

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Composition

Key messages

Candidates are reminded to pay particular attention to:

- engaging with all key words in a question;
- planning the development of their writing;
- avoiding predictable or derivative plots and ideas;
- using a tone appropriate to the type of writing specified by the question;
- checking that tenses used are correct and consistent, as appropriate.

General comments

On the whole, responses were of a similar standard to those produced in recent sessions, with answers ranging from the very mature and thoughtful, to ones affected by significant lapses in technical accuracy. At the higher end of the range there were some very creative and highly imaginative narrative/descriptive responses and some sophisticated and well exemplified argumentative/discursive compositions. At the lower end of the range, *Section A* answers tended to rely on often undirected and drifting plots, and *Section B* responses tended to be undeveloped, with lapses in expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. Some candidates needed more carefully to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in *Section A* e.g. areas of focus such as 'character and motivation', 'setting', 'mood', 'mystery' or 'suspense'; or a specified structure such as 'novel' or 'short story'.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in *Section B* was convincing on the whole: most candidates were well prepared in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as discursive texts, letters, arguments and magazine articles. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in letters opposing each other; some candidates kept to the same voice for both.

There were some sophisticated and mature responses which were highly enjoyable to read and impressive, considering the time constraints within which they were produced. On the whole, time management was satisfactory, and relatively few instances of short work were seen this session. There were some examples of prepared answers that did not quite fit the examination questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 (Ghost Town)

There were some very evocative and focused responses which created atmospheric suspense. Candidates employed a range of descriptive and narrative effects in a substantial number of answers. Many stronger candidates involved subtle mixtures of place and mood, often highly subjective points of view from lone travellers. Sometimes ghost towns were not conventionally empty places, but contained ethereal, ghost-type entities which had past relations with inhabitants or situations.

Less secure compositions tended to draw on horror conventions alone at the expense of a degree of originality. Sometimes there were parodies of westerns or post-holocaust scenarios. Weaker candidates often used image after image in an attempt to 'describe', often overdoing the numbers of adjectives applied

to the task. On the other hand, some candidates concentrated too much on 'narrative', thinning out the descriptions and largely ignoring 'mood' and 'place'. Some were too absorbed in 'mood' to observe gradations of 'place', but also, some over-facile descriptions of 'place' were produced, as if on a tour of the town.

Question 2 (The Coach Trip)

There were some pleasing and engaging responses, characterised by careful planning and forethought. Successful answers established subtle and carefully constructed contrasts in individual purpose and motivation. Some answers used dialogue very effectively indeed and blended in telling bursts of descriptive writing to great effect. Answers lower down the range lacked subtlety and sophistication, and tended to make such factors explicit from the very start; to spell out the construction of the episode well in advance; and a number ignored the coach element.

'Coach' was variously interpreted according to the cultural understanding of the word. For some candidates a sports coach was the main interpretation, for others it was coach class on an aeroplane as opposed to business class. Others wrote historical accounts of trips in horse-drawn coaches or railway carriages. In most cases, the candidate's interpretation added to the interest of the story.

Question 3 (Contemporary version of fairy tale/myth)

This was not such a popular choice and some answers struggled to find variations on the original fable or myth. There were some pleasing responses and these tended to be aware of the conventions and elements of the original sources to the point that they were adapted with subtle and, at times, ironic, techniques. Some good offerings included a re-writing of 'Red Riding Hood' from the wolf's point of view; another version satirised teenage dependency on all the technology of modern life. However, some merely told an established story/myth in their own words, which was hardly the point of the question. With the weaker answers there seemed to be a lack of understanding of 'contemporary'; there were several unadventurous re-tellings of the Cinderella story, and even a very competent re-telling of an ancient Greek myth, but with no attempt to update the setting.

Question 4 (Life without/with money)

This was a popular choice. Some candidates felt the need to include stage directions in their responses. One of the limitations of some answers was that the second piece often tended to be a simple reverse image of the first – that is, negative becomes clearly positive or vice versa, thus rendering the expression rather unvaried. There were, nonetheless, some imaginative and focused answers which offered subtle and persuasive contrasts in the situations of the narrators, often drawing on fictional self-realisation and personal insights.

Strong candidates stressed the contrasts through a variety of personae/situations: often the reversal of the clichéd happiness-with-money took place, where the narrator was more content without money and, after winning the lottery, felt the burdens of guilt or the dilemma of whether to use the fortune altruistically or for selfish ends. Misreading led to two separate characters or placing the whole piece into the third person with little emotional impact.

