

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J360**

OCR Report to Centres

June 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

This entry, over 36,000 candidates from over 360 centres, was by far the biggest so far, largely due to Centres using the Controlled Assessment as one of the units to fulfil the terminal rule. It is very pleasing to report that overall there was a consistency of marking and application of standards, and the responses to a wide range of tasks underlined the clear guidance that the teachers had given in order for students to complete their assignments without any teacher intervention. In general, moderators were pleased to report that they were impressed with what they saw and were particularly pleased to see that many candidates had chosen texts from across the whole selection for both the poetry and also the Shakespeare.

General Admin

This was excellent overall. Folders were mostly submitted on time and were well- presented with detailed annotated comments making the moderation process much easier. In the vast majority of cases the annotated comments helpfully referred to the assessment criteria and indicated that internal moderation had taken place. A small minority of centres had clearly had difficulty in filling in the cover sheets, and in the “Justification” box had added comments like “I think this mark is generous”, or “I am not sure about this one I would be grateful if you would look at it”. What these centres need to do in the future is include an overall comment on the candidate’s ability and how they have justified the marks awarded.

The use of Modman and the electronic sampling system clearly facilitated the whole process and centres generally responded promptly to the request for folders.

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 the assignments in a separate package to 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 as 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 large 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. Centres must only include 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 in the vast majority of centres and on this entry there were only some small adjustments needed to a small 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 most 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.

Some centres had, however, clearly not applied the weightings appropriately in arriving at their final mark. These centres had given a final mark based upon halving the total mark, and not using a “best fit” approach as outlined on page 18 of the specification. If centres have been alerted to this on their report from the moderator they should remember to address this when they submit marks on their next entry.

Response to Shakespeare

The vast majority of 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 the film had enhanced the interpretation of the play, and centres had clearly used the film to stimulate a general interest in the text. Moderators reported that it was pleasing to see the various films used intelligently alongside the text instead of as a substitute for the text, as was often the case with coursework in the past. What was particularly impressive was where centres had been able to see a live performance as well, enabling some candidates to express their enthusiasm for this openly.

Some moderators did however note that a minority of centres had taught the Shakespeare “traditionally”, and candidates seemed reluctant to use the film and comment upon it, often balancing their final response in favour of the text. One moderator commented on the lovely confusion of a candidate who said that Shakespeare and Luhrmann had “worked from the same script”.

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. Moderators reported that 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.

Response to poetry

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

The responses to Owen were generally well done and moderators reported some subtle Browning analysis, which was almost “forensic” in detail. Responses to Rossetti and Chaucer were a little uneven as candidates often got bogged down in explaining and “translating” the text rather than responding to its effects.

One Moderator reported that one centre had chosen to do Chaucer with a group who although not able to respond with a sophisticated critical style, gave a refreshing response to what was clearly a challenging text, and had “a really good go at it.” It is worth reminding centres that this is a good example of how the poetry is equally accessible for all abilities.

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

Summary

Generally this was a very 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 component, 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 period of the GCSE English Literature Specification (J360), some 363 centres, totalling more than 28,000 candidates, took advantage of the opportunity to enter for the June Modern Drama Units in 2012. The large increase in entries from previous assessment periods was, no doubt, due to the fact that this examination session represented the Specification's first aggregation opportunity. 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, with the proviso that 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 could conceivably have gained marks in excess of the permitted maximum for the lower tier.

The overall quality of the work submitted varied somewhat and it may be that some centres have not yet adapted their approaches to the teaching of the play as a performance, seen from an audience perspective, rather than merely a text on the page. Indeed, a significant number of examiners commented that some candidates did not view the works as drama, making frequent references to "the book" or "the reader" and even, in some cases, to "the novel". That said, there was a significant amount of very sophisticated and insightfully analytical work, showing very sound knowledge of texts, evidence of thorough and imaginative 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. Many candidates were, therefore, able to see themselves not merely as readers of a text, but as members of an audience and 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.

There seemed to be a continuing tendency for centres to focus largely upon the passage-based question; perhaps 90% of candidates in total, and in a large number of centres all of them, exercised their prerogative to select this option. Whilst many examiners expressed satisfaction that candidates had been thoroughly prepared for the extract question and were able to get the balance right between dealing with the extract and with its wider significance within the play, there was also significant concern that some centres are tending to treat the extract almost as an "unseen" and one examiner felt that there needed to be more guidance given to centres on the desirability for contextualisation. **With this in mind, Centres are urged to consider the features of successful and less successful answers that are offered later in this report, as indeed they have been in every Principal Examiner's report since the inception of the Specification.** It may also be worth noting at this point that often the better answers in some centres tended to be from candidates who had chosen the discursive question (b) option, allowing themselves free rein over the text, selecting relevant material, developing an argument and demonstrating a perceptive understanding of their chosen text. It may be that centres would find it productive to encourage some candidates to consider this option as one better suited to allow them to demonstrate their full potential.

Once again, a significant number of examiners observed that some centres have adopted an approach to passage-based questions that relies heavily on logging linguistic or literary features, and even punctuation, which inevitably leads candidates away from the dramatic action of the extract. More able candidates are often able to assimilate such features with some degree of coherence and, occasionally, relevance, but, for the less able, any appreciation of the dramatic/emotional content tends to be lost, along with the chance of getting a mark commensurate with their abilities. An answer that begins, for example, by citing Sherriff's use of stage directions as the key to an extract's dramatic impact and proceeds to subject them to a

rigorous linguistic analysis, when they cannot, after all, be seen by an audience, without relating them to the visual impact of what is happening on stage is unlikely to allow a candidate to maximise his/her potential. In extreme cases, and there were, regrettably, a significant minority of these, this approach led to an assumption that a question that refers to “the ways” or “how” a writer is working applies to technical features of the writing, giving rise to lengthy discussions of the use of dashes, exclamation marks, question marks and commas for dramatic effect. The misuse of linguistic or literary features continues to be a bone of contention for some examiners, with “juxtaposition” now apparently interchangeable with “contrast”, “foreshadowing” proliferating at epidemic proportions and all irony now seeming to be “dramatic”

There were again some, though relatively few, examples of candidates answering more than one question, with some attempting to conflate (a) and (b) questions, clearly feeling that a (b) question was also directed at the given passage, which proved to be a significantly limiting factor. A significantly larger number of candidates than in previous examination sessions seemed to experience difficulty in completing their responses in the time allocated. Whilst the much larger entry may, to some extent, account for this, some examiners felt that time management was an issue in some centres and that shorter more focused and succinct answers would have been to the advantage of candidates.

The great majority of candidates at both tiers seemed, nonetheless, to have been successfully prepared for the demanding task of producing a well-structured response in only 45 minutes, deploying a sound, often impressive knowledge of text. Despite this, some of the perennial reasons for under-achievement still seem, frustratingly, to persist. Redundant, lengthy general introductions were a feature in some centres and 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. In the Miller and Priestley extract-based responses in particular this was a problem for some candidates, with one examiner commenting that candidates pursued Priestley’s themes and the idea of Socialism versus Capitalism at the expense of close analysis of the actual text as a work of drama, and another observing how a particular feature “acted as a trigger for the unleashing of extraneous material, usually to do with context (tragedy or socio-political).”

