

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0476/01

Paper 1 Set Texts

Key messages

The following are necessary for success on this component:

- showing evidence of a detailed knowledge of the whole text
- ensuring that the answer is relevant to the question
- maintaining a focus on the extract in the passage-based questions, considering particularly the language of the extract
- using a well-structured and developed argument
- supporting in detail, by means of well-chosen quotation or close echoes of the text.

General comments

The majority of candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the texts they had studied and an ability to adapt that knowledge to the purposes of the question. There was much evidence that they had enjoyed their reading. As ever, the most able showed an impressive appreciation of literature and the ability to analyse language.

Most candidates knew how to construct a literary essay, focusing on the question, constructing a solid argument with several key points and development, and supporting it with good use of quotation and textual detail. One of the key messages for teachers preparing candidates for this paper remains the importance of analysing individual words and phrases if marks in Band 5 and above are to be achieved, but the majority had clearly been taught how to approach literary language, and they made good efforts to discuss the effects of the writers' language choices. Where critical literary terms are deployed, it is important that candidates can explain them. For example, many used the term 'pathetic fallacy' but some were not able to go beyond merely noting its presence, as opposed to exploring what use the writer made of it. While it may be perfectly appropriate to note sentence length, enjambment, lexical fields, and so forth, it is a fairly arid exercise if these are not related to meaning and context; fortunately, though, there was far less simple 'feature spotting' in evidence this series than previously. Some candidates seemed to think of quotations, especially for poetry questions, as fulfilling the requirement to explore language choice and its effects - which generally they do not do. A minority of candidates merely gave line references to sometimes quite lengthy passages instead of quoting, and as a result the focus of a point being made was not clear.

Another key message is the importance of maintaining focus on the question. Candidates who lost sight of the key theme, or, in passage-based questions, the passage itself, struggled to develop a response sufficient for the higher bands if central ideas or sections of the passage were missed.

Candidates should be reminded that passage-based questions require more than narrative run-throughs. The whole of the extract is important, and it has been selected to offer candidates the optimum opportunity for discussion. Although there is not necessarily a specific requirement to contextualise the passage, it is more often than not useful to give at least some indication of the circumstances surrounding it. Prompts such as 'dramatic', 'moving', 'powerful' are specifically intended to draw out a personal response and if they are ignored the answer will not demonstrate the engagement that is crucial for achieving the top Bands, no matter how competent the understanding of situation.

A significant number of candidates tried to apply a formulaic approach to all responses, evidenced by pencilled acronyms/mnemonics they wrote on the answer booklet. While this was a useful memory jogger for some, it could cause a problem, particularly with passage-based questions, when it led to extremely

disjointed answers that ignored what was actually happening in the extract and tried to organize the response mechanically into separate paragraphs on subject, form, language, purpose etc. By contrast, the best answers were those that integrated all these effectively to produce a developed, focused and coherent response.

The poetry drew some very sensitive and engaged responses this session. Candidates generally knew that it was important to focus on language and imagery, not merely to describe or narrate. Some candidates focused on the effect of rhyme and rhythm at the expense of meaning, but generally there were many enthusiastic and engaged answers. In weaker answers there was a tendency for the words 'positive' and 'negative' to be overused rather than words which identify effects precisely.

Candidates were usually disadvantaged when they wrote lengthy drafts, often as long as, and identical to, the answer itself.

There were fewer attempts at empathic questions this series, but most who tackled them knew the importance of writing 'in character' and trying to capture particular mannerisms and turns of phrase. For success it was, of course, essential to have identified precisely the moment specified in the question.

Most candidates adhered to the rubric, and their scripts showed evidence of good time management.

