. At all levels of response to 'My Rival's House', lack of consideration of how the poem is characteristic of Lochhead's poetry had a limiting effect on the mark.

### Question 5

#### KATHERINE MANSFIELD: *Selected Stories*

This was a less popular text this session but both questions produced answers across the range. The over-investment in details of Mansfield biography continues to be an issue for some candidates by overwhelming answers which might be better focused on the text itself.

- (a) This question provoked several answers which were well focused on a discussion of narrative viewpoint. The best essays showed a good understanding of Mansfield's modernist techniques and carefully selected stories to support their discussion of the 'inner life' characters. Effective use was made of 'A Married Man's Story', 'Je ne parle pas français', 'Bliss' and 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding'. The appropriate use of literary terms such as: stream of consciousness, first person viewpoint, omniscient narrator enabled discussion to be more tightly focused on the terms of the question. Successful essays were built around particular themes such as the presentation of the married woman's lot, the existential crisis of 'what is it all for?' or the extent to which characters had self-knowledge. There were apt textual allusions and quotations to reveal the extent to which the characters were aware of the contrast between their outer and inner selves, with some detailed discussion of the use of symbolism and moments of epiphany. Weaker answers tended to offer character portraits with quite a lot of contextual material. They often saw the inner life as a guilty secret and although they managed to give some sense of Millie's emotional life, they struggled with 'The Woman at the Store' and relied upon a narrative approach.
- (b) This was the more popular option. Most candidates seemed to find the given passage accessible and once again the discriminating factor was often the extent to which candidates were able to discuss its significance within the wider story as well as its characteristics in terms Mansfield's methods and concerns. Good essays were able to refer to the rest of the story – Mansfield's presentation of a series of encounters and shifts of point of view – to explore the characters' sense of entrapment and dissatisfaction here and elsewhere in the story and selection. They considered the use of dialogue and how the naturalistic speech rhythms, the accumulative effects of the repetition and the rather tragicomic effects of the imagery shape a reader's response to Jonathan. A few noted the deflationary effect of Linda's private view of her brother as being 'like a weed'. Some examined the effects created by the intrusion of the omniscient narrator at various points, particularly the shift from lyrical natural description via the inclusive second person pronoun and the images of the Last Judgement to Linda's contrastingly 'joyful' view of the scene. Less assured essays tended to deal with the passage in isolation and often relied on narrative summary. The best of these presented a character study of Jonathan with occasional insights into more obvious aspects particularly the effects of the comparison of himself to an insect and the irony of his giving Linda no time to answer his challenge to: 'Answer me that little sister.'

### Question 6

#### ARTHUR MILLER: *Death of a Salesman*

This was the most popular text with the majority of candidates opting for the (b) question which was often very well done. Most referred to the context through ideas about the American Dream, to explain ideas about success and family life. Candidates found Miller's essay: 'Tragedy and the Common Man' helpful in developing discussion about Willy but there was a tendency for some to drop references to Charlene Fix's idea about the 'bankruptcy of Willy's legacy' without showing textual support for the quotation or how it illuminated their reading of *Death of a Salesman*.

- (a) Most candidates used the American Dream as the context to explain the pressure to compete and attain concrete examples of status and achievement. Successful essays focused on both elements of the question and considered the dramatic presentation of the way sport is seen as a means to wealth and glory, through the physical presentation of young Biff as the potential football star in

Willy's memories and Happy's idea of the Loman Line greeted enthusiastically by Willy as a way to 'lick the world'. There were some insightful discussions of Willy's competitive relationship with Charley, his stubborn refusal of a job, the pleasure he takes in the perception that Charley is 'liked but not well-liked' and his surprise at the extent of Bernard's success. A few candidates intelligently pointed out that his social and professional success is symbolised by his taking his tennis kit to play on a friend's private court. There were also some productive explorations of the presentation of Happy: the comic effects of his competition with Biff for Willy's attention when young and the language of competition used at key moments such as his sense of injustice at earning less and having to take orders from a manager he can 'outbox' and his determination to validate himself and Willy's dream of coming out 'the number-one man' in *The Requiem*. 'He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him'. A few candidates considered the moral implications of Uncle Ben's 'Never fight fair with a stranger, boy' to work up an argument about the way competition and the determination to succeed compromises moral values. Less assured answers tended to make a few valid general points about the themes but lacked specific textual references to support their assertions, or offered narrative accounts of some of the events with over-elaboration of the wider socio-political contexts such as the American Dream.