Once again, it is pleasing to report that all six texts were covered in this examination session. “An Inspector Calls” remains by some distance the most popular choice and it was generally felt to be handled well by the majority of candidates. “Journey’s End” also attracted a large number of centres and “A View from the Bridge” appears to be growing in popularity, eliciting some particularly sophisticated responses. “Educating Rita” continues to be studied by a significant number of centres, with smaller numbers opting for “The History Boys” and “Hobson’s Choice”.

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

The History Boys

A relatively small number of centres selected this text and the majority of candidates were entered for the Higher Tier. The passage-based question **1a** was the preferred option of most candidates and it elicited mixed responses. On the face of it, the extract is fairly short and demanding, but most candidates seem to have been able to respond to Mrs. Lintott's curiosity and sarcasm, her relationship with Rudge, the contrast between her methods and Irwin's and the humour of the scene and the wider play. Better answers linked the scene to the wider theme of what makes good teaching, with some thoughtful comment on how Rudge is handling Irwin's teaching (either he has taken it on completely or is treating it with scepticism, both interpretations were legitimately argued and supported). Only the best, perhaps surprisingly, were able to write coherently and convincingly about the extended "battery chicken" metaphor and the implications of the conversational threads regarding the "Carry On" films and the incongruity of left-wing George Orwell joining the National Front if he were alive today. One examiner expressed surprise at how few made broader links to messages about education overall, but that many candidates, nonetheless, were able to respond to the humour of the scene. The few Foundation Tier responses to this question perhaps struggled to appreciate the humour and offered a wide range of interpretation depending on the candidate's viewpoint.

Question **1b** was a far less popular choice, with few responses known at the time of writing. The question demanded relevant selection and thought and development if a coherent overview was to be reached, but the best answers covered the Head's views on education, linking this to his relationships with Hector, Mrs. Lintott and, to a lesser extent, Irwin. Weaker answers tended towards character study of the Headmaster and the very few Foundation Tier responses struggled to contextualise their understanding or to select key scenes.

Hobson's Choice

There were very few centres attempting this text in this examination session, with a roughly even number of candidates entered for the Foundation Tier and the Higher Tier. The majority of responses were to **2a**, with candidates responding successfully to Maggie's abilities both as a saleswoman and as the manager of a shop and household. The relationship between Alice and Albert provided material for comment on Hobson's control over his daughters and many candidates picked up on Maggie's comments on courtship and marriage to consider their wider implications within the play as a whole. Better answers were able to touch on the themes of class, women's changing position in society and marriage. Foundation Tier candidates seemed to have found the bullet-pointed guidance useful in developing a response. Generally, 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 instances Willie Mossop's behaviour in answer to Question **2b** and the majority of these experienced some difficulty in explaining the humour, though selection was seen to be largely appropriate.

A View from the Bridge

The extract question (**3a**) was by far the most popular choice on this text. It was well-received by the majority of candidates and the dramatic context was often fully appreciated in terms of Eddie's obsessive protectiveness towards Catherine. Many candidates were able to really engage with the dramatic build-up of the extract and its foreshadowing (often correctly used here) of the play's end. Answers often showed informed discussion of the relationship between Alfieri and Eddie, analysing the pauses and stage directions in terms of the tensions that they create in the onstage action. There was frequent evidence of profitable close analysis of the possessive nature of Eddie's language in his representation of Catherine as an object being stolen from him, and strong responses showed an understanding of the way Miller positions his audience to create sympathy for Eddie through how hard he has worked for Catherine alongside these disturbing feelings for her. The very best answers showed a sensitive awareness of how this extract prefigures the tragedy to come, discussing Alfieri's role as a choric figure, and showing awareness of the tragic inevitability suggested in Alfieri's final speech. Some examiners, however, did point out a tendency to overplay the focus on Alfieri as the choric figure of Greek tragedy, which they saw as detracting from the analysis of the dramatic intensity of Eddie's reactions to his increasingly uneasy comments.

Although the majority of candidates answering on this text went for the extract-based response, question **3b** seems to have been competently answered by those candidates that attempted it. Most answers were able to focus on Marco's strong, silent quality, the family-man figure and his future role in ending Eddie's life. More successful responses explored the complexities of his character, his critical view of Rodolpho's behaviour, his conceptions of honour and manhood and the boxing and chair-lifting scenes as clear signals of the tragedy to come.

An increasingly popular text that clearly appears to have been both well taught by centres and greatly enjoyed by candidates.

An Inspector Calls

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 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, with candidates clearly appearing to have engaged with the play and to have understood the dramatic context and content of the extract. Sybil Birling aroused strong feelings for her treatment of Eva Smith and the vast majority of answers were able to engage effectively with this and the tensions between Mrs. Birling and the Inspector. At both tiers responses seemed to appreciate the language and structuring of the Inspector's questioning to "challenge" Mrs. Birling's cold-hearted attitude towards Eva. The powerful irony of Mrs. Birling's final line was appreciated by most. Stronger answers clearly defined the differences between the generations and many were able to link the views of the Inspector and the "changed" Sheila to the socialist views of Priestley himself, though some tended to lose themselves in a morass of socio-economic background detail. The best answers considered the developing dramatic impact of the extract on an audience and the most sensitive picked up on the way that the Inspector is actually becoming more emotionally involved at this point in the build-up to his "fire and blood and anguish" speech, whilst the stage directions signal Mrs. Birling's sudden vulnerability. Some also perspicaciously commented on the significance of Mr. Birling's minimal, but telling contribution. It was noted that some Foundation Tier candidates became so incensed and moralistic about Mrs. Birling's supercilious attitude that they didn't really get around to exploring why this might be so important within the context of the scene.

Question **4b** was attempted by a smaller, but nonetheless significant number of candidates, probably being the most widely attempted discursive style question in this examination session. The opening section of the play is particularly packed, so a range of ideas were, inevitably, covered. It would appear that the majority of answers focused productively on the irony of Birling's comments on the "war" and the "Titanic" and some were able to pick up on the hints given, in Gerald's absence the previous summer and Eric's heavy drinking, as indications of what is to come. Some made thoughtful comments on the staging, set and lighting to establish that this was a positive opening and gave some sense of the contrast it forms with the rest of the play in the light of the timing of the Inspector's arrival, though it was observed that some responses leant so strongly on stage directions to set up the attitudes and social class of the family that it did sometimes detract from the opportunity to explore the dialogue in any detail. The best answers had a strong sense of the way Priestley positions his audience with regard to what is to follow.

Educating Rita

A reasonably widely-studied text, with the majority of candidates opting to attempt Question **5a**, thus answers varied between highly-competent explorations of what is both entertaining and important to basic appreciation of both humour and situation. Successful answers were able to engage with the rapport between Frank and Rita and those that explored Frank's contributions generally found the most profitable material, especially if they linked his language and verbal clues with the theme of education. Frank's comments towards Rita and his barely concealed attraction for her were understood by most, though Rita's adroit and amusing deflection of these was only really explored by the better answers. The best responses showed an understanding of the cultural disparity between Frank and Rita and were able to consider the stage of Rita's journey towards becoming an educated woman that she has reached. Such responses were also able to explore the importance of the bird, which was "dead out of place round our way", in terms of what it shows about Rita's attitude to education and of its symbolic significance, though some examiners expressed surprise that this image was not more widely appreciated and often received a much more simplified response. Many Foundation Tier candidates focused on the differences between Frank's and Rita's speech without really explaining why they was relevant to the question, though some were able to relate this to the notion of Rita's working-class identity.