Question 5 (Capitalism)

This produced some very thoughtful and, at best, sophisticated and passionate, strongly-argued material which contained incisive and very relevant exemplification. Such answers drew on a wealth of historical and contemporary knowledge. Some candidates were not afraid to take an individual and unexpected line. There was, however, a tendency to conflate democracy and capitalism; capitalism is an economic theory not a system of government. The more able candidates understood the nature of the overlap, though weaker candidates showed confusion. There were some extremely complex answers, which although exhaustive and using the correct technical economic terms, often failed to be clear and/or fluent. Many answers tended to be a little diffuse, not focusing sharply on the actual question. However, stronger candidates who were aware of a possible non-expert audience, simplified the more abstruse ideas into a flowing discussion, either to press home a strong sense of voice in argument, or to even-handedly discuss the benefits and weaknesses of both systems.

Question 6 (Advice to a ten-year-old)

This was a hugely popular choice, which in general was answered very effectively, though more difficult than it first appears. The best candidates realised the need to keep the focus clearly on a ten-year-old reader. Weaker candidates produced the whole gamut of teenage angst and the horrors of life in general, assuming a life-history had to be unfolded through to old age for the ten-year-old, and some assumed the reader was already thirteen. Some candidates spent too much time describing the processes of puberty and the physical changes the recipient of the letter would experience. However, the title elicited some very detailed and thoughtful answers which gave some sensible advice and showed real sensitivity. 'Preparing' and 'coping' were usually well-balanced, with a lot of sincere/heartfelt sentiments (many obviously real experiences of the writers). This question provided lots of opportunities for ironic humour, some darker than others. Many of the better answers wrote in straightforward language suited to a ten-year-old, with reiteration, encouragement and empathy: 'Trust me, I've been through this'.

Question 7 (Feminism)

Occasionally, a misunderstanding of the term 'feminism' occurred: taken to mean femininity, prejudice against women and bias in favour of women, sometimes all in the same essay. In general, though, answers were strongly argued and developed, relevant and used informed examples. At best, responses were supported by a strong sense of personal voice and an engagement with the issue. There were some useful appraisals of past activists, with some accurate historical references, and illuminating analyses of ongoing struggles.

Question 8 (Marriage)

This was a popular question with many steady and competent responses, with all but a few avoiding the pitfall of merging both points of view into one long discussion. There were some pertinent and sensitive explorations of both aspects of the case, and a clear sense of voice was apparent in each section. Interesting political and religious connections were made also. Occasionally, candidates would lose direction, or focus on one half of the response. The first part was sometimes weaker, concentrating on the expense of a wedding; the second part usually managed to address the idea of marriage as the foundation of society. There were others who wrote really well on marriage being outdated and then struggled to write effectively for the opposition. These candidates needed to plan the structure of their material more carefully.

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Paper 8695/22
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General comments

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The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. Some candidates needed more carefully to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in *Section A* e.g. areas of focus such as 'character and motivation', 'setting', 'mood', 'mystery' or 'suspense'; or a specified structure such as 'novel' or 'short story'.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in *Section B* was convincing on the whole: most candidates were well prepared in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as discursive texts, letters, arguments and magazine articles. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in letters opposing each other; some candidates kept to the same voice for both.

There were some sophisticated and mature responses which were highly enjoyable to read and impressive, considering the time constraints within which they were produced. On the whole, time management was satisfactory, and relatively few instances of short work were seen this session. There were some examples of prepared answers that did not quite fit the examination questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 (The Land that Time Forgot)

This question provided a good opportunity for candidates to be inventive with sci-fi or semi-realistic scenarios and create suspenseful and tantalising cliffhangers at the end of their answers. It was a popular choice. Many candidates produced focused and atmospheric work and offered imaginative and convincing narratives, evoking a sense of a lost and isolated world with a fair level of success. However, others were far-fetched and sometimes over-ambitious. Some responses tended to ignore the rubric request to write 'a short opening chapter' and completed a wholly narrative short story instead, forgetting 'mood' and 'place'. Then there were candidates who were side-tracked and wrote narratives prior to reaching 'the lost world'; these narratives took precedence and candidates seemed to feel that because this was an opening chapter they did not need to focus on 'mood' or 'place' until the next chapter.

Question 2 (The Day Trip)

Candidates established a strong sense of characterisation in the most effective responses, teasing out subtle contrasts between different participants. Less secure answers tended to make the contrasts too clear from the start, leading to a rather simplified, although honest, interpretation of the material. Writers seemed very constrained by the 'day' element; some just ignored it and wrote about lengthy holidays instead. Candidates need to be reminded to keep to the terms of the question.