- (b) Most candidates were able to link the scene effectively to the rest of the play, discussing the significance of the affair, Biff's discovery of it and the dramatic effects of the motif of Linda darning her stockings. The discriminating factor here was the degree of attention paid to the subtle details in the text and the sophistication of the discussion. Some wrote very well on the dramaturgy and time overlaps, discussing the dramatic impact of having both women on stage at the same time and how this affects an audience's response to Willy. They commented on the disturbing visual and aural effects of the scrim, lighting and laughter and the specific details of language that mark the transition between the present 'reality' and Willy's enactment of a previous encounter. Some broadened the discussion to look at the way Miller dramatises Willy's emotional and mental state elsewhere in the text, for example where Willy is talking simultaneously to Charley and his brother Ben. The best essays confidently roamed around the wider text while also looking very closely at the language in the extract to discuss the ambiguity in the presentation of the characters. While recognising the irony in most of Linda's lines, they also saw her use of empty and inaccurate hyperbole as being either the action of a stereotypical loving wife; or a flawed woman whose refusal to confront and challenge her husband contributes to his demise. Some less effectively, pursued a psychological discussion of Willy's insecurities, seen to be caused by the early loss of his father and the disappearance of his brother which was used to explain his vanity in being 'picked'. Better essays noted how details of the scene with the woman are set up in Willy's opening speech and they contrasted his hypocritical treatment of Linda here as a 'pal' with the physicality of his behaviour with the Woman and the coarseness of his humour. More modest essays tended to offer simpler views of the characters with moralistic disapproval of Willy's 'cheating' on such a loving, supportive wife. Most noted the transactional nature of Willy's relationship with the Woman in her assurance that she would put him 'right through to the buyers' but this often prompted some candidates to over-invest in ideas about Miller's critique of the 'American Dream' and materialism.

## Question 7

### W.B.YEATS: *Selected Poems*

This text is seen to be challenging and was not a popular choice but some well-informed candidates did well. The (b) question was the more popular option and produced answers across the range, while the few who tackled the (a) question tended to show greater confidence in their understanding of the wider text.

- (a) There were several intelligent treatments of poems linked to contextual knowledge of Yeats's unrequited love for Maud Gonne and the way she represents his love of Ireland. The most successful essays focused on two shorter poems such as '*No Second Troy*' and '*He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*' which led to some impressive analysis of poetic language and effects. Some explored the way Yeats expresses love for the disdainful woman or contrasted the presentation of self in '*He Wishes..*' with the strange admiration and acceptance of 'what she is' in '*No Second Troy*'. Together with '*Adam's Curse*' these poems were considered within the context of traditional Renaissance love poetry, 'the old high way of love' and there was some sensitive appreciation of Yeats's use of mythology, natural imagery, variation of tone and form.
- (b) A few candidates had an informed understanding of what it was that Yeats was lamenting and were able to give a coherent reading of the poem with some impressive analysis of the effects of the poet's choice of language in the first stanza and the various ways he creates some ambiguity in the

presentation of the heroes as possibly useless and ineffectual. They considered the use of rhetorical questions and repetition of 'for this', the effect of the refrain and the significance of the reference to maddening effect of 'Some woman's yellow hair'. Relevant links were made to poems such as '*In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*' and '*Easter 1916*'. Others struggled to work out what it was Yeats was suggesting about materialism, religion, martyrdom, the past, emigration and his feelings about the changes. Less assured candidates could not get much beyond the general sense that people were too preoccupied with making money and saying their prayers. Many lacked adequate knowledge of the context of the writing. There were vague references to the 'rebellion' without any specific knowledge of what was particular to September 1913 and some confusion about the historical figures listed. Many said they were all poets and some confused them with the average people that Yeats addresses at the beginning of the poem. Without this knowledge some essays became very general with candidates making narrow and unjustified statements about the poem, and tenuous links to the wider text, for example via the 'wild geese' to '*The Wild Swans at Coole*'.



# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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<p><b>Paper 9695/71</b> <b>Comment and Appreciation</b></p>
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## Key messages

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- A focus upon the form, structure and language of the poems or passages and how these shape meaning is clearly shown and responses do not rely upon narrative or paraphrase.
- A range of literary devices and techniques used by the writers are identified and discussed along with the effects that they create;
- Effective responses demonstrate a personal responses to the ways in which the poem or passage is written, not simply to what is said.
- A tight focus is maintained on the poem or passage throughout.
- In response to passages – it is clear that in prose and drama especially – are works of fiction, and that the characters and events have been created by the writers.

## General comments

All Examiners commented on the generally good, often very good, responses that they saw this session. Although some were inevitably less confident in various ways, the majority showed a sound or good appreciation of what each passage or poem says, and demonstrated some critical skill and perception. Relatively few candidates relied upon simple paraphrase and narrative where candidates did rely on this, there was little to reward. Some tried, often too hard, to see other meanings beyond what is actually said by each writer, and spent too much time trying to fit their particular personal interpretations into the passage or poem, instead of quite simply exploring what is clearly there. Nevertheless, the majority did just that, and there was some interesting and often quite perceptive examination of how each writer creates his effects. The drama extract was a popular choice, addressed by a large number of candidates, almost all of whom made it quite clear that they could imagine the extract in a theatrical context, not just by using the word “audience”, but more importantly by showing how particular aspects or moments were very clearly dramatic in nature. In the same way, responses to the poems frequently showed a good sense of how the poets use rhythm, rhyme, stanza form and other specifically poetic techniques.

There were very few rubric errors; some responses were clearly cut short by pressure of time, but there were very few serious weaknesses in this respect; a similarly very small number wrote on only one response or even none at all.

The way in which a candidate communicates her or his ideas is always one of the central criteria that Examiners assess, and while there were no responses in this session whose command of English was sufficiently poor to make meaning unclear, there were some whose handwriting did cause some difficulty. While this is not in itself part of the marking criteria, no penalty is ever made for this reason, it is worth reminding candidates of what is said on the front of the examination paper itself: “You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers”; it can never help a candidate if an Examiner cannot easily read what is written.