Question **5b** was, predictably, the less popular option on this text, but those candidates who attempted it covered a range of relevant material to consider how Rita improves Frank's life and enables him to "renew" himself and his outlook on teaching. Most responses were able to discuss Frank's drinking, his growing feelings for Rita as the play develops and the conflicting areas of their educational backgrounds and social worlds in terms of how his life is changed. The better answers developed a response to Rita's role in reawakening Frank's interest in teaching in a focused and selective way, acknowledging that her language, humorous retorts and unconventional attitudes were largely to be credited for "uplifting" his life in general. Whilst examiners felt that those choosing this question generally showed a good knowledge of the whole play, it was felt that some answers tended towards the descriptive rather than the analytical and that few were able to put forward any counter argument that Rita may have had some negative influence on Frank's life. One examiner observed that "the haircut received due attention!"

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 conflicts and tensions of the extract and the best responses were informed by a clear and sensitive understanding of the dramatic contexts, which, as one examiner observed was even more crucial here than in most extract-based questions and that "candidates who failed to recognise the significance of the unmentioned, but painfully present Osborne automatically penalised themselves." That said, there were a great many reports of answers that engaged effectively with the reasons for Raleigh's absence, the simmering build-up of Stanhope's rage and frustration, Hibbert's "sneaking" on Raleigh, a more heroic man than he could ever hope to be, the conflict between Stanhope and Hibbert and its roots in other parts of the text and Hibbert's failure to recognise Stanhope's dangerously volatile mood, as opposed to Trotter's slightly affronted humanity and subsequent pragmatic silence. Some of the best answers were able to consider the deeper significance of the silence and the sound of the guns outside and relate these external tensions to the maelstrom of emotions within the dug-out.

It was noted by a number of examiners that a significant minority of candidates concentrated solely on analysing the language structure and, indeed, the exclamation marks and hyphens, at the expense of the onstage action and dialogue to which these things related. **With this in mind, the Principal Examiner would urge centres to refer to the characteristics of successful and less successful answers outlined earlier in this report.**

Some candidates seemed to have misapprehended the context entirely and didn't understand Raleigh's reasons for remaining above ground, others appeared to ignore what was already known about Hibbert and responded towards him rather magnanimously, whilst the concept of rank was sometimes not really appreciated and the extract regarded as a conversation amongst equals.

There were fewer responses to Question **6b**, but the consensus was that it was generally well done by those who attempted it, with some warm and engaged responses to the rounded and humane character that Trotter genuinely is, despite first impressions. Successful answers ranged through the play, focusing on Trotter's down-to-earth qualities, his responses to the other officers, his ways of dealing with the stresses of war and his quiet, dutiful and unassuming heroism. Most candidates related to his preoccupation with food and comic bantering with Mason, with many able to consider its deeper implications of escapism in some critical detail. The best responses avoided character study and offered a truly balanced and evaluative approach, to explore Trotter's role as an Everyman character, representative of many ordinary soldiers with homes, families and gardens, now placed in a bewildering and terrifying situation and saw his more complex feelings, noting that this was a man set apart from the other officers by his speech and background who was not always "the same". As one candidate perceptively observed "Given the chance, he would not have been a bad successor to Osborne." Less successful commentaries tended to see Trotter as merely ignorant and a figure of fun, simply based on his speech patterns and 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 Remarks

The number of schools entering for the unit more than doubled from January to 360, involving about 30,000 candidates. A significant number of centres took advantage of one of the final opportunities to take the modular route by entering year 10 students. The January 2013 session (for candidates in year 11) will be the last occasion where early entry will be possible.

The ratio of Foundation to Higher Tier entries changed again with fewer Foundation Tier candidates presented – below 20%, after having been as high as 35% in January. However the impression among examiners was, as in January, that the quality of the work at Foundation Tier continues to improve, with a significant number achieving band 3. The feeling again was that the bullet points did help candidates structure their responses and focus on the key areas relevant to the question; the advice to centres, therefore, remains: to seriously consider the Foundation Tier for all candidates not expected to attain above grade C.

Of Mice and Men continues to be most schools' text of choice, though its dominance was slightly less complete than previously, with *To Kill a Mockingbird* continuing to find some favour particularly with schools with a large proportion of high-achieving students, and Tsotsi beginning to make more of a mark, again mainly among able candidates. The majority of examiners who saw responses to Fugard commented on the high quality of the work and the degree of enthusiasm shown by the students who answered on it. *Anita and Me* was the fourth most popular choice, though the quality of the responses here by contrast with *Tsotsi* did not markedly differ from the general standard set by *Of Mice and Men*. The other two novels attracted very few candidates, with the result that, once again, I have been unable to draw conclusions as to the success of the questions in offering candidates of all abilities the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

The predominance of the passage-based question has also slipped just a little, at least where *Of Mice and Men* is concerned. We even detected, for the first time, a few schools where candidates must have been steered towards the b) option given the overwhelming popularity of that choice. We often see the opposite phenomenon – large centres where more or less every candidate plumps for the passage-based question – but the other way round is new. My advice will always be to encourage students to weigh up both options, not to enter the examination with a bias towards one; and in that weighing up they should be encouraged to ask themselves the question: what opportunity to target AO2 and AO4 does this question offer me? I return to this issue below in my comments about the *Of Mice and Men* choices.

In the view of many examiners who have been marking this unit from the beginning, the overall quality of candidates' work does continue to improve. I have made similar comments on three consecutive occasions now; pin-pointing the reasons for this rise in standard is not straightforward, but my view is that it is a combination of greater maturity in the candidates, and much better handling of the Assessment Objectives, particularly AO4.

We were also once again impressed by the level of the engagement with the texts demonstrated by candidates: one examiner wrote, "*There was a genuine feeling of enjoyment of the novels and a willingness to explain and understand what the writer was trying to convey.*" It is testament to the quality of the teaching that such engagement, not just with character but also theme, is increasingly characteristic of students' responses.

Of Mice and Men

- 1 (a) This question seemed to enable the full range of students to exhibit their knowledge and skills. Weaker candidates focused mainly on Curley's aggression; the more able made cogent points about the relationship between George and Lennie, although it was often assumed that George was as frightened as his friend, while those at the top were able to explore why George was 'tense' in more revealing detail, often drawing in AO4 to good effect - insecurity of employment for example - as they commented on his struggle to repress his anger while standing his ground. The best candidates were able to interweave AO4 comment, on say Curley's boots, with perceptive references to structure and the inevitable 'foreshadowing' throughout. Better candidates also explored AO2 in effective detail, particularly focusing on 'lashed' or on the combative nature of the dialogue. One unexpected feature was the number of candidates who were very ready to find excuses for Curley and underestimated his vicious nature – there are a surprisingly large number of students who are fairly indiscriminate and unstinting in their ability to respond empathetically to characters, even such a one as Curley!

