



**General Certificate of Education**

**Classical Civilisation**

**CIV1C Aristophanes and Athens**

**Report on the Examination**

*June examination - 2009 series*

**This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)**

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## **CIV1C Aristophanes and Athens**

### **Section One**

Option A, on *The Knights*, was considerably more popular than Option B, on *Peace*.

#### **Option A**

Questions 01, 02, 03 and 04 were all generally well answered, although some candidates gave only one accurate point for Question 04. In Question 05 virtually all candidates were able to show some understanding of the comic techniques Aristophanes uses in the passage, but some did not go much further than a mention of the Sausage Seller's accent and appearance. Better answers discussed a range of techniques from across the passage, supported comment with brief relevant detail and explained the reasons for the comic effect. The most successful did not just give examples of, for example, vulgarity and slapstick, but succinctly linked them to the contemporary political context, such as Athens' democratic principles and imperialist ambitions as well as the position of Cleon.

The same was true for Question 06. Most candidates had some awareness of Aristophanes' targets, but the best answers supported generalisations with analysis of specific scenes apart from the one in the passage to produce a tight argument which showed a clear understanding of contemporary events and issues.

#### **Option B**

Questions 07 and 10 were generally better answered than Questions 08 and 09, but in all four questions accuracy and precision were generally lower than in the comparable parts of Option A. It was particularly surprising that answers to Question 08 were so often vague since the rescue of Peace forms such an important part of the play.

Similarly, evaluation of the passage in Question 11 was generally less assured than in Question 05, mainly because candidates tended to list examples of verbal and/or visual humour without going beyond simple labels such as 'word play' and 'toilet' and without explaining how individual details might have worked together to make the whole passage entertaining for the Athenian audience.

By contrast, Question 12 received proportionately more very good answers than Question 06. These effectively categorised different types of humour with examples from across the play and reached a reasoned overall judgement.

### **Section Two**

More candidates chose Option D, which required a comparison between *The Acharnians* and *Peace*, than Option C, which focused just on *The Acharnians*. However, the split was more even than in Section One. The performance in Option D was generally of a slightly better standard than in Option C.

#### **Option C**

Good answers to Option C adopted an argumentative approach and weighed Aristophanes' use of surprise and the unexpected against other sources of comic effect. Many convincingly challenged the assertion in the quotation, the most successful taking the audience's

expectations and the political and military context into account in their assessment. Weaker answers tended to adopt a narrative approach, punctuated with comments which declared a twist in the action and/or dialogue as surprising without explaining the reasons. Disappointingly, some responses did not reach an overview of the play as a whole but were patchy in their coverage.

### **Option D**

Opinion was divided on how passionately Aristophanes opposes war with Sparta (or war in general) in *The Acharnians* and *Peace* and how far he was just trying to win the prize. Most candidates did attempt some form of argument, the best of which linked knowledge of the context of each play to detailed evaluation of their contents. Particularly pleasing was the number of candidates who made effective use of the *parabasis* of each play in their discussion, but in several cases the argument would have been stronger if candidates had questioned more critically the assumption that one can straightforwardly discover Aristophanes' personal political preferences from the utterances and antics of make-believe characters in surreal fantasies.