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FOREWORD

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

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8695/02

Composition

General comments

The Paper seemed to differentiate fully across a diverse range of candidates. There were, as before, many excellent and highly enjoyable responses. A large number of candidates seemed superbly prepared, offering mature, subtle answers often written in highly appropriate and accurate English. In a few cases, there was some concern over the quality of handwriting - some compositions proved very difficult to mark. One or two answers also caused the markers some concern over the inappropriate use of language.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There were some very effective answers here with mood and atmosphere being convincingly and evocatively portrayed. Some candidates need to ensure that they read the question carefully so that they are not tempted to write a complete story which plagiarises an existing story or film.

Question 2

The mood here was generally apt but often the account was based on one memory only, rather than a series of brief flashbacks. Even here, though, the mood was still apt and the significance of the overall structure was grasped. Candidates would be advised, though, not to try forms with which they are unfamiliar.

Question 3

Some candidates integrated the idea of diary extracts in superbly original and effective ways. As with **Question 2**, though, some candidates only wrote one extended extract rather than a series of extracts. Those answers which worked out plot and structure in advance fared better than some where the narrative appeared to meander. Answers which also got beyond some cliché material (such as teenage romances) tended to allow more mature and sophisticated issues to surface.

Question 4

There were some superb, mature and evocative answers here; the best writing experimented with point of view and imagery. Most answers showed an even and balanced structure; answers at the lower end of the range tended to forget this was about descriptive writing and focused on narrative comparisons - again candidates need to ensure titles are read in the light of the section in which they are placed.

Section B

Question 5

This was a popular choice. Responses were often witty and fluent. Generally good reasons were given by the reviewer in terms of characters and plot. Weaker answers tended to summarise the story only without offering much personal insight or comment.

Question 6

This was a fairly popular choice and the material was, on the whole, handled competently and confidently. The contrasts could have been stronger in some instances in order to evoke differences in style and language a bit more clearly and effectively.

Question 7

Occasionally 'turn the other cheek' was interpreted as 'turn a blind eye' but this did not really impede marks or arguments. There were many efficient and proficient answers here with the best ones also incorporating some personal evidence or brief anecdote to establish possible approaches to such moral dilemmas. The responses displayed again how thoughtful and mature candidates can be even under timed/controlled conditions.

Question 8

This was tackled with vigour and depth, allowing many candidates to explore current and cultural issues from a variety of perspectives. Many good answers seemed adept at drawing on a pleasing and effective range of examples in order to examine a number of central arguments.

<p>Paper 8695/09 Poetry, Prose and Drama</p>
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General comments

There was a very wide range of responses to the Paper in this session. At the upper end, there were examples of individual, responsive and sophisticated writing about the texts and questions, while at the lower end of the mark range, some candidates seemed ill-prepared for the nature of the examination. There was an unusual number of rubric errors, while some candidates did not seem to have read the questions carefully.

Blake and Achebe were once again the most favoured authors, while *Macbeth* was the most popular drama text on Paper 9. On the whole, candidates showed a thorough knowledge of the texts they had studied. What discriminated between their answers was the ability to direct that knowledge towards the questions set. Careful selection, reference and coherent organisation of the argument are the keys to success on the Paper. Those candidates who made reference to specific areas of their texts to support their arguments, those who were able to incorporate words and phrases of quotation and those who were able to comment on the writers' style, were marked highly.

It is worth reminding Centres that the passage based questions give candidates the opportunity to discuss language and writing style closely. To take advantage of this opportunity, candidates must write about the passages in a focused and detailed way.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) Most candidates were able to say that the children in Blake's poems are often figures of innocence, though many of the answers were rather simplistic, merely showing that children feature in the poems. Better answers here developed from innocence to consider harmony with nature and identification with Christ, while noting the change of tone in the Experience poems to examine social and religious oppression. Even amongst the most confident answers, however, few candidates were able to comment on the style of the verse, with reference to the outward simplicity, children's songs and nursery rhyme patterns.

- (b) While some candidates offered a paraphrase of *The Echoing Green*, those who noted the instruction in the question to trace the development of ideas were much more successful. Better answers made explicit comparisons with other poems to evaluate how characteristic the poem is, while some were able to recognise the movement towards the world of experience in the final stanza, noting the change to “the darkening Green.”