Question 3 (Claustrophobia)

This was a popular choice: the title allowed for some excellent and authentic writing, although the condition was widely interpreted. More imaginative responses seemed to adopt a first person narrative with a strong sense of voice, often adopting the present tense in order to convey feelings and sensations as they unfolded. Strong answers included very precise and effective description, for example, of what it was like to be transported in a black plastic bag against one's will. Less effective answers tended to focus on narrative aspects, such as how and why the central character had ended up in a claustrophobic situation; several candidates completely ignored claustrophobia and just wrote a story creating danger and tension.

Question 4 (Monologues)

Clear and effective contrasts were established in the majority of answers in what proved to be a popular choice of question. There were some mature and thoughtful considerations of the topic combined with some other responses which tended to take an 'I had nothing and now I am rich' approach with rather obvious and foreseeable contrasts. One of the limitations of some answers was that the second piece often tended to be a simple reverse image of the first – that is, negative becomes clearly positive or vice versa. Inevitably there were a few third person responses. A few wrote in the personas of two different characters, thus losing the opportunity to show a vivid and reflective descriptive contrast.

Question 5 (Social equality)

This stimulated some thoughtful and strong responses underpinned by a sense of purpose and voice. Answers in which the candidate adopted a personal and individual approach evoked some particularly engaging and sensitively aware ideas framed by historical and contemporary knowledge and examples. The question allowed candidates to express complex arguments and develop points; the topic was usually chosen by more able candidates who showed good understanding of the issues involved. However, although candidates who chose this question usually understood the meaning of the term, some found the issue rather too wide-ranging to handle. A few candidates found this a step too far conceptually, but attempted it nevertheless, resulting in answers that were diffuse and scattered. Candidates should be reminded to choose their questions carefully and write on what they understand best.

Question 6 (Letter to five-year-old self)

Responses, on the whole, were focused and informed by a strong degree of personal experience and effective reflection on it. There were common areas of advice – such as peer pressure and romantic advice – but also some individual and telling anecdotes drawn from the candidate's own development, successes and failures in real life. The responses were more directed to a teenage audience; work hard at school, get good grades, etc. The more successful ones, which emphasised the need to play, read and not be glued to the TV or computer screen, were often engaging. Most were clearly able to use voice in this question to varying degrees of success.

Question 7 (Men need their rights)

This was not a popular choice. Some candidates turned this title into a gender equality essay without quite adapting appropriate material to suit the focus of the question. 'Men's rights' was frequently turned into an argument for women's rights, with the main focus forgotten. Most tried to offer alternative points of view with examples, which was pleasing. At best, answers were detailed, developed and mature, combining apposite examples and arguments with an individual and measured sense of reasoning and assessment.

Question 8 (Parents' Legal Responsibilities)

This was a popular choice and presented candidates with the challenge of adopting stances not always in tune with their own experiences. There were some lively and strongly argued ideas and candidates in the main could voice the arguments from a parent's point of view as well as their own. However, weaker answers re-wrote or simplified the question as a description of how parents should bring up their children. This in itself would not have been a problem had they brought the question back to legal responsibility; most did not. Many failed to separate the arguments. The few who did so struggled with development of ideas beyond two or three, or produced unbalanced arguments.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23
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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/91
Poetry and Prose

Key Messages

- For high marks, candidates need to know their texts in great detail to make secure references and use quotations to support points.
- Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must be very detailed, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. Poetry answers should focus on the set poem.
- Answers should focus on the writing of the texts, avoiding dwelling on the biography of their authors.
- Candidates should focus more closely on the language, imagery and structure of prose and drama as well as poetry.

General Comments

In the course of this session, Examiners read some sophisticated and subtle responses to the questions on the examination papers, demonstrating an assured knowledge and understanding of the texts, often accompanied by a warm appreciation of them. In many cases, not just at the top of the mark range, it was very clear from the engagement of the writing that candidates had enjoyed their set texts and gained much from their studies. Those who showed an appreciation of the writers' craft, their choices of form, structure, imagery and language, were the most successful, recognising not only plot and character, but crucially, how those elements are constructed in the writing.

The skills of close reading and analysis are particularly important in the passage based questions, where every question demands this kind of close commentary on the writing of the extract or poem. All answers on the paper require quotation to support points, but it is vital that candidates examine the writing of the selected passages in very close analytical detail, whether it is poetry, prose or drama.

Question Specific Comments 9695/31

Question 1

Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This question was relished by some candidates, who chose appropriate poems and wrote informed answers about the nature of the personas created in them by Hardy. A particularly successful choice was 'The Ruined Maid', with strong answers looking at the interplay of the two women's voices as they discuss the changes that have occurred. There were perceptive comments on the simple, uneducated vocabulary used to create the voice of the central speaker and very strong responses noted the ambiguity of 'melia's replies. Other poems used effectively were 'He Never Expected Much', 'The Man He Killed' and 'The Haunter'. Candidates who attempted the question with reference only to Emma poems struggled, as did those whose writing lapsed into a narrative summary of the chosen poems without fully acknowledging the question.