How well candidates integrated their contextual comments was an effective discriminator; it is clear that centres have schooled students in the importance of the assessment objectives, and the great majority made some reference to context, the most successful appreciating that good contextual reference is that which drives the answer on and enriches it; however, many less successful candidates had difficulty in making a relevant selection from what they knew about the social history of the time, finding it easier to write down a sizeable chunk of their understanding of, for example, the American Dream, the dustbowl, the Wall Street Crash, in a lumpy paragraph, often acting as some form of loose introduction. A particularly clumsy instance of the insertion of contextual comment would be the following: "*Lennie 'twisted with embarrassment' which is just one of the ways that Steinbeck uses to show the consequences of the Wall Street stock market crash in the 1930s.*" The opportunity to show insight into the character (Lennie's childlike response here) linked to Steinbeck's choice of language is ignored in favour of a tenuous link to the historical context. The tightly hierarchical nature of life in the closed society of this ranch, and the economic necessity of keeping a job at all costs, are surely the key contextual references here and it is a pity that some candidates missed the mark, writing at some length about the dust bowl and the Wall Street Crash.

I have dwelt on a weak example of contextual linking but in general students are getting significantly better at it, appreciating the value of informative, passing reference without any loss of focus on the passage or the task. The effective deployment of such comment is a considerable skill and responses that demonstrate it are well rewarded.

Examiners noted a continuing tendency to use the passage more as a jumping-off point than the prime focus of the response. References to other moments in the novel (as to social context) should be passing, and serve to illuminate the point being made; some even quite able candidates are still tending to dwell overly on earlier or later events connected with the passage, using quotations and involving the full PEE structure. Here it was moments like the fight with Curley, the recounting of the Weed incident, the death of Lennie. Students are very keen to write about foreshadowing and the concept is relevant here, and dealing with it shows understanding of structure, a part of AO2 so eminently rewardable; however, weaker candidates used the idea of foreshadowing as an excuse for re-telling these other events in the narrative, which weakened their responses.

Two centres voiced concerns about the short length of the passage, and whether it offered the full range of opportunities to candidates to achieve to their potential. The range of responses, including many achieving band 1, re-assured us on that point: this is a key moment in the novel, tied back and forward to other key moments; it incorporates a rich vein of both dialogue and description; it involves four characters and a complex set of inter-reactions between them; it provides rich opportunities to discuss Steinbeck's choice of words and to link to the social and historical context.

Many band 1 and 2 candidates were able to target AO2 by analysing Curley's manner of speech, his use of expletives and his sarcasm for example, often contrasted with Lennie's 'soft' and hesitant delivery; less successful responses tried to look at language through more general points about colloquial or uneducated speech which is a less fruitful vehicle for distinguishing among the characters here.

- 1 (b) This question was in most centres far less popular – in many virtually no one chose it. Nevertheless, it managed to differentiate very successfully with a very wide range of attainment noted. I envisaged an approach that looked primarily at the physical conditions, the nature of the work and the quality of the social interaction, or lack of it. I expected to read much comment on the problems caused by the itinerant lifestyle and the macho culture. However, many candidates took a thematic approach, dealing either with loneliness or the power and precariousness of the American Dream, often with considerable success. Many candidates also took a character-based approach and here the results were more variable; it was possible to look at harshness through the experiences of the individual characters and some did that very well, showing the effect of social discrimination on such as Crooks, Candy, Lennie and Curley's wife – whose inclusion does stretch the definition of 'ranch hands' quite a long way. Examiners did find, though, that some of these responses were effectively little more than series of mini-essays on key characters, rather bitty because so many characters incorporated, and only tangentially relevant.

Many examiners noted the similarity of this question to the GCSE English Language Controlled Assessment task on 'disadvantaged characters' though there was disagreement on how that affected performance. One wrote, "*Some students basically rewrote their CA under exam conditions, without clearly relating it to the question, which limited their marks*"; and another, "*This rehashing often meant a very hit-and-miss approach to the actual question itself, with far too few candidates taking any time to draw explicit links with the harshness of ranch life.*" However, it was also pointed out that this had, "*clearly helped in the development of candidates' knowledge and understanding of the texts*" and that the question did "*offer the very brightest candidates the chance to shine by picking out various details (Whit's excitement, the otherwise god-like Slim's drowning of puppies etc)*". The conclusion is, I think, that candidates may be advantaged by having a broader knowledge as long as they recognise that the focus of the question is different and the response must be shaped correspondingly.

There are clear links to social context in this question: candidates could score highly for AO4 without having to dwell on historical events; any sensitive appreciation of George and Lennie's difficulties would show at least 'good understanding' of the economic environment and the way it controls these men's lives. Delivering AO2 content needed more precise handling: if candidates found key sections – the description of the bunkhouse; the 'guys get so lonely' speech; Carlson's bullying of Candy – and selected examples of language use which could be related to 'harsh' they were well rewarded. However, the level of textual knowledge required to do that as quickly as necessary in a forty-five minute paper is considerable; so, in relation to the issue of which option makes the better choice for candidates, they need to weigh up the opportunities to target AO2 and AO4 in each question.

Another feature of the *Of Mice and Men* questions was that some of the material in the extract could be used in answering the b) option. That proved very much to be a double-edged sword. One examiner wrote, “*Interestingly, some students had used the extract to aid them in answering this question as it naturally reflected the idea of ranch life being harsh. There were a very small number who seemed to be a little confused though; they exclusively used the extract to answer this question which impeded their marks as the resultant response was extremely narrow.*” Occasionally the candidates wrote about how the extract depicts the harshness of life to the point where it became unclear as to which question was being answered, giving the distinct impression that the candidate had become mixed up about which question he or she had originally chosen. In those situations examiners were asked to mark the answer as a response to whichever question would result in the higher attainment.

Perhaps candidates should be specifically guided on this point in the future: it is perfectly acceptable to exploit the extract for material in responses to the b) question but a far wider knowledge of the text will be required for high achievement.

To Kill a Mockingbird

- 2 (a) Most candidates preferred the extract-based question. There were few responses that did not recognise its function in showing the difference between the two churches, and therefore the two worlds, of the black and white communities. Some responses engaged well with the language, picking up on the effect of the descriptive details for example and bringing to the fore Scout’s shock and naivety. The passage provided good opportunities to target AO2 and AO4 and the best answers found an effective balance between the two, picking up on vivid phrases as well as the revelations about the functioning of black society.

The exchange with Calpurnia over the money was a good discriminator: most realised that refusing the children’s offering was significant, but not all candidates appreciated what lay behind her refusal – the laws of hospitality and Calpurnia’s pride in her church and her community.

Candidates were usually keen to show their disapproval of the way the black community was treated, but some made comments about, for example, the reasons behind the way the children are welcomed, Reverend Sykes’s manner of dress or Zeebo’s voice, that unwittingly displayed something of the kind of racial stereotyping that is being attacked here. This made it more difficult to give extensive credit for understanding of the social and historical context.

