

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

<p>Paper 8693/01 Passages for Comment</p>

General comments

The paper facilitated the whole range of performance. There were many fluent, sensitive and promising responses, and also those which demonstrated limited understanding of the texts, relying on surface identification of features in the analysis sections. Yet, where there was limited understanding of linguistic and literary aspects, less able candidates were, in general, able to compensate for their lapses by offering some sound material in the directed writing sections. Candidates do need to practise analytical aspects, though, as much as the creative pieces: encouraging candidates to work through passages in sections looking for similarities and differences in mood and tone would provide a solid foundation (and this was pleasingly evident in some of the responses to the Orwell passage in **Question 1**); beyond this, practice in commenting on (not just identifying) aspects of imagery and register can be nurtured. What qualities or associations do particular words and phrases have? How do they fit in to the context of the passage at this point or at earlier/later stages? Similarly, candidates need to be aware of particular directed writing formats: letters, newspaper reports and so on. Some candidates set out their analytical answers in note form or with subheadings: this should be discouraged.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates answered this well. Even less able candidates grasped the overall meaning and the three main sections of the account. There was some sensitive, personal and mature interpretation of Orwell's attitudes and values. The presence of the dog evoked some pleasing awareness of its contrasting role and how the response conveyed in the only use of dialogue reinforced the link between the way the creature was treated and the prisoner himself.
- (b) Almost all candidates engaged in creating an apt style for this, although some focused purely on the incident in the passage, forgetting that this was meant to be a book of essays. The most skilful selected stylistic aspects of the original passage to comment on the tenor and register of the other imaginary essays.

Question 2

- (a) There were some pleasing analytical observations from more able candidates, commenting incisively on the humour and the child's viewpoint. There were some discriminating comments on how figurative language was used to achieve the writer's purposes. This question allowed candidates to explore a more light-hearted text in comparison to the other more serious extracts. Less able candidates tended to rely on identification of surface features in this question in particular.
- (b) The better answers here selected relevant details aptly and sensitively (again the need for candidates to select appropriate material is imperative in planning their directed writing answers as well as reviewing the generic features of particular formats); less focused answers suffered because they moved too far away from the passage and substituted alternative narrative strands.

Question 3

- (a) On the whole, candidates responded sensitively to the extract. Able candidates sensed the bitter one-sided tone clearly and worked through the material in sections, noting progressive changes. Some candidates, though, felt Steinbeck was being even-handed and was weighting up both sides and remained objective. There were some nice comments about the ways in which the writer used the language of the apparently threatened population to highlight their intolerance.
- (b) In general, this was handled competently, especially where the appropriate format was used. Candidates should be reminded about the need for clear paragraphing – it was not always evident here.

Paper 8693/02

Composition

General comments

The paper produced a pleasing overall performance with many sophisticated and proficient responses across a range of styles of writing. There was a good variety of answers at all levels. Candidates produced a lot of enjoyable and sustained essays, underpinned by careful planning and informed arguments for the most part. Sometimes discursive writing resulted in one-sided responses rather than a discussion of alternative viewpoints. Time management was good and few rubric infringements occurred. Centres appeared to have prepared candidates well for the requirements and expectations of the paper. Candidates seemed to enjoy the tasks they faced. At times, technical lapses were a problem – for example, candidates should check for consistency in the use of tenses and agreement between noun and verb.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Successful candidates managed to present the contrasts vividly and sensitively, employing skilful vocabulary and turns of phrase. Less successful answers did not build effectively on the foundation of the first half of the essay and drifted in the second part: a more sustained use of time for planning might be advised here.

Question 2

This was not such a popular choice. There were some sound responses but candidates did not always let their imaginations loose. Answers were sound and competent rather than inspiring.

Question 3

This was a very popular choice. Candidates were enthusiastic and there were some really imaginative responses in many cases. Candidates should be advised here not to be derivative to the point of simply lifting plots and characters from other recognisable texts and films. Cliché endings – such as 'it was a dream' – are also advised against. In a few cases, lack of planning was evident here too: weaker answers meandered with no real or sustained purpose.

Question 4

This was also a popular choice and encouraged some real efforts to engage with the chosen genre. There were some genuinely excellent answers here but also some mediocre ones where personal fantasy made some scripts exaggerated and implausible.

Question 5

This was a popular choice and many drew on their personal experience to explore and evaluate the issues of the title. This led to a lot of convincing and persuasive writing with an appropriate use of voice and strategies.

Question 6

This was also popular and elicited lively, well-paced answers with a clear sense of audience, purpose and effect. Better answers explored a variety of health-related issues, both physical and mental.

Question 7

There were some genuinely provocative and challenging responses here which investigated philosophical, moral, religious and ethical issues in depth. The many who opted for this wrote convincingly and articulately with an effective sense of voice and persuasive techniques. Less able candidates tended to be dismissive rather than investigative.

Question 8

This was slightly less popular as a choice but was tackled effectively by the majority; arguments were handled with a clear sense of balance and tact, supported by the relevant use of specific examples and possibilities.