

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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**Papers 0486/01 and 0486/04**

**Paper 1 (Open Books) and Paper 4 (Closed Books)**

## General comments

There was strong evidence that candidates across the ability range had enjoyed reading and exploring their texts thereby fulfilling the principal aim of this literature examination. A number were awarded maximum marks for quite outstanding work on individual essay answers. Only a tiny proportion of those entered found themselves with very little to say; these, sadly, had not benefited from their reading and had been careless and less than conscientious in their preparation (or, perhaps, inappropriately entered.). In such cases, only small in number, there is still much for Centres to do. Candidates who received only modest reward were those who failed to read the questions carefully, who presented unfocused responses, who used unsuitable or irrelevant material as corroborative evidence and neglected to explore fully the nature of the task given to them. The highest attainers were those who saw the point of the question and then addressed it, who avoided needless repetition, who used relevant and appropriate supporting evidence from the texts, and who showed enthusiasm and engagement in their responses.

It is good to note that fewer candidates were guilty of rubric infringements this session than in previous years. It is important that all candidates are trained to read most carefully the instructions clearly printed on the front sheet of any question paper; indeed, candidates should in any case already be aware of the rubric requirements well in advance of the examination itself. Candidates who answered two questions on the same text or who neglected to choose an asterisked (passage-based) question or answered too many questions, will always put themselves at a significant disadvantage (unless there are particular extenuating circumstances to be considered under Special Considerations procedures - and it is emphasised that these are rare). Occasionally, the previously over-prepared answer was offloaded, perhaps one written in response to a question on the same text but with a different emphasis. Examiners will, of course, recognise such discrepancies for what they are and mark accordingly. Where this problem has occurred it is often in tackling the poetry section: sometimes it was clear that answers had been 'learned' on a particular poem, but one which did not meet the criteria in the question set: that way lies disaster!

Putting these deficiencies in a small proportion of scripts aside, it is good to note how much better most candidates now seem prepared to tackle this examination. Most Examiners reported a positive, appreciative, knowledgeable and well-prepared cohort this year: a great tribute to candidates and their Teachers. There were some excellent responses to the empathetic questions especially (even if they were seldom the most popular option on a text), with imaginative candidates using them as a vehicle for their insightful and creative talents. These questions should not be regarded as easy options, for they require considerable skill and textual familiarity as well as imagination if they are to result in high reward.

Candidates are learning to apportion their time more judiciously: there were fewer instances reported this session of the hurried last question in a script or evidence of allocating a disproportionate amount of precious time to one, perhaps favourite, text. Passage-based answers were, on the whole, focused and relevant, though there were a number who simply relied on the extract at the expense of showing any knowledge whatsoever of the text as a whole.

Examiners were pleased to note a general improvement in presentation of answers, but Centres should continue to stress to candidates the importance of filling in accurately the required information on the front of their scripts and ensuring that questions chosen for answer are clearly numbered as they are on the examination paper. Packaging scripts in the correct order, and ensuring that attendance registers are accurately completed are of great importance in ensuring the smooth running of this examination.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Poetry**

#### **Questions 1 - 3**

Seamus Heaney: *Death of A Naturalist*

Some very good answers to **Question 1** were noted as candidates responded to Heaney's vivid, detailed picture. Those who simply sought to paraphrase the poem could receive only modest reward. 'The Barn' had clearly been enjoyed by those who had studied it. **Questions 2** and **3** were less popular, though a number of candidates who recognised and explored fully the striking nature of Heaney's imagery scored well. This text was less popular than the alternative poetry text.

#### **Questions 4 - 6**

Douglas Hydes, ed.: *Touched With Fire*

There were some excellent responses to **Question 4**, but some that were very disappointing. Those who engaged fully with the question and brought out 'the excitement of personal discovery' in 'On First Looking...' were well rewarded. Unfortunately, there were others who did not really understand Keats's poem, and seemed not to have worked on it before the actual exam. They mistakenly assumed that Keats's travels were literal rather than metaphorical and in so doing, they distorted much of their answer. A few had no idea as to who Chapman was nor, moreover, Homer; since this was not an unseen practical criticism-type exercise, that lack of knowledge was problematic and disappointing. The most used poem in response to **Question 5** was the depressing 'I am the only being whose doom' - an appropriate choice. Examiners reported some creditable responses here. In answer to **Question 6**, too many candidates offered analyses of the poems rather than focusing on 'particular lines or parts of poems' as required by the question.

