

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **GCSE 1901**

Report on the Units

June 2009

1901/MS/R/09

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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CONTENTS

GCSE English Literature (1901)

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Unit/Content	Page
2441 Drama Post-1914	1
2442 Poetry and Prose Post - 1914	8
2443 Pre – 1914 Texts (Coursework)	15
2447 Post – 1914 Texts (Coursework)	15
2444 Pre-1914 Texts	16
2445 Drama Pre-1914	22
2446 Poetry and Prose Pre - 1914	24
2448 Post- 1914 Texts	30
Grade Thresholds	31

2441 Drama Post-1914

General Comments (including 2445)

Examiners were very impressed with the overall quality of the entry in this session and there was general agreement that standards were higher than on any other occasion. The proportion of candidates entered for the Foundation Tier papers has continued to shrink (from one in four of all 2441 candidates in May 2005 to something like one in ten for this session) and although a few Higher Tier entrants would have benefitted from the bullet-pointed prompts of many Foundation Tier questions, it was clear that Centres had made shrewd tiering decisions. There were some damaging question misreads, so that the wrong characters or the wrong moments were mistakenly tackled, but there were very few unfinished answers or rubric infringements or multiple answers. It appears Centres have ensured that their candidates are intimately acquainted with the well-established format of the Drama Units. It was felt that the candidates' knowledge of their set play was almost universally sound and that thorough, sensitive teaching had enabled many to write with remarkable individuality, engagement and insight, and to communicate genuine enjoyment. There was much less evidence of unassimilated ideas and of pre-packaged answers and many more examples of tenacious attention to the terms of the question, originality of thought and well-informed personal response. In fact many grizzled examiners found themselves astonished at the levels of emotional maturity and sophisticated understanding displayed by fifteen and sixteen year-old candidates in a forty-five minute exam. "Assured...highly accomplished...dazzling...a joy to read..." were the kind of comments appearing regularly in examiners' reports.

Journey's End remains by far the most popular post-1914 Drama text, closely followed by *Death of a Salesman* and *Whose Life is it Anyway?*, and although *The Caretaker* remains a minority choice, it is clearly taught and studied by a number of dedicated Pinter enthusiasts. *Romeo and Juliet* remains the most popular pre-1914 choice, followed by *Much Ado About Nothing*, with the non-Shakespearean options, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, occupying a tiny but gradually increasing share of the market. The pattern of question choice once again varied significantly from Centre to Centre. Although the second question on each play, which tends not to be anchored to a single starting-point in the text, proved to be more popular in this session, it was not unusual to find every candidate from a Centre either tackling the extract-based question or, less frequently, the empathic question as if their options had been deliberately circumscribed prior to the exam. Nevertheless there were many outstanding extract-based answers which successfully balanced close attention to the dramatic detail of the passage with a broader view of the dramatic context, and also many empathic answers which adopted the voices of Biff or Aston or Raleigh, for example, were so convincing that they could have been penned by Miller or Pinter or Sherriff themselves. A highly experienced examiner admitted that she had been moved to tears by one of the many excellent portrayals of Biff after his father's funeral.

Finding an effective starting-point for their answer proved a difficult challenge for some candidates and too much time was wasted in the production of introductory paragraphs which simply reworked the terms of the question without beginning to answer it, or - even more damaging - launched into unhelpful biographical details about the playwrights, or provided a meaty historical background for the text as if addressing the social/historical/cultural contexts assessment objective (which is not required for the Drama Units). Many candidates had been thoroughly and effectively coached in the art of constructing an exam answer but some of the scaffolding lists and lengthy mnemonics, often fully listed and explained in the opening paragraph, were so elaborate that they assumed lives of their own and almost entirely obscured the nature of the question being tackled. A learned agenda for all extract-based questions such as "context, plot, setting, character, theme, lighting, stage directions, dialogue, language..." often encourages candidates to reserve a paragraph for each heading irrespective of the focus of the question and leads them away from the dramatic detail of a specific moment, into sweeping and

repetitive comment. Examiners' hearts tend to sink when opening paragraphs contain topic lists or sweeping statements like "Sherriff uses dialogue and stage directions..." and say nothing specific about the play or the question. Time would be much better spent establishing the exact location of the extract in the play, clarifying which characters are onstage, what they know and what they are feeling at this point, and what the audience knows and is likely to be feeling as well. Introductory paragraphs likely to lead to successful answers are those which go straight for the dramatic context and, for instance, point out: that Linda has just told her sons about Willy's suicide attempts and therefore they are seizing on the Bill Oliver plan to lift his spirits or that Biff is so protective of his mother because he knows about his father's infidelity (*Death of a Salesman*, Question 1); or that Ken knows that Travers is a psychiatrist visiting to assess him and assist Emerson in confining him under the Mental Health Act (*Whose Life is it Anyway?*, Question 7); or that the Nurse and the audience know that arrangements have been made for Romeo and Juliet to be married, and that Juliet is waiting impatiently for this news (*Romeo and Juliet*, Question 4, 2445). Similarly the starting-point for successful empathic answers has to be a return to the prescribed moment in the text to ascertain exactly what the character knows and has just experienced: Raleigh, for instance, is newly arrived in the trenches, and will have noted the chilly reception he has received from Stanhope, as opposed to the friendly helpfulness of Osborne and Trotter, but he will have nothing to say about Hibbert because he is yet to meet him (*Journey's End*, Question 12).

The majority of Centres had clearly encouraged their candidates to see their text as a play script, to visualise the action and to consider the impact on a theatre audience, and the benefits of watching or being involved in a live performance and of classroom-based drama activities like role-play, hot-seating and the presentation of key scenes, were strikingly evident in many answers. Nevertheless some candidates see no distinction between the Drama Units and the Poetry/ Prose Units, approach the plays as "reading matter", refer only to "the reader" and convey little sense of a theatrical experience. At its worst this approach can lead to a minute linguistic analysis of the stage directions, as if assuming that these words would be read out by a narrator in the theatre, or an obsession with the way the playwright uses punctuation. Previous reports have often commented on the damaging tendency to log features like dashes, ellipses and exclamation marks and ascribe astonishing dramatic powers to them, without engaging what is actually being said or responding to the onstage action, as if the candidates see the plays as written texts only. For some candidates the identification of features, such as stichomythia, polysyndeton or a variety of lexical fields, became an end in itself so that the primary focus on the dramatic action of the play was obscured.

Generalising about the findings of over forty examiners based on the work of 30,000 candidates is always a difficult exercise but after thirteen sessions assessing the Drama Units since May 2003, it's possible to identify the features which tend to characterise successful and less successful answers.

Generally

Successful candidates:

- see the texts as scripts for performance and themselves as members of an audience
- see the stage directions as part of the dramatic action of the scene and visualise this onstage action
- pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and balance attention to each strand of the question
- construct purposeful opening paragraphs which focus specifically on a particular question about a particular play
- select and integrate brief quotations to support and amplify their ideas
- avoid formulaic approaches and trust their own direct personal response.

Less successful candidates:

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

- see the texts as pieces of writing only and themselves as readers
- see the stage directions merely as a pieces of tacked-on written communication and ignore the onstage action
- start with a pre-packaged introduction which is unhelpfully generalised, biographical or list-like and says nothing specific about the play or the question
- lose the focus of the question and import prepared material which has very little direct relevance, or misread the question entirely and write about the wrong character or wrong moment
- become bogged down in feature-logging and detached from the dramatic action
- work through a pre-digested agenda without fully engaging the question or the play, and without expressing a personal response.

Extract-based Questions

Successful candidates:

- devote at least two-thirds of answers to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself but still convey understanding of the whole-play context
- start by returning to their text to locate the extract in the context of the whole play
- establish the dramatic context for the characters and the audience quickly and economically in the opening paragraph
- ground their whole-play reflections firmly in the detail of the extract
- pay close attention to the way the dramatic action evolves throughout the extract.

Less successful candidates:

- produce generalised answers with little attention to the printed passage, or approach the extract as if it is an “unseen” exercise and give little sense of the rest of the play
- produce a sweeping opening paragraph with an all-purpose list of headings and largely ignore the question
- rarely quote from the extract or copy out huge chunks unaccompanied by any attempt at commentary
- miss the reference to “this moment” in the question and as a result answer the question on the play as a whole with little reference to the printed extract.

Discursive Questions

Successful candidates:

- focus rigorously on (and sometimes challenge) the terms of the question and maintain relevance throughout
- range selectively across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments
- balance their attention to double-stranded questions on two characters/two moments/two elements
- show a sharp awareness of audience response
- quote shrewdly and economically
- reach a relevant conclusion.

Less successful candidates:

- become bogged down in one moment in the play so that the range of reference becomes too narrow
- rely only on the printed extract for the previous question for their ideas and quotations
- spend the bulk of their time on one strand of a two-stranded question

- lose the question entirely and unload pre-packaged and lengthy material about “the American Dream” in *Death of a Salesman* or about coping strategies in *Journey’s End* , or on another previously prepared topic with limited relevance to the question.

Empathic Questions

Successful candidates:

- anchor empathic questions securely to the prescribed moment to focus solely on what that character knows, thinks and feels at that point
- emphasise the character’s dominant feelings and priorities at that point in the play
- select appropriate detail and integrate quotations of the character’s actual words smoothly into the answer
- maintain a limited point-of-view so that knowledge and attitudes are credibly circumscribed
- sustain a voice that rings true in terms of language and tone
- know when to stop and therefore avoid repetition.

Less successful candidates:

- ascribe knowledge, feelings and attitudes to characters in empathic answers which are inappropriate to that character at that point in the play
- work through the character’s experiences in a chronological and unselective way up to the prescribed point without asking “what’s my main feeling at this precise moment?”
- lose the moment entirely and leap on the later moments in the play
- use inappropriate or anachronistic idioms
- over-simplify or stereotype both character and language
- write too much and therefore lose control of point-of-view and repeat themselves.