- (b) Answers on 'The Going' were often constrained by accounts of Hardy's life and relationships, sometimes serving as a whole page introduction with no direct relevance to the question. The question asked candidates to show their understanding of Hardy's choices of language, imagery and form in the expression of grief; it did not ask for the biography of the writer. A little context can be useful, used relevantly and judiciously, but here it was more often an impediment to a successful answer to the question. More focused answers looked at Hardy's use of pathetic fallacy, the questioning tone, the use of memory, the change of pronouns from 'you' and 'me' to 'we' and the disrupted punctuation of the final stanza. Some good answers discussed competently the varying forms of grief: angry, melancholic, hallucinatory, wistful, regretful and resigned grief were just some of the many forms discussed by candidates. There was less comment on the slightly varied stanza pattern through the poem and comments on the rhyme scheme usually did not progress beyond stating its pattern.

Question 2

Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Those writing on Heaney tended to opt for this question on 'Helmet', which elicited some very thoughtful and probing responses. Close commentary was evident and there was strong focus on 'ways'. The link between the helmet and Bobby Breen was effectively discussed in most of the answers, with the progression of the narrator's emotions clearly appreciated. There were thoughtful comments on the imagery used, such as 'scarlet letters', 'tinctures of sweat and hair oil' and 'fire-thane's shield'. Enjoyment of the poet's craft was clearly evident.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves

- (a) There were some odd choices of poems in responses to this question. 'Friend' and 'For Heidi with Blue Hair' formed perhaps the most successful pairing, but candidates also used 'My Parents', 'Praise for my Mother' and even 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' successfully. Most answers showed a good knowledge of the poems, with strong answers being able to support points with detailed quotations and careful comments on how meaning is shaped. The instruction to compare often stimulated candidates into interesting points and helped them structure their responses. Less successful answers gave a narrative account of the chosen poems; where the poems chosen were inappropriate, a narrative approach highlighted this problem.
- (b) 'Childhood' was an immensely popular poem and provoked some thoughtful, detailed and perceptive responses. Despite – or perhaps because – the poem is so short, candidates found plenty to write about, engaging really closely with the details of the poem. Comments were made on the childish tone and vocabulary in the first section, compared with the more sophisticated lexis of the second half of the poem. Candidates also noted the altered perspective from generalisation ('grown-up people') to particularity ('great-aunt Etty's friend'), from childish perception ('small fat snakes') to specifics ('onyx') and what starts as jolly ('I used to think') ends rather sadly ('And I was helplessly young'). The difference between 'grand' and 'groped' was noted both thematically and poetically, as was the difference between 'chose' and 'helplessly'. There was good comment too on the symbolism of the unstrung beads and the child's observation from the banister. The form and structure were discussed particularly well, with most candidates recognising the development from lines 1-4 and then 5-10. Rhyme scheme changes were noted and successfully linked to the question, with the change from a nursery rhyme approach to the more mature.

Question 4

Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) Candidates responded well to this question and had no difficulty in finding suitable material from the novel to illustrate family tensions. Some insightful responses were centred on the character of Babamukuru and the way in which his role in the novel is pivotal to this question. Financial, moral and educational problems and the aspiration towards 'Englishness' were often recognised as the source of the tensions. While less successful answers listed examples of family tensions without analytical engagement, more sustained answers chose to discuss particular episodes from the novel, looking at Dangarembga's presentation of Shona culture and the characterisation of Babamukuru, Tambu, Nyasha, Maiguru and Lucia in particular. Strong answers pinpointed cultural difficulties as the underlying cause of tension, including trouble over the suppression of women, their needs and ambitions.
- (b) Many answers skimmed over the surface of this rich passage and missed its core, just as Tambu misses the seriousness of Nyasha's letter. Under the 'light-hearted and gay' tone of the letter, Nyasha explores her essential anxieties and feelings of isolation from family, culture and friends, yet though Tambu refers to her 'pang of guilt', she never responds. The significance of the content and tone of the letter, and of Tambu's reaction, were often left without developed comment. More successful answers engaged in detail with the tone of Nyasha's letter and the ways in which Tambu's response is presented, with perceptive candidates looking at the water imagery and some commenting perceptively on the irony of the last sentence of the extract. Good answers focused closely on Dangarembga's choice of language, for example the author's use of 'galloped by so quickly', 'torrent of news' and 'bursting to be told' to highlight Tambu's excitement at school which she wishes so much to share with Nyasha when she meets her, oblivious to the fact that the 'svelte, sensuous me' is an alarming and not positive image. A few impressive answers explored the critical impression created of Tambu through her own narration.

