

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J360**

OCR Report to Centres

January 2012

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

General Comments

The entry this January was very encouraging, as the quality of the responses adequately met the assessment criteria and the consistency of marking indicated that centres had been able to apply the descriptors and handle the weightings of the assessment objectives well.

General Administration

This was excellent overall. Folders were submitted on time and were all well presented with detailed annotated comments making the moderation process much easier. In many cases the annotated comments helpfully referred to the assessment criteria.

Centres are urged in the future to make sure that the cover sheets for each folder are clearly filled in for all candidates that have been selected in the sample, and that the overall mark on the folder is the same as the one submitted on the final mark sheets. A minority of centres sent assignments in a package separate from the final annotated cover sheets and the moderator was then left with the task of collating the complete folder before the moderation process could begin.

Centres are also urged not to put individual assignments in plastic wallets. This again is time consuming as they all have to be removed before the moderation process can begin. One staple in the top corner of the completed folio is the most advisable form of collation for the future.

Interestingly this time there was a wide range of presentational features. There were again a growing number of centres who are word processing the final assessment piece, and other centres included all the background research and notes with the final assessment piece. Clearly some centres feel much more secure including everything in the final presentation. However, centres should include only those materials that they feel will facilitate the moderation process and which will clarify how the final mark has been awarded.

Generally there was clear evidence that internal moderation had taken place and on this entry there were some small adjustments needed to only a minority of centres. Marking was generally consistent and centres had been rigorous in their application of the assessment criteria. It was encouraging also to see that centres were using the “best fit” approach when awarding the final mark, and giving more weighting to the poetry piece if this was in fact the better response of the final two for submission.

Response to Shakespeare

Most centres responded to the tasks on *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but there were also responses to *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*. There was clear evidence that the use of film had enhanced interpretation of the play, and centres had clearly used the film version to stimulate a general interest in the text.

Most candidates showed clear and critical engagement with the play and were able to refer to the text to support their observations. Centres had also clearly encouraged their students to look at the set scene in the context of the whole play and this enhanced the final response as a result. It is worth noting that the response to a selected scene from Shakespeare has drawn the attention of the national press and indeed been the subject of chat room gossip on the internet between practising teachers. The suggestion in these forums is that teachers are only looking at

the one scene from the play and then showing their students the film before completing their written response, which can only lead to the 'dumbing down' of the study of Shakespeare. On the evidence from this entry, that is clearly not the case. Candidates had been well prepared and were able to refer to the characters selected in the context of the rest of the play. There was no evidence to suggest that centres had been anything other than totally diligent and conscientious in their study of the whole play, and then directed this into the selected scene for the final assessment piece.

Marking was consistently in line with the assessment criteria.

Response to poetry

The majority of centres responded to the poems by Wilfred Owen, but there were some responses to the Browning poems and also to Chaucer.

The responses were generally of a very high standard and centres had applied the assessment criteria consistently. On this entry centres had clearly rewarded close personal analysis and the ability to make clear connections between the texts.

Summary

Generally this was another impressive entry, and centres demonstrated a clear understanding of the new specification and responded appropriately. Teachers are to be complimented for their hard work in delivering this unit, and their conscientious approach and consistency of standards was reflected in the quality of work that was submitted for final moderation.

A662 Modern Drama

General Comments

In this assessment series, Foundation Tier candidates again accounted for more than 20% of the total entry, suggesting that centres continue to make careful and largely justified tiering decisions. A small minority of Higher Tier candidates may well have been better suited to answering the more structured Foundation Tier questions and a similar number of Foundation Tier candidates might conceivably have gained marks in excess of the permitted maximum for the lower tier.

The overall quality of the work submitted varied somewhat, though it is possible that some candidates were entered for the unit after only one term's study of their chosen text, whilst others will have been in their first term of Year 11. That said, there was a significant amount of very sophisticated and insightfully analytical work, showing very sound knowledge of texts, evidence of sensitive teaching and an encouragingly increasing amount of comment directed at the play in performance. The work of candidates in a growing number of centres displayed clear evidence of classroom-based Drama activities and reference to specific productions/theatre visits – though it should be noted that some film versions are not entirely faithful to the original text (in particular, the ending of “An Inspector Calls” in the old black and white version differs from Priestley’s text, which may have had repercussions for some answers to the extract-based question). Many candidates were, therefore, able to see themselves not merely as readers of a text, but as members of an audience and to engage with the ways in which an audience’s reactions are influenced by sound, movement, gesture and tone as well as the crucial effects of dialogue, characterisation and plot development.

On the other hand, there was continuing evidence of some centres encouraging lengthy introductory paragraphs, packed with background details, at the expense of swift and meaningful engagement with the dramatic context. Equally unfortunate, since an extremely high proportion of candidates overall (perhaps as high as 90%) opted for the passage-based option, examiners observed the continuing tendency in some centres to adopt an approach to these tasks that leaned heavily on logging linguistic or literary features, even punctuation, and this served only to lead candidates away from the dramatic core of the extract. Generally though, examiners’ reports suggested that the great majority of candidates, regardless of tier of entry, had studied their texts closely and engaged effectively with the examination process.