The words of one Examiner are worth quoting in full here, as they sum up very well what all Examiners felt at the end of the session: “*When I consider that all these texts were unseen, and that the candidates had only two hours to complete their work, it was most pleasing and heartening to read so many interesting, relevant and perceptive responses.*”

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Question 1: *Over My Dead Body***

This was a popular question, leading to some perceptive and forcefully argued responses. Many candidates were drawn immediately to the stage directions and used information from them to comment effectively on Barungi's presentation of character. Very often it was evident at this point that a pleasing number of candidates recognised that they were dealing with drama, and talked about the audience response to seeing visibly on stage what was indicated in the stage directions. Effective comments were made on the stage directions that came later too, and there were some perceptive responses to directions such as '*...commanding gaze*'; '*silences her with his hand*'; '*moving menacingly*'; many candidates could clearly see how such visual effects helped to create character, relationships and indeed dramatic tension. Attention was often drawn to the fact that Boona says almost nothing in the entire extract and candidates again used the stage directions to form their ideas about Barungi's presentation of her. There was also much focus, particularly from more able candidates, on the nature of the dialogue in terms of revealing character presentation and creating dramatic effect. A number of interesting responses dealt with the audience's shifting response to Mbogo's attitudes and behaviour; most responses felt that his autocratic behaviour was unarguably wrong, and that while he may possibly have his daughter's interests at heart, his treatment of her and of his wife was perhaps understandable within the play's cultural context, but certainly gave evidence of a self-centred man who did not allow any serious disagreement with his very firmly held views. Some candidates who began by being thoroughly critical of his somewhat bullying manner did change their minds when they realised that for all her apparently docile demeanour, his wife Ngoma does actually have some good arguments in favour of encouraging Boona away from higher education, and that Mbogo may in fact be more controlled by her than the other way round. There is plenty to consider about each of the three characters in the extract, even the almost entirely silent Boona, and those responses which addressed each character in turn often produced some perfectly sound or good ideas about how the playwright presents each of them through both dialogue and physical movement.

Some responses were rather too concerned with cultural matters, whether to suggest that Mbogo was to some degree controlled by social and gender expectations and perhaps therefore to be more readily understood, or whether to criticise what some candidates saw as old-fashioned and even "wrong" beliefs, and thus spent more time than was wise on considering the extract in a contextual way, instead of seeing it simply as a piece of literature and a piece of theatre. The writer is certainly presenting readers and audiences with some cultural ideas, and some consideration of gender roles, but discussion of these issues should not be the prime focus for a short, examination-timed, response.

### **Question 2: *In the Orchard, the Swallows***

This was the least popular question, but for those who did write in response to it, it led to some interesting and critically sensitive responses; particularly from those candidates who treated it precisely as it is written, rather than trying to argue that it is wholly or even partly metaphorical rather than simply narrative and descriptive. There were some unexpected and perhaps rather strange interpretations – several candidates thought that the narrator has died and is writing about his journey to the next life (though without ever pointing to any textual evidence for this), and one or two suggested that he was Jesus, again without any textual support. The best responses treated it quite literally, about a man or woman who for reasons unknown has made a slow, cold and stressful journey back to an orchard where he/ she once worked, and then back to his/ her home (for brevity's sake the rest of this section will refer to the speaker as male, as he in fact is in the novel itself, though no penalty whatsoever was given to those who thought she was female). There are perhaps three stages in the passage: the recollection of how bitterly cold he is; a change of temperature and mood as the dawn approaches; recollections of the orchard where he once worked. The air of mystery that is central to the passage is something that seemed to worry some candidates, who wanted to try to explain the background, rather than just critically exploring it as it stands.

The opening paragraph has some powerful language and images, stressing how bitterly cold the speaker is, and most candidates selected and commented appropriately on some of these. The third paragraph, after a short break, returns to his physical pain, and many responses spoke well of the short, almost breathless, clauses and sentences here, creating and echoing his actual breathlessness. The second paragraph introduces the approaching dawn and the changing colour that it brings; sunlight is literally warming the scene, and does not need to be in any way metaphorical or allegorical. The colours continue to develop, becoming rose and scarlet in paragraph four, following which the speaker introduces the orchard and writes of the profound sense of comfort that it brings – lines 22–23 introduce an extraordinary and very powerful image of how the cold dust is like water, cleaning and temporarily washing away his pain. He then speaks of the orchard which he so clearly once worked in and loved, wishing above all that he could work on it again;

but he must leave “before the farmer comes to his orchard and finds me here” (line 45), one line which could certainly lead as it did for some candidates to believe the speaker to be a criminal on the run from something or somebody. Then reluctantly, he feels the need to begin his return journey, presumably to suffer the cold and breathlessness once more.

We are not told what lies behind the passage, and this does not matter: what Examiners look for must always be a critical focus on what is there, not what might exist before and/ or after it. In this case, too many candidates lost time and focus in trying to establish, or guess, what the reasons might be for the speaker’s journey and his love and fear in the orchard, rather than exploring what is actually written, and perhaps too how the writer creates mystery and uncertainty. The strongest responses were those which focused on the effects of his natural surroundings and how the air of mystery is presented and sustained by the writer.

