

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 0396/01
Composition

There was a wide range in the standard of the work presented. At the higher end of the range, while truly inspired work was rare there were some highly proficient scripts containing imaginative, fluent and focused compositions underpinned by an awareness of strategy and audience, making them a genuine pleasure to read. At the lower end of the range, a number of responses were marked by a level of accuracy not commensurate with AS level standard. Lapses in tenses, expression and syntax were very much in evidence in those scripts. Unfortunately, a small number of candidates' responses were inappropriate to task due to insecurity of form/genre.

There was little rubric infringement or misuse of time allocation.

A number of candidates ran out of time resulting in a brief response to **Section B**. However, most candidates used their time allocation effectively

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a popular choice and produced some imaginative and sustained responses supported by effective use of language. Occasionally there were some digressions into narrative. Less discriminating candidates failed to bring out contrasts in 'setting' and 'atmosphere'.

The main points and qualities that characterised good answers to the question were a wide range of descriptive devices within a tightly constructed response; a variety of sentence structures used effectively to assist in the creation of atmosphere; and original figurative language. (This is applicable to other questions on the paper too.) The main weaknesses seen were use of clichéd similes and metaphors resulting in a lack of originality; unvaried expression; using too many simple sentences resulting in a disjointed style; describing the buildings in a very literal manner without attempting to create atmosphere; and failing to create descriptive *contrasts*.

Some candidates simply narrated the process of renovating a building rather than creating a sense of restoration and newness.

Question 2

This, too, was a popular choice and elicited some inventive and persuasive ideas. There were some original plotlines interpreting the idea of invasion in interesting ways, from war invasion to body invasion and even to invasion of the mind by the media. Less successful examples tended to rely on plot at the expense of effects. Many made use of rather derivative or unconvincing alien invasion plotlines.

In better answers Examiners noted strong opening paragraphs in which narrative devices were used to create a sense of fear and suspense from the very beginning. Some candidates were able to create a convincing sense of character through direct speech, using tightly constructed responses that engaged the reader throughout with varied language and narrative effects.

In lower scoring answers the main problems were unclear expression, and a failure to use a range of descriptive/narrative devices resulting in an opening chapter that did not engage the interest of the reader.

A few candidates constructed their response as a short story rather than an opening chapter.

Question 3

Effective responses clearly brought out contrasts between the generations, each part possessing a clear and valid sense of voice and appropriate register. Key qualities that characterised high scoring answers were frequent connections in subject matter between the two monologues and original ideas about the basis of parent/child conflict rather than the obvious ones. In such scripts a variety of narrative and language effects was used to good effect.

In the weaker scripts monologues tended to become rants rather than thoughtful considerations. There was also a lack of connection in subject matter between the two monologues.

A number of candidates simply gave a third person generic explanation of the differences between parents' and children's attitudes and behaviour rather than providing two separate monologues.

Question 4

In the main, this was tackled disappointingly. While some good answers utilised a range of narrative and descriptive features and had some imaginative and original ideas for storylines, it was more frequent to read answers with a paucity of descriptive/narrative devices. Many had clichéd conclusions, and there were a surprising number of "it was all a dream"-type endings. Many candidates relied far too heavily on appropriating elements of popular children's stories (e.g. the *Harry Potter* books) for this task. Others failed to give their story a sense of an unusual or unexpected ending which the question required.

Some scripts entirely ignored the fact that this was a Section A (Narrative/ Descriptive/ Imaginative) task and provided an explanation of magic rather than a short story as instructed.

Question 5

This was the least popular question on the paper. While there were some strong responses which were convincing and engaging, it proved rather difficult for other candidates who attempted it. Weaker candidates merely described some conspiracy theories rather than attempting to write the discursive essay as required. Sometimes there was no response to the quotation given, and sometimes a confusion over what the phrase 'conspiracy theory' means.

Some of the more commonly occurring areas explored in answers were the assassinations of Martin Luther King and President Kennedy, '9/11' and the Roswell UFO incident.

Question 6

This was a popular choice and was generally well answered. It drew out some competent and proficient material where contrasting voices and perspectives were aligned in sharp opposition. The best answers showed clear understanding of the possible benefits and disadvantages of industrial and residential developments, referring to specific places known to candidates. This helped add a sense of realism and atmosphere. These answers made good use of contrast in perspective when switching to the other side of the argument.

Weaker answers had difficulty with appropriate tone and made limited use of persuasive techniques. Use of imaginary locales was often unconvincing. A number ignored the question's focus on 'residential' and 'industrial' and wrote about new shopping malls or retail parks.

Question 7

This was by far the most popular Section B question. Many responses explored the issues involved with relish and keen interest. There were some very strong opinions voiced, but candidates were usually able to offer measured and highly focused ideas and attitudes without resorting to diatribe or rant, giving a variety of valid reasons to support their arguments.

In weaker scripts the main weakness was an over-reliance on personal anecdote, and lack of counter-argument and discursive techniques. Some answers were far too rambling and digressive.

Question 8

There were some solid and focused ideas in response to this task, but sometimes the choice of location was rather surreal or unimaginative. Most candidates wrote about well known holiday destinations and disappointments. This task enabled them to cover a good range of complementary detail in their two pieces of writing. Letter writing was popular here. As with Question 7, weaker answers used very few persuasive techniques in their writing, and tended to be rambling and digressive, with little solid support.