Comments on Individual Questions

Death of a Salesman

Candidates found the extract for **Question 1** so rich in dramatic incident and significance that examiners could read consecutive answers which achieved very high marks but had very few common elements. Many candidates responded strongly to the mood shifts in the scene, to Willy’s confusion and to the tensions within the family. As the General Comments have already pointed out, an appreciation of the context for this scene was a vital starting-point, and the first bullet on the Foundation Tier paper did prompt some candidates to explore Happy’s motives in suggesting the business idea and to recall the previous scene where Linda pleads for her sons’ help because Willy has been trying to kill himself. Although some candidates did become so caught up in the Loman enthusiasm for the get-rich-quick scheme that they appeared to share their optimism about the future, the majority maintained some critical distance and wrote thoughtfully about dreams and delusions. Textual knowledge was so detailed in some cases that candidates were not only able to assert that Willy criticises Biff’s use of the word “Gee” when he uses it himself, but also able to cite an example of this from beyond the extract (at the end of Act One). Many commented thoughtfully on the speed with which the mood moves from excitement and enthusiasm to anger and frustration. In the very best answers, a detailed attention to the conflict in the scene was informed by a confident overview of its significance, and layers of irony were unpeeled: Biff receiving business advice from a man who is working on commission and is about to be sacked, Willy’s naive faith in personality, the contradictions inherent in his advice, the flaws in the business plan, the truth about Biff and Bill Oliver, the specific reason why Biff is so protective of his mother, Linda’s astonishing loyalty to the man who has betrayed her...and so on. Ideas occasionally strayed a long way from their source in the

extract, and developed into free-standing essays on success, popularity and the American Dream. Some candidates tried to convey the importance of the Boston revelation and explored the reference to Willy's "guilt" in line 45 and even argued persuasively that Biff turns away from Linda's reproach to avoid revealing the truth; others struggled to understand the play's complex chronology and to make it clear that the audience, and of course Biff, already know about the Woman. There were some fascinating arguments about Linda's submissive role from candidates incensed by Willy's treatment of her in this extract, and some powerful ideas about the ultimately counter-productive effect of her colluding in his delusions.

There was much intelligent comment about the contrast between the characters of Willy and Charley in answers to **Question 2**. Charley was often seen as a foil for Willy and his apparently successful business, his financial security and his relationship with his son were often used to highlight Willy's shortcomings. Some answers drifted into rather separate and often rather unbalanced character studies and lost the focus on the "differences", and there was a tendency to ignore the impact of their shared scenes (like the card game or the scene in Charley's office) and the memory scenes where Charley remains comically amused by the furore over the Ebbets Field game and appalled by the building site thefts. Willy's inability to accept reality (and a job from Charley), Charley's repeated question to Willy "when are you going to grow up?" and their contrasting values were often at the heart of convincing answers. Some candidates are still being unhelpfully distracted by the stage direction, "CHARLEY enters in knickers", and attributing bizarre characteristics to him based on a misunderstanding of this term.

There were many highly authentic and often very moving representations of Biff's voice for **Question 3** and the most successful candidates were clearly those who had re-read the Requiem before starting their answer and so had managed to anchor Biff's thoughts and mood precisely to the prescribed moment. Strong feelings about Boston were often believably integrated but the best answers tended to maintain a regretful, but forgiving and philosophical tone, and convey reflections informed by the newly acquired self-knowledge which Biff expresses at his father's funeral. Love for Willy, concern for Happy, sadness about "wrong dreams" and consideration for Linda were often at the heart of the most authentic responses. Answers which were dominated by anger and guilt, or even worse, portrayed Biff as someone convinced by his father's death that he should stay in the city to achieve success in his memory, were much less convincing. Some answers were so angry that they could have been written by the seventeen year-old Biff leaving Willy's hotel in Boston and others expressed the feelings that emerge in the extract printed for Question 1, rather than in the Requiem.

The Caretaker

Question 4 was by far the most popular Pinter option and there were many strong answers which placed the extract in context after Aston's monologue, scrutinised Davies's shifting allegiances, his disloyalty and ingratitude, and saw the moment as part of a broader power struggle. The idea of a "turning-point" in the Higher Tier question occasionally lured candidates into an overlong summary of the action leading to and following the extract, but as is often the case with Pinter answers, there was much impressively detailed analysis of the impact of the language: Davies's wheedling approach to Mick as opposed to his off-hand response to Aston, Mick's taciturnity, the effect of the pauses... Some answers, on the other hand, were rather sweeping and imprecise in their application of a linguistic vocabulary (colloquialisms, lexical fields, interrogatives...) and tended to feature-log without engaging the unfolding dramatic situation. The humorous potential, particularly of Mick's unresponsiveness and then his surprising invitation to Davies to "come up" and "Listen to some Tchaikovsky" was rarely explored.

Answers to both **Question 5** and **Question 6** were rare, but Mick's violence, menace, unpredictability, facility with language, and references to the Electrolux and "Jen-kins", figured prominently in successful answers to Question 5. Once again, the humorous potential of many

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

of his monologues remained largely overlooked as if candidates (understandably perhaps in the forbidding context of the exam room) found it easier to deal with menace than comedy. Material from the extract for Question 4 often featured so strongly in answers to Question 5 that the focus became damagingly narrow almost as if the two questions had become conflated. There were some wonderfully convincing Astons in answer to Question 6 often conveying a new-found decisiveness about Davies, the shed, the future...tempered by painful memories of the electric shock treatment and couched in characteristically restrained language.

Whose Life Is It Anyway?

Once again, the extract-based **Question 7** was by far the most popular choice on this text. The majority focused very effectively on Ken's moving accounts of his final encounters with his fiancée and his parents and on his anger at the end of the scene. There was much thoughtful wrestling with Ken's motives for rejecting his fiancée although only the strongest candidates understood his insistence that he did it for selfish reasons and fully grasped the significance of his "real" babies remark. Indeed, some candidates inferred that Ken would miraculously be able to produce offspring who would inherit his physical paralysis. A particular difficulty for many candidates was fully engaging the dramatic context for Travers's visit and some remained rather confused about his identity and role, with a significant minority thinking that he is female, as if confusing him with Dr Scott or Mrs Boyle. The first bullet helped some Foundation Tier candidates to demonstrate understanding that Travers is there to assess Ken as part of Emerson's plan to have him committed under the Mental Health Act and they were able to confront what is at stake in this scene. Strong answers explored the Catch 22 frustrations of Ken's situation, the precise reasons for his anger and the irony of a Consultant Psychiatrist destroying Ken's mind. There was a widespread tendency on both tiers however to focus almost exclusively on Ken's sad accounts of the visits and to neglect the drama of his interaction with Travers. A few candidates used Travers to expound at great length on the theme of "professionalism" throughout the play and lost touch with the extract.

Question 8 was a much less popular question but a few candidates relished the opportunity to respond to the drama of the hearing. Most candidates supported the judge's decision, and Ken's speeches about dignity and choice were often thoughtfully explored to support their case. A willingness to engage the "how far" of the question explicitly and to weigh the arguments without oversimplifying them tended to characterise the strongest answers. A significant minority of candidates missed the focus on "the hearing" in the question and ranged too widely across the whole play or became so wrapped up in complex ethical debates that their attention to the text became very limited.

The best answers to **Question 9** were securely rooted in the argument between Dr Scott and Dr Emerson which precedes the moment prescribed by the question. Many candidates managed to convey a convincing impression of the conflict between Dr Scott's professional role and her private feelings at this point in the play, making her respect for Dr Emerson clear despite the frostiness of their most recent encounter but also emphasising her reservations about the plan to commit Ken. Some candidates found the voice of a mature, educated, professional woman difficult to maintain, and there was occasional drift into excessively sentimental reflection on Ken or inappropriate abuse of Dr Emerson. The very best answers confronted and explored the implications of Dr Emerson's remark about a "post-mortem", suggesting how offensive this warning might appear to a dedicated doctor like Dr Scott.

Journey's End

Question 10 was by far the most frequently answered question on the paper and a large number of candidates were able to respond to the emotion of the post-raid scene. The majority registered the importance of this scene as the moment when Osborne's death is revealed to the Colonel and to the audience, and particularly successful answers explored the Colonel's

insensitivity and then his discomfiture in the face of Stanhope's hostility, as well as the evidence of Stanhope's bitterness and grief, and Raleigh's traumatised response to the raid. There were many examples of subtle commentary on the dramatic effect of movement, of the faltering dialogue, of facial expression, of the gathering dusk, of the booming guns... The strongest candidates often declared themselves in their sharp awareness of the dramatic context and were able to contrast Raleigh's exhaustion and silence with his pre-raid excitement and chattiness, and explore the significance of Osborne's bed, particularly in relation to the play's final scene. There were some moving arguments about the lost opportunity for Stanhope and Raleigh to comfort and support each other. Some candidates found it difficult to understand Stanhope's sarcasm and the constraining effects of the military hierarchy, and to engage the power of the unstated feelings throughout the scene; others ignored the Colonel completely or spent valuable time examining the dashes in his speeches; and others got rather bogged down in the idea that Stanhope blames Raleigh for Osborne's death and that Raleigh is overwhelmed by guilt, based solely on the single statement that Osborne was killed "while he was waiting for Raleigh."

Successful answers to **Question 11** ranged widely across the play to explore the relationship between Osborne and Stanhope, and made effective use of Osborne's conversations with both Hardy and Raleigh about Stanhope, the "tuck me up" scene, the conflict over Raleigh's letter, the "worms" conversation, the pre-raid conversation and the powerful evidence of Stanhope's grief after the raid. There were many intelligent arguments about the dramatic importance of their most intimate conversations and what they reveal about both men. Some answers became rather locked into the early scenes of the play and others relied rather heavily on the evidence of the extract used for Question 10 as if they were conflating the two questions.

Some astonishingly convincing Raleighs were reproduced in response to **Question 12**. The early moment in the play was fully engaged with, the enthusiastic tone and period vocabulary lovingly reproduced, appropriate details selected and a range of feelings expressed in many outstanding answers. Successful answers tended to weigh a boyish excitement and a determination to do well and to make Stanhope and his family proud, against apprehension and a certain anxiety, particularly about the frosty reception he has received from his childhood hero, and to convey appreciation for the support and advice of Osborne and Trotter. Some candidates found it difficult to limit the expression of their textual knowledge and had Raleigh expounding rather too expertly on "coping strategies" or on the subject of Hibbert, a brother officer he is yet to meet. The voice became overly jingoistic, bloodthirsty or inappropriately war-weary in some answers. Others went overboard in their repetitive use of expressions like "cheero... righto... simply... topping... frightfully... awfully... splendid..." and produced lots of gung-ho enthusiasm without real substance, thereby moving away from the play into a Bertie Wooster-style caricature.

2442 Poetry and Prose Post - 1914

It is difficult to make definitive comments on the work of so many candidates, on so many texts, and with results across the complete A*-G range. It is hoped, however, that this Report will be helpful to Centres as it seeks to identify the strengths and weaknesses of candidates' responses to this Unit in June 2009.

There was some uncertainty among examiners as to whether Centres had always entered their candidates at the right Tier. A number of Higher Tier candidates whose work was ungraded because it fell below the mid-E level would have benefited from being entered at Foundation Tier. Some candidates at Foundation Tier might have achieved a grade above C had they been entered at Higher Tier.

Candidates were usually able to display their understanding of the texts they had studied and underpin their ideas with reference to those texts. As in previous years, some work was remarkably mature and sophisticated, and an absolute pleasure to read. Every year examiners are astonished by the abilities of some of the sixteen-year-olds whose work they encounter.