### Question 3: *The Sisters*

Perhaps because it is short, this was by quite a long way the most popular question, and Examiners all saw some very perceptive and sensitive responses. As with **Question 2**, the most successful ones were almost always those that read the poem quite literally, while those who saw it in more metaphorical or symbolic terms often found themselves arguing themselves into unsupported difficulties. It may conceivably be more than just a simple poem about two elderly sisters reminiscing about their lives, but it is hard to rationalise interpretations that they are already dead, or that they are in fact children rather than adults.

Many saw the three stanzas as echoing three stages: the first the present; the second the sisters’ childhood and youth, and the third their lives as wives and mothers, and finally their situation now as they come towards the end of their lives. Almost all responses noted the significance of “the veranda” in the poem and in the lives of the sisters; its repetition at the end of each stanza suggests perhaps that whatever has happened in their lives, this place is where they feel most at home, where their lives have been centred, and where they wish to remain at the end. Most too, saw the tight construction of the stanzas: five lines of approximately equal length, with a rhyming couplet in the second and third lines helping to keep control and unity; it is not, as a few said, completely free verse and thus reflective of their wild and uncontrolled lives – very much the opposite, in fact.

There was plenty of discussion of images and colours, the most significant perhaps being the light in the opening stanza, combined with the colour yellow, reflective of evening and autumn and thus of the approaching winter of the sisters’ lives – the imagery of their voices in lines 3–4 make this very clear. A strangely large number seemed worried by what they saw as the supposedly paradoxical phrase “the cooling sun” in line 2, but this is surely again, simply suggestive of both evening and autumn. The second stanza moves back to childhood and adolescence, to memories of “dolls and ponies”, and to the excitement created by young men coming to court them, with very masculine images in lines 6–7, and the intimate and secretive whispering of the young sisters in line 8. Some candidates again seemed bothered by the old-fashioned use of the word “gay”, some even wanting to see a kind of ambiguity here rather than just accepting the word in its original sense; “courting”, too, attracted much rather unnecessary comment, rather than just taking the word as reflecting traditional instead of contemporary social custom (the poem was published in 1976, for most candidates a dimly distant past). The final stanza is a more difficult one, but at its core lies the reality that even when, like these two elderly sisters, whose lives have been closely linked for many years, there are times when we all “walk alone”; one such time is of course at death, but equally it is true of marriage, childbirth and motherhood. And despite the ordinariness of their two experiences, what they recall is “wide and wild”, and a life that has been “that golden jungle”; this phrase is surely not death, or heaven, as a number of candidates felt, but just the complex, rich and often inexplicably uncertain nature of human life itself. And, as many did point out, the yellow of the opening has become golden – whether this latter colour describes their past lives, or what they are contentedly enjoying now, is perhaps immaterial. Their lives have been, and are, good.

One Examiner made the interesting point that because this is a short poem, there was less opportunity for candidates to fall back on simple narrative, so that almost invariably there was comment on form and structure as well as on content, even from the least confident. Although in some respects a prose passage might appear to be easier to manage, better responses can often come from a poem.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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<p><b>Paper 9695/72</b> <b>Comment and Appreciation</b></p>
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## General comments

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There were very few rubric errors; some responses were clearly cut short by pressure of time, but there were very few serious weaknesses in this respect; a similarly very small number wrote on only one response or even none at all.

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## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1: *Gondwana Rocks***

This was the least popular question, but there were some very good responses, and many candidates found the poem strikingly effective in its presentation of nature's majesty and power. The best ideas came from those who saw the poem in an entirely literal manner, about some actual rocks and their almost incomprehensible staying power; the least convincing came from those who seemed determined to view the poem as entirely metaphorical and not really about rocks at all; for example the words "corpse", "war", "ghosts", "death" led to some often quite far-fetched and unsupported assertions that this is in fact a poem about war, or the supernatural. It is surely quite simply, though with some very strong and striking imagery, a poem about a group of rocks which have lasted an immeasurably long time; despite everything which natural and human forces have thrown at them, they have outlasted everything.

Some candidates noted that the opening and closing lines use the same phrase – "coming rain" (line 2) and "the coming rain" – and saw this as reflective of the permanence and immutability of the rocks; one candidate used the interesting expression that this was the poet's use of "a literary envelope" in which to contain his ideas. Many spoke of the "hundred million rains" in line 10, some using this as an example of unrealistic hyperbole, but most saw it as literally true, again indicative of how the rocks have withstood so much for so long, and still survive. The second stanza lists a number of ways, in which they have been attacked by both men and nature, but again have still lasted. The third stanza compares their lives with those of humanity in its "cold salacities" (several candidates commented on the perhaps unintentional pun in this word, which includes "cities", with its underlying suggestions of human building and a lack of ethical control), and with those of forests, which grow and die at a slow but measurable and "charted" pace. And finally the picture becomes vaster and even cosmic: the rocks outlast glaciers, tidal waves, human hands and "the constant wheel of stars".