Question 5

EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) This question allowed many candidates to demonstrate a strong grasp of the novel as they explored its structure. Some answers conveyed an understanding of how the different religions are presented in the three sections, often linked to the weather. Such answers considered how each section has a distinctive 'atmosphere', with Mosque consisting largely of social encounters and discussion, Caves dominated by intense heat and feeling claustrophobic, and Temple more relaxed with an emphasis on the spiritual. While some answers were limited to an account of the plot of each section, there were many careful and thoughtful responses exploring both the significance of this structure to Forster's aims in the novel and its effectiveness in guiding the readers' responses.
- (b) There were many enthusiastic answers to this question on the bridge party, with many candidates considering the implications and ironies of that name. There was much focus on the unsympathetic characterisation of Mrs Turton, looking at her dialogue in particular, while many answers also showed keen awareness of Forster's use of the setting to separate the two groups. Mrs Turton was frequently contrasted to Forster's presentation of Mrs Moore and Adela, here seen as much more open and sympathetic characters who refer to their guests as 'ladies' and refer to arrival in 'their country'. The Indian women in the passage were sometimes neglected, but they produced fruitful analysis too, with some comments that the similarities in Forster's presentation of the women outweighed the differences: they had to obey the men, irrespective of race. Others noted that the Indian women are as uncertain as Mrs Turton and linked this to the novel's concern with the possibility of equal relationships and friendship between English and Indian. A very few strong answers noted the presence of the narrative voice, creating humour and sardonic commentary which guide the readers' responses.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) Most candidates attempting this question paired 'Of White Hairs and Cricket' with 'To Da-duh, In Memoriam', though there were also effective answers on 'Sandpiper', 'The People Before' and 'The Door in the Wall'. A few answers were limited by inappropriate choices; 'The Open Boat' and 'A Horse and Two Goats', for example, were unwisely attempted. Less successful answers retold aspects of the stories which involved interaction between children and adults, but better answers explored ways in which these relationships were presented and the implications for the stories themselves. It was very encouraging that many candidates had a detailed knowledge of the stories, with the strongest answers also considering how the relationships were portrayed. These considered such issues as narrative voice, characterisation, symbolism and structure – in particular epiphanic moments and the conclusions of stories.
- (b) Most candidates engaged with the central concern of the development of the narrator's feelings, but fewer engaged with *how* meaning is shaped. Some answers were also limited by candidates' apparent lack of knowledge of the rest of the story. Some were puzzled by the reference to the *Milice* and the *maquisards* and seemed unaware of the outcome of this relationship. Stronger answers were very aware of the context of the war and the ability of love to blossom within its constant threat. Some picked up the reference in the first paragraph to 'soft rubber' and explored the story's symbolism of tyres and inner tubes. Candidates who managed to focus on the writing of the passage commented on the conversational tone, which is enhanced by the use of punctuation such as brackets to suggest asides to the reader; the narrator's eye for detail, for example in his planning of the meeting with the girl, which shows his determination to get everything right; and the use of humour which helps to alleviate the tension of the wartime situation. Many candidates clearly empathised with Thorpe's presentation of the nervous exhilaration of a young person in love, but perceptive responses matched this with the developing feelings of wartime oppression. The best showed their awareness of the irony of this retrospective narration by a mature, unmarried man, carrying with him the knowledge of his inadvertent killing of the girl the adores.

8695/91

Question 7

Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part 1*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The few answers to this question noted the formality of the blank verse and the initial courtesy between the representatives of the two sides, but noted how that courtesy declines as Hotspur's speech develops into bitterness and recrimination. Stronger answers noted the careful structure of Blunt's second speech, noting the caesurae which pace it, as well as language such as 'hostility' and 'cruelty', balanced by 'griefs' and 'confesseth'. Alert candidates noted Hotspur's apparent acknowledgement as the beginning of his response ('The King is kind') before the rest of his speech reveals his irony and finally tests Blunt's patience.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar named Desire*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/92
Poetry and Prose

Key Messages

- For high marks, candidates need to know their texts in great detail to make secure references and use quotations to support points.
- Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must be very detailed, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. Poetry answers should focus on the set poem.
- Answers should focus on the writing of the texts, avoiding dwelling on the biography of their authors.
- Candidates should focus more closely on the language, imagery and structure of prose and drama as well as poetry.