As ever, there are irritable gripes. There are gender-issues with some of the poets. Winifred Letts was too often considered to be "he", presumably because of the 'Fred' element. When he wasn't male, she was in danger of having her views taken lightly, because, as a woman she had not fought in battle and did not, therefore, have a valid opinion of her subject-matter. By the same token, presumably, Shakespeare should be taken lightly as he was not present when Julius Caesar was assassinated. Stevie Smith was often taken to be male, as, surprisingly was Fleur Adcock. Sassoon was, surprisingly, taken to be female by a number of candidates. It might be worth suggesting to candidates that they refer to poets by their surnames. Many candidates referred to Winifred, Wilfred and Ivor, as if they were close pals. It may just be a matter of register, but candidates who adopted it were all too often at odds with the moods of the poems, which are, simply, not particularly matey.

Some examiners in their reports raised the issue of Written Communication, awarded a maximum of 4 marks at Foundation Tier and 6 at Higher. It is to be regretted that few GCSE subjects other than English Literature now require candidates to produce a forty-five minute piece of continuous writing. The consequences are that students do not develop essay-writing skills elsewhere and that English teachers can not expect support from other subject-areas. They are on their own when advising their students to spend a little time in planning a response, and re-reading it before closing their exam booklet.

As previous Principal Examiner's Reports have made clear, a candidate's Written Communication mark can have a considerable effect on performance on this Unit. Many students did not punctuate titles appropriately and some frequently used capital letters for what they perceived as "important" words. One examiner commented that "Very few students wrote a suitably brief, but well-structured, introduction which linked securely to the thrust of the question, preferring to rely on formulaic features of the sort that 'In this essay I am going to talk/write about ...' with the concluding paragraph beginning, 'In this essay I have shown ...'". It is a safe, unadventurous formula that too often leads to a safe, unadventurous and disengaged talking/writing about literature, where candidates who have engaged with the texts they have studied reveal their interest/enthusiasm, even excitement, in the incisiveness of their opening and concluding paragraphs. Another experienced examiner reported, "Many candidates wrote an apparently well-focused introductory paragraph, and then ignored what they had introduced".

Several examiners commented on candidates' uncertainty over the meaning of "imagery" and their confusion of the words with "images". "Imagery" was too often taken as the pictures candidates have in their minds, and not the language - the similes, metaphors etc - that poets use. There were mixed messages in examiners' reports this summer about "literary devices". The majority noted, and welcomed, a reduction in identifying devices for the final satisfaction of a verbal-archaeological dig and linking the device to a specific effect. However, device-spotting still haunts the work of some candidates, for whom the study of literature has shrunk to the hunting down and outing of the

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

shrinking oxymoron (when, all too often, the outed oxymoron has been just a simple combination of unusual words).

It might be worth reminding candidates here that the rather formulaic words, such as “memorable”, “vivid”, “striking” in questions at both Foundation and Higher Tiers, are intended to encourage engagement with the language writers use. By responding to the writing, it is hoped that candidates will avoid merely paraphrasing and narrating and move towards a higher band descriptor.

Some examiners continue to lament the imprecise language they encounter. “Sympathy” has apparently become too inadequate for our touchy/feely times. “Empathy” is so often felt; for mothers with white hair; a man who fears the German guns; a boy victimised by Mr Chase “Negative” continues to appear as an all-purpose, usually unsupported, condemnatory criticism: our feelings towards Mr Chase are negative; as are our feelings about the Brother Officer ... Examiners’ comments in the margins are usually, “But why?”

Weaker responses too often ignored the wording of questions. For example, in Question 6, candidates asked about the horrors of war in *Spring Offensive* too often focused on the opening lines of the poem, discussing “the May breeze, murmurous with wasp and midge” (referring to the way alliteration highlights the peacefulness of the scene) at the expense of the horrors of the second part of the poem. Weaker responses often summarised or paraphrased poems or prose passages, explaining words and phrases without real engagement with the language writers use.

Poetry

OCR Opening Lines: How It Looks From Here

This was, by some distance, the less popular section of the OCR *Opening Lines* Anthology.

Candidates sometimes gained marks on *Things* by commenting on the repetition of “worse”; most quoted “things come stalking in / and stand icily about the bed”, but only the better responses commented on the resonances of “stalking” and “icily”. There were many simple explanations of the poem, as candidates struggled to nail it down to a simple graspable meaning. In *Bedfellows* some insisted that the poet had murdered the previous occupant of the bed and was now feeling guilty, an interpretation which stifles awareness of what else the poem has to offer. Although most understood the worn away flowers as referring to the wallpaper, there was often little idea of the significance of this. The halo was used to suggest the murdered man was now an angel, and the heart-tick was a wrist-watch. Some answers argued that the bedfellows of the title were a prostitute and her client. Best answers responded to language details like “last incumbent”; “greasy head”; “I have to rest” (why “have to?”); “dreary innuendo”: remaining open to the building of atmosphere and not closing interpretation down by insisting that the suffocated voice is that of the murderer’s victim or a prostitute.

The need to nail a poem down to a single finite meaning hampered a number of candidates who wrote about Hill’s *The Hare*. The second Foundation bullet drew attention to “the words and phrases suggesting mystery and fear”. Too many candidates seemed bent on explaining what was happening in the poem, thus dispelling the mystery and dissolving the fear, rather than sharing the mystery and fear Hill creates for the woman in her narrow bed. Understanding of *Defying Gravity* was more secure. However, only the best candidates really engaged with the image of the giant yo-yo, saw its application to gravity, and that the friend does, at the last, defy gravity. These also commented effectively on the rugby imagery in the penultimate verse. Some weaker candidates commented on the apparently incongruous association of a child’s toy with death and that the rugby-player died from a sports injury.

There were comparatively few responses to Question 3. The better ones engaged with the language, picking out Smith’s imperative “Seize colours quick”, and with the simplicity of the poem’s style. There was often uncertainty about “that puddle” and “vertigo”, and some misunderstanding of the last lines where “the landscape of the dead”, according to a number of candidates is colourless. Reed’s

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

rather complex poem was pleasingly understood by candidates who recognised the dreamy, poetic, non-military “voice” that responds to the world’s beauty in its “vestments of purple and gold”.

OCR Opening Lines: *The 1914-18 War* (ii)

The War poems were, as in previous years, the most popular of the poetry selections. However, examiners reported interestingly different responses to the war poems. Some felt that recent political events apparently polarised candidates’ feelings about war, when responding to questions about the soldiers’ feelings or the horrors of war. Some felt distaste, even contempt, for men too afraid to do their duty for King and country. Others berated the government of the day (and perhaps of recent days) for misleading men to lay down their lives quite unnecessarily through propaganda (which was seen, without textual evidence, to be directly attacked in *The Target* and *Lamentations*). Such responses were often interesting and forceful, but tended to result in an over-simplification of poems and the reduction of the complexities of writers’ views to a slogan that could be painted on a banner.

Candidates at Foundation Tier were usually able to indicate what the mothers’ reactions to the deaths of their sons were, though often the grief of the mother in *The Hero* was not touched on. Many, at both Tiers, commented on the moving nature of the mothers’ unawareness of how their sons died. There was speculation, and disagreement, as to why the mothers were told “gallant lies” (including, presumably, the mother in *The Deserter*). Some thought army propaganda, to keep up morale at home, was the reason. Others thought it right to protect the mothers from the knowledge that their sons were, like Hibbert in *Journey’s End*, not cast in the heroic mould. Still others condemned lying, for whatever gallant reasons, in the roundest of terms.

At both Foundation and Higher Tiers, candidates were asked to focus on the mothers’ reactions. The best responses accordingly focused closely on the mothers, in *The Deserter* using the first part of the poem only to illustrate that the mother is unaware of the circumstances of her son’s death. Unfocused responses dwelt in considerable detail on the man’s fear and the way it is described. At both Tiers, many candidates misread line 29: “So she goes proudly; to the strife”, explaining that the mother is going proudly to the strife, “strife” being (mis-)understood to be the grave of her son. Good responses found much to say about the reactions of the mother in *The Hero*, focusing on “the tired voice that quavered to a choke” and the eyes that “brimmed with joy”. The deserter and ‘Jack’ were often both considered to be deserters, although Sassoon’s poem says “he’d tried/ To get sent home” and was “blown to small bits” when the mine went up at “Wicked Corner”. Pleasingly, the last two lines of *The Hero* often evoked sympathy in candidates. Less successfully, many candidates thought that the Brother Officer was the Colonel, and/or that Sassoon himself believed Jack to be a “cold-footed useless swine”. As in previous years, candidates often saw Sassoon as a chastiser of unenthusiastic warriors. The last line of *Lamentations* (Question 6) was often held to be Sassoon’s view of unpatriotic droppers of the stiff upper lip when encountering the death of a brother. Curiously, a number of candidates misread the last two lines of *The Deserter* by adding a comma after “O well” and interpreting the lines as indicative of the voice’s lack of interest in the mother, and not of her relieved satisfaction at the way the mother has been protected from a revelation that would crush her.

The pairing of Gurney’s *The Target* and Owen’s *The Send-Off* produced some impressive answers, particularly when there was close engagement with the workings of the soldier’s mind and the language the soldier uses. Owen was often the less securely understood. Often the soldiers were said to be quite oblivious of what awaited them, so they sang gaily on their way to the train (a confusing, perhaps, of these men with the recruits singing like the lark in *Joining the Colours*). The coupling of “grimly” with “gay”, suggesting that they may know all too well what they may encounter, was often ignored. There was also some misunderstanding of the flowers given by the women. A number of candidates took these to be tokens of cowardice, the feathers given by girls in the third verse of *Recruiting*. The “voice” in the Owen was often not understood. Who was the observer saying “These were not ours”? Were the grimly-gay men aware of the secrets winkingly conveyed? Were they aware of the lurking misery of their return?

Question 6, on the powerful portrayal of the horrors of war (Foundation) and the poets’ use of striking words and phrases to express the horrors of war, produced, as was to be expected, a range of responses. Weaker ones tried to draw attention to the horrible situation in which men found

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

themselves, with little reference to the language the poets use. So the German guns were to be considered a horror of war, which, indeed, they were, though more could have been made of the physical and mental effect they produced on the deserter. Most were able to claim, with some support, that the war has dehumanised the soldier in *Lamentations*. Perceptive responses also sought to show that one of war's horrors was that it had desensitised the "voice" of the poem, making him incapable of understanding the soldier's grief. A number of examiners indicated their surprise in their reports that too many candidates still did not know what "had gone west" means, or "His number had gone up". As indicated above, a number of responses lingered too long on the opening of *Spring Offensive*, writing about the relaxing soldiers and the calm before the storm, when the storm itself cried out for engagement. There were some debatable assertions, such as that Owen is attacking the Army and the government for treating the men like animals (the men are "eased of packloads"); or that the men should not have been taking drugs "for their bodies' pains". Better ones tended to explain the words and phrases they picked out; for example, when Owen writes "earth set sudden cups", he is trying to describe the craters made by a bombardment. The best responses engaged closely with the language of two poems, were able to discuss the effect of literary devices (the use of enjambment that isolated "Exposed" at the beginning of a line) and the horror of the green slope that "Chasmed and deepened sheer to infinite space".