Question 2

ed. Hydes: *Touched with Fire*

- (a) The range of poems which candidates chose for this question was wide, sometimes suggesting that they were using poems with which they were familiar, rather than the most appropriate ones in the selection. However, Examiners marked whatever was offered, looking at the ways candidates applied their choices to the question. Some particularly successful choices were ‘Diary of a Church Mouse’, ‘To His Coy Mistress’, ‘On My First Sonne’ and ‘Mid-Term Break’. Those candidates who focused on how the chosen voice affected the meaning of the poem and the reader’s response, were answering the question directly and well.
- (b) There were some very good answers on ‘Pain’. Many candidates showed a personal and lively response to the development of the ideas and the imagery in the poem. Some viewed it as a powerful description of a storm only, while others, noting the title, the personal address to the reader and the strength of the imagery in the final two stanzas, argued for a metaphoric reading, suggesting revolution or colonialism. Some candidates missed the instruction to compare the poem’s techniques with those of another, while those who made the comparison ranged quite widely. Snake, for example, was often used to compare freedom of form, while the language and imagery was frequently compared with Refugee Mother and Child.

Question 3

Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) There were not many answers on Plath, but often the essays showed enthusiasm and responsiveness. Some candidates seemed to relish the chance to write about the brighter side of Plath’s poetry. The poems about children, particularly ‘You’re’ and ‘Balloons’, were popular, while others referred to the vibrancy and challenge of poems such as ‘Cut’, ‘Poppies in October’ and ‘Letter in November’.
- (b) ‘Medusa’ proved a challenging poem for many candidates. While some seemed confused, and may have been better served by (a), Examiners rewarded candidates who applied themselves carefully to the poem and explored its imagery. Some candidates considered alternative interpretations, and many were personal and responsive.

Question 4

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

- (a) It was a curious feature of the answers to this question that many candidates wrote about Okonkwo rather than the presentation of Christians and Christianity. Among the answers which did focus on what was asked for, some were partial, either arguing that the Christians brought redemption and great improvement to Ibo society, or that their influence was totally destructive of Ibo culture and offered no benefits. Such answers sidestepped Achebe’s carefully detached observational narrative; better answers were balanced, aware of the upheaval and change in Ibo society, but also noting the Christians’ acceptance of the Ibo outcasts, for example.
- (b) There were some responsive answers to the question on the presentation and significance of the spirit court. The stronger answers examined the physical descriptions of the spirits, the ritualised dialogue and the positions of the onlookers. The issue of significance was sometimes less well handled, but those who noted the organisation, respect and justice of the Ibo’s judicial system did well, and some candidates made explicit comparisons between the egwugwu court and the court of the District Commissioner.

Question 5

Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

- (a) Candidates' understanding of 'progress' varied, some interpreting it to mean a journey from one point to another, others as a passage towards improvement. Both approaches were equally valid, as candidates noted the changes in Pip following his visits to Satis House, his time in London, and finally on the return of Magwitch. To be fully successful, candidates needed to select references carefully to form an argument; weaker answers here relied on plot summary and paraphrase.
- (b) Most candidates were able to comment on Pip's disillusionment when he arrives in London, but surprisingly few were able to develop comments on Dickens' style in the passage, and thus his presentation of Pip's reactions, as required by the question.

Question 6

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) There were very few answers on *Martha Quest*. Those who answered this question tended to write character studies of Martha's parents. Those who focused more successfully on the question of their roles in the novel made productive comments about the effect of their upbringing on Martha and her development, though few commented on their responses to her marriage towards the end of the novel.
- (b) Better answers to the passage question commented on the homogeneity of the Dutch and Martha's detached judgemental view of them.

Question 7

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a)(b) Too few scripts seen to make a meaningful comment.

Question 8

Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman*

- (a) Most candidates who answered this question were able to recognise the tragedy of Willy's story, comparing his dreams with his achievements, both as a salesman and as a father. Some challenged the title of 'hero', and this kind of questioning led to productive answers.
- (b) Candidates answering this question were usually successful in looking closely at the dialogue between Willy and Bernard, and showed awareness of the contrast between Bernard's achievements and Willy's lies about Biff's. More confident answers also moved out of the passage to compare it with other episodes involving Bernard in order to contextualise the extract and develop comments on Bernard's role.

Question 9

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) Candidates showed their awareness of the guilt of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, but many overlooked the wording of the question, which asked them to discuss "the language and stage action". Opportunities were missed to discuss Macbeth's breakdown in the banquet scene or Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, for example.
- (b) Candidates showed their understanding of the content of the set passage, and usually concentrated on the description of Macbeth, noting the changes in his loyalty to Duncan as the play develops. Some confident answers also noted the question's focus on "the world of the play" and noted that the language of the scene creates a world of horrific violence and treachery.