General Comments

In the course of this session, Examiners read some sophisticated and subtle responses to the questions on the examination papers, demonstrating an assured knowledge and understanding of the texts, often accompanied by a warm appreciation of them. In many cases, not just at the top of the mark range, it was very clear from the engagement of the writing that candidates had enjoyed their set texts and gained much from their studies. Those who showed an appreciation of the writers' craft, their choices of form, structure, imagery and language, were the most successful, recognising not only plot and character, but crucially, how those elements are constructed in the writing.

The skills of close reading and analysis are particularly important in the passage based questions, where every question demands this kind of close commentary on the writing of the extract or poem. All answers on the paper require quotation to support points, but it is vital that candidates examine the writing of the selected passages in very close analytical detail, whether it is poetry, prose or drama.

Question Specific Comments 9695/32

Question 1

Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This question provoked some interesting answers. Most candidates who attempted it steered clear of the Emma poems, with 'The Man He Killed' being particularly popular, paired with poems such as 'In Tenebris' and 'The Darkling Thrush'. Successful answers looked at Hardy's linguistic and structural control which holds emotional moments up to scrutiny. The way 'The Man He Killed' examines ideas of death and killing in warfare was compared with traditional war poetry, while candidates looked at how feelings of despair are compared with the symbolic 'caroling' thrush. Some candidates, however, did choose Emma poems, often successfully showing how Hardy suppresses deep emotion and seems to reflect on it through the control of memory, symbol and tightly ordered stanza construction.

- (b) Candidates who avoided biography and concentrated on the writing of the poem on the question paper usually did well, though some answers showed confusion, some candidates taking the poem to be an active conversation. Better answers showed a good understanding of the retrospective nature of the poem, the imagining of a former moment and the imaginative creation of what the departed one might say. Such answers sometimes explored the suddenness and unexpectedness of death shown at the opening of the second stanza and the finality of it made clear at the poem's conclusion. Candidates commented on the effects of such details as the caesurae in lines 3 and 13, the euphemisms of 'lie', 'halt everlastingly', 'resting-place' and the climactic list of abstract nouns in the final line.

Question 2

Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves

- (a) There were a number of answers to this question where the candidates gave quite detailed accounts of their chosen poems, but without clear reference to the question. Confident candidates recognised the opportunity to demonstrate not only their knowledge, but their appreciation of the range and effects of imagery; there were some very sophisticated and detailed answers. The range of references to nurture and the natural world in 'Praise Song for my Mother' were often discussed, alongside the symbolic imagery of 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death', the violent and despairing metaphors of 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', the imagery of pace and distance in 'Meeting at Night', among others. The best answers carefully considered the implications and connotations of imagery, considering the effect on the reader.
- (b) This was a popular question and produced some thoughtful, developed and detailed answers. Many candidates noted that the narrator addresses the poem to his 'Friend' and builds on the shared memories to arrive at a very tentative hope for the future and the 'troubled world'. There was often appreciation of the conversational free verse, while the symbolism in the tree, the clay floor and the fort were recognised. There were some thoughtful comments on the use of italics to isolate the third stanza. Many candidates had a solid understanding of the poem and were able to develop individual interpretations from careful reading of language, form and imagery.

Question 4

Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) Some responses to this question lapsed into narrative and character summary, but more successful answers were able to discriminate between men and male authority and candidates wrote perceptively about ways in which the novel challenges its own cultural background. Babamukuru dominated many of the responses, but perceptive candidates compared him with Jeremiah, while considering Chido and Nhamo as representatives of the younger generation. Many candidates wrote from a largely feminist perspective, looking at the ways in which Tambu, Nyasha and their mothers suffer under and sometimes challenge male authority, while others took a wider political view. Answers usually showed a confident knowledge of the text and an engaged appreciation of its issues.

- (b) Many answers to this question worked through the passage offering paraphrase illustrated with some quotation, missing the instruction to 'Comment closely'. Some candidates offered general discussion of the family relationships in the novel with minimal focus on the selected extract. Neither of these approaches addressed the task. More confident candidates recognised that the question demanded that they look closely at the writing of the passage and noted that the focus was on the presentation of 'Tambu's view' of those relationships. Such answers examined the creation of the narrative voice in the passage, taking the reader into its confidence and balancing quotations from others with personal judgements, which becomes clearer with the divergence of the different views of Lucia.