Poems 2: Larkin and Fanthorpe

Too few responses to the poems of Larkin and Fanthorpe were seen to provide a helpful over-view of the candidates' performance on these poems.

Touched with Fire

This remains a very popular anthology. The quality of responses to the poems suggested considerable engagement with both the content of the poems and with the language of the poets.

Candidates were able to identify the fairly unmissable sadness of a family mourning the death of a four-year-old, and the sadness, more than a little tinged with anger, of a continent dispossessed. In the Heaney, the reactions of the father, unusually crying, the mother, unable to shed tears, Big Jim Evans hinting at a sadness unexpected in a man with the soubriquet "Big Jim", and the voice's response first to "the corpse", then "him" and to "the cot", were often carefully and thoroughly covered. Some responses failed to comment on the last line of the poem, surely the saddest line of them all. Sometimes there were shadows of another question lurking. Some responses were concerned with building suspense: why is the boy isolated in the college sick bay? why do the neighbours drive him home? why do old men reverse the expected order of things to stand up to shake the hand of a boy? whose corpse is it? Asking such questions deflected attention from sadness. Some responses focused on the numbed emotion, but were usually able to make the required link to sadness.

Dipoko was frequently well understood, and the naïvete of pre-colonial Africa in being misled was supported by close textual reference. "Illusion of pearls", "carcass of drifting whales", "razed the forest" were often carefully explored. However, as with the last line of the Heaney, only the best answers engaged closely with the last, complex, five lines of the Dipoko.

The invitation to look at /compare the ways in which the strength and power of nature is conveyed in *Mushrooms* and *Hawk Roosting* was taken up by many. The comparison/contrast was often closely focused on the hawk's arrogant violence and the mushrooms' insidious, unnoticed progress towards inheriting the earth. The language of both poems was carefully considered. Clearly the social context of the Plath had been discussed in some Centres, with the possible association of the mushrooms with the feminist movement touched on. Usually, this was an added dimension that did not deflect discussion far from the path of "strength and power of nature".

There were comparatively few responses to Question 12 on the thoughts and feeling of children and adults in *Piano and Drums* and *Nursery Rhyme of Innocence and Experience*. Of these most commented soundly on the child's ancestral response to the drum, and the adult's response to the Westernised piano, but found engagement with the last lines of the poem difficult. Most commented

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

soundly on the child's expectations of the sailor in the Causley and the adult's (?) puzzlement on the ship's return.

Prose

There were two general issues that examiners frequently aired this year in their reports.

The first was how closely candidates focused, or did not focus, on the extracts in extract-based questions. The extract-based questions usually focus on the extracts and demand little or no deviation from them. So responses to Mr Chase's bullying of Clement that explored Clement's status as a victim (certainly a legitimate area) were on solid ground when they referred to the extract's reference to his being "shabby and barefoot", but less so when they explored, often in some detail, the family room (last year's extract), or how Evelina's singing and Clement's sax-playing baffle Mr Chase. Similarly, responses to the Hemingway extract sometimes used the whole novel to support their feelings about the old man, and not just in the extract which focuses on his setting out.

The second was, with reference to *Opening Worlds*, how much historical context students need to be given when engaging with literary texts. The simple answer is to provide how much the student needs to know to understand the text; that is, what arises naturally from reading the story. An understanding, but not detailed knowledge, of the Cultural Revolution in China should help students to see that the tailor's wife's antagonism towards the Tall Woman is, however personal, licensed by the state. On occasion, interpretations were pronouncedly anti-colonial. The beating Bolan is given was said by some to reflect the beating given to slaves; the red ball and cricket to reflect the influence of British colonials; the statue a legacy of colony-builders. The best candidates here are aware of the social conditions a writer reflects and the extent to which these are used for political/satirical effect.

OCR *Opening Worlds*

As noted above, this was by far the most frequently studied text. Question 13, at both Foundation and Higher Tiers, was the most answered question. Candidates usually found plenty to say about Mr Chase, his appearance, words and actions, many noting the pleasure he derived from bullying Clement in particular. Many were able to comment on the physical threat posed by his rod, and on Chase's intention to continue his bullying every morning. The best responses engaged with Sealy's writing, considering words like "cruel laughter", "sauntered", "hapless", "laughing stock" and "scrawled". The extract from *The Tall Woman and Her Short Husband* was less confidently handled, usually because of lack of familiarity with the Cultural Revolution. There were cross-references to the Nazis and to Stalin, but almost none to Chairman Mao. As indicated above, many candidates saw the bullying on simply a personal level, with the tailor's wife abusing Mrs Tall, and her position of authority, because she envied the comparative wealth of the physically ill-matched couple. The reference to the manuscript was often ignored. There were some frequent misreadings; for example, too many candidates described the bullying as physical believing that the tailor's wife slapped the chest of Mrs Tall, and not her own; many thought that the description of eyes that "glinted with derision and contempt" described the tailor's wife's eyes and not Mrs Tall's. The best responses at Higher Tier looked at the writing: at Feng's use of the word "bullies", questions "fired" at Mrs Tall, the "hysterical screams" and the "threatening growls". Answers at both Tiers sometimes compared the extracts, providing a useful structure to the response. However, comparison is not assessed in prose responses, although it can, on occasion, be helpful to candidates.

Question 14 invited responses to clashes of culture in *The Train from Rhodesia* and *The Young Couple*. Candidates sometimes did not reflect quite enough on the key term in the question, "clashes of culture", jumping into descriptions of poverty in the Gordimer without showing how it clashed with the wealth of people on the train. There were often quite forceful discussions of the poverty of people at the station, with condemnation not just of the people on the train but the whole of Western materialism and exploitation. The lion was often seen as a powerful symbol of African culture, haggled over, devalued and finally ignored. Some candidates wrote about the clash between the wife and the husband, which they usually found difficult to relate to clash of culture, since it appeared more like a marital than a cultural clash, exposing all too clearly the fault-lines in the marriage.

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

Candidates generally showed sound understanding of *The Red Ball*, *Games at Twilight* and *The Pieces of Silver* and were able to outline the unhappiness of two of the children in the stories. Weaker responses tended to focus on early paragraphs of their chosen stories; for, example, stating that Bolan must be unhappy in *The Red Ball* because the cricketing boys call him “Thinny Boney” and “Match-stick foot!” or that the children in *Games at Twilight* are unhappy because the hot weather has confined them indoors. Bolan’s misery at his father’s treatment and Ravi’s unhappiness at discovering his insignificance often went unexplored, leading some examiners feeling that the trees were seen but not the wood. At Higher Tier, strong responses quoted to illustrate that the children were unhappy. Less secure responses used details describing the Dovecots’ coop to show that Clement lived in conditions that ought to make him unhappy, without supporting the case that he is, indeed, unhappy.

There were good responses to the D H Lawrence Short Stories, not least to the extracts from *Her Turn* and *Second Best*. Foundation Tier candidates often showed their understanding through paraphrasing and narrating, whereas the best candidates at Higher Tier engaged closely with the wording of the question and focused on the writing of the extracts.

Empire of the Sun attracted a number of candidates, most of whom answered the extract-based question. Most were able to comment on Jim’s reactions to the Japanese soldiers and on his ability to gain their confidence, an element crucial to his survival. There were some good responses to Basie as a survivor, especially when focus on Ballard’s depiction of him at particular moments was maintained. Weaker responses tended to recount moments when Basie appears, without focusing on what is memorable about his depiction; showing in short, what he does, and not how Ballard writes about him. There were too few responses to Question 21, on the Chinese poor in Shanghai before the war, for any useful comment to be made.

Candidates continue to respond well at both Tiers to *Things Fall Apart*. Again, the extract-based question was the most popular, with almost everyone being able to select the beheading of the messenger as being dramatic. Many too saw in Okonkwo’s speech confirmation of the falling apart of the clan. At Foundation Tier, better candidates put the extract into context, recognising Okonkwo’s fury at his treatment, and that of the five other leaders, at the hands of the District Commissioner and the court messengers. (Very many candidates at both Tiers clearly thought that the messengers were white.) Many noted that this is the last action Okonkwo carries out, his suicide being a consequence of his killing of the messenger and his knowledge that Umuofia would not go to war. At Higher Tier some candidates looked closely at the creation of atmosphere, the sudden stir in the crowd, the silence as “the world seemed to stand still”, the shortness of the sentences, and the impact of the final one-sentence paragraph. Okonkwo’s relationship with Ezinma was often carefully considered and well understood. Few candidates responded to the question on family life in the novel.

Many examiners commented on how well candidates at both Tiers responded to the extract from *The Old Man and the Sea*, and reported that responses suggested real enjoyment of this text. Certainly, candidates were able to comment on the old man’s love of the sea and its creatures, his response to its beauty, his seeing it as a woman, his skill and experience ... The opportunity for such comments were all offered by the extract, and there was no need for candidates to scrutinise the ending of the novel to argue that the old man is a Christ-like figure because he carries his mast and falls. There was so much to say about the extract that leaving it, and the invitation to discuss Hemingway’s writing, too early meant that some responses lost focus and wrote too generally about what they found impressive about the old man. The question on the old man and *salao* produced some excellent answers where candidates sought to evaluate his achievement in term of catching the marlin, proving himself, attracting the affection of Manolin Less successful responses offered character-based comments on the old man, or offered fairly random thoughts about what he did, or did not do. Going down the path of the Christ-like parallel led to some theologically odd conclusions; such as the old man is a failure, just as Christ failed because he ended up with a cross and fell on his way to Calvary, as the old man falls on his way home. Almost no candidate noted that Christ fulfilled his purpose through His crucifixion and could not be said to have failed, or to be unlucky. Responses to Question 28 tended to show respect and admiration for the old man often through paraphrasing one or two moments. The best really engaged with Hemingway’s writing to show how Hemingway compels respect and admiration.

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

Nineteen Eighty-Four also elicited some admirable responses from candidates, who often showed detailed understanding of the novel and real engagement with it. Most saw the way in which Parsons' arrest and reactions are horrifying, though some, rather surprisingly, expressed considerable sympathy for him. His pride in his daughter, his blubbery servility and apparent, though justifiable, fear, make sympathy difficult and his depiction horrifying. However, where the sympathy cause was argued, it was rewarded when supported by textual detail. It remains encouraging that this novel is so stimulating at this level and that candidates can demonstrate such engagement when writing about it.

At the time of writing this report, the Principal Examiner had not seen any responses to *Modern Women's Short Stories*.