SECTION A: DRAMA

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

- 1 It was helpful to outline briefly the immediate context and the strong but sometimes fraught relationship that has existed between Brutus and Cassius up to this point. The characters of the two men were worthy of consideration. Brutus has always been deferred to by Cassius, and sees himself as a beacon of honourable behaviour. Cassius, the pragmatist and soldier, is deeply hurt that Brutus should think him dishonourable. The strength of their emotions, perhaps the fact that Portia has just died and the pressures of the situation just before the battle were worthy of exploration. Differentiation came from the depth in which candidates explored the power of the language and the dramatic conflict. Excellent knowledge of the text was displayed by many candidates. Most understood the context of this scene, and also the changed relationships within it. Quotation was generally used well. Brutus's feelings of guilt and disillusionment were recognised. There were some sound comments on Brutus's strong language; when two characters are involved in such a bitter row, the way they deliver the lines is just as important as the meaning of what they are saying in terms of the 'dramatic moment' suggested in the question. Better answers commented upon individual exchanges in this manner.
- 2 Answers usually focused on the fickleness of the Roman crowd, highlighted in the first scene when they have forgotten Pompey and are now following Caesar, on their self-interest (Caesar's will), on their readiness to turn to violence and to run out of control, e.g. the murder of Cinna the poet, on how they are despised by the higher classes but consciously manipulated by Caesar and Antony. There were also some well-developed responses with relevant detail and understanding of the crowd's fickle nature. Some strong answers considered how are sometimes used for comic relief, particularly in the early stages of the play, and how they are presented as a mob, not as individuals. By contrast, there were some rather mechanical answers which ran through the attempt to crown Caesar, Brutus and Antony at the funeral, Cinna the poet. There were a few outstanding answers which discussed what the play revealed about history, politics, democracy and the power of the people. The best quoted the crowd, freely pointing out the irony that they are seen as 'senseless' yet they have control.
- 3 Answers focused on Antony's shock and grief at the death of his friend, his feelings towards Brutus and the rest of the conspirators, Brutus's speech, how he can turn things to his advantage and avenge Caesar, and his plans for joining forces with Octavius. Discrimination came from the degree to which the voice was convincing, and the most successful answers conveyed genuine sadness and anger, and also the manipulateness of the character. The better answers in general tended to integrate phrases from the text – not in a purely narrative sense, but to highlight the significance of a key idea, e.g. a reference to specific phrases in Brutus's speech by Antony enabled candidates to really explore his bitterness.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

- 4 This question was generally chosen by those who had the confidence to explore the language in detail and there were some very good answers which showed how the characters of Antonio and Sebastian are revealed through the aggressiveness and violence of their dialogue. The best answers thoroughly engaged with the tension, and with the noise and chaos of the apparently doomed ship. Less successful answers often remarked that the scene showed Prospero's power as a magician, when that is not known at this stage. Better responses took into account the physical business on the stage; recognising, for example, how a sense of chaos could be created by, amongst other things, the various entrances and exits. Most candidates recognised the way Shakespeare used the scene to introduce us to characters and how they might behave in the future.
- 5 This was the most popular question on the play, and the material was well known. The following points came up in most answers: Caliban is brutish and presented as savage, he has apparently attempted to rape Miranda, and his normal mode of discourse is truculent and abusive. He feels a sense of injustice and has a sense of grievance against Prospero, who, he feels, has cheated him of his birthright, and he is capable of a sense of wonder (e.g. 'The isle is full of noises') but lacks discernment. Many answers were very sympathetic, even to the extent of writing off the attempted rape of Miranda as not really his fault because he has not been taught any better, omitting to mention his plot with Trinculo and Stephano to kill Prospero and seeing him entirely as a victim. The best explored his function in the play and the implications of nature and nurture. To score highly, candidates needed to move beyond a mere character study and to evaluate the different aspects of his character. Most candidates opted for a balanced response, highlighting the character's strengths and weaknesses often with impressive sensitivity. There were some interesting responses referring to aspects of colonialism. However, few took time to really explore the beauty of Caliban's 'island' speech (though some did mention that it was recited during the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games).
- 6 Ariel is about to gain a yearned-for freedom. He is likely to feel a sense of joyous excitement. He may reflect on the events of the past few hours and his own part in them. He may feel gratitude to Prospero at his release, but this may be tempered by a feeling of resentment at his servitude. He may think further back to his plight before Prospero's arrival. There were relatively few responses to this question but those who attempted it made a real effort to capture the voice. Although the voice may be elusive, candidates who were attentive to 'Where the bee sucks' found the song helpful in capturing it.