- 2 (b) This question was extremely well done by some candidates: the best answers took on both adjectives in the question and delivered a strong response both to the character of Boo Radley and through him to the key themes of the novel. However, many candidates provided a synopsis of the role of Boo through the novel and came to his one appearance quite late in their answer. If this was shaped to show the contrast between the children’s fantasy of Boo and the reality of Arthur, that could lead to high attainment; but some answers dwelt on earlier moments – the presents in the tree for example – and skated over or omitted reference to the man cowering in the corner or being led home by Scout, which was a pity. These responses tended to do much better on ‘important’ than ‘moving’, on AO4 (the importance of ‘standing in others’ shoes’) than on AO2.

This question illustrates the importance of thinking about the thrust of the question for a few moments before embarking on the response; examiners sometimes felt that candidates saw this as a general question on Boo and how he fits into the story and the message, without providing sufficient focus on the impact of his appearance in the final chapters.

Tsotsi

- 6 (a) *Tsotsi* is gaining in popularity. This may be related to the fact that it serves the Assessment Objectives very well, with a good number of incidents that are dramatic, where Fugard's expression is vivid and where the social context to a great extent influences the situation and the characters' behaviour.

The work done in response to this question was generally impressive. Candidates found much to say about the drama in the moment and its significance in the narrative and for the character. In the words of one examiner, *"There was so much in the Tsotsi passage to comment on and analyse that candidates really excelled themselves and it was a pleasure to mark the scripts. The extract was easily accessible because of the atmospheric nature of the writing. Therefore, the majority of candidates were able to engage with this task and they were able to focus on what made it a dramatic and significant moment."*

This extract was particularly successful in encouraging candidates to target both Assessment Objectives. Another examiner comment refers to AO4: *"Candidates made reference to the situation in South Africa and the position of women in that society and they referred in their responses to so many themes, including responsibility, identity, morality, redemption and mercy."* Expressions like, 'The scream of terror that had fallen from her lips like splintering glass,' invited consideration of Fugard's use of figurative language and the description of the baby's face, 'wrinkled with an age beyond years' also prompted much perceptive comment.

- 6 (b) This was a less popular choice, demanding a wide knowledge of the text and the ability to reconcile disparate events and map their effect on Tsotsi's thinking and behaviour. However, several examiners saw impressive work on this option too. One examiner commented, *"Candidates clearly felt comfortable in engaging with this question and although it is likely to have been the topic of discussion in class, there was a freshness of approach and evidence of personal reflection, well grounded in the text. The context was used effectively to explain Tsotsi's behaviour and also to see how terribly his actions impacted on others."* Another wrote, *"Good responses came from candidates who ranged fully through the text to highlight the impact of Tsotsi's early upbringing and the importance of violent incidents in his life. They made reference to context in showing Tsotsi as a victim of society. Few candidates included the incidents with Boston, Gumbolt and Miriam. However, the poignancy of Tsotsi's reaction to the baby and his road to redemption were clearly noted"*. It was interesting that surprisingly few candidates were devoid of feeling for Tsotsi; few wanted to conclude that he deserved his fate because of his earlier cruelty.

Anita and Me

- 3 (a) *Anita and Me* was the fourth most popular novel with a few schools using it. The extract was chosen because it highlights key aspects of Meena's personality – both strengths and weaknesses – and provides a vivid example of an incident arising out of a misunderstanding caused by racial tension, linked to and to a large extent brought on by Sam Lowbridge's outburst at the Spring Fete. There were good opportunities to engage with both AO2 and AO4 here, which able candidates exploited effectively.

Examiners who encountered it reported a wide range of attainment. One commented: *“Many candidates responded very well to the humour of the extract and reflected thoughtfully on what it showed of Meena and this stage in her development. There was some very sensitive interweaving of context and analysis of the language....the attitudes to the other characters which Meena displays and the impact on her of her realisation that she has been wrong were very well handled. Discussion of the use of English and Punjabi was also used to good effect and related well to context”*.

Another examiner observed that, *“Almost all candidates had at least some awareness of contextually important information, like the incident at the local fair and Meena’s horrified encounter with full frontal racist comments, which colours her reaction to what happens here. Only a few candidates even began to touch upon how the humour comes over, e.g. the difference between what she thinks - “smartarse”, and what she says - “Yes a bit”*.”

- 3 (b) This was not a popular choice of question even in relation to the small number of candidates who answered on *Anita and Me*. Those who did choose it tended not to provide work of high attainment. The word ‘moment’ appears in the Higher Tier question which is always chosen to offer a certain flexibility to the candidates in how weighty an episode to select, but it can lure the unsuspecting into taking a very narrative approach which makes it difficult for responses to hit the criteria for the high bands. As one examiner put it, *“Instead of a couple of really well chosen incidents, which could be closely explored, especially in terms of the language, too often the answers involved narrative tracts and extended subplots.”*

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha and The Joy Luck Club

- 4 and 5 The number of candidates who answered on *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha and The Joy Luck Club* was tiny which severely restricts my ability to say anything worthwhile about the success of the questions. I can pass on one illuminating comment about question 5a: *“Candidates clearly appreciated the way it is written from his adult perspective but reflects his experiences and feelings as a child and there were some effective responses to the language. The relationship between his parents and their singing in unison clearly struck a chord with many and they liked the way the parents clearly knew he was there but pretended otherwise.”*

It may help to point out areas which could be focused on to improve candidate performance:

- ***Inadequate focus on the extract in the passage-based question:*** this is dealt with in the fourth paragraph under 1a above but it is a generic problem; a useful rule of thumb is that at least two-thirds of the response should relate directly to the passage.
- ***Overlong preamble, for example introducing the novel, the author, the decade:*** still observed though a little less so – candidates were more aware that contextual comment should be integrated not bolt-on.
- ***Over-elaborate notes:*** certainly less commented on by examiners – brief notes are fairly common, and a good idea for most students, but careful, detailed plans are inadvisable in a 45 minute paper and were less in evidence this time.
- ***Set-piece content:*** occasionally candidates still show a stubborn determination to include their favourite observations whether or not relevant to the question, but full-blooded model answers are thankfully now rare.

- **Over-focus on very technical features of language:** fewer examiners commented on this but it has not disappeared; often students are uncomfortable with the use of rhetorical terms – ‘Stychomythia’ and ‘tricolon’ are particularly exotic examples from this time round – and don’t do more than provide a general definition without any focus on particular examples from the text.
- **Over-simplification of the differences between here and there, then and now:** still observed – it is challenging to make subtle points about the differences between another society and our own which is presumably why candidates sometimes resort to sweeping generalisations.

A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry

This Unit had been offered for examination on three previous occasions, but, unsurprisingly, the entry was small. A664 is most suited for candidates at the end of the GCSE course. This summer's entry, consisting of approximately 34,000 candidates, gave the first clear indication of how Centres might view this Unit. Although some texts were manifestly more popular than others, all were taken up, so that the range of texts seemed to meet with general approval. It is pleasing to record that the inclusion of an Unseen Poem seemed popular with Centres, and even more pleasing that responses to it were thoughtful, often sensitive, well supported and often full of insight.

In general, Centres entered candidates at the appropriate Tier. Most Higher Tier candidates were able to respond to the demands of questions, to a greater or lesser extent whilst Foundation Tier candidates benefited from the prompts to extract-based questions.