There is a wealth of material in the poem; most responses used plenty of the images created by the poet, and many saw and felt the almost inexpressible awe which the rocks create in him. Many also made some thoughtful comments about the poem's form: despite its lack of rhyme and apparent lack of regular rhythm it is in fact, very carefully and strictly controlled, not just that each stanza is the same length, but that each line has almost exactly the same number of syllables in a generally straightforward though carefully modulated iambic measure. This sense of control within the poem's form and structure gives rise to many, varied interpretations of the poem's effects and also helps to unify its form and content.

### **Question 2: *The Matchmaker***

This was a very popular question, and as noted in the General Comments above, what was so pleasing about very many responses was that it was seen very clearly as a piece of theatre to see, hear and experience, rather than just as a piece of prose to read. Often this has been something missing from many responses in the past, so it was particularly encouraging to see such evident dramatic awareness this session. A few candidates resorted to simple narrative, and a few also spent too much time on generally discussing whether or not Mr Vandergelder has any right to forbid Ambrose and Ermengarde from marrying; such discussion was usually a misuse of time, as these candidates tended to consider social and cultural matters, as well as their own personal prejudices, instead of exploring the text in front of them.

Right from the start of the extract there is humour – Ambrose's "And I tell you for the thousandth time" neatly and comically echoing Vandergelder's "I tell you for the hundredth time"; many candidates saw this as evidence of a long-running and humorous battle between the two men, which is likely to provoke at least a smile from an audience. Joe's insistence that Mr Vandergelder must sit still is visually as well as verbally entertaining, as is his warning – curiously ignored by almost all candidates – that "if I cut your throat it'll be practically unintentional".

The ensuing argument between the two principal characters is lively and amusing, and candidates often saw how most audiences are likely to side with Ambrose, whose points are much more convincing and warming, perhaps even more so in 2016 than they might possibly have been in 1954, a very distant time for candidates; Ambrose is clearly in love with Ermengarde herself rather than with financial success or security. The ongoing struggle that Joe has throughout this section adds plenty of verbal and visual comedy, though whether it really qualifies as "comic relief" in what is in no ways at all a tragic situation, is debatable.

The extract moves entertainingly towards a climax at the foot of the first page (lines 40–42), with Mr Vandergelder's self-satisfied assertion that Ermengarde has left, and his attempted closure of the conversation is wonderfully ironic: "I thank you for the honour of your visit", a sentence repeating what he said earlier (line 9), and thus suggestive again of his sense of self-importance. However, in a stroke of theatrical delight, Gertrude enters, and all candidates noted the splendid irony that a woman of her age, deaf and half-blind, should in fact become the means by which Ambrose can find, and presumably then marry, his



love; that Ambrose kisses Gertrude, an excellently comic dramatic action, was noted by many candidates as a final touch of real humour.

Comedy is never easy to write about, but there were some very good responses to this extract, with almost all candidates seeing very clearly how the dramatist creates humour, some light tension, two strikingly different but equally determined male characters, and how he also uses the two minor characters to add comedy and further the plot. In all it was seen by Examiners as an extract which led to some very good work.

### **Question 3: Suzhou Park**

This was the most popular question, partly perhaps because of its brevity, and most responses were able to make some interesting comments about its delicate portrayal of the park itself, about the contrast between human and animal activity in the park, and about the kind of universal significances that the poet offers his readers.

The poem is a form of sonnet – each line is shorter than in normal sonnets, but there are 14 lines and the rhyme pattern is conventional – and some candidates made interesting use of this fact; being so relatively short, the poem presents a finely drawn and delicately detailed picture, with almost no intrusive comment until the final few lines; it is almost like a small painting in many ways, partly because what it portrays is so very still and quiet, and its impact upon a reader is much more one of feeling and gentle emotion than of argument or idea. Some, too, suggested that as sonnets are conventionally used to express love, this is a poem expressing the poet's love for the park. Most candidates made a pleasingly good job of exploring the writing, particularly when they focused fully and specifically upon what it says, rather than upon what they wanted it to say. Those who wrote about it simply as a portrayal of a moment in a park were much more successful and critically convincing than those few who wanted it to be a poem about humanity's destruction of the environment, or how nature is better than humanity, or even – rather surprisingly – about how the grandfather symbolises mankind's carelessness about future generations; there were some who saw it as comment upon the nice balance between man and nature, and while these may well have been closer to what the poet has in mind they still seemed determined to see ideas and "messages" in the poem that may not be there at all.

The opening lines immediately set a gentle tone: the use of magnolia trees, beautiful but quiet in colour, the alliteration of the letter "f", and the soft sounds of the words, all suggest a naturally peaceful scene, suddenly stopped by "a rubbish heap". However, while a few candidates took this phrase as a cue to write about the destructive and ugly side of human life, it may perhaps be seen simply as part of life, particularly part of the life in this specific park, rather than having any wider or symbolic. The grandfather, his grandson, the man performing tai-qi-quan, are all still, slow, silent; and the butterfly and birds act out their natural lives quietly too; nothing disturbs the restful picture, even the flapping of the magpie. Some candidates wondered about the adverb "whitely" in line 9, but while it is not a conventional adverb of movement, it surely adds a nicely gentle touch to the whole picture of pale and quiet stillness.