There were very few responses to the Literary Non-Fiction texts, some of which were obviously done "unseen". However, a few Centres had studied the texts and had prepared their candidates well. Most were able to show understanding of the extracts, largely through paraphrase, with best responses seeing the humour of both writers.

It is hoped that this Report will help Centres prepare candidates for the examinations in January and June 2010. It is not intended to be critical of this Summer's candidates, so many of whom showed remarkably mature understanding and enjoyment of the texts they had studied and should manage the transition to AS and A Level English Literature with ease. Nor is it other than full of respect for candidates who do not intend to study English Literature beyond GCSE level but who enjoyed their study of set texts, and, it is hoped, will enjoy their own choice of future reading.

2443 Pre – 1914 Texts (Coursework)

2447 Post – 1914 Texts (Coursework)

Most centres have now settled for a stable set of well tried tasks and a standardisation procedure that is effective. However, many moderators continue to complain that one such endemic task, 'Who is to blame for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?' rarely succeeds in offering candidates the opportunity to demonstrate skills of examining the effects of language and stagecraft. The best tasks are those which remind students that texts are imaginative and artistic creations rather than real people requiring forensic or pathological analysis, as could be the case in a task such as comparing the two kings in 'Macbeth'. A similar issue is raised by employing texts as a vehicle for exploring a theme, such as heroism, where a formative discussion on the topic should not become the final outcome.

Again there was evidence of fine teaching of comparative skills with seemingly fewer comparative comments left to a short summary of preference at the end of the essay. Blake and Wordsworth, Tennyson and Owen remain popular means of meeting this criterion. Poetry of seduction continued to exercise the minds of many students who mostly moved beyond mere listing of chat-up lines. 'Goblin Market' was a welcome addition this year which provided a lot of scope for exploration of AO2 and AO4, as well as having some rather more implicit and subtle sexual nuances to discuss. Centres entering for unit 2443 need to be reminded that where a post 1914 text is used a substantial piece of the argument must relate to the pre-1914 text. The same is sometimes true also of prose comparison.

In the prose, tasks that focused on genre, particularly the Gothic, remained successful supporting candidates by giving them techniques and effects to examine. Such assignments also provided suitable opportunities for considering relevant social, historical and cultural dimensions to the texts.

Some students still paste in unproductive biographical details from internet sites, often stylistically at odds with the rest of their writing. Teachers must be responsible for the monitoring of such material. Rather than just bemoaning the use of the internet, centres might profitably be engaged in teaching students how to use secondary sources constructively. Some very strange biographical details have been asserted, ranging from disputable allegations to downright error. In one or two cases the regularity of such information appearing indicates a teacher who is not on top of the subject. Thus Wordsworth might well have taken exception to being described as "posh and rich".

Centres should remind themselves of the JCQ guidelines about unacceptable practice. Some are over prompting candidates with rigid paragraph structures and key quotations, cramping the individual insights of more able candidates and exposing less able ones to comments they clearly do not understand.

In general, however, once again the moderators wish to congratulate teachers on their expertise and hard work. Teacher marginalia and formal comments demonstrated how skilfully marking criteria were being applied. Sympathy was often felt for lone teachers without the benefit of a group standardisation experience, for non-specialists, for those picking up after staffing changes and for those unfamiliar with the specification and Board's procedures. Teachers in such situations are encouraged to request support or exemplar material from the Board.

2444 Pre-1914 Texts

General Comments

Examiners all reported that they had seen some very good work this session; candidates had been carefully and thoroughly prepared, and in most cases clearly knew the set texts either well or very well. There were of course some less good answers, and a small number where it seemed as if candidates were seeing at least some of the printed extracts for the first time, but these were very much in the minority. The great majority answered with some degree of confidence, and almost invariably there was ample textual support for what was said, together in most cases with at least some attempt to explain how and why these quotations were effective; very few answers indeed lacked at least some illustrative material.

There were no serious rubric infringements, so that virtually every candidate presented answers to each of the three sections, and very few indeed appeared seriously hindered by a lack of time in their final question. No one section appeared to produce generally better or worse answers, though there was something of a *flatness* or a lack of sparkle about some work on *Romeo and Juliet*; the play is, of course, new to every candidate, but there was something of a tired quality about many answers, which suggests that an almost routine approach to the play has begun to develop. By contrast, the few answers on Wilde's play and *Much Ado* were rather fresher and more personal. This is of course not to suggest that every Centre should immediately change texts for the last few sessions of the Unit, or indeed that such a change will necessarily lead to better work, but it is a point worth noting.

Poetry answers continue to be better than they were a few years ago; candidates were fully aware of the need to move well beyond simple re-iteration of the contents and "story" of each poem used, and there was plenty of discussion of language and structure, most of it critically sensible and often astute. There was a sense in the work of a few candidates that a poem must almost by default have a "hidden message", so that a number of answers failed to explore what their poems are really and quite simply saying, in their attempts to find metaphorical, symbolic or allegorical interpretations which may possibly not be there at all.

Prose answers were once again among the most confident, and as with the other sections candidates showed an understanding that the best work will always come from at least some detailed exploration of what is said and how it is said, not just from simple knowledge of plot and character. This is obviously most important in regard to the extract questions, but it does apply also to the more general tasks.

Comments on Individual Questions

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 1

There were few answers to this question, but candidates certainly saw the importance of what happens in the extract, and were well able to discuss how Shakespeare makes the conversation dramatic; there was understandably no love lost for Don John, though quite a lot of dislike was expressed for Claudio's naivety and his threat to "shame her" if he finds that the accusations being made against Hero are true. Drama was seen in the way in which Don John so easily manipulates the other men into believing him, and also for the way in which this scene later proves so significant in the plot as a whole.

Question 2

There were no answers to this question.

Romeo and Juliet

Question 3

This was the more popular of the two questions on *Romeo and Juliet*, and on the whole it was well addressed by candidates in both Tiers; few lost time and marks by outlining the events leading up to it, and fewer still told examiners the story of the whole play. Many, however, did make brief but pointed reference to what the Prologue says at the very start of the play, and how this is fulfilled by the closing scene. Most answers, however, focused correctly and closely upon what is said in the given extract, talking about several key points – the Prince's anger and personal grief; the reconciliation of the two families; the plans to build memorial statues, in order never to forget the love of the two young characters; the sad formality and finality of the closing few lines. A surprising number seemed unable to distinguish between the Prince and Paris, which led to some convoluted explanations, and a large number were uncertain about who "he" is in line 4, apparently forgetting that by this point Romeo is dead.

Question 4

This question led to a good number of very warmly felt and often quite angry responses, seeing nothing but a cold aloofness in Juliet's mother, and a bitter rage and total lack of fatherly emotion in her father. There was no problem with this, except of course that both parents at different times in the play do demonstrate at least some sort of affection for their daughter. What was a little more worrying, however, was an almost uniform lack of any apparent awareness of social and family conventions at the time being depicted in the play, and an inability to separate the feelings that a 21st century daughter must have from those probably felt by young women in Juliet's social position. Having said this, though, answers were almost invariably fully supported by quotation and/or reference to the text, which was a very good feature throughout all answers in this Unit.

An Ideal Husband

Question 5

There were some good, workmanlike and personally responsive answers to this question; candidates knew the scene well, and were well able to show ways in which it is entertaining, both in its own right and in its wider whole-play context.

Question 6

There were too few answers to this question to make any useful comment.

An Enemy of the People

There were no answers on this text.

OCR Opening Lines: War

Question 9

There was plenty of informed and strong personal response to both of these poems; most candidates clearly knew both well, and were able to show with some detailed illustration how both Scott and Kipling convey such strongly bitter and angry feelings about war. Candidates had clearly been well prepared, and almost all supported their arguments with not just quotation but more importantly some comments about how the poets' language and poetic structuring adds to the effects and impacts. Most found Scott's an easier poem to discuss, and talked with some ease of its repetitive, even hypnotic, opening, and the sharp contrast with this that the second stanza presents. Kipling's poem was a little less securely understood and handled; those who wanted to argue that it is more than just about hyaenas, that the creatures in some way symbolise attitudes of military hierarchy and/or politicians, too often found it hard to do more than to simply *assert* this view – and of course could not easily include the poem's final line in their argument.

Question 10

Those who tackled this question used all three poems in roughly equal proportions, with Byron perhaps being marginally the least popular, and, as in Question 9, candidates generally showed a considerable confidence in what they said, and in how they argued and supported their views. The weakest aspect of many answers, however, lay in the fact that even allowing for the very short time available, almost no candidates covered more than a few small moments in Byron and Southey, while most managed to deal with almost the whole of the Hardy. Examiners are fully aware of the difficulties faced in poetry questions, and are sensitive to the problems caused by having to write about (and at Higher Tier to compare) two poems, but they do expect an approximately similar amount of time to be spent on each – 50/50 is ideal, 60/40 perfectly acceptable, 70/30 a little worrying, and 90/10 certainly not really adequate.

OCR Opening Lines: Town and Country

Question 11

This was the more popular of the two "Town and Country" questions, and led to a very wide range of answers, some showing a quite remarkable ability to discuss two such lengthy and complex poems in such a short time, but others showing almost no real understanding of what either poem is really about, especially Hopkins's. Some candidates spent a huge amount of time outlining a range of cultural, biographical, historical references in Yeats's poem, to the extent that it lost its impacts as a poem of simple nostalgic longing; many more, though, were well able to explore its gentle rhythms and quiet images. *Binsey Poplars* is certainly a more difficult poem, but it led to some answers that seemed to come from candidates who had never seen it before the examination itself; there were of course some good ones, and some that were excellently sensitive in their understanding of Hopkins's images and techniques here, but it concerned examiners how many did not appear to understand the word "felled" in line 3, so that of course the rest of the poem made increasingly little sense. Given the 21st century fears about environmental pollution, it is understandable that some answers wanted to see such concerns in this poem, but Hopkins certainly did not know what global warming was, nor would he recognise in himself the idea of a green campaigner. Most Higher Tier candidates made thoughtful attempts to compare and contrast the poems, as did many Foundation Tier candidates, who often showed a real sensitivity to the writing.

Question 12

Most answers to this question focused upon Tennyson and Kipling, but although comparisons were attempted these were not as successful or as detailed as similar comparisons in Question 11, sometimes simply because candidates tried too hard to see symbolic or metaphorical meanings in one or both of the poems, rather than viewing them simply as they are written. *The Eagle* may of course be read as a poem about humanity's arrogance and selfishness, but it is

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

surely easier to see it more simply as descriptive of the nature of this particular bird, through the eyes, of course, of one man. Few candidates looked at Keats's Ode, and those who did so rarely managed – understandably, because of its length and sheer richness of language – to cover much beyond the first stanza; this did not worry examiners provided that the stanza was explored in as much close detail as possible.

Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience

There were no answers on this text.

Hardy: Selected Poems

There were no answers on this text.