There were some few examples of candidates answering more than one question, but a greater number of answers seemed to conflate (a) and (b) questions, clearly feeling that the (b) question was also directed at the given passage; this proved a significantly limiting factor. This seemed to be especially apparent with responses to “An Inspector Calls” that attempted to answer the question on the relationship between Gerald and Sheila, using only the end of the play, and those on “Journey’s End” that wrote about Stanhope’s qualities as a leader with reference only to what is revealed about him in Osborne’s conversation with Hardy. Again there was a small number of able candidates who ran out of time and failed to complete their answers, suggesting that the planning and organisation of a 45 minute response may be an issue for some centres to address. Foundation Tier candidates, generally, seemed to use the bullet-pointed guidance effectively to structure their responses; very brief and unfocused answers at this level were comparatively infrequent.

Whilst the great majority of candidates at both tiers seemed to have been successfully prepared for the demanding task of producing a well-structured response in only 45 minutes, and were able to deploy a sound, often impressive knowledge of text, some perennial causes of under-achievement seem, frustratingly, to persist:

- Redundant, lengthy general introductions were a feature in some centres, but are clearly a disadvantaging factor in such a brief examination. A succinct and focused introduction often made a massive difference to the quality and structure of an answer.
- Reader-based thematic approaches to plays that focus on the social and historical contexts at the expense of engaging with the dramatic detail, dialogue, characters, the relationships and the candidate's own feelings and viewpoints seem to be encouraged in some centres. It should be noted that **A04 is not assessed in this Unit** and, whilst examiners are instructed to credit sound and **relevant** knowledge of the social/historical context, too heavy a reliance on such features is likely to be self-penalising.
- Candidates often still write about stage directions as if the audience can read them. This is fine when they can comment that stage directions set a tone of voice for an actor, or show a particular attitude visually, but can distort answers when the language points made are based on them rather than the language in the dialogue. A number of examiners commented that in some answers the focus on the stage directions completely supplanted the dialogue.
- There seems also to be a growing tendency to include often misused linguistic features and literary terms at all costs, regardless of their relevance to the dramatic detail under discussion. Examiners have noted the misuse of "juxtaposition" (for contrast), foreshadowing, dramatic irony (one examiner commenting that all "irony" now appears to be "dramatic") and bathos.
- Regrettably, some centres still seem to be convinced of the dramatic qualities of punctuation, though this is a trend in an English Literature examination that appears, thankfully, to be on the wane.

As in previous Reports, it may be useful to offer some general guidelines about the strengths and weaknesses that have typified responses in this session to enable centres to consider these in their planning and teaching of this Unit for future assessment opportunities:

Successful candidates:

- see the texts as plays in performance and themselves as members of an audience
- see the stage directions as part of the dramatic action of the scene and visualise the onstage action
- pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and balance attention on each strand of the question
- construct succinct and purposeful opening paragraphs, focusing specifically on the given question
- select and integrate brief quotations to explore the dialogue and to support and amplify their ideas
- avoid pre-conceived model answers and formulaic approaches and trust their own direct personal response.

Less successful candidates:

- see the texts as pieces of writing only and themselves as readers
- see the stage directions merely as pieces of bolted-on written communication and ignore their significance to the onstage action
- start with a pre-conceived introductory paragraph, which is unhelpfully generalised, biographical, focused on social/historical background or list-like and says nothing specific about the play or question

- lose the focus of the question and use pre-prepared material which has little direct relevance to the question
- misread the question and write about the wrong character or moment
- become detached from the dramatic action and resort to listing features, such as decontextualised stage directions.

Extract-based questions

Successful candidates:

- devote at least two thirds of their answers to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself, but still convey understanding of the whole play context
- begin their response by locating the extract in the context of the whole play
- succinctly establish the dramatic context for the characters and audience in the opening paragraph
- ground their reflections on the whole play firmly in the detail of the extract
- pay close attention to the build-up of dramatic detail throughout the extract.

Less successful candidates:

- produce generalised answers with attention to the given extract, 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 and largely ignore the question
- rarely offer quoted material from the extract or, conversely, copy out large chunks without any attempt at commentary
- miss the reference to the given moment in the question and, as a result, answer on the play as a whole with little or little or no reference to the printed extract.
- write lengthy analyses of the linguistic features (and even punctuation) of stage directions, which are, of course, never seen by an audience.

Discursive Questions

Successful candidates:

- focus rigorously on (and sometimes challenge) the terms of the question, maintaining relevance throughout their response
- select judiciously across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments
- balance their answers thoughtfully when answering double-stranded questions
- show a sharp awareness of audience response
- quote shrewdly and economically
- arrive at a relevant and well-reasoned conclusion.

Less successful candidates:

- become bogged down in one moment in the play so that the range of reference becomes too narrow
- rely, mistakenly, on the printed extract for the previous question for their ideas and quotations
- spend too much of their time on one strand of a two-stranded question
- completely lose focus on the question and write pre-prepared material with limited relevance.

Comments on Individual Questions

Once again, it is pleasing to report that all six texts were covered in this examination session. “An Inspector Calls”, “Educating Rita” and “Journey’s End” remain the most popular choices, but there were a growing number of responses to “A View from the Bridge” and “The History Boys”, texts which elicited some first-class responses. One examiner commented, with reference to work on “The History Boys”: “Joyous to read work on a challenging contemporary text and one with which candidates can identify”— a view with which the Principal Examiner would wholeheartedly concur. “Hobson’s Choice” was tackled by a smaller number of centres in this examination session.