### **Prose**

#### **Questions 7 - 9**

Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

*Jane Eyre* proved to be a very popular set text across a wide variety of Centres and Examiners were pleased to find how it continues to stimulate great interest and engagement across the ability range. Most candidates who had prepared it offered **Question 7**, and Examiners were impressed by how many confidently searched out the words and phrases which revealed the hypocrisy and unpleasantness of Mr Brocklehurst. Those candidates who explored such examples with insight and perspicacity gained very high reward indeed. For **Question 8** the episode of the Red Room was the most used in illustration, although other interesting and apposite episodes were used as candidates brought out the fear and suspense in the writing. Many of those who chose **Question 9** clearly enjoyed creating Blanche Ingram's annoyance at being ousted by poor, plain Jane.

#### **Questions 10 - 12**

Thomas Hardy: *The Woodlanders*

As last year, this was less popular than some other prose texts in this section. The hints in the extract question (**Question 10**) revealing the growing attraction Fitzpiers and Grace had for each other were teased out by the better candidates and then placed in context. The second part of the question required more insight than was seen in most answers. **Question 11** was usually competently done, although a few candidates came down firmly on the side of one of the alternative descriptions of Grace, totally ignoring the other. Very few answers were seen in response to **Question 12**.

#### **Questions 13 - 15**

Doris Lessing: *The Grass is Singing*

Surprisingly, perhaps, this book was the least subscribed of the prose texts. Examiners reported some sound work on it, nevertheless, with scripts revealing fair understanding of Mary Turner's situation in **Questions 13** and **14** and appropriate recognition of Charles Slatter's racial bigotry in the empathetic task, **Question 15**.

## Questions 16 - 18

Joan Lindsay: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

Many of those who tackled **Question 16** did well. They saw the nature of the relationship between Michael and Albert and gave detailed references from Lindsay's novel. Some were less sure about the second part of the question. **Questions 17** and **18** tended to be tackled with rather less competence. A few candidates did, nevertheless, produce lively accounts of Dianne de Poitiers' thoughts on her way to Bendigo, and were duly rewarded.

## Questions 19 - 21

Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*

As in previous sessions, many candidates chose to answer on this text. The passage-based **Question 19** was often very well done, as candidates recognised the great significance of this first real dialogue between the creator and his creation. Many found rather more humanity in the monster than in Victor and were able to support their views with relevant material from the passage. There were some excellently argued answers to **Question 20**; only a tiny minority wrote about the three different narrators.

## Questions 22 - 24

Amy Tan: *The Joy Luck Club*

This proved to be a much enjoyed prose text, but it was by no means as popular with this cohort as Brontë and Shelley. Answers revealed insight into and empathy with Tan's characters. **Question 24** elicited some delightfully moving responses that were a joy to read, as candidates showed their enthusiastic understanding of, and sympathy with, Jing-mei.

## Questions 25 - 27

Paul Theroux: *The Mosquito Coast*

The irony of Father's desire to dominate and forcibly drive his family into what he thought was a better life was not lost on the perceptive candidates; nor was Mother's calm and measured way of going about things in Father's absence (**Question 25**). Differing views were expressed as to Allie's role as father (**Question 26**). Some few thought his energetic courage and inventiveness were ideal qualifications for praise and admiration whilst the majority felt he was over-zealous, lacked sensitivity and, for some, was guilty of cruelty. So long as candidates made their case cogently backed by appropriate supporting evidence either view could score equally well. Surprisingly, perhaps, the empathetic option proved far less popular, and Examiners reported some disappointing responses here.

## Questions 28 - 30

Richard Wright: *Black Boy*

There was much in the passage-based **Question 28** to provide candidates with material for a sound answer. Those who used this material to identify Richard's fertile and thoughtful mind and resolute determination were able to score well. There are many examples throughout the book to illustrate Richard's resourcefulness, stamina and imaginative thinking: high-achieving candidates instanced such examples in their answers to **Question 29**, explored them and drew relevant conclusions. In response to **Question 30**, the popular choices were Granny, Richard's mother and Aunt Addy.