A number of examiners noted that, at both Tiers, candidates too often provided little focus on key words in questions. For example, the extract-based questions on *Lord of the Flies* invited candidates to consider what they found frightening (and, in the case of the Higher Tier question, revealing) about the extract. Responses which paraphrased/summarised the extract, provided a character study of Simon, or looked forward to the moment of Simon's death at the hands of the boys as evidence of their descent into savagery, could not be highly rewarded. Responses which focused on both frightening (and revealing), with personal response at both Tiers to the extract, and discussion of language at Higher, were destined for the higher bands. Similarly, the extract-based question on *Pride and Prejudice* at both Tiers invited responses to what was dramatic about this encounter between Elizabeth and Mr Darcy. A number of candidates provided detailed accounts of Darcy's first assessment of Elizabeth, character studies of both Darcy and Elizabeth, claimed that the encounter was an illustration of the novel's title, but paid very little consideration to what was dramatic about the printed extract.

Responses to extract-based questions were usually most successful when candidates focused closely on the extract. All the prose extract-based questions asked for close focus on the extract. Candidates sometimes needed to provide a context for the extract. However, printing an extract on the question paper is an indication that this particular moment in the novel/story requires close discussion/analysis and must be the predominant focus of the answer. There is, otherwise, no point in highlighting it for candidates' attention. In the case of poetry questions, there is absolutely no need to do other than respond to the one poem of a particular poet, or the Unseen.

Some candidates appeared to think they had to offer alternative interpretations of details and examples they used in their responses. Answers often lost coherence when providing interpretations contrary to ones previously offered. Forty- five minutes offer little room to develop a single detailed analysis of an extract, a prose text, or a poem. They provide too little to support an alternative analysis convincingly.

Some examiners reported that the spotting of literary devices was a feature of a significant number of candidates' answers. In poetry responses, the caesura, enjambment, rhyme schemes, and rhythm were regularly spotted. Caesura and enjambment are, for some candidates, magical, interchangeable, chameleon-like terms. They can "grab the reader's attention", help the poem "flow", and make the reader "stop and think". Identifying an oxymoron is too often an end in itself. Discussion of "lexis" can have a deadening effect, particularly so when candidates have given no clear indication of what a poem is about. Very few candidates were able to identify rhythm, often confusing it with rhyme. The caesura has now been spotted in prose extracts in its disguise of full-stop. Prose devices include "the rule of three", the tri-colon, and "free indirect speech". Using literary terms is, of course, fine, but only if candidates understand the effect they create.

LITERARY HERITAGE PROSE

The most popular prose texts were *Lord of the Flies* and *Animal Farm*. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* attracted a number of Centres, but comparatively few opted for *Silas Marner* or *The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales*.

Pride and Prejudice

A number of Centres chose *Pride and Prejudice* as their prose text and usually their candidates chose to answer the extract-based question. The extract provided ample material for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, and to focus on the way the language works to reveal the clash of characters and values, and relate this to the particular demands of the question. Less successful responses sometimes struggled to get beyond a narrative account with brief explanatory comment, but this is a characteristic of less successful responses where narrative and paraphrase limit the level of achievement. Some Centres had prepared candidates for Jane Austen with a range of most unJanean vocabulary so that Elizabeth's opinions were sometimes said to be conveyed through "free indirect speech/discourse". Occasionally candidates seemed more intent on offering examples of "free indirect discourse" than exploring how Austen's writing made the encounter dramatic.

There were too few responses to the discursive question, on Mr Bennet, for any general comment to be helpfully made.

Silas Marner

Rather surprisingly, comparatively few Centres entered their candidates for this text. Of those, most opted to answer the extract-based question. At Foundation Tier, most saw that the extract's importance lay in the coming of Eppie into Marner's life and considered the effect this would have on him. At Higher Tier, most candidates recognised that the coming of Eppie is a memorable turning-point in Marner's life. Some also considered the death of Molly as a memorable turning-point in the lives of Eppie, whose "parent" becomes Marner, and Godfrey Cass, who is now free to marry Nancy. The best responses looked closely at Eliot's language and what it reveals about Marner, for example his "almost unconsciously" uttering "sounds of hushing tenderness". Few candidates at either Tier showed willingness to engage with the redoubtable Dolly Winthrop.

Lord of the Flies

Responses to the Golding extract were sometimes unconvincing, not least because candidates seemed over-laden with theories about Simon. There were assertions that he was a Christ-figure, sacrificing himself for others; that he was omniscient and omnipresent, like Christ, or God. In some responses, at both Tiers, discussion of Simon and what he might represent distracted candidates from the actual question. The pig's head was sometimes seen as god-like because it could read Simon's thoughts, and was also omniscient. Such ideas were often asserted at the expense of the question, which simply asked what was frightening and revealing about the extract. Some responses asserted that Simon had been driven crazy by the island and was reduced to talking to a pig's head. The best answers were able to say what was revealing about the words of *The Lord of the Flies*, Simon's earlier words to the boys ("maybe it's only us") and the language Golding uses. They were also able to demonstrate that the dialogue is going on inside Simon's head and is a construct of what he knows about the darkness of man's heart and his own fears and insecurities. Most candidates were able to comment effectively on what they found frightening about the extract: the talking pig's head, the voice it employs, its threat, its forecast of what Simon will find on the beach, Simon's loss of consciousness. Unpersuasive responses here asserted that, at the end of the extract, Simon dies.

A number of candidates, mainly at Higher Tier, wrote about Ralph as a leader, and as a leader who was bound to fail. Less successful responses chose to discuss material found only in the early pages of the novel; for example that divulging Piggy's name to the other boys when asked not to showed disloyalty and a desire to make himself popular that disqualified him from ever being a successful leader. More successful answers, still using the early pages, saw weakness in Ralph's allowing Jack to take control of his choir. These often went on to make a powerful case for Jack's being a central cause of Ralph's failure, moving to consider their conflicting loyalties, one to rescue and "democracy", the other to hunting and "anarchy". Some linked his failure to "the darkness of man's heart", the beast that made it inevitable that it would be "no go".

The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales

There were comparatively few responses to the Hardy Tales and these were mostly Higher Tier responses to the extract from *The Withered Arm*. The best responses were those that provided brief contextualisation, focused closely on the extract, and kept the key words "dramatic and moving" firmly in their sights. These found ample material in the extract, ranging from the suspense Hardy generates, the almost simultaneous shrieks of the two women, for very different reasons, the revelation of the corpse's identity, to the death of Gertrude. There were very few responses to *Tony Kytes*, *The Arch-Deceiver*. Happily, most found his self-created "nunny-watch" entertaining and found appropriate parts of the story to support their view.

Animal Farm

The extract-based question on the Orwell proved very popular with both Foundation and Higher Tier candidates.