Austen: Northanger Abbey

Question 17

A very popular question, which led to plenty of good and full responses; candidates were well able to see how and how successfully Henry is teasing Catherine with his exaggerated gothic descriptions, and how Austen makes Catherine's ready and obvious gullibility so entertaining. There was plenty of reference – sometimes quite specific – to earlier gothic novels that Austen may be parodying through Henry, and many candidates saw the passage as an important moment in Catherine's life experiences as a whole, but the answers that scored highest points were on the whole those that stayed firmly within the passage itself and what the question asks.

Question 18

There were a few answers to this question, and they were mostly thoughtful and sensible in their descriptions of how Catherine's view of the world and of people changes and matures throughout the novel. Most answers managed to steer clear of simple rehearsal of the whole novel, and did maintain good and apt focus.

Dickens: Hard Times

Question 19

There were a few answers to this question, most of which saw how a reader's view of Tom here might be more sympathetic than has been the case earlier in the novel. The question does not specifically ask this, but those who compared Dickens's portrayal of Tom with Harthouse at this moment often produced the most convincing and thoughtfully personal responses.

Question 20

There were no answers to this question.

Hardy: Far From the Madding Crowd

Question 21

This question was generally very well answered, with candidates showing a good deal of understanding and sympathy to Gabriel at this dreadful moment in his life; candidates explored Hardy's language with considerable confidence and critical awareness. A surprising number – possibly because of a shortage of time or the length of the passage – failed to make any comment on the closing sentence, which surely tells us a huge amount about his sense of concern for Bathsheba, and his lack of selfishness – as Hardy says, "it was as remarkable as it was characteristic".

Question 22

There was just a handful of answers to this question, mostly using the moment when Sergeant Troy sees Fanny Robin in her coffin and tells Bathsheba how little he actually cares for her.

Eliot: Silas Marner

Question 23

About half of the many *Silas Marner* answers came from this question, but relatively few managed more than a fairly pedestrian commentary on the passage, often with quite a lot of misreading and/or misunderstanding. For example, there was considerable concern that, in line 7, Nancy is regarded as “bewitching”, not apparently appreciating that the word has nothing to do here with superstition or witchcraft; and although the point is perhaps valid, the fact that Nancy has her arm around her father, in line 8, is more to do with her unwillingness to fall off the horse than any necessary evidence of her love for him. Most answers saw how Eliot (too often *Elliott*) makes Nancy’s beauty so significant, despite her drab coat – this last adjective is clearly significant as Eliot uses it three times in four lines, and even if candidates took it in its more general modern meaning the point is important. Nancy’s strength of character is stressed in her reluctance to fall for Godfrey’s wayward courtship, and most answers made good use of this, often sensibly relating it to later events in the novel.

Question 24

There were plenty of answers, many of them good, to this question. Too many candidates, however, although showing thorough and excellent knowledge of the novel, did not address the word “admire”, making their responses simply narrative and descriptive of what his actions say of Silas’s character. Admiration was often implied in what was said, of course, but given the wording of the question this really should have been central and completely explicit in what was said. There is ample to say – as several candidates pointed out, most men in a similar circumstance might have simply told the child to go away, or taken up offers of help, but Silas’s stubborn nature is what leads him to take her on despite all the personal difficulties that this involved; allowing himself to become at least partially dependent too upon other people’s help, especially that of Dolly Winthrop, is a difficult and therefore admirable aspect of his behaviour, and one that many answers mentioned too.

Poe: Selected Tales

Question 25

Poe remains very popular, though many candidates find his writing hard to discuss; as one put it, clearly with some frustration though certainly making a quite valid point, “his writing usually consists of a lot of punctuation”, without going on to explore what effects this creates for a reader. The opening of *The Tell-Tale Heart* does most certainly have a lot of punctuation, and those candidates who talked of how the fractured phrases and sentences here reflect the crazed mind of the narrator made some very good points. The opening of *The Masque of the Red Death* is slower and more considered, but there is a nicely controlled crescendo of feeling as the two paragraphs develop, leading to the stark contrast in the final two sentences – “All these and security were within. Without was the ‘Red Death’.” It must be a dull reader who does not want to go on from here, and candidates who pointed out how Poe whets their appetites in these openings were entirely right.

A few candidates focused all their attention on just the opening sentences of each passage, leading examiners to wonder if they assumed that what was printed in the question paper was the complete story.

Question 26

There were relatively few answers to this question, but some at least showed not just a secure knowledge of the two stories that they chose but also and more importantly of what sort of characters Poe creates in their narrators, and of some at least of the language he uses to do so.

Wells: The History of Mr Polly

Question 27

This was often answered well – candidates clearly found this a particularly entertaining and amusing moment, and were almost invariably well aware of the way Wells shows Mr Polly falling helplessly towards a marriage that he does not really want; very few, surprisingly, commented on the wonderful expression in line 5, “the conversational ice-run upon which he had embarked”, but many noted that a few moments later he felt himself “falling, falling through the aching silence”. And almost none commented on the dreadful glum finality of the last line of the extract. Having said this, however, almost every answer showed a real awareness of the trap into which Mr Polly was stepping, and of how this would lead towards the unhappy marriage at the centre of the novel, and which in turn caused Mr Polly’s rebellion and ultimately his complete happiness in the Potwell Inn. Humour is a very difficult thing to write about or explain, and it is to the credit of some clearly good teaching that so many candidates were able to explore how Wells makes this moment so comic but at the same time so poignant.

Question 28

There was a handful of answers to this question, mostly selecting the conclusion of the novel; one or two used an episode with the Three P’s, or Mr Polly’s short-lived infatuation with Christabel.

Chopin: Short Stories

There were no answers on this text.

2445 Drama Pre-1914

General Comments (see 2441 Section)

There was a much smaller entry for these papers than for 2441, and a very small entry for Foundation Tier which makes generalised comment difficult. The two most popular texts were *Romeo and Juliet* (by far) and *Much Ado About Nothing*, and although *An Enemy of the People* has established a small foothold as one of the two non-Shakespearian choices, Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* is so rarely attempted that secure conclusions about the general characteristics of candidate performance are difficult to reach. The remarks in the *General Comments* (2441) section of the report on the narrowing of question choices are particularly relevant to 2445 once again and many Examiners lamented the rarity of empathic answers, in particular.

Comments on Individual Questions

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 1 was easily the most popular *Much Ado About Nothing* option and genuine enjoyment of the physical, musical, situational and linguistic comedy was often very striking. The strongest answers conveyed a clear understanding of the dramatic context, saw the ironies in Benedick's attitudes to women and marriage, contrasted Benedick's grumpy cynicism with Claudio's romantic euphoria, explored the humour in the dialogue and the unfolding situation and commented on the significance of the song. There were some effectively integrated ideas about the scene in performance and some candidates felt confident enough to express their own views on how the scene should be dramatised. The response to the "entertaining" strand of the question was generally much more explicit and developed than the response to the "revealing" strand. Some answers slipped into overlong discussions of "noting" or "gulling" and lost contact with the extract. The most successful candidates were able to comment in detail on the richness of the language and the sources of the humour.

Question 2 was not a popular choice but there were some persuasively argued and well supported answers on the subject of suffering love. Hero's experiences were generally felt to be the most painful although Beatrice, Benedick, Claudio and even Don John were also seen to be the most long-suffering by a small minority of candidates. The repression and abuse of the innocent Hero was felt very keenly and an exploration of her shaming at the wedding was often placed at the centre of strongly-argued answers. Some candidates wrote as if they believed that Hero had actually been driven to her death and a significant number of answers became surveys of the suffering of several characters so that the focus on the suffering of one character in particular became damagingly diffused. **Question 3** was rarely attempted but a believable happiness, an avoidance of gushing sentimentality or submissiveness, an ongoing concern for Hero and a clear-sighted love of Benedick tended to characterise the most convincing responses.

Romeo and Juliet

Question 4 was by far the most popular question on this text and on both tiers of this paper. Many candidates managed the balance between close attention to the printed extract and an evaluation of its overall impact in the play very shrewdly. A few worked through the passage with little sense of the audience's awareness that Romeo and Juliet are to be married and therefore the full impact of the nurse's delay in imparting the news and of the resulting ironies were rather overlooked; others focused effectively on the dramatic irony and on the humorous contrast between Juliet's youthful impatience and the Nurse's interminable and teasing digressions. There was a generally sound understanding of the humorous elements with some

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

confident exploration of the Nurse's bawdiness, and although some candidates moved outwards effectively to comment on the scene's dramatic impact in the context of the feud, the secrecy and speed of the developing relationship, fate and tragic inevitability and so on, answers were often less secure on the second strand of the question. Lord Capulet's violent ranting at his daughter in Act Three, Scene Five was the subject of much intelligent comment in answer to **Question 5** on both tiers but strong candidates were able to range confidently across the play and to explore the impact not just of his feuding folly but of his more rational early scenes with Juliet and at the feast, and of his genuine grief at both the faked and the real death of his daughter. The voice of Romeo was often movingly evoked by the small number of candidates who attempted **Question 6** and a welter of powerful emotions – grief, regret, guilt, anger...- were convincingly expressed.

An Ideal Husband

There were so few answers on this text that it is difficult to make any valid generalisations about performance; there was a broad impression that answers to **Question 7** tended to work interestingly through the humour of the conversation in the extract but found it difficult to develop a sense of its place in the context in the whole play.

An Enemy of the People

Again, there were very few answers on this text and almost all of those to **Question 10**. The majority of the candidates wrote very convincingly about Dr Stockmann's gradual realisation that the gentlemen of the press have betrayed him and about the shift in power to his brother, the Mayor, in the extract. There was a strong sense of the dramatic confrontation in the scene and, occasionally, a fully developed appreciation of what the audience knows and of the dramatic ironies. Successful answers were explicit about the nature of the extract as a "turning point" and conveyed understanding of the ways in which Dr Stockmann's desire to serve his community and tell the truth has been frustrated. More surprisingly, some candidates saw him as simply arrogant and single-minded and appeared to relish his humiliation as if they found no distinction morally between the two brothers.

2446 Poetry and Prose Pre - 1914

This year's examination produced work that demonstrated engagement and perception. In response to poetry, the comparative element of the questions is beginning to be addressed far more effectively by many candidates. They are making comparison an integral part of their essays and meaningful comments on the similarities and differences in style or treatment of subject matter were far more in evidence this year. Candidates are also responding more noticeably to the auditory effects in the verse and to the tone of the poems. This will be considered in more detail below when looking at work on the poetry set texts. The work of weaker candidates still betrays a lack of secure knowledge of the content of the poems. This could be remedied by revision sessions spent writing a brief summary of what each poem is about.

