

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0396/01

Composition

General comments

As usual in this component, there were some very imaginative and highly creative responses underpinned by an awareness of purpose, audience and genre. Such responses contained vocabulary of a high standard; many candidates seemed to enjoy writing compositions and their interests and energy were markedly engaged. There was clear evidence of excellent preparation. However, some candidates' marks were limited by matters of technical inaccuracy (especially confusion of tenses and subject/verb agreement) or by the continued failure of some to address the clear rubric requirement of the length of answers (between 600 to 900 words), a self-penalising process. It is worth noting that a degree of fluency commensurate with AS standards is a prerequisite for this component and this needs to be borne in mind. Most candidates seemed to divide their time well. It was noticeable that a few candidates felt it was appropriate to use swear words in their compositions, often in the discursive writing section where there seems to be little justification for any such use. On the whole, though, Examiners commented that they enjoyed the responses they saw and found the cultural insights they gained rewarding and intriguing.

COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Section A

- 1 Effective answer allowed an initial stimulus to develop into an interesting and engaging evocation of memories and feelings, with a real sense of structure and purpose. Some candidates, though, were inspired by an initial idea but had not considered fully how to develop it. Candidates, in such cases, need to ensure they read the question fully and use some of their time for effective planning. Less secure answers tended to focus purely on lyrics sometimes even failing to name the song or piece of music and wrote in such a generalized way that they avoided the central aspects of the title.
- 2 This was a popular choice of question. There were some very touching insights and successful answers forged apt connections between the viewpoints, although this was not a requirement in the question. Such answers were also fluent and choices of details evoked feelings and lifestyles with creative flair. There were some areas where some candidates could have been more watchful: a casual diary format, punctuation and an over colloquial style (it is noticeable that some candidates feel that representing the first person singular with a lower case 'I' is acceptable these days). One Examiner felt that on some occasions the material was a little predictable in less secure answers: that there was, at times, a tendency towards sentimentality or cliché with the wealthy person being miserable and the poor person ecstatically happy.
- 3 This, too, was popular and generally well covered, especially when clearly based on personal experience. Often, very effective contrasts were developed. There was, at best, some powerful and evocative descriptive writing. Less secure responses tended to be a bit over ambitious and produced some streams of incomplete or broken sentences in a rather over-written style so that florid expression stood out.
- 4 Where candidates managed to blend all the elements together there was some highly skilful writing with a surreal blend of colours. Successful answers also addressed the requirement that the pieces were also meant to form the opening to a story and created mystery and intrigue. Others also rooted the composition in a believable situation and avoided any excessive elements. Answers lower down the range tended to be over ambitious here too, self-consciously striving for effects with inappropriate imagery and attempted lyricism. They also tended to string together rather random images with little sense of planning or purpose.

Section B

- 5 Most candidates were skilled in addressing and sustaining an imagined audience. They projected thoughtful familiarity with and concern for their localities, often bringing in an understanding of environmental issues and matters of tourism effectively. Examiners noted that there was much evidence of sound teaching on how to structure a discursive essay here.
- 6 This was a popular choice and interesting to read. It was rather heartening to see how many young people crave peace, social harmony and justice for their countries. The majority of essays were structured well and justified their ideas clearly. Many wrote with sincerity about their own countries' problems. There was evidence here of detailed planning with a clear focus on laws and the nature of society. Less secure answers waxed lyrical about democracy and entry restrictions but did not really expand or explore issues beyond rather generalized ones.
- 7 Strong answers usually drew on knowledge of specific examples and there were some interesting responses from some who saw charity concerts as a focus for all forms of wickedness but cases were clearly argued and engaging for the candidates because notions of celebrity are so international. Opinions were very persuasive and there were some very original ideas on display. Less effective responses tended to describe lists of superstars or rock stars who were role models.
- 8 Good answers supported reasonably polite criticism with structured lines of argument. Less successful answers adopted the pop jargon of radio programmes to create diatribes of vitriol which were entertaining in their real venom but had little in the way of reasoned argument. Sometimes, if one work of art was covered adequately, the other was cursorily dismissed. Some candidates could not identify by name the pieces of work they had chosen.