The History Boys

It was good to see an increase in the numbers of centres attempting this text and there was extensive evidence of candidates having clearly enjoyed the experience and engaging successfully with Bennett’s language and humour as well as some of the challenging themes. The passage-based option (1a) was favoured by the majority of candidates, who found much to say about the humour of the rapid exchanges, the edgy beginnings of the relationship with Irwin, the significance of his approach to history and the emerging conflict between his view of education and Hector’s. The best answers at Higher Tier were able to gauge not only the humour of both the language and situation here but also the cutting effect of Scripps’s narratorial comment, and to make meaningful links with other relevant parts of the play to address the second “significant” strand of the question. There were relatively few Foundation Tier candidates attempting this text and some found the single “entertaining” focus of the question difficult, mistaking the boys’ gentle mocking of Irwin for demands for real information. Few noticed Scripps’s contribution, but Irwin’s comments on the essays and questions about Hector were sometimes explored.

Question 1b was a far less popular choice, but yielded some very full and well-argued responses at Higher Tier. Candidates were critically aware of Scripps’s dramatic function and were able to range widely throughout the text to find relevant evidence of his relationships with Dakin and Posner, his occasional narratorial comments and his opposition to certain aspects of Irwin’s approach. In one centre, answers on this question showed a particularly detailed, sophisticated and insightful appreciation of Bennett’s methods in his deployment of Scripps’s contributions.

Hobson’s Choice

There were very few centres attempting this text in this examination session, with the majority of candidates entered for the Foundation Tier. The majority of responses to 2a were generally stronger on the “important” or “revealing” strand, depending on the tier of entry, with plenty of thoughtful comment on the shifting balance of power, the contrasts between Maggie and her sisters and the lead-in to the entrance of the transformed Willie. Generally candidates were less confident to deal with the humour of the passage than with its wider importance and the “entertaining” strand of the question proved to be a useful discriminator. There was evidence of some uncertainty about the dramatic context with respect to the various sisters’ marital status, about Vicky’s “circumstances”, about the significance of the collar (for Hobson, Alice and Vicky) and about the hypocrisy of the younger sisters, but examiners felt that the majority of candidates had a firm grasp of text and had clearly enjoyed their study of it.

Only a very small number of candidates attempted to explore Hobson’s responsibility for his own downfall in answer to Question 2b and the majority found him wholly responsible with, as one examiner observed, “many puritanical lectures about the evils of drink”. It was observed that some candidates wrote competently, but with very little textual reference.

A View from the Bridge

The extract question (**3a**) was well-received by the majority of candidates and the dramatic context was often fully appreciated in terms of Eddie's situation at this point and the build-up to the final confrontation with Marco. Strong candidates responded thoughtfully to how Rodolpho and Beatrice are trying to save Eddie, in contrast to Eddie's stubborn intransigence, and were able to demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the implications of Beatrice's climactic revelation. Many candidates at both tiers were able to work systematically through the extract, looking carefully at the build-up of suspense and the growing sense of tension and fear. Several examiners commented on the way in which a real sense of mounting tragedy was brought out by a large number of candidates, who had obviously been well-taught and who demonstrated their enjoyment of the text with some thorough and detailed responses. The drama of the extract was explored effectively as was its relevance to the play's wider themes – honour, friendship, family, reputation – which elicited some valuable comment that often distinguished better answers, though many examiners also noted a fairly frequent tendency to lose the passage in a determination to work through a thematic list (Greek tragedy, fate, machismo, identity , , ,) and some answers drifted into a rather formulaic way of dealing with the technical vocabulary of Greek tragedy (anagnorisis, hubris, hamartia etc) as if spotting the feature or naming the term were sufficient evidence of understanding or response to the play.

Although the majority of candidates on this text went for the extract-based response, question **3b** seems to have been one of the more popular discursive choices on the paper, perhaps because it allowed candidates to choose their own territory to analyse Eddie's disturbing behaviour. A significant number used the extract, quite legitimately; Eddie's phone call to the Immigration, the boxing scene and the kissing scene were also popular choices. In the main, answers were well-developed and engaged with text and character effectively, though some responses were seen as being a little unsympathetic or one-sided.

An Inspector Calls

This was once again the most popular choice of text by some distance and answers to **4a**, the passage-based question, generated the full range of achievement at both tiers of entry. The great majority of responses revealed a really good appreciation of the dramatic nature of the scene, showing clear awareness of the apparent decrease in tension amongst some of the characters when the Inspector appears to be exposed as a hoax. The best were able to establish this swiftly and economically and then really explore the dramatic detail of the extract, successfully homing in on the contrasts between the attitudes of the older and younger characters, the mood shifts and the double twist at the end, and often making intelligent connections between the ringing of the phone and the earlier ringing of the doorbell, and the way the audience is encouraged to expect Birling's earlier pompous pronouncements to come back and bite him. It was also pleasing to note that many stronger candidates – and there were a good many of these – were able to comment on Priestley's social concerns without allowing this to take over the response. Mid-range candidates at Foundation Tier were really helped by the bullet points to work systematically through the characters and extract, but it was observed that some Higher Tier answers, without these helpful cues, became embroiled in wider political ideas and themes (eg capitalist/socialist) at the expense of a focus on the dramatic impact of the ending, sometimes missing the final phone call entirely.