Lines 11–12 draw together what the humans are doing in the park, and the simplicity of line 12 is particularly striking; what they are doing is simple, uncomplicated, almost motionless; one or two candidates took this line as indicative of the poet's scorn, showing that nothing that humans do is of any productive value at all, but surely this is in a way the point of this line – the park is a place of rest and peace, away from any normal active or working life. And the "design" in line 11 is interesting, perhaps suggesting that there is a pattern in human life that the poet momentarily sees in the park, and which may be lost in the everyday world. Line 13 is less easy to interpret, and perhaps wisely most candidates ignored it, focusing instead upon the powerful, arguably sad, idea in the last line: while we are with other humans at all times, we are, at least while in the park and in our temporary dreams, on our own. But being alone is not the same as being lonely. Many candidates found this a sensitively drawn portrait of a quiet park, perhaps with some universal overtones.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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<p><b>Paper 9695/73</b> <b>Comment and Appreciation</b></p>
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## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1: *Inside*

This was by far the most popular question on the Paper, and there were responses from nearly every candidate; many were sensitive and perceptive, and all clearly saw the central metaphor that the poet uses in order to portray the hurt and pain suffered by the narrator of the poem. A few relied upon paraphrase, but apart from establishing what the poem is about, this approach did not get candidates very far, largely perhaps because there is very little “story”. A surprisingly large number of responses, despite the words in lines 18 and 34, assumed that the fruit in question were lemons rather than limes, but still addressed the image successfully, so such a slip did not cause any major problems. What did take focus away, however, was the use, made by quite a large number of candidates (perhaps being misled by Beyoncé) of the saying “*when life gives you lemons, make lemonade*”; apart from the inaccuracy of the fruit, this maxim misses the point of the poem itself, which is not telling the woman to pull herself together, but simply and painfully presenting her situation.

The opening four lines – introduces the fruit metaphor, making clear the bitterness of the narrator’s rejection by her friends; no reason is given for this rejection, but again this is not the point being made – the narrator has been badly hurt, and that in a way is all that matters. The second section moves more closely towards the lime image, as the narrator metaphorically takes the hurt into her hands as they might do a piece of fruit, and tries in vain to squeeze the pain away. In just the same way as in lines 10–16, the juice bursts out of her hands and “stung her eyes”, just as it used literally to do in her mother’s kitchen. It was at this point that several responses wanted to blame the mother for her hurt, but there is no justification for this in the poem, especially as lines 4 and 22 strongly suggest that it was the narrator’s friends and failed relationships that caused her problems.

No matter what she does, however, “the pain simply won’t subside”, as the closing line says; lime trees are still growing, and something that she or others did years ago (lines 30–34) set the whole distressing process in motion, and it cannot now be stopped. It was perhaps this that frustrated some candidates, who wanted her to be more courageous and break away from these so-called friends, and/or her mother, rather than letting herself wallow in self-pity. But the poem is not a moral argument, or a self-help document; it is a literary portrayal of a deeply hurt woman, and candidates who wanted it to be more than this often spent too much time losing sight of what is actually being said. It is critical in this Paper that responses remain focused fully and entirely upon what is written, and upon how it is written, rather than moving into philosophical or ethical considerations.

The poem is certainly written in free verse, though as many candidates pointed out there is some interesting and effective use of enjambment: apart from **section 3** each consists of just one sentence, and the ways in which lines run into each other, with just the necessary but momentary pause at the end of each, can – as in **section 4** – create very striking effects; in this section, for example, the “twisted and snarled” relationships are echoed by the way in which the lines themselves are similarly twisted and snarled. There are no rhythmic or rhyme patterns, a factor noted by several candidates, who suggested that to have a tighter structure might have prevented the poet from creating such a wild and painful picture; those who simply *said* at the poem is free verse, without any comment, made a valid point but lost an opportunity to make something more of this fact.

### Question 2: *Hot Noon in Malabar*

This poem led to some sensitive and often perceptive responses, but it was noticeable how often Examiners made the same comment, that there was a significant number of candidates who apparently failed to read the whole poem before they started writing, so that the significance of the closing few lines was in many cases completely missed. In the words of one Examiner, “*stronger responses saw the disconnect between the reader’s response to the place described and the persona’s, which ultimately results in the surprise at the end of the poem*”; this is the key to the poem – what appears to be a description with much that is unpleasant is in fact a nostalgic recollection by the speaker, who is far away and homesick, and wishes to be back in Malabar; the ellipsis that closes the final line speaks volumes of his feelings.

There is no doubt that some of the descriptions *are* at least on the surface displeasing: the use of the word “whining” in line 1, especially given its placement in the line; the cards that are “stained with time; the Kurava girls (again the placement is important, suggesting an attractive picture, but then suddenly and less pleasingly they have “old eyes”); the dust-covered bangle-sellers, with cracked heels. None of these things is in any conventional way appealing. And the poem builds in this way to a kind of climax in lines 19–20, where the emotion is certainly mixed and initially uncertain – “wild men, wild thoughts, wild love”: the repetition of

“wild” is very striking, and the movement from “men” to “love” is deliberately ambiguous, but the next lines suddenly and unexpectedly destroy this ambiguity: “To/ Be here, far away, is torture”; the speaker reveals that despite, or even because of, the heat and dust of Malabar he desperately misses the place. “Wild” is repeated in line 21, together with dust and heat and these are now the very things that he so badly yearns for – and the word “Home” in the closing line is surely particularly unexpected and moving.