Question 5

EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) It was clear that many candidates had considered this central question in their preparation of the novel, though many answers were restricted to accounts of particular friendships. There was much discussion of Fielding and Aziz, and Aziz and Mrs Moore, but such answers were limited unless they moved from the particular to consider the wider issues at stake, as implied by Fielding at the end of the novel. Answers which explored these ideas varied, as some stressed an optimistic and others a pessimistic view of the question. Some thoughtful responses placed the argument within a historical and political context, while others looked at the question from a religious angle. Often such answers considered the structure and settings of the novel, showing a sophisticated understanding of Forster's writing.
- (b) There were a few, but very few, narrative and descriptive responses to this question. As the opening to the novel, nearly all candidates were clearly familiar with it and the chapter often enabled candidates to write about context and language in an impressive way, identifying and writing about the language and metaphors and making links to the novel. The presence of the Marabar Caves in the opening and closing lines of the chapter was seen as a foreboding note, particularly when linked with the 'fists and fingers' description. Many candidates wrote well on the contrasts Forster creates between the two views of Chandrapore, one dominated by 'rubbish', 'filth' and 'mud', the other 'a tropical pleasance, washed by a noble river'. Alert candidates were able to suggest the sardonic humour of some of Forster's narrative comments. The paragraphs on the sky were often seen to represent a unifying force above humanity, under which the whole is unified and made beautiful, and candidates who saw this linked it to the central concerns of the novel.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) The most popular choices of story were 'Sandpiper' and 'Tyres', with some answers broadening the definition or object of love to include 'The Open Boat', 'Of White Hairs and Cricket', 'The People Before' and 'To Da-duh, In Memoriam'. 'Sandpiper' was perhaps the most successfully treated, as candidates were able to explore the language, tone and metaphors of this story effectively, thus addressing the question's concern with 'different ways' of exploring love. Some candidates also dealt well with the central tyre metaphor in Thorpe's story as well as the control of narrative voice. Structure was considered with 'Of White Hairs and Cricket' as candidates noted the contrast in the boy's view of his father between the opening of the story and its closing.
- (b) In most cases, it was clear that 'The People Before' was a well-known and liked story, as this passage produced some developed and thoughtful responses. Many answers took the relationships in turn, which proved a more effective approach than working through the passage chronologically. On the whole, the relationships involving the father were more effectively dealt with than that between the brothers, though some noted the narrator's patience and acceptance of Jim, despite 'his difference from most people'. The best answers explored the voice of the narrator in some detail and several noted the absence of the mother from his narration. There were also interesting comments on the narrator's perception of his father as a strong man in charge of his 'kingdom', but one who 'accepted defeat' in his 'battle for Jim'.

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Question 7

Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) There was a small number of responses to this question, but candidates who chose it discussed the genesis and development of Alan's worship of Equus through an examination of relevant episodes. Dysart's own situation was also considered, looking at the way the play contrasts Alan's 'faith' with his loss of it.
- (b) Some answers dwelt too heavily on the context of the extract, but there were answers which showed some depth and detail, particularly with regards to characterisation. The most successful answers came from candidates who examined Shaffer's dramatic purpose and methods and wrote about the extract as a piece of drama. These looked at the structure and tone of Dora's long speech and contrasted it with the short bursts of confrontational dialogue between Dysart and Alan which follow. Some candidates were able to comment on how the action moves quickly from scene to scene without pause, enabled by Shaffer's staging of the whole play.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part 1*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar named Desire*

- (a) Too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Candidates responded well to this confrontation between Blanche and Stanley, often commenting on Stanley's ease of control in the scene. Such answers examined stage directions closely, contrasting Stanley's '*leisurely*' and '*insultingly*' with Blanche's '*shrinks*', '*frightened*' and '*fiercely*', matched with the language and tone of their dialogue. The strength of answers like this was candidates' ability to visualise the scene on stage and show a real appreciation of how drama works.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/93
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Question Specific Comments 9695/33

Question 1

Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Most candidates discussed well the idea that the men might have been friends had they not been set against each other in a war, but fewer engaged closely with Hardy's language and structure. Candidates sometimes discussed the first two stanzas in some detail, but did not extend that to the rest of the poem, missing opportunities to comment on structure and form. Some candidates did comment on the repetition of the word 'because' in the third stanza, separated by the dash, seen to be representing the speaker's difficulty in accounting for his actions. Several candidates commented on the sense of guilt and regret in the poem, but only the most analytical candidates linked Hardy's frequent use of dashes and words such as 'because' and 'although' in the middle of the poem to a questioning of actions and an examination of conscience in relation to soldiers and warfare. Some candidates noted the conversational quality of the poem, its colloquial language and the fact that it is written within speech marks, making it sound, perhaps, like a conversation a survivor might have over a drink 'where any bar is'.