Question **4b** was attempted by a smaller, but nonetheless significant number of candidates. The general consensus was that it was handled less confidently than the passage-based option, with Foundation Tier candidates in particular sometimes tending to discuss both characters without considering their relationship in any depth of detail. Some answers tended to romanticise the earlier relationship to emphasise the betrayal and break up, whilst some saw no evidence of affection at all and the relationship merely as a marriage made in the boardroom. The better responses noted Sheila's early reservations about Gerald's whereabouts in the summer, her

respect for his eventual honesty, the way she appears morally to outgrow him in the end and the open-ended resolution of the concluding speeches between them. The strongest often considered the position of women in society at the time and the extent to which Sheila conformed at different stages of the play, and some were even able to see the collapse of the relationship in parallel to the breakdown of the Birling family.

Educating Rita

The majority of candidates answering Question **5a** were able to consider the significance of Rita's growing independence and the way that this extract introduces a changed Rita, though not all were able to recognise that this change was not entirely positive and some felt there was nothing to criticise in her triumphant put-down of a fellow student. Generally, Higher Tier candidates noted that Trish was not the best influence and that Frank was resistant to the change in Rita. The strongest candidates were able to explore the nature of the change in Rita, the reasons for Frank's disquiet and his growing disappointment, as well as considering Russell's language and humour. As a rule, most candidates were more comfortable with the "significant/important" strand of the question than with the "entertaining" strand, but there was a good deal of intelligent discussion of the nature of Rita's development and some sharp insights into issues of identity and finding a voice, role models, class and values. The question proved very accessible to Foundation Tier candidates, who were able to engage effectively with the context of the extract following Rita's return from Summer School and with her growing sense of confidence and diminishing dependence on her teacher. Russell's humour was commented on by many, but weaker candidates at this level struggled to explain how it was created. Question **5b** seemed less successfully tackled, though it was done by relatively few candidates. Many candidates wrote about Rita and Frank's personal friendship rather than the teacher-student aspect of the relationship or about Frank in general rather than his qualities as a teacher, focusing on his drinking. Some stronger responses were able to explore not only the notion that it is Frank's teaching, at least to some degree, that gives Rita the choices she enjoys at the end of the play, but also to balance against this his weaknesses, such as his drinking and his rather un-teacher-like fondness for Rita. Some answers, however, showed a tendency to generalised comment and lacked focused reference to specific parts of the play in support.

Journey's End

A very popular text, with **6a** being the most frequently attempted question. The vast majority of candidates were able to focus on the dual perspective on Stanhope presented via Hardy and Osborne, clearly focusing on the widely differing attitudes towards the weaknesses of a drunkard and the sense of loyalty and admiration for a friend. Strong answers often revealed a sophisticated sense of the scene as exposition, analysing the detail of the extract but relating it to significant later developments and themes, such as Stanhope's vulnerability, courage and dedication to duty, leadership, comradeship and the toll that war takes upon men. At both tiers of entry many were also able to make a clear response to Stanhope's behaviour in the trenches, his dependence on whisky and the revelations about his home life and last leave, though only the better Higher Tier candidates perceived the tone of Osborne's challenge to Hardy's views. Generally, there was excellent work on this extract, though there was some confusion about rank, particularly Hardy's, and one examiner observed that the Foundation Tier bullet point "what the passage reveals about life in the trenches" led some responses into writing in broad terms about the boredom, food and general conditions at the expense of the main issue – the strain on Stanhope and his way of coping.

There were fewer responses to Question **6b**, but it still attracted a significantly large number of candidates, the majority of whom were able to avoid conventional character study and focus upon the notion of leadership. Candidates at both tiers were able to access a wide range of relevant material to reason a case for Stanhope as a good leader of his men despite his drinking

and mood swings. The best answers tended to take a clear and balanced view of the two sides of Stanhope's character before eventually concluding that his positive qualities overrode any negatives. There were good, meaningful references to Stanhope's apparent cruelty to Raleigh and the letter incident, to the confrontation with Hibbert, and to Stanhope's "hard drinking" and unpredictable temperament, but these were all effectively set against his courage, volunteering for dangerous missions rather than risk his brother officers and his leadership of his men under extreme conditions. The best responses offered a truly balanced and evaluative approach, though it was observed that some answers were self-limiting by writing exclusively or mainly about the extract given for Question **6a**.

A663 Prose from Different Cultures

General Comments

The entry for the unit continues to rise. On this occasion, 35% of the entries were for the Foundation Tier. It is encouraging to note that this percentage is rising. This may be a sign that the tendency for schools to enter only their more able sets is declining; or perhaps that their decision-making on tiering is changing. There is some evidence for the latter from this exam – fewer (in fact very few) Higher Tier candidates were ungraded this time, and significantly more Foundation Tier candidates attained band 3. There is also some anecdotal evidence from examiner feedback that Foundation Tier candidates were significantly helped by the bullet points in the passage-based questions to organise their thinking, thus boosting performance.

Of Mice and Men continues to dominate, with more than 90% of the entry; *To Kill a Mockingbird* accounts for most of the rest. The Report on last June's examination reflected on the reasons Steinbeck's novel is so popular, and the quality of the work submitted this time provided plenty of evidence for its continuing success in engaging students and provoking strong responses. Only very small numbers of all the other books were seen so that it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the questions.