The prose texts on the paper present certain challenges to candidates which most met admirably. Many answers showed wide-ranging knowledge, a response to style, narrative technique and to characterisation. Some responses, however, are still character studies rather than an analysis of author's methods of portraying a character. Most impressive was the ability, in strong answers on the passage-based questions, to look at authorial voice. This presents a considerable challenge at GCSE level. Many of the set prose texts are complex in their narrative techniques and teachers and candidates are to be congratulated in rising to that challenge. Much of the work on these questions was excellent. Knowledge of the context in the passage-based questions was generally sound with some exceptions, outlined below. It is worth reminding students that these questions are primarily a test of close reading as well as of appreciation of the text as a whole. Most of the candidate's time should be spent on an analysis of the extract. Good answers always manage to reveal an embedded understanding of context. Foundation Tier candidates need to be reminded to base their answers on the passage and to use quotations from it to support the points they make. In essay questions there was less secure knowledge of plot at this level.

OCR: Opening Lines War

Question 1 was answered well by candidates who grasped the fundamental difference in attitude between the two poems and strong candidates explored the differences in style including Collins' use of euphemism and the ambiguities of the final line in the Housman poem. Foundation Tier candidates struggled a little more with this question- the language and idiom of Collins seem too remote for them to understand. Many did not realise that the soldiers in the poem are dead. The abstractions caused a particular problem: many candidates wanted to construct a story for the pilgrim and hermit. In answers to **Question 2** candidates found it easy to write effectively about the sentiments and description of both poems, and this question allowed them to write directly about the way the poet's language encourages the reader to share the grief of the families of Pete and Tommy. Candidates enjoyed the opportunity to compare the relative merits of the two poems, and tended to write better about one than the other; Whitman probably emerged the winner, thanks to the strong descriptive power of this poem, but many also responded to the details and despair of Dobell. In **Question 3** candidates responded to the "voice" in Hardy's poem and explored its ironies with some confidence. Anne Brontë's *Song* continues to prove problematic for some candidates who seem to interpret the narrator of the poem as cruel rather than compassionate and fail to realise that the reference to hunting the hare is metaphorical rather than literal.

Town and Country

There were some strong responses to this section of the Anthology this year and it proved a popular choice. These questions all asked for comparison of poems with strong descriptive qualities; candidates were therefore able to write in detail about the writers' use of language and even form, and did so with some distinction. **Question 4** was very popular and probably produced the widest range of response. Strong candidates knew the context of the Raleigh poem

and showed a sensitive appreciation of how both poets reflect on time and mutability, through their portrayal of wayward Winter and the wood in trouble. Candidates enjoyed the many opportunities which these descriptions afforded for parallels with human behaviour, from the wayward but flattering lover to the troubled Roman and his more modern counterpart. These poems do need good preparation, and some candidates had forgotten who Philomel or Uricon were, but plenty found it easy to appreciate the tone of complaint and how a less-than-idyllic pastoral landscape demonstrates the passing of time, while speculating interestingly about the differences between the ways in which the two poets saw Nature. Weaker answers found it difficult to focus on the portrayal of the countryside, whether in descriptive or thematic terms. Many answers still reflect a lack of understanding of the Housman poem and an inability to look at the more obvious things in it such as the striking descriptions of the wood and the wind.

Question 5 was often the best answer on a paper for those studying this section. The question produced engagement with detail and commitment to the metaphorical power of poetry, in this case through contrasts between the country and the city. Candidates wrote particularly well about Yeats and the sensuous landscape he evokes, sometimes bringing out the idea that this was perhaps a dream or fantasy as much as memory of an idyll. There was pleasing engagement with the sounds and images of the poem as well as its sense. There were similar opportunities for close response to imagery in Meynell's poem, although some candidates were extremely keen to see the autumn leaves as above all metaphors for wasted lives. Some linked the dead leaves/lives to Meynell's religious preoccupations and saw them as symbols of spiritual aridity, or as dead souls destined for the everlasting bonfire. The best answers on Meynell understood that the harvest idea was central to the poem. It was noticeably in response to Yeats that candidates were beginning to respond to auditory effects. This has raised several issues. Some candidates identify the sounds with their eyes rather than their ears. A very rare selection of devices (like eye-rhymes and symbolic lay-outs) does appeal to the eye, but most poets are interested in creating "music" with their verse. Often to appreciate sound, knowledge of *basic* technical terms alone is not particularly helpful. Many commented rightly on the liquid sounds of the "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore," though alliteration spotters might have missed it because there are no two words adjacent beginning with "l". Anaphora spotters will have noticed that "dropping" is repeated, but may not have noticed the effect of it being repeated at the beginning of another line and the effect of the line starting with a stressed syllable. It is encouraging, however, that candidates are addressing sound and how to best teach this and examine it is a challenge to be taken up.

In response to **Question 6**, the slightly smaller number of candidates writing about Hood and Wilde enjoyed the contrasting moods of these poems, as well as the ample opportunities they afforded to write about the effect of descriptive detail. Some of the humour and satire of Hood was missed: many commented on pick-pocketing as a different form of 'Conveyancing' from the various forms of transport in the earlier parts of the poem, but missed the idea that the whole poem may be less exuberantly celebratory of the noise and busy-ness of the city than it appears to be on the surface. Some found the impressionism of Wilde's poem a little difficult to engage with – they wanted it to convey a moral message about the city, or (sometimes) the horrors of pollution. Others, more wisely and sensitively, simply enjoyed a critically informed wallow in the synaesthetic collision of sensuous experiences and their poetic expression which this poem offers.

Blake: *Songs Of Innocence and Experience*

Responses to Blake's poetry were lively and engaged and reflected teaching by some real enthusiasts. Answers to **Question 7** showed appreciation of how the contrasting styles of the two poems reflected *Innocence* and *Experience*. Some answers to this question were very detailed indeed and showed considerable insight. Answers to **Question 8** suffered in some cases from a desire to restrict the powerfully suggestive imagery of the poems to one meaning - for example, an assertion that *The Sick Rose* is about rape or sexually transmitted disease, without consideration of other possibilities or less concrete interpretations. Though this was a valid response to the poems, it can be rather limiting and reductive, especially when candidates

put forward theories rather than analysing the poem in front of them. Work on *The Garden of Love* was often stronger in this answer with an appreciation of the powerful imagery. Most answers to **Question 9** chose *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* and wrote well when not too keen to make the Tyger all about the Industrial Revolution. One felt, however, that much significant work had gone into the preparation of these poems and that most candidates had responded to them with perception and engagement.

Hardy: Selected Poems.

The most popular questions were 10 and 12. In answer to **Question 10** candidates compared the relative social isolation of “the sweetheart” and ‘Melia and analysed the differences in tone of the two portrayals. The striking effects in the style were generally clearly grasped with effective comment on the use of the colloquial in *The Ruined Maid*. Responses to **Question 12** showed appreciation of the imagery of alienation in *Drummer Hodge* and the poignant ironies of *A Wife in London*. Candidates were generally very well prepared and examined the poems in detail.

Austen: *Northanger Abbey*

Question 13 allowed for an interesting variety of responses. Candidates rightly felt that this was an opportunity to decide for themselves what they found most entertaining in the passage. Answers which concentrated on the relationship of Catherine and Henry, both on how he teases her and on how she half-believes him, and those which focused on the parody of Gothic, and Jane Austen’s contrast of fantasy with social realism, were equally highly rewarded. The discriminating quality of really good scripts was the detail with which they showed engagement with ‘Austen’s writing’ in the passage. However, good answers frequently showed appreciation that the passage is best understood in context, some looking back at how Catherine’s fantasies had been encouraged by her reading, and many looking forward to the reality of her first night at Northanger, or to her ‘investigation’ into Mrs Tilney’s mysterious death. At this point, however, by daylight and comfortable in Henry’s company, Catherine really does believe that ‘it cannot really happen to me’, and Henry can hardly be aware of the consequences of his joke. Good candidates picked up his smile, Catherine’s breathless interjections, and the way in which he involves her in his developing fantasy, as well as providing checklist of Gothic paraphernalia and cliché. Henry certainly proved an attractive and likeable hero for those who answered **Question 14**, not least as many developed their responses by contrasting him with John Thorpe. Some good answers focused on the initial meetings of Catherine and Henry in Bath, and Austen’s descriptions of his many virtues, not least his patient humouring of Mrs Allen. Even better responses extended this to look at his patience with Catherine and how he rescues her from a number of potentially embarrassing moments, not least when he defies his father to marry her. The very best responses picked up that his most attractive characteristic is his ironic wit, which Catherine appreciates from the beginning even when she only partially understands the joke, and so used the question to engage in detail with ‘Austen’s writing’, moving beyond plot and characterisation. Weaker answers to this question barely ranged beyond Henry and Catherine’s first meeting in Bath and seemed to struggle with selection of material from the novel as a whole. There were few responses to **Question 15**.

Dickens: *Hard Times*

There were some extremely effective answers to **Question 16** which showed detailed knowledge of characterisation, context and a response to style – particularly, with the strongest candidates, the effect of the narrative voice. The best responses were balanced in judgement of Tom and recognised the insincerity of his friendliness to Louisa later in the passage. Some failed to see that although Harthouse offers Tom money, he does not accept as the offer comes too late. Tom has already robbed the bank. Most candidates recognised Harthouse’s machinations and commented accordingly. Some, however, took him at face value. **Question 17** was less well answered with candidates narrating rather than focussing on what is moving about Dickens’s portrayal. Often candidates looked only at the first section of the novel or concentrated on Louisa’s and Sissy’s contrasting upbringings rather than on the relationship between the girls themselves. Many missed the moving nature of their reunion towards the end of the novel,

though this was appreciated in stronger answers. **Question 18** was a minority choice but was answered very well by candidates who could see how Stephen was betrayed, both by fellow workers and by Bounderby, and who examined Slackbridge's oratory with satirical flair.

Hardy: *Far From the Madding Crowd*

In answer to **Question 19** candidates really showed enjoyment of the passage, reflecting enjoyment of the novel as a whole. Most candidates were acutely aware of the context, both of what came before and what came afterwards. They were also aware of the way Bathsheba's behaviour differed from her behaviour with men up to this point in the novel. The best candidates looked carefully at the complexity of her emotions, the tensions she was feeling. Most showed the increasing attraction she felt for Troy but the best also recognised the way her sense of decorum was being undermined by both Troy and her own emotions and impulses. Only the better candidates, for example, recognised that her efforts to ensure that her dress covered her ankles was done out of a sense of modesty rather than (or as well as) a vain concern for her appearance in front of Troy. The best candidates also were very much aware of the extended image of the "armour" of the bee-keeper's clothes. There were minor mis-readings such as candidates having Bathsheba look at the ground rather than looking at Troy from the ground and some assigned speeches to the wrong character. Responses to **Question 20** revealed some excellent knowledge of the book as a whole, most concentrated on the way Boldwood had been treated at the hands of Bathsheba – often exclusively so. This was effective as long as the answer did not become a narrative account and as long as it centred on the portrayal of Boldwood. Some candidates found it difficult to go beyond Boldwood's response to the Valentine Card and answers became more focussed on Bathsheba than the portrayal of Boldwood. The way Troy treated Boldwood and his reaction to Troy at various points in the novel also was obviously relevant but not always picked up by candidates. Balanced answers that looked at Boldwood's increasingly disturbing obsession and possessiveness, supported by evidence such as the room full of gifts addressed to "Bathsheba Boldwood" scored highly. Oddly the fact that Boldwood killed Troy at the end of the novel was often overlooked. **Question 21** was not tackled so often, but there were some excellent answers to this question. Many candidates were more interested in the meeting of Bathsheba and Gabriel than the events leading up to this, even including the dramatic description of the fire. They did, however, respond to the theatricality of the reunion – and clearly enjoyed it.