## Drama

### Questions 31 - 33

Alan Ayckbourn: *A Small Family Business*

Examiners were pleased to sense a greater appreciation of humour's dramatic potential and effects than has generally been evinced in responses to comedy texts in past sessions. A good number of candidates effectively brought out the hilarity of the situation in Ayckbourn's opening scene in tackling **Question 31**. The best noted the parallel dialogue among the two sets of characters going on simultaneously and the juxtapositioning of the action. The other two questions on this play were rarely attempted, but those who did so scored reasonably.

### Questions 34 - 36

Athol Fugard: *“Master Harold” ... and the Boys*

Most candidates were able to note the banter and humour in the extract (cf. Comments on **Question 31** above) and the casual relationship between Sam and Hally in **Question 34**. The more perspicacious gained credit for noting and commenting upon the undertones which hinted at the deeper issues of inequality and race which feature in this play. **Question 36** was chosen by relatively few candidates, but elicited some insightful responses.

### Questions 37 - 39

Arthur Miller: *A View from the Bridge*

This text produced some excellent work. The passage-based **Question 37** proved to be marginally the most popular of the three options. Many candidates achieved high reward here, as they successfully identified the tension amongst the male characters and the way the dialogue brought this out. Comment on the differing roles of Beatrice and Catherine was often illuminating, and its presence enhanced the quality of a number of scripts. **Question 38** was almost as popular, and there were some effective and mature responses as candidates sought to grapple with the major issue in this play. It was a tribute to the teaching and discussion of what is undoubtedly a delicate subject, raising uncomfortable issues, that candidates, on the whole, performed so well. There were some touching and revealing responses to **Question 39** which showed the empathy candidates felt towards Beatrice and how much they sympathised with her.

### Questions 40 - 42

William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*

This elicited a good range of responses with some competent essays on **Questions 40** and **41** but scarcely any on **Question 42**. The passage-based question was popular and many recognised how Shakespeare was establishing the dramatic atmosphere in this opening scene. The potential for violence was recognised by the more perceptive candidates in all sections of the Veronese society. (Some candidates on the 'Open Book' 0486/01 option thought they were required to analyse the Prince's speech, which was not the case, as the passage ended with the entry of the Prince. However, they were not penalised for doing so. It should be noted too that reference to the Prologue was not required, and full marks could be obtained without reference to it.) Some answers to **Question 41** were balanced and perceptive as candidates highlighted the two sides of the Lord and Lady Capulet. Others were rather one-sided, castigating or canonising Juliet's parents. There were very few good answers to **Question 42**. Most answers struggled with costumes, weapons, background and family relationships, whereas Examiners - who appreciated that there were several ways of tackling the question, and were open to any - were hoping for more illuminating discussions on whether the play had the relevance for a modern audience as for Shakespeare's through its exploration of timeless and universal verities; this approach was seldom seen.

### Questions 43 - 45

William Shakespeare: *The Taming of the Shrew*

Some lively and interesting answers showed that this play had been enjoyed by candidates. **Question 43** was quite well answered, though some scripts overlooked the second part of the task set. Most candidates expressed their sympathy for Tranio rather than Lucentio. Those who answered **Question 44** well discussed the respective qualities of the bride and groom - their strength of character, their wit and their determination. Some commented on Katherine's apparent change of attitude and wondered whether it might be a carefully and cunningly planned way of her eventually having her way in future jousts with her husband! There were some provocative answers to the empathetic **Question 45** as the many facets of Katherine's character and voice were caught.

### Questions 46 - 48

Oscar Wilde: *An Ideal Husband*

There was evidence that some candidates struggled with the language and irony in the passage set for **Question 46**. Nevertheless, those who were better prepared coped adequately with the subtleties of Wilde's writing and made some telling comments about Lord Goring. Few answered **Question 47**; most of those who did were of the opinion that, initially at least, Lady Chiltern was too moral and too good to be liked by an audience. **Question 48** seemed to be enjoyed by the candidates who attempted it, as they explored their chosen dramatic moment with creativity and wit.

**Paper 0486/02**

**Coursework**

**General comments**

All Centres entering this component receive an individual report on their coursework submission.