The June Report also reflected on the overwhelming popularity of the passage-based question; this has not changed. Indeed it seems clear that in a number of schools candidates were under a three-line whip to choose it. Last summer, some might have done better to have answered the discursive question; on this occasion the evidence from *Of Mice and Men* seems to point the other way and the passage-based question was on the whole better handled than the b) option, while both *To Kill a Mockingbird* questions differentiated successfully. The advice, however, remains the same: if candidates know the novel well, and can range confidently over the whole text in search of material, then the b) option should be given equal consideration.

Particularly at Foundation Tier, the overall standard was higher than last June, which in turn represented a significant improvement from the January. Many examiners noted that candidates' handling of AO4 is increasingly assured: fewer responses ignored it, and fewer (though still not a negligible number) offered lumps of undigested social history, divorced from the task, often as their introductory paragraph. Candidates' ability to interweave deft, illuminating touches of contextual detail is a very effective indicator of attainment at a high level – for example:

“The hopelessness of the situation would have been real to Harper Lee, as although she was describing America in the 1930s, the same problems were still occurring when the book was published in 1960.”

Less able candidates were generally as aware as their more able counterparts of the requirement to consider AO4, but displayed a greater tendency to make rather sweeping generalisations about the times. As one examiner put it:

“It is not accurate to say that, at that time, all marriages were marriages of convenience or for financial gain; not all men beat their wives or used them for sexual gratification; migrant ranch work was not the only form of employment; not everyone, even on this ranch, dreamed of having a farm of their own. It is not true to say that all women dressed like tarts/prostitutes and ‘asked for it’.”

In a 45 minute examination, having to make subtle connections to context while focusing on text and question provides a stiff challenge, but generalisations of the above sort were regrettably common. They are not the most effective way of engaging with this particular assessment objective.

Individual questions

- 1a) This was again by far the most popular choice. The passage was quite short – perhaps an advantage for Foundation Tier candidates – but it was tightly packed, with detailed description of Curley’s wife’s appearance and behaviour, as well as the reactions of three other characters. The bullet points were straightforward and fairly chronologically ordered, and many Foundation Tier candidates made effective use of them. The questions were quite sharply differentiated – very open in the Foundation paper, more pointed in the Higher; the word ‘significant’ offered the chance to comment on how this first appearance foreshadows later dramatic developments in the novel. Candidates who could illustrate the structural importance of this moment without losing focus on the extract tended to score highly. Alternatively, those who spent a large proportion of their time detailing what happens in Curley’s wife’s other two appearances usually lost out because of it.

There was a huge range of responses to Curley’s wife here: some candidates, the less sympathetic, thought she knew exactly what she was doing, cynically manipulating the men to feed her ego; others saw her as lonely, naïve, victimised. Both were creditable, if supported with evidence, especially if rooted in her behaviour here. Many candidates, as well as commenting on the inappropriateness of her dress, saw the symbolism in the colour red, and in the way she cuts off the light at the start of the extract. Effective word level analysis – ‘nasal’, ‘bridled’, ‘brusquely’, ‘playfully’, ‘archly’, ‘twitched’, ‘apprehensive’ – tended to differentiate best answers from the rest, with the first two, particularly, causing some difficulty for less able candidates. Another successful discriminator was how well the exchange with Slim was handled, with some thinking it suggested that they were having an affair (not so well rewarded) while others effectively explored her change of manner here and Slim’s easy way of encouraging her to leave.

The very best responses usually managed to deal with all the characters in the scene, contrasting George and Lennie’s reactions and exploring the reasons for George’s terseness. The link to the events in Weed was often made, deftly by the best candidates. Other links were established to previous and subsequent references to Curley’s wife as ‘a tart’ and ‘jailbait’ and to George warning Lennie to stay away from her. These could be illuminating references, though candidates were sometimes a little indiscriminate in using material (often quoted) from outside the extract and tended to become side-tracked away from the passage. The advice is that the *bulk* of the answer should derive from the extract; as a rough fraction, around two thirds to three quarters.

It was heartening to see how many candidates were able to appreciate some of the ambiguities in Curley’s wife’s character and not condemn her. They could comment on the contrast between the dream of movie stardom that inspired her and the reality of her life with Curley. It was also pleasing that candidates could even sometimes produce observations that had not occurred to *Of Mice and Men* examining veterans, for example the fact that Curley’s Wife’s nasal voice would have precluded any real possibility that her dream of Hollywood might come true.

There was a good awareness of the social constraints around Curley’s wife and George in this scene. Effective answers tended to appreciate how George summed up the situation and remained focused on deflecting the danger to their precious jobs that Curley’s wife represented; they also understood her unenviable position on the ranch, in a macho environment in a sexist society. As already noted, it was a considerable challenge for

candidates to quickly convey an understanding of these aspects without resorting to exaggerated generalisations about the times; but it is clear that there is an increasing awareness of the importance of AO4 and a better understanding of how to deploy it.

Finally, another indicator of high achievement was awareness of the double focus of the question. It can be argued that the moment is ‘significant’ because it is ‘revealing’ but good candidates were often aware of both adjectives and made points that focused discretely on one or the other. In preparing for the examination candidates should be reminded to give a little time to contemplating the key words in the question in order to develop a clear and precise idea of its requirements.

- 1b)** Again, as in both of last year’s papers there were far fewer answers here, though unlike last summer the quality of the responses seen was generally lower. That might have been because the question invited a wide-ranging response, with material selected from throughout the novel, the first to the last chapter.