Eliot: *Silas Marner*

Question 22 was popular, but answers ranged greatly in quality. Stronger candidates examined the areas of anxiety and discontent in Godfrey and Nancy's thoughts and thus their marriage as outlined in the opening paragraph. The "voice" of the first paragraph did prove difficult for candidates and they struggled sometimes to explain exactly how Eliot had created the sense of unease in Godfrey's childless household. George Eliot's voice seems to incorporate the space between Godfrey and Nancy. We were sympathetic to the complexity here and rewarded candidates who responded to the situation and placed the passage in context. The second part of the passage allowed them to answer to the question at a more straightforward level. Many responded accurately to the role of Jane in the piece and had caught Nancy's character well. Many were also fully aware of what had happened to delay Godfrey, though some did not disclose that they knew. The strongest answers paid attention to the description of the churchyard and the ominous raven and showed how Eliot's style created Nancy's growing fear. **Question 23** was often done quite well. Some candidate did separate character studies of Godfrey and Dunstan rather than concentrating on the relationship. Many characterised the relationship well and, through their choice of detail emphasised the "power" of the writing. Others understood that they were supposed relate it to the novel as whole. Most did this at plot level but there were one or two who showed how it contributed to the thematic drift of the novel and responded to the moral message contained therein. In answer to **Question 24**, the best responses emphasised "enjoyment", while showing what Dolly's role in the novel was. Stronger answers commented on the humour in some of the episodes such as Aaron's carol singing but also saw that Dolly was instrumental in bringing Silas back into the community and restoring his faith.

Poe: *Selected Tales*

There were strong answers to **Question 25**, which looked at the climaxes to these stories in the context of the story as a whole, where candidates focussed clearly on style and narrative technique. At the other end of the scale, answers ignored the context completely and failed, for example, to even mention the appearance of Madeline in the passage from *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Commenting on punctuation in answer to questions on Poe has become a kind of short cut for analysis of his style. Analysis of punctuation at the expense of content does not get one very far. Answers to **Question 26** were often disappointing. Again punctuation ruled and the actual pit and pendulum, the rats, the horrid damp were passed over. The narrator's actual "premature burial" in the boat bunk he assumes is a coffin was overlooked. Approaches were oblique, with candidates making the task much more difficult than it really was. There were a few takers for **Question 27** who generally showed enthusiasm for the task and knowledge of the text.

Wells: *The History of Mr. Polly*

Most candidates who studied this text answered **Question 28**. The passage encapsulates Wells' characterisation of Polly; candidates needed a rich appreciation of the subtle ways that this characterisation is reflected in the narrative. This was only achieved by a few candidates who responded also to the humour. Many candidates seemed to be treating it as an unseen, which seems odd when it is one of the funniest and best-known episodes.

Chopin: *Short Stories*

Candidates respond to the intensity and drama of Chopin's writing and to the ironic twists of her narratives. Two questions dominated: there was almost equal response to Questions 31 and 33. Candidates usually had little difficulty in identifying the sources of fear in the extracts in **Question 31**: *Désirée* and *La Folle* are popular characters for candidates, who sympathise with their stories. Most were able to contextualise these dramatic moments very effectively, and appreciate them as turning points in each narrative. Some sensitively observed that while *La Folle*'s story shows the capacity of love to overcome fear, *Désirée's Baby* shows the reverse. Once again, it was important to pay attention to the question and to the passages themselves for higher marks. It is the intensity with which the defining moment is prepared for through description and interior monologue, and then bursts out in vivid action and reaction which distinguishes the writing here. Good candidates need to engage with and analyse the distinctive qualities of Chopin's prose, rather than make generalised comment on racism or the role of women. Very few tackled **Question 32**, and they tended to settle for a narrative response rather than looking at how jealousy was portrayed. Candidates seemed to struggle to engage with the intensity and prolonged development of the jealous feelings of Tonie and the unnamed husband, and seemed to lack the patience to describe how that development is sympathetically but devastatingly revealed.

A moralising approach could sometimes lead to rather trite, or plot-dominated responses to the characters in **Question 33**. This was a very accessible question, and candidates enjoyed the opportunity it afforded to write about how memorable they found Armand's violently changing and misdirected emotions, Madame Carambeau's rather more comic prejudices and inconsistencies, and/or Mrs Mallard's fleeting moment of self-realisation and liberation. Many showed implicit appreciation of the ironies of all of these narratives. Good answers moved beyond plot to characterisation and used quotation to demonstrate that it is the intrinsic nature of these characters, as they are first introduced to us, which shapes the narratives and our response to them. Very good answers would have picked up the invitation in the answer to comment in detail on 'Chopin's writing' and the ways in which she is manipulating our reaction to these characters and what becomes of them. Several answers were able to shape interesting comparative evaluations of the stories (even though this is not required by the paper), shaping a personal response to how these stories end and how we judge their protagonists.

Report on the Units taken in June 2009

Students of all levels of ability have enjoyed the challenges of this paper, and found ways of shaping and expressing individual responses to these challenging texts. The paper offers opportunities to engage with writing of real sophistication, subtlety and depth, and allows for a very wide variety of readers' reactions. The best writing produces the most interesting interpretations and arguments. It was pleasing to see so much evidence of good teaching, and of independent thinking on the part of candidates.

Most candidates made good division of their time between questions. There were relatively few rubric infringements – generally, only answering one question or writing on two poetry texts. A few candidates wrote about poems that were not specified in the question. There were, however, some scripts that showed very limited response to the second poem or second story, where appropriate, especially in the Foundation Tier. This inevitably reduces the candidate's chances of high achievement.

Many answers were very well written, and there was plenty of evidence of a focused initial response to the task and extensive use of quotation and comment. Only the best answers tended to return to the question at the end of their response, evaluating the candidates' observations and bringing them together in a conclusion which responded to, and developed, the terms of the question. By this stage, the very best have often developed an argument of their own which takes the broad hints of the question and applies them in original and striking ways.

2448 Post- 1914 Texts

With such a small entry (approximately sixty at both tiers combined), it is difficult to make firm judgements about trends and characteristics of candidate performance. Nevertheless some observed features of these scripts, echoed in other sessions and units, may be useful to students and their teachers in the remaining life of the specification.

Answers on *Whose Life is it Anyway?* generally showed a clear understanding of Ken's plight in interpreting the **Question 1** passage and also in writing as John for **Question 2**. However answers to the latter found it difficult to write in John's voice or from John's point of view. The *Death of a Salesman* passage, **Question 3**, was sympathetically handled for the most part; there were a number of answers that responded to the dramatic impact here, mentioning the music, the lighting, and references to 'dark' and 'grave' at the beginning. Weaker answers omitted reference to Charley and failed to distinguish between Biff and Happy in their comments on their father. Questions on *Journey's End* were answered well on the whole, with relevant details showing knowledge of the play; weaker answers to **Question 5** could not identify or respond to Stanhope's ironic turns of phrase.

It is appropriate at this point to refer to the dangers for candidates in spotting 'techniques'. We all hope that candidates can trace aspects of the writer at work, but a determination to hunt out techniques can be reductive and inappropriate. These two examples were typical of many in even this small entry, and echo concerns expressed in other examination reports:

"One technique Miller uses is speech and grammar."

"The first way (Miller makes this passage moving) is through punctuation and short sentences."

The problem, in a question which asks for response to a very emotional scene in a play, is compounded by the fact that these candidates seem to be treating the play script as a different genre altogether.

Poetry answers were confined to *Opening Lines*, and were generally well prepared. There were some interesting answers on *I am a Cameraman*, **Question 9**, in which interpretations went beyond its binary opposition of film and life. *The Bohemians*, **Question 11**, continues to cause candidates difficulty, especially if they ignore its last line.

Question 17 was popular on *Opening Worlds*, and the majority were able to respond to a range of humour in their answers. There were also thoughtful and sensitive answers to **Question 27**, *The Old Man and the Sea* passage, and to **Question 29**, the passage from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The answers on *Pole to Pole* were also concentrated on the passage-based **Question 31**, and generally well done. Yet again we remind centres that comparison is not required in these fiction and non-fiction answers where two extracts are set, although it may prove fruitful.

There were some high marks from Foundation candidates and low from Higher in this session, indicating the possibility that candidates may have been entered for the wrong tier. The danger, as most centres realise, is that some candidates may find their grade capped and others fail to achieve a grade at all.

Grade Thresholds

General Certificate of Secondary Education
English Literature (1901)
June 2009 Assessment Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a*	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	u
2441/1	Raw	21				19	16	13	10	7	0
	UMS	27				24	20	16	12	8	0
2441/2	Raw	30	27	25	22	19	16	14			0
	UMS	40	36	32	28	24	20	18			0
2442/1	Raw	46				33	27	22	17	12	0
	UMS	69				60	50	40	30	20	0
2442/2	Raw	66	48	43	37	32	27	24			0
	UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	45			0
2443	Raw	45	42	37	32	27	22	17	12	7	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2444/1	Raw	42				33	27	21	15	9	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2444/2	Raw	60	51	45	39	33	27	24			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	27			0
2445/1	Raw	21				19	16	13	10	7	0
	UMS	27				24	20	16	12	8	0
2445/2	Raw	30	27	25	22	19	16	14			0
	UMS	40	36	32	28	24	20	18			0
2446/1	Raw	46				37	30	23	17	11	0
	UMS	69				60	50	40	30	20	0
2446/2	Raw	66	55	50	44	38	33	30			0
	UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	45			0
2447	Raw	45	42	37	32	27	22	17	12	7	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2448/1	Raw	42				33	27	21	15	9	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2448/2	Raw	60	47	42	37	33	28	25			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	27			0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
1901	200	180	160	140	120	100	80	60	40	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total No. of Cands
1901	9.7	27.5	53.7	76.4	90.1	95.8	98.3	99.4	100.0	31874

31874 candidates were entered for aggregation this series.

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
www.ocr.org.uk/OCR/WebSite/docroot/understand/ums.jsp

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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