Question 2

Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were a very few answers to this question, which generally showed some appreciation of Heaney's use of the senses to describe the spade: the physical feeling and the aural quality of its 'ring'. There were comments on the precision required to make it and the choice of diction, as in 'The shaft to be socketed in dead true and dead straight'. Some candidates were able to articulate an appreciation of the combined effects of rhythm, sentence structure with the repeated use of 'and' and the sound effects of the alliteration and assonance in lines like 'Lightsome and pleasant to lean on or cut with or lift'.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) This was a popular choice and produced answers across the range, some very thoughtful and informative on the cultural significance of the praise song. Many answers commented on the connotations of the poem's metaphors of 'water', 'moon's eye' and 'sunrise', discussing the life-giving necessities and positive associations relating to motherhood that they represent. Fewer candidates gave as much thought to commenting on the connotations of the final lines of each stanza that post-modified these metaphors, though several commented on the change to a different type of metaphor and memory in the fourth stanza, sometimes linking them to the metaphors of the first three. The change in stanza structure at this point was often noted too, while the repeated 'You were' drew much comment. Relatively few candidates, though, mentioned the lack of punctuation in the poem, or the significance of its absence.

Question 4

Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Candidates were usually able to give a good account of Nyasha's character, with some reference to the passage, but concentrated discussion of the ways in which she is presented by Dangarembga was less common. Some answers honed in on Tambu's first person narration and her commentary on Nyasha's condition, observant and sympathetic. Answers focusing on the presentation of Nyasha read greater significance into Tambu's statements that Nyasha's battle was one of 'self versus surrender' and on her detailed observations of Nyasha's growing emotional problems. Many of these descriptive elements in the passage were overlooked in other answers – the fact that Nyasha sobs 'great lumps of pain' and that she was 'grieving' for example, or the disturbing level of psychological detachment Nyasha had reached where Tambu has to pass her hand in front of her eyes and 'shout very loudly to bring her back.'

Question 5

EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) This question elicited some interesting responses from candidates who grasped the particular thrust of the question, though pinning down and elaborating upon textual evidence showing Forster's presentation of Adela's judgement of Ronny proved more challenging for some. Confident candidates referred to the third person narration, which offers comments, and the choice of diction characterising both Ronny and Adela. The most successful answers looked closely at the presentation of dialogue, scene description, and Adela's state of mind and feelings. Some noted the manipulation of reader sympathies via dramatic irony (Ronny's dialogue about Aziz forgetting his tie-pin). Such observations allowed candidates to combine detailed appreciation of the selected passage with their wider knowledge and understanding of the text.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) The most popular and successful combinations of stories chosen by candidates were 'Sandpiper' and 'Tyres' or 'Sandpiper' and 'Journey'. Some candidates wrote about 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The People Before' and 'Of White Hairs and Cricket'. While some answers lapsed into narrative commentary or paraphrase, better responses discussed how family relationships were explored through the language, form or structure of the stories. For example, candidates writing about 'Sandpiper' were able to comment on how Soueif handles past and present narrative time, and how this enhances readers' perceptions of what has changed in the family relationships. Commenting on Soueif's use of tone and symbolism was also very fruitful for many candidates. These kinds of comments provided a platform from which to compare and contrast the techniques used in the second story, leading to confident answers.
- (b) Though a popular question, many candidates found Grace's style elusive. They often found it difficult to discuss narrative mode, narrative voice, and the narrative point of view of the passage. Many answers did not discuss these concepts or use critical vocabulary that explained how, in literary terms, Grace communicates her presentation of the old man. Some answers did mention that fact that the passage is written in the third person, but did not explicitly discuss the way that Grace maintains a very close focus on the old man's thoughts and feelings. Some responses centred on candidates' impressions of the old man's character, such as 'he is old but does not think of himself as old', and then using direct reference to support these points (e.g. l.6: 'even an old man like him, but not what you would call properly old.'). There were some comments on the colloquial tone and the shortness of some of the sentences, though these often needed more focus on how the sentence structure conveys the sense of the character's voice and feelings.

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Question 7

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- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
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Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part 1*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar named Desire*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The question produced answers across the range. Some candidates clearly explained the context and the significance of losing Belle Reve and the growing animosity between Stanley and Blanche. Some answers were limited by a running commentary approach to the extract, drawing out examples of Stella's protectiveness towards Blanche, Stanley's resentment of his 'cold plate' and the requests to treat Blanche with consideration. Strong candidates were able to focus on Stanley's suspicion and aggression by commenting on his working-class idioms like 'monkey doings', 'just dandy', 'gander', 'what in hell' and the tone of 'Sister Blanche' as well as the aggression in his short questions, noting the repeated 'So?' Less attention was often paid to Stella's language, though some pointed out her concern for Blanche's nerves and the indulgence in her instructions for Stanley to 'try to understand her and be nice... admire her dress'. Less assured

candidates drifted into a discussion of Stanley and Stella's relationship, missing the thrust of the question.