In the best responses candidates discussed the paternalistic nature of George’s relationship with Lennie and also his final act of kindness in killing his friend. They commented on the life of the migrant worker and their shared dream of living ‘off the fatta the land’. Many explored George’s understandable frustrations with Lennie and his complex attitude towards him – both resenting him and appreciating his company in such lonely times. An appreciation of the symbiosis in the relationship definitely made for a more sophisticated and insightful response.

However, many answers seemed rather unbalanced, with most of the evidence often coming from early in the novel, especially chapter one. A detailed consideration of the moment in the clearing when George throws the dead mouse into the brush was common, presumably because the passage – last Summer’s extract – was well known from class work or mock exam. Surprisingly, George’s actions in shooting Lennie, which arguably present him at his most admirable, were quite often passed over quickly or even ignored altogether.

Another weakness found regularly was an imprecise hold on the question. Some answers concentrated on the relationship, and commented a good deal on Lennie’s behaviour – not irrelevant but not quite so sharply focused on what there is to ‘admire’ about George’s approach to his friend.

Both AO2 and AO4 were less well handled by candidates here than in the responses to question a). There was less overt exploration of Steinbeck’s use of language: word-level analysis might perhaps be expected to play a less significant part here than in the passage-based task, but many quite able candidates, in otherwise cogent answers, offered none. Obviously, the passage-based question does much of the donkey work of searching on behalf of the candidates, but those who managed in the discursive essay question to quote text and comment on it effectively were well rewarded.

Perhaps more surprisingly, AO4 was not as effectively incorporated in this question as in the passage-based option. There was much about the social context of the novel – the threat of unemployment; the endemic callousness; the harsh living conditions – that made George’s care of Lennie harder and therefore more admirable, but many candidates tended to get bogged down in exploring specific incidents. As one examiner reported:

“There was little that really reflected the depth and complexity of the relationship. Narrative drift was always bound to be a problem; any mention of Lennie developed into a separate character study, losing the question in the process; any mention of the fight with Curley and the whole episode was recounted in detail.”

More successful candidates responding to the questions on *Of Mice and Men*:

- were knowledgeable about the text and responded personally to the characters and their situation
- focused closely on the terms of the question
- illustrated the points they made about language and character with appropriate quotation
- wove relevant contextual comments into their answer maintaining a close focus on the question.

Less successful candidates (comments in italics refer specifically to this exam series):

- began with overlong preambles, for example introducing the novel, the author, the 1930s. *Less of this was seen in this series but it is still an issue; contextual links should add an extra dimension to a specific point made in the body of the response.*
- made over-elaborate notes. (Occasionally when candidates ran out of time because they had spent too much of it planning, credit was given to material in the notes that did not find its way into the answer proper.) *Examiners still comment on this: a few minutes to reflect on the approach to be taken and perhaps jot down some brief notes, but elaborate plans take valuable time and often lead to unfinished work. Candidates should be told not to score out plans in case they do not finish; credit may be given to points made in note form.*
- tended to use pre-prepared material of, at best, only tangential relevance. In short, writing what they remember from their notes about a moment in the novel, rather than applying that knowledge to this particular question. *This wasn't commented on as much this time; less over-prepared content, though some candidates are still fond of explaining all the animal imagery surrounding Lennie, even when not relevant.*
- focused too much on technical features of language: use of dialect and slang; sentence length; punctuation; sound features (alliteration, enjambment, caesura et al) and tending to spot techniques without first getting to grips with the writer's key intentions in the scene. *Also less in evidence; but the one topic which is still often given a prominence far larger than it can usually support is the characters' use of slang, which has been seen as a defining characteristic of Curley's wife, Slim, George and Lennie.*
- over-simplified the differences between the society of the novel and our own. *This tendency continues with the notion that women and people with learning difficulties were treated badly then but not now.*
- tended, in Question 1a, to lose focus on the passage and dwell too much on other moments in the story. *There is a real improvement here but many candidates are still getting the balance wrong. There were fewer responses that used the passage as merely a jumping-off point, so fewer candidates whose attainment was significantly reduced.*

2a) Again the passage-based question was by far the more popular choice though there was no marked difference in the overall quality of the responses to (a) and (b). Much, though by no means all of the work on 2(a) was of a high standard: there was some very sophisticated comment on the narrative voice, with many candidates writing insightfully on the effect of Dill's words, both in terms of the symbolism of the 'big foot' as a metaphor for racism, and, in the best answers, in terms of the added poignancy of having this grim moment described in such naive, infantile, yet vivid language. Many candidates appreciated how the descriptions of the children and their interaction with Atticus also enhanced the emotional power of the scene. It was clear that many candidates had engaged strongly with this novel; they conveyed a powerful personal response in their comments.

The last paragraph of the passage provided a good opportunity to focus on 'shocking'. Some candidates appreciated the intensity of Lee's attack on the callousness of the white people of Maycomb, and pointed up the contrast between the image of the Robinsons they held in their head with the reality just presented to us. The way that direct switches to free indirect speech, to emphasise the collective cruelty of the gossip-mongers, was picked up in some of the best responses. Some weaker candidates were less sure of the voice here

and associated Scout with these sentiments; even, in a few cases, the older Scout whom they understood to be narrating.

