



General Certificate of Education

Classical Civilisation

CIV1C Aristophanes and Athens

Report on the Examination

January examination - 2010 series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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CIV1C Aristophanes and Athens

Most candidates made a sensible attempt to engage with the issues raised by the questions and generally showed some good insights into the plays of Aristophanes and their historical context. The best answers were outstanding for their command of relevant detail, perceptiveness of analysis and structure of argument. Most candidates adopted an evaluative approach with some attempt to organise an argument that led to a formally stated conclusion. The main shortcomings in the middle range of answers were the failures to provide sufficient reference to detail to back up opinions and clear links between paragraphs to join the argument into a coherent whole.

The majority of candidates used their time sensibly in proportion to the marks available for each question. Some, however, wrote at excessive length for the early questions and consequently left one of the essays incomplete. It was evident that candidates who planned could ensure they covered the full range of points and reached a conclusion, even if they were under pressure of time.

A number of centres failed to use the new AQA answer books. As well as enabling AQA to process and mark scripts quickly and accurately, these new answer books allow teachers to access detailed information about their candidates' performance, including a breakdown of their marks, through the Enhanced Results Analysis service.

Question 1

There was a general tendency to interpret Question 111 to be asking about the author's motives in writing the speech (Aristophanes' alleged intention to persuade Athenians to seek peace) rather than the character's reasons for making the speech at this point in the plot (Dikaiopolis' need to justify his personal peace to the hostile Acharnians). Marks were available for either interpretation, but relatively few scored both points, especially if they took the former view. Candidates were generally more successful in Question 112 in identifying the Lenaea as a festival – though less so in explaining the absence of foreigners – and in Question 113 in recalling Sparta's annual incursions into Attica.

Central to a successful answer to Question 120 was the ability to set Dikaiopolis' absurd trivialisation of events (retaliatory tit-for-tat 'tartnapping' and such japes) against views on the importance of the Megarian Decree as a trigger for war. A disappointingly large number of candidates was unable to do this effectively, and many misinterpreted 'the rest of the Dikaiopolis' speech' to refer only to the printed passage, even though it included virtually nothing about 'the start of the war'.

Which side of the argument a candidate favoured in Question 130 was, as always, unimportant, but it was essential to consider both. The best answers had a clear theme and point of view, made a coherent sequence of judgements (sometimes starting from the observation that one might expect Aristophanes' targets to be outsiders rather than his fellow citizens) and supported opinions with details from across the whole play. A particular error was the categorisation of the Acharnians as foreigners. More generally there was a tendency for essays to refer to only part of the play and/or to provide little or no detailed evidence to justify the views expressed.

Question 2

Candidates attempted this question in similar numbers to Question 1 and showed comparable difficulties in recalling details of the plot (The people's rejuvenation was not well remembered in Question 211) and demonstrating knowledge of the historical context. Although in Questions 212 and 213 candidates generally recognised that the Paphlagonian was a disguise for Cleon, many did not have a clear grasp of his capture of Spartan prisoners at Sphacteria and subsequent refusal to negotiate peace.

However, responses to Question 220 were generally far more successful than those to Question 120. Most candidates had something to say about the audience's satisfaction on seeing the villainous Paphlagonian get his comeuppance and the little man, the Sausage-seller, triumph. Some extended their discussion with comments on the jokes and comic business and/or the differences between this ending and the far more sexually charged, chorus-led celebratory finales of *The Acharnians* and *Peace*. Some, perhaps the most perceptive, pointed out that the Sausage-seller's victory was not so much satisfying as disturbing in its implications for the health of Athenian democracy.

By contrast, answers to Question 230 tended to be less good than those to Question 130. It mattered little whether candidates found the various bouts of the contest inventive or repetitive; what counted was the ability to support opinions with detailed knowledge of each round, and this was often lacking.

Question 3

This was the more popular of the two longer essays. Most candidates made sensible use of their knowledge of the historical context of *Peace* and attempted to link their argument to the quotation given (although few pointed out that *Peace*, gaining only second prize, was not in fact that successful). Strengths and weaknesses were very similar to those in Questions 130 and 230, the main shortcomings being omissions in covering the whole play (little attention was often given to the succession of visitors in the second part) and imprecision in supporting generalisations with detailed evidence.

Question 4

Most candidates made some attempt to provide an overview that encompassed all three plays and to support opinions with some relevant knowledge. It was pleasing, too, how many tried to organise their material thematically rather than play by play. Overall, there was good understanding both of the centrality of the chorus in the Athenian comic tradition and of Aristophanes' flexibility in adapting the conventions to suit his needs in each play.