As noted above, the whole poem’s mood and purpose does not become fully clear until the poem’s final, tonal shift; when suddenly it becomes a poem with a kind of love rather than the dislike which so many candidates seemed to think was its central mood. It is worth suggesting here that, as well as reminding candidates how important it is to read each passage or poem in full before starting work on it; they should not let any personal prejudices colour what they write; they may – as many did – find the descriptions unpleasant and unattractive, but even without the apparent change of heart at the end it is not part of a critical exploration to criticise *what* is written – it is *how* it is written that matters.

### Question 3: *Mary*

Much the same can immediately be said about this passage; some of the relatively few candidates who addressed it were quite unhelpfully critical of Mary’s personality, and of her apparent reasons for doing what she does. Some treated her almost as if she were a real person rather than a fictional character, and attacked her for what they saw as a patronising and selfish attitude: the sick and impoverished people were not like this deliberately, and Mary should not look down on them as she – supposedly – does, and she should forget all about Henry, and get on with her own sheltered and pampered life. In the words of one Examiner, “A significant number of candidates relapsed into narrative summary, and gave extensive comments on how Mary needed to sort out her own life first before helping others”; another suggested that several candidates “felt she was trying to ease her own misery by becoming involved in the misery of others”. Even if this were to be a true portrayal of how the writer creates Mary, to write in this way is again to misuse critical time, when what Examiners must expect is a closely focused discussion of the language and images used by the writer, rather than an attack on wealth, or poverty, or any other personal or cultural factor; and while in the context of the whole novel it may well be argued that Mary *is* trying to forget her own distress by helping others, this is not what a critical exploration of the writing requires, and candidates did not have access to any more of the novel than the passage printed.

There were, however, some thoughtful and interesting responses to the description of the dilapidated mansion-house in the second and third paragraphs; more confident candidates, while making plenty of apt observations on some of the writer’s language and images here, also suggested that the decay and misery of the house was used by the writer as a means of portraying Mary’s own sadness and feelings of personal decay. Most candidates sensibly spent time discussing these paragraphs, focusing on the house itself and then on the effect that it has on Mary; there is plenty of material to consider: “tattered shreds”, “cobwebs and filth”, “broken windows”, “hollow sounds”, “broken panes were stuffed with dirty rags”, “sallow cheeks and weary eyes”, all of which, though describing the house and its inhabitants, are equally relevant as descriptive of Mary herself, both literally and metaphorically.

As readers, we are clearly invited to sympathise with Mary, and to share her distress when – having helped the young mother to return to health – she is no longer treated with the same respect and courtesy as before. Her kindness has led to her own sickness, but there is no gratitude, and while she is returned to health her mind is still deeply troubled and abused. The final lines of the passage, words that Mary writes in her book, are especially poignant, and the short, fractured sentences, with frequent question marks, are strikingly evocative of her returning misery and loneliness.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9695/08  
Coursework

## Key messages

### **Good answers will:**

- Address their texts with clear and concise focus upon what the questions ask.
- Explore how the writers create their particular effects, discussing some of the literary or dramatic techniques used.
- Support responses and ideas with brief but apt textual quotations and references.
- Make some brief use of critical and/ or contextual material to support arguments.
- Make use of individually selected and worded questions, to make responses as personal as possible.
- Ensure that the work submitted remains within the overall 3000 word limit (NB quotations do not count towards this total).

## General comments

This was a very good session in almost every way, with a larger than usual entry, and with candidates who generally showed a confident understanding of what is required by the Syllabus; in the same way, almost all Centres demonstrated a thoroughly efficient and professional approach to the presentation of work and to their assessment of the submitted folders, with marks that were generally close to agreed standards.

All candidates followed the Syllabus rubric correctly, addressing questions on two texts, each from a different genre, and almost invariably kept what they wrote within the required 3000-word limit. This limit no longer includes textual quotations, so that responses were, in most cases, a little longer than has sometimes been the case in previous years. Although no candidate used this change to write work that was significantly beyond the old limit; what was noticeable, however, was that the change did allow for rather greater use of textual quotation and reference, making some at least of what was written even more effective than it might otherwise have been. There was evidence throughout the entry of good, often very good, knowledge of the two texts used, combined with some sensitive and perceptive critical ability to move beyond this simple knowledge, to present thoughtfully and carefully structured responses to some often quite demanding questions.

Centres are strongly advised to submit an Outline Proposal Form (OPF) for each candidate who will be entering coursework, before any work is begun. This will enable a senior Moderator to comment on the texts being proposed (and to make sure that these are appropriate, not works in translation, and not set for any other Paper in the Syllabus), and to make any suggestions for amending the questions that each candidate will be addressing; in most cases the texts and questions will be approved, but if any changes are either necessary or advisable it is important that there is plenty of time for this to be done. Cambridge Assessment does not have any knowledge of individual candidates' strengths and skills, so it is very important that Centres do their very best to ensure that what each candidate proposes is appropriately challenging for them. Implicit in this is the expectation that candidates may, and ideally will, be addressing different questions, rather than all doing exactly the same. This encourages a much greater sense of ownership, and is likely to lead to a greater independence and individuality in what they write; if all candidates address the same questions there is a much greater likelihood that what they write may be overly taught, and that there will be a degree – sometimes a large degree – of overlapping ideas and arguments. While most Centres this summer offered the same texts for all candidates, there is no doubt that most of the best work did come from those where questions were different.