Some weaker candidates showed uncertainty about what had led to this moment and even what was going on here, some assuming wrongly that the Robinsons already knew of Tom's death and that the children playing showed somehow a lack of care, rather than the carefree quality of ignorance. These sometimes misplaced Atticus's attitude to Helen or focused on the fact of him being there at all as a white man at a black family's house as what was 'shocking' in the extract.

The passage lent itself well to linking with the social context; it would have been difficult to convey an effective response to this scene without showing a knowledge of the society in which it is set, and most candidates did that well, in commenting on the setting, the unusualness of Atticus's behaviour, and the stereotypical view of the Robinsons held by the white population.

- 2b)** Much of the work done by candidates who chose this option was impressive. They seemed to enjoy tackling Mayella; the majority of responses demonstrated a mixture of pity and contempt for her, drawing attention to her hideous home life and her pitiful attempts to keep herself clean and to grow geraniums amid the chaos. They saw her confusion, both at Atticus's good manners and at his questions about friendship, and they appreciated the impossibility of her position in the face of prejudice and hostility to the black community. Some of the best answers highlighted the glaring contrast between Atticus and Bob Ewell as father figures, fixing the blame on to Bob Ewell for Mayella's stunted development. They commented on Tom's own pity for someone so thoroughly at the bottom of the heap and they recognised how trapped by her circumstances she was. Her evident confusion in the courtroom and the level of pressure from her father were also picked out as further grounds for pity, although her ultimate choice to allow a man to face death rather than face humiliation herself was generally condemned. Examiners were impressed by the ability of candidates to weigh up the evidence and deliver a thoughtful and well-balanced verdict on Mayella.

Not many weaker candidates attempted this; those that did tended to produce one-sided, judgemental accounts of Mayella and her behaviour.

Responses generally made effective links to context, exploring the status of the Ewells as 'white trash' (though still a big step higher up the social ladder than the Robinsons) and the way the justice system supported racial discrimination and intolerance. Mayella's volatile responses to Atticus's questions provided candidates with the opportunity to examine her speech, meeting the requirement to look at language, while highlighting how the way she speaks reveals her personality and her lack of education.

- 5a)** Those few examiners who read responses to *Tsotsi* saw mostly the passage-based question and were impressed both by candidates' understanding of the South Africa of the time, and by their ability to use it to inform their responses to the passage and the character. There was some imaginative but well rooted speculation about the reason for the smile at the end. One of the reasons this novel seems to work well is that the historical and social context is very accessible, and candidates find it relatively easy to incorporate AO4 into their responses.

Whilst some responses were made to the other texts, there is not enough information available to offer any useful feedback on them.

Conclusion

The fact that the general standard is rising is encouraging. The reasons for this improvement may well involve some combination of better understanding of how to handle AO4, increased familiarity with the OCR style of question, and the fact that the average age of candidates has been going up every time. It was pleasing to see fewer short, sketchy and unfinished responses as well as a more sophisticated, nuanced take on character and motivation.

A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry

Nearly 3300 candidates (920 at Foundation Tier and 2350 at Higher Tier) were entered in January 2012, the largest entry so far. However, the only prose text which provided sufficient evidence for comment was *The Lord of the Flies* and the only poets Armitage and Duffy; so this report will focus on them.

It is noticeable that a number of candidates responding to the extract-based prose questions do not work on the passage printed on the question paper, but locate it in the edition they have with them. This edition is, of course, unannotated, but using it can in some cases be unhelpful. Some candidates, for example, provided lengthy paraphrases of events immediately preceding the extract (Simon's "conversation" with the Lord of the Flies before his death, or analysis of the description of his shoulder becoming "sculptured marble"), where the focus of Higher Tier questions is on the writing of the extract itself. It may be worth noting here that extracts are chosen with care, attention being paid to length and ensuring that candidates have the opportunity to comment on all it contains, including the opening and closing lines. Thus, if candidates choose not to discuss a considerable chunk of an extract, they may be disadvantaging themselves. However, it remains the case that candidates must be selective in what they consider central to their response, and examiners must be receptive to what candidates choose.

Examiners also noted that the best responses to questions actually answered the set question, focusing, at Higher Tier, on words suggesting close language comment, such as "vividly" and "memorably", and not on explanation of what, especially in the case of poems, the poet was saying – or often, apparently, was "trying" (and presumably failing) "to say".

Some examiners expressed surprise that so many candidates referred to readers of prose and poetry as "the audience", a term appropriate to the A662, the Drama unit.

The Lord of the Flies

This proved to be a very popular text, one that clearly captured the imaginations of the many candidates who answered on it. Most clearly knew the text well, and were particularly well versed in such linked themes in the novel as loss of innocence, the descent of the boys into savagery, and the darkness of man's heart. The best responses focused closely on both the question and the extract, illustrating clearly what was frightening about the extract and how details of Golding's writing made it so. Such features as the chant, the storm, the circle that becomes a yawning horseshoe, the tearing of teeth and claws, were considered in detail. The thrust of the question was on how Golding's writing makes this such a frightening moment in the novel, and best responses focused on the reader's response to the writing; since the boys in the extract know nothing of Golding's writing, the question's thrust was towards what frightened the reader. Less focused answers considered the fear the boys were experiencing, and its causes, but developed reasonable responses to the extract that attracted suitable reward. Examiners noted, however, that many responses omitted any mention of the murder of Simon, perhaps the most frightening feature of the extract. Other responses sometimes over-elaborated elements of the extract, becoming detailed discussions of the significance of Simon as prophet or Christ figure, at the expense of analysing the language of the extract. Some also offered elaborate discussion of the parallel between the boys' behaviour in the extract and the war in a world elsewhere. The point is important and interesting, but often assumed an importance that distracted candidates from Golding's writing here.