There was often a high level of personal response to the plight of the animals, the dashing of their hopes and dreams, Clover's perception that things were wrong and the animals' inability to put them right, the touching belief that Clover still believed that life was better than under Mr Jones, the banning of *Beasts of England* There were some excellent discussions of Orwell's language, for example of the description of the farm itself, the mournful singing and Squealer's language. Less convincing responses to the Orwell extract sometimes strayed too far from the extract, commenting in too much detail on Major's speech and the events leading up to Clover's thoughts. Some candidates wrote, despite the evidence of the extract, that Clover believed that the days under Jones were preferable to life under Napoleon's rule. A number of candidates wrote too little on the extract and too much on the allegory, pursuing parallels between *Animal Farm* and the Communist revolution. Candidates, on occasion, need to remember that this unit is part of an English Literature examination which concerns itself principally with the way writers use the language to communicate with readers, and not simply to provide a commentary on twentieth-century history. AO4, which relates texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts, is not assessed on this unit. Candidates need to know what satire/allegory is, but there is a balance between how much detailed modern history they need to know and how Orwell's writing conveys his ideas in order to enjoy *Animal Farm*. Often answers on what was moving about the extract spent much time on identifying Napoleon with Stalin, Snowball with Trotsky, Jones with the Tsar, without considering the terms of the question. Some candidates had difficulty locating the actual context. Some thought it came after Boxer had been taken away. Some thought the extract conveyed Clover's dying thoughts.

There were some excellent responses to Snowball and his significance in the novel, not least when candidates contrasted his vision and genuine desire to improve the lot of all animals with Napoleon's greed for power and his use of it simply to benefit himself. Less successful responses used the question as an opportunity to write about the significance of Trotsky and Stalin rather than Snowball and the world of *Animal Farm*. More than one candidate produced a response that early on abandoned the names Snowball and Napoleon and referred to them as Trotsky and Stalin. An occasional candidate wrote about Squealer, and not about Snowball.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

This was quite a popular text, especially at Higher Tier. Perhaps the structure of the novel, or novella, with its multiple narrators is less accessible to Foundation Tier candidates than its horror story associations might suggest. Responses were often lively and engaged, suggesting candidates had enjoyed studying this text. The extract-based question was often very well answered by candidates who seized upon the suspense generated by the ten minutes which pass from the men's taking up their positions until Utterson's challenge to the cabinet's occupant. The weapons, the darkness, the wind, the candle, the solemn humming of London, and the footsteps, all offered valid material, and candidates often avidly took them up. Weaker responses provided paraphrase and summary, or wrote out quotations with little or no comment on them.

Comparatively few candidates accepted the challenge of the discursive question. The general opinion was that Dr Jekyll himself was to blame for his downfall for, apparently like most Victorian gentlemen, he led a disreputable double life as Jekyll which he was able to conceal by losing Jekyll in Hyde. Good responses were able to support their views with textual detail. Some good responses weighed up the culpability of both Jekyll and Hyde before coming to a decision. Sometimes candidates digressed into AO4 territory and discussed Darwin or the Victorian underworld in too much detail, at the expense of the question.

POETRY

Most candidates wrote their poetry response as their second one on this Unit. This was sensible, as the Prose response attracts higher marks than that on Poetry. Candidates who wrote their first response on poetry sometimes disadvantaged themselves by seeming sometimes to spend too much time on a response with a lower tariff than the prose.

Secondly, some candidates, not surprisingly, seemed to flag a little in their second response on the Unit. (The Unit demands **two** written responses in ninety uninterrupted minutes, a demand now rarely, if ever required at this level). For this reason too it seems sensible to write about the prose text first.

Many examiners noted that candidates writing about poems do so with sensitivity and sometimes with considerable insight. These invariably focus principally on the language of the poem. Less successful responses become bogged down, often early on (in the second paragraph) in discussions of rhyme and structure. These sometimes rather laboriously identify rhyme schemes ("the poem uses an AABBBB rhyme scheme": e.g. Cope's *The Stickleback Song*); or suggest that much of the poem's effect comes from the use of enjambment (variously spelled) or the caesura. Usually, the effect of rhyme and other devices is not explained, whilst the thrust of the question (what is moving, memorable, entertaining, for example,) is relegated for later consideration and often given too little of that as time constraints on the second response start to bite.

The most popular poets were Simon Armitage, Carol Ann Duffy and Seamus Heaney.

Simon Armitage

All five Armitage poems elicited responses, but *Alaska* was by far the most popular. At both Tiers it was quite well understood and most candidates at Higher Tier were able to comment on the bitterness of "Girl" and "Big Deal!". The attempt of the persona to convince himself and the reader that he doesn't care (for example, "the only time I came within a mile of missing you" was sometimes taken at face value) was not always understood. There was also some misunderstanding of "that big king-sizer", which examiners believe to refer to the bed covered by the sheets mentioned two lines earlier, a belief clearly not shared by some candidates. There were successful references to the cold, but sometimes less successful accounts of the Russia/Alaska Bering Strait history at a length which meant that some candidates left themselves with too little time to consider other aspects of the poem. Perhaps this is another sign of AO4 encroaching on a Unit which examines only AO1 and AO2.

The relationship between a child and a parent was often thoughtfully considered by candidates at both Tiers, especially at Higher Tier by candidates writing on *Mother, any distance greater than a single span*. This short poem offers many opportunities to discuss the poem's language and candidates often profitably seized them, recognising the way the distance between the zero-end and the end held by the son increases. The metaphor of "anchor" and "kite" was understood and often clearly explained. "Hatch" presented a difficulty to some candidates who associated "hatch" with eggs; nonetheless they could offer a sensible reading, though candidates who saw "hatch" as a feature of the son's house found themselves in more comfortable territory. There were too few responses to *Mice and snakes don't give me the shivers* for any useful general comment to be made.

A number of responses were made to destruction in *The Convergence of the Twain* and in *Gooseberry Season*. There were some interesting and thoughtful analyses of the former, but the humour of *Gooseberry Season* often passed undetected. Indeed candidates sometimes struggled with Armitage's humour in some of the other poems, rarely seeing irony or the playfulness of the tone even when the subject matter was quite dark.

Gillian Clarke

There were very few candidates who opted to write on Gillian Clarke's poems. Those who did showed considerable appreciation of *Marged*, where the irony of the last line was often carefully considered. *The Angelus* proved to be a poem very accessible to those who wrote about it and who explored its language with some sensitivity. *Sunday* proved to be equally accessible. Although less successful responses stopped after recording the father's anger, successful ones explored the whole poem, including the surly steaming of the sprouts. One examiner commented that some candidates knew why: and "it's not just because sprouts are the traditional Sunday fare".

Wendy Cope

Very few candidates offered responses to Wendy Cope's poetry. Of these comparatively few chose to discuss *The Stickleback Song*, but were able to comment on the effects of the repetition, rhythm and rhyme. Perhaps the best responses were to *On Finding an Old Photograph*. Possibly this suggests that candidates are happier with analysis of what is moving rather than what entertains. Consideration of the figures in the photograph, the father's happiness, and the poignant last line of the poem enabled candidates to write sensitively about the poem. A number of candidates writing about *Engineers' Corner* clearly understood Cope's irony and the witty reversal of the lives of the engineers and the poets. Less successful responses were uncertain about whether Cope was attacking engineers for being unnecessary and useless and seemed to take the poem quite literally.