All candidates used a novel for one of their texts, with drama or poetry as the second; this was perfectly fine, but it is worth commenting that there was sometimes little sense that poems and plays have both particular and different characteristics to novels. Most responses on poetry commented, often perceptively and at times



sophisticatedly, on the poets' uses of language and imagery, but there was often little or no consideration of other specifically poetic factors – stanza form, line length, rhythm, rhyme, for example – all of which are crucial to the ways in which a poem creates its meaning and shapes readers' responses. In a similar way, there was often little sense that drama is intended primarily to be seen, heard and experienced rather than just read. It may of course be difficult or impossible for some candidates to see live theatre, but other forms are just as valuable – through DVD, television and the internet – all of which can be used to show how the dramatists have used particular theatrical skills and techniques. Such visual versions can also of course be introduced by candidates as a way of integrating possible, or actual alternative interpretations of a play into their own developing personal views.

Critical views are a requirement within AO5: “*the ability to appreciate and discuss varying opinions of literary works*” and those candidates who introduced and discussed them strengthened their own arguments considerably; the proviso here is that they must *use* such views, not just quote them. Similarly, for the top three Bands, candidates should make use of some contextual material or factors, and consider how these have influenced the writing, and the reception of their texts; such factors can be of many different sorts – literary, biographical, cultural, historical, for example.

Most Centres followed administrative instructions correctly, and included the appropriate paperwork – a mark-sheet (MS1), individual candidate cover-sheets, and an assessment summary sheet for the whole Centre. It is very important that all these documents are included. Almost all candidates presented their work effectively and often professionally; there is no requirement for it to be word-processed, though in virtually every case it was. When this was done, it was most helpful for work to be double spaced, using a reasonably sized font, and printed on just one side of the paper. In the same way, the best Centres had annotated their candidates' work in some detail, with brief summative comments showing how assessment decisions had been reached. Work should be annotated in this way, and where appropriate and possible it is also very helpful to see evidence of internal moderation or double marking.

Overall, a very pleasing session, with work that was almost never less than sound, and often very good indeed from many Centres whose professionalism and efficiency was of a high level; making the process of moderation straightforward and often truly pleasurable.

### **Texts**

The list below contains a number of texts that were used successfully by candidates. It is not an exclusive list, nor is a list of recommended titles, but it is included to illustrate the very wide range of writing that candidates used. Most, it will be agreed, are canonical, but there are certainly also some that are less obviously so; what matters above all is that each text is a sufficiently demanding one for sustained Advanced Level study, that it is approved by Cambridge following submission of an Outline Proposal Form, and that the questions set on it are helpfully directed to the particular strengths and interests of each candidate.

### **Prose**

Anthony Burgess	A Clockwork Orange
Charles Dickens	A Tale of Two Cities; Oliver Twist
Charlotte Brontë	Jane Eyre
Chinua Achebe	Things Fall Apart; A Man of the People
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni	Selected Short Stories
Edith Wharton	Ethan Frome
Ernest Hemingway	The Sun Also Rises
F. Scott Fitzgerald	The Great Gatsby
George Eliot	Silas Marner
Ian McEwan	Atonement
Iris Murdoch	The Bell
J.D. Salinger	The Catcher in the Rye
Jane Austen	Pride and Prejudice
Kathleen Grissom	The Kitchen House
Louis de Bernières	Captain Corelli's Mandolin
Margaret Atwood	The Handmaid's Tale
Markus Zusak	The Book Thief
Nathaniel Hawthorne	The Scarlet Letter
Oscar Wilde	The Picture of Dorian Gray
Ken Kesey	One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest
Sylvia Plath	The Bell Jar

Thomas Hardy                      The Return of the Native; The Mayor of Casterbridge

**Poetry**

Carol Ann Duffy	The World's Wife
John Donne	Selected Poems
Kamala Das	Selected Poems
Philip Larkin	The Whitsun Weddings
e.e. cummings	Selected poems
Robert Browning	Dramatic monologues
Sylvia Plath	Ariel
Thomas Hardy	"Emma" poems
William Blake	Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience

**Drama**

Alan Bennett	The History Boys
Arthur Miller	The Crucible; All My Sons
Brian Friel	Dancing at Lughnasa
John Webster	The Duchess of Malfi
Ola Rotumi	The Gods Are Not To Blame
Oscar Wilde	The Importance of Being Earnest; An Ideal Husband
R.B. Sheridan	The Rivals
T.S. Eliot	Murder in the Cathedral
Tennessee Williams	A Streetcar Named Desire, The Glass Menagerie; The Rose Tattoo
Thornton Wilder	Our Town
William Shakespeare	King Lear; Hamlet
Wole Soyinka	Death and the King's Horseman