There were comparatively few responses to Piggy and the sympathy he might attract. Good responses ranged across the novel, including comment on the theft of his glasses, its consequences, and his death. Less assured responses based their reasons for sympathy solely on the opening pages: Piggy is fat; he has asthma; Ralph reveals his name. Other less assured responses simply described Piggy and his part in the novel, with no personal response, although the question invited personal response.

As noted above, the novel is clearly one that intrigues candidates.

Poetry

Several examiners remarked on the fact that candidates' responses were, in general, superior to responses on Unit 2442 of the Legacy Specification. Clearly, the removal of the need to compare two poems works to candidates' advantage, as does the opportunity to focus on just one poem. Consequently, there were many responses that showed real insight into the poems and the ways in which the poets use language to particular effect. The clue in the question that higher-level responses should engage with language and its effects came, as it will in the future, in the use of such words as "vividly", "strikingly", "entertainingly", "powerfully"

However, there was some evidence to suggest that candidates were spending a disproportionate amount of time on the prose question, at the expense of poetry. Given the distribution of marks (at FT 16 for Prose and 11 for Poetry: at Higher Tier 24 for Prose and 16 for Poetry), some differentiation is appropriate. However, some prose responses extended to three or more sides, whilst the poetry response, on the same script, sometimes did not reach a second page.

There were also suspicions that candidates had revised less thoroughly for the poetry questions than for those on prose, perhaps believing that more thorough concentration on the prose text was justified by the mark differential. Sometimes there were surprising lapses in understanding the narrative, the poet's treatment of his/her subject, or the language of the poem (see, for example, the section on Simon Armitage below).

Simon Armitage

Question 7(a) *Wintering Out* is a comparatively long poem for candidates to engage with, and many did so very well, avoiding a stanza by stanza trawl through the poem by selecting details that they found particularly vivid from any point in the poem. Most focused on the principal difficulty, the lack of privacy in wintering out in the mother-in-law's "place". Some included the noise from next door, the apparent eccentricity of the mother-in-law, problems with the spring water ... The best responded to the humour of the poem (the mother-in-law's midnight undercoating of the guttering; breathing through the tube of the loofah) and considered its language, such as the "skewering of the fallen fruit". However, weaker responses suggested only a nodding awareness of the poem. A number wrote that the "voice" in the poem was staying with his mother, possibly with a girlfriend of whom his mother disapproved as her son was too young to be staying with a girl in the family home. Some wrote that, although the son did not have to pay rent, he was giving the daughter of the house (presumably his sister) Grade 1 cornet lessons to pay his way; that his and his partner's footsteps were running up and down the stairs in an effort to avoid the attentions of his mother. Such insecure responses often followed very competent prose responses, raising concerns, mentioned above, about possible reasons for such diverse outcomes.

There were comparatively few responses to **Question 7b**. Responses to *To Poverty* mostly made much – quite rightly – of the personification of Poverty and the humorously resigned acceptance of his presence. Candidates answered well when considering what *Kid* was about, but, after considering the poem's content, found difficulty in commenting on the language of the poem.

Responses to **Question 7c** tended to veer towards *My father thought it bloody queer* rather than *Without Photographs*. Those that focused on how Armitage's writing brought the voice's memories alive noted the mixture of nonchalance and anticipation of paternal disapproval in the first stanza, the father's words, and offered some engagement with the rather challenging final verse. Most responses reflected on the adolescent need to assert a degree of independence and the older generation's sarcastic reaction. Less strong responses drifted from the poem and its language to reflect on the candidate's own rebellious strivings for individuality (acquiring a tattoo, for example), usually concluding that the parent was usually, in the long term, right ... The thrust of the father's criticism that his son was easily led was missed by some candidates, who built a case that the father feared that the ear-piercing indicated that his son was, perhaps, gay but found difficulty in supporting this interpretation. There was some misreading of the second stanza, some candidates stating that the piercing was done with ice, needle and safety pin, despite lines eight and nine of the poem.

Carol Ann Duffy

There were some very good responses at both Tiers to **Question 10a**, *Head of English*. At Foundation Tier, candidates found much to annoy them about the teacher. Most found plenty to say about what she reveals about herself, and were able to provide sound textual support. At Higher Tier candidates found much to entertain them and were able to discuss the language of the poem in detail. Not all candidates showed understanding of what happens between verses four and five, and the significance of the Head of English's "Well. Really." There were also some gleeful suggestions that the teacher's speech patterns, personality and classroom manner were not unknown to them in their own educational lives. Happily, the suggestions remained just that – suggestions.

There were fewer responses to **Questions 10a** and **10b**. Responses at both Tiers were able to comment usefully on the contrast between an English autumn and the other country, the desk and the rain, and the moon like an orange peeling itself into the sea. The best responses really engaged with and analysed the language of the poem, whilst less strong responses tended to explain or paraphrase particular lines. *Nostalgia* clearly intrigued candidates, with many engaging well with the first two stanzas and grappling satisfactorily with the lines about the priest and the schoolteacher. Some responses showed little awareness of the meaning of "mercenaries" and struggled to make much of the poem.

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