Carol Ann Duffy

Quite a considerable number of candidates chose to write on Duffy's poems and often did so very successfully. The question on *War Photographer* was rather general, allowing candidates to choose their own grounds for finding him memorable. The most successful considered in detail how Duffy's language makes him memorable, examining, for example, the comparison of the photographer with the priest, and his darkroom with a church. The horrors he has seen, the fields which explode beneath the feet of children, the blood staining "into foreign dust", were usually noted. Candidates were often able to comment profitably on the indifference of the editor, selecting just five or six photographs out of "the hundred agonies in black-and-white", and their transitory effect on the supplement's readers between the twin comforts of their baths and beers. Responses to the photographer varied. Some saw him as hardened to the agonies he has captured ("He has a job to do.") and criticised him for earning his livelihood from the suffering of others. Others considered the hands which tremble in the darkroom and his memory of the cries of "this man's wife" as "he sought approval ... to do what someone must." Only a few candidates really engaged with doing "what someone must". The indifference of people in "rural England" to what the photographer considers a moral obligation perhaps is hinted at in the poem's last two lines. The divergence of responses to the photographer was interesting.

A number of candidates wrote about *Liar* and a similar number chose to write on *Stealing*. There were thoughtful and well supported considerations of both poems. The best responses discussed the language in detail and offered supported explanations for Susan's compulsion to lie and the thief's compulsive thieving. The best responses to *Liar* offered analysis of the last stanza, considering that stealing the child was a way of deluding herself that she was a mother. The extension of lying to the self-delusion and hypocrisy of the judge (also a cross-dresser) and the top psychiatrist (a fantasist with a deplorable if humorously described nocturnal routine) was sometimes ignored, perhaps on the grounds that the candidate found casting light on the lines somewhat embarrassing. The best responses to *Stealing* considered the language of the dramatic monologue and what it revealed about the speaker. Less successful responses to the chosen poem tended to limit themselves to thoughts that the central character was fascinating because poets do not usually choose to write about outsiders of this kind.

There were some very engaged responses to change from happiness to other emotions in *In Mrs Tilscher's Class* and in *In Your Mind*. The best writing on *In Mrs Tilscher's Class* engaged closely with the happiness of the classroom, the laughter of the bell, the "enthralled" books, and the change in the third and fourth stanzas with their "heavy sexy sky" and the thunderstorm waiting outside the school gates. Less successful responses tended to list words and phrases and commenting only "This shows happiness." or "This shows the change from happiness." Other less successful responses provided similar lists, but the comments changed to the sort that you too had feelings just like this when you were in the equivalent of Mrs Tilscher's class, and this is the reason why Duffy's poem is so vivid. Such approaches engage with the situation described in the poem, but not with the language itself. *In Your Mind* was usually well done by candidates who engaged with the poem's language and not just with the fact that the happiness enjoyed on a good holiday, or an escape into your idyllic imagined country, necessarily makes the poem vivid. A number of examiners noted that candidates' responses communicated a sense of real enjoyment of *In Mrs Tilscher's Class*.

Seamus Heaney

Heaney proved attractive to a number of candidates. All five of the poems mentioned on the question paper were discussed, with *Ancestral Photograph* being the least popular. The first question, on *Death of a Naturalist*, asked about striking descriptions of nature, and the best answers were those that provided some discussion of Heaney's language. Candidates were still able to link their analyses to the way in which the boy's perception of nature changes in the course of the poem. There was on occasion real insight into the way the flaxdam is described in the early part of the poem and into the horrific description of the "great slime kings" in the last part of the poem.

Candidates often wrote well on *Blackberry-Picking*, showing how the boy's excitement in the first sixteen lines gives way to disappointment (one of the changes in the poem) and the recognition that an inevitable rot awaits the blackberries, as it does mankind.

Candidates were clearly well prepared to answer perceptively on both *Digging* and *Follower*. Some rather missed the thrust of the question in their discussions of *Digging*, looking fairly perfunctorily at "men at work" but devoting too much time and space to arguing that Heaney feels he has let his family down by taking up a pen rather than a spade.

Benjamin Zephaniah

A number of candidates responded to the questions on Benjamin Zephaniah, most discussing either *Jimmy Grows Old* or *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us*. Jimmy attracted sympathy at both Tiers for somewhat resentfully growing old, his loneliness and increasing reliance on the social worker, the parish priest and the doctor. Parts of the poem were used to support candidates' responses. However, at Higher Tier candidates struggled a little to comment with much insight on Zephaniah's choice of language and form. Successful responses to *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us* usually recognised the angry tone of the poem and engaged with such language in the opening stanza as repeated "strut" (repeated), "paraded" and "angels of death". They also commented on the way the last line of the poem repeats the opening line. Less successful responses paraphrased parts of the poem and condemned racism without any close engagement with the poem. Some candidates were unclear about what had actually happened to Stephen Lawrence and where it had happened. These explained that "waiting for a bus" referred to Rosa Parks waiting for a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, although the waiting was hardly the cause of her fame. As with some Orwell responses, it seemed that social, cultural, historical issues came between candidates and personal engagement with the text.

UNSEEN POEM

Although this Unit has been set on three previous occasions, the numbers sitting it were comparatively small, so it has not been easy to assess the response of Centres, or of candidates, to the option of answering on an unseen poem. With so many candidates this summer, it is now possible to assess the popularity of this option. A senior examiner reported that the unseen at both Tiers, though it was more commonly tackled at Higher Tier, was a popular option and was encouragingly well done. Centres had obviously spent time preparing candidates for the challenge of the unseen, and the best work was impressive in the extreme. Very few candidates totally misunderstood the poem before them.

Four Years was generally understood and drew sensible comments. Most candidates offered a coherent account of the poem, were moved by it, provided reasonable textual support, and gave some comment on individual words and phrases.

There were a few slight, or perhaps eccentric, readings of *Walking Away*. The idea of a final literal parting, or death, occurred quite frequently, but was accepted (as was the gender of the parent) as the parting is so moving. Some candidates saw the reference to eighteen years as the boy's age and were drawn into a slight digression about the age of majority; some saw the football match and the "walking towards school" as two separate occasions. However these were minor deflections that did no damage to candidates' responses. Some words or phrases were frequently quoted, but the invitation to explore them in detail was sometimes ignored: "gnaws" and "wrenched", for example. Some struggled with the reference to God in the final stanza, but most understood the central idea of the poem's conclusion, the need for "letting go".

However, there were many sensitive responses that engaged with the poem's language. There was detailed consideration of the leaves just turning, as a relationship is just turning; the image of the winged seed and the parent stem; the image of something "half-fledged" freed "Into a wilderness".

Many examiners reported that the work of candidates on the Higher Tier poem was the best they had encountered in the comparatively brief life of this specification. Few candidates misunderstood the poem. The vast majority had obviously developed the skills that enabled them both to understand it and to consider Day Lewis's use of language. Examiners often noted that candidates writing on the unseen poem seemed less inclined to hunt for literary devices that may, or may not, be used in the poem, and that, as a consequence, responses were more engaged and, as a result, often a pleasure to read.

Until this examining session, the jury has been out on the success of this launching of the unseen into the unknown. The jury is back, and has to report that the venture is indeed a success. This is clearly a popular option and its success is a credit to those teachers who have prepared their candidates so well for it. Potential AS/A and University English Literature students have a valuable academic tool in their hands if, at the end of Year 11, they can show such insight into, and engagement with, a poem they have not previously encountered.

Conclusion

It was encouraging that so many examiners' reports expressed their enjoyment of marking the responses they encountered. That so many candidates obviously enjoyed the texts they had studied and were able to deploy the skills they had acquired made assessing their work a pleasure.

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