Overall, this component was well administered by Centres this year, and where the Moderators found administrative problems, those tended to be only small ones. Accurate and meticulous organisation of such aspects as completion of mark sheets in this component is essential - and due attention to completing the folder cover sheets appropriately is always appreciated by the External Moderators.

Relatively few scaling adjustments needed to be recommended for the Centres' marks; where this was the case, the recommendations were invariably relatively minor.

The External Moderators were impressed by some very good tasks designed to get the best out of candidates across the ability range, and which worked well for coursework. On the whole, where empathetic tasks were attempted, they tended to be approached with a little more success than in last year's folders; the Principal Moderator's comments in the general report for that session seem to have been heeded to some extent, but the issue of the importance of bearing in mind the *Literature* assessment criteria when setting tasks needs reiteration: such tasks always need to be centred firmly in the text itself to be successful.

**Paper 0486/03**

**Alternative to Coursework**

**General comments**

The prose passage, Mark Twain's account of his crossing of Niagara, proved accessible to most candidates and produced many excellent accounts making plain the pleasure and stimulation it had provided. Very few were unable to respond in some measure to the rubric's requirements and there were few misreadings. At the most basic level of response, candidates were able to offer a reasonably competent summary of the events described, together with some attention to language, if only in the form of apt quotation. Answers of this kind comprised literal reconstructions of the passage varying in substance from the sketchy to the often laboriously detailed paraphrase. They offered little evidence of personal engagement. Levels of depth of response were signalled by candidates' perception of the distinctive 'tone' of Twain's writing and the clarity of their awareness of the 'nuances' which provide a humorous undertone to his account. At one level, candidates showed an awareness of such 'nuances' but found difficulty in articulating what they intuitively felt. Thus, many candidates referred to Twain's reflections on the "picturesque, but not beautiful" jacket, or his explanation for clinging to the railing, or his plaintive wish to go home, but were unable to express precisely the effectiveness they had recognised, settling for unpointed repetition. Similarly, many candidates were clearly aware of the force of Twain's hyperboles but identified them only as exaggeration. At another level of perception, candidates identified personification of, for instance, the 'furious' wind and offered a gloss; or they defined the hyperbolic "most of the American cataract went down my throat" as 'sarcastic' which, if not quite the *mot juste*, at least suggested an awareness of intention. The wish to go home was frequently described as 'childish', and again Examiners recognised that the candidates had sensed, and responded to, something of Twain's technique.

At a deeper level of perception, candidates noted the *effect* but could also comment on the *method*. Characteristically, they commented on not simply the wish to go home, but more tellingly on the verb "remarked", pointing out that, in the circumstances that Twain was so vividly describing, he might more appropriately have shouted, yelled, screamed - but not, prosaically, "remarked"! The more accomplished accounts provided clear evidence of such an awareness of Twain's deadpan humour and also offered a reconstruction of the events that recognised the structure of the passage, its altering pace and increasingly dramatic imagery.

Examiners were pleased to see a reduction in the incidence of labelling figures of speech for their own sake. Candidates were for the most part careful to explain the effect of metaphor and simile. Explanation was on occasion highly ingenious; Twain's alarmed remark as the cataract went down his throat, "If I had sprung a leak now I had been lost", was seen (not entirely unconvincingly) as a reference to involuntary micturition! Some weaknesses, evident and remarked on in the past, were still identified. Accounts were sometimes ill-organised and this was particularly damaging where the candidate was offering little more than summary. A competent and thorough summary can gain modest reward, but a summary that omits crucial material, or fails to reflect the structure of the set passage, can expect little recognition. Examiners felt that some accounts were improvised as the passage was read, and not planned or ordered. There were still several rushed and incomplete accounts, evidence of a failure to organise one's time; paradoxically, however, some candidates offer a 'rough' draft which is often copied out again verbatim. Inevitably these 'final' accounts are damagingly brief.

The rubric asked candidates to express the impression they gained of the author 'from reading the passage'. Many accounts were damaged by the candidates' failure to observe this requirement, offering instead generalised descriptions of character. There were also a few examples of inappropriate recourse to autobiography: 'I could understand how he felt because I too have been to Niagara and have experienced fear..' etc. While personal response is welcome, candidates should realise that it is valid only when it illuminates understanding of and engagement with the text.

Finally, it is a pleasure to record the Examiners' satisfaction with the general quality of candidates' achievement this session.