SECTION B: POETRY

- 7 Differentiation came from the extent to which candidates engaged with mood and the way in which it is conveyed. (Part L is full of grief and despair and LXVII is resigned and almost celebratory of Hallam. The words of L convey physical pain caused by the extremity of grief and also a loss of faith and sense of futility. LXVII is much calmer and more mystical. The imagery of L is harsh and physical ('blood creeps', 'nerves prick', 'pangs', 'Time a maniac' etc.), that of LXVII is calmer, associated with rest and peacefulness ('broad water of the west') and light ('silver flame', 'glory on the walls', 'moonlight dies' etc.)) The most successful saw a contrast in the two parts and movement from despair to acceptance. Less successful answers rolled both parts together and did not distinguish between them. There was much less biography in answers than has been the case in previous series, which was a great improvement.
- 8 The key word in this question was 'compelling' and the mystery and suspense of both stories was central to this. We know what happens next in *The Lady of Shalott* but not in *Mariana*, and in both stories there are unanswered questions. Other areas for exploration were the central characters and the extent to which we empathise with them, and the ways in which Tennyson creates a setting for the stories. Differentiation came from the extent to which candidates went beyond re-telling and showed a clear understanding of the writer at work. Understanding was more complete and there was much more personal engagement with these poems than with *In Memoriam*. Particularly impressive in responses to *Mariana* was the recognition of decay, or inertia at least, as conveyed through the description of her surroundings. Candidates were also able to recognise the power of repeated lines in emphasising her mental stasis and persistent anguish. Particularly impressive in *The Lady of Shalott* was the awareness shown by some of Lancelot's lack of consciousness of the impact he has had upon the lady and the events his appearance has precipitated.

- 9 This was a less popular question than the other Tennyson options, but the poem was generally well known. Success was dependent on the amount of focus given to the word 'movingly'; it was not sufficient merely to describe Ulysses' feelings; the emotional impact of the words and imagery needed close examination and those candidates who showed sensitivity to his recognition that he was approaching the end of his life and recognising his loss of strength (and yet determined to push forward) achieved good marks.

SONGS OF OURSELVES: from Part 4

- 10 Focus here was explicitly on Hopkins's methods and elicited comment on the juxtaposition of words to create contrast and embody 'pied'; the way in which the entire poem is a hymn of praise and the individual details which corroborate this (the opening words, the repetition of 'For', the last line of the poem, for example); the poem's sense of inclusiveness (repetition of 'all', use of 'Whatever'); the use of (frequently alliterated) compound words and the rhythm and rhyme of the poem. Most candidates were able to stay focused on the question and recognised the poet's intentions in writing about nature in this way. Better responses recognised the sense of awe and wonder in the 'voice', illustrating the point by referring to the rhetorical question and the neologisms as well as the use of contrasting words for effect towards the end. One weakness in some answers was the failure to recognise that the landscape Hopkins refers to is man-made, and this aspect – developed in 'trades', 'gear' etc. – was largely overlooked, as if candidates could not make the connection between the work of God and the work of man. Most answers explored the language and imagery very thoroughly but there were some who gave only a general overview and some that focused entirely on the rhythm and rhyme, ignoring the meaning of the poem.
- 11 Candidates usually referred to the following: the general references to people in the first stanza and the details of city life (in particular, the smells) and references to organisation and crowding; the second stanza and its references to spaciousness, neglect and disorder; the contrast between the two and the movement from the general to the more particular ('Where I come from'); and the significance of the last two lines of the poem. Brewster's attitudes and preferences were clearly recognised and discussion of imagery was adequate, but it was rare to find that a candidate had grasped the whole sense of the poem as the final lines (which jar so strongly with what has gone before them) were overlooked in most cases.
- 12 As this was an open-choice question, candidates needed to ensure that their chosen poems contrasted natural and man-made things. They needed to refer in appropriate detail to two poems, demonstrate how their chosen poems contrast the natural and the man-made, offer some evaluation of how these contrasts are made striking, and move beyond giving an account of or listing literary features of two poems. Unsurprisingly, frequently the Brewster poem was chosen along with one of the city planning poems. Having to write about two poems proved challenging for a lot of candidates, and resulted in an 'overview' approach which did not allow for detailed consideration of individual images or lines. The dislike shown in all three poems towards the man-made city environment made it a challenge to highlight their individuality. Some candidates chose to write about one poem which dealt with natural things and one that dealt with man-made. Such an approach was allowable but tended to produce less convincing arguments than by choosing poems where both aspects were covered. *Lines composed on Westminster Bridge* produced some very good work.

SECTION C: PROSE

EMILY BRONTE: *Wuthering Heights*

- 13 Lockwood appears as someone who considers himself as a rather superior sort of gentleman, accustomed to be treated as such. His gentlemanly self-regard and composure is instantly and almost humorously destroyed by the dogs. Heathcliff is, like his house, rough and inhospitable and finds it highly amusing that his effete guest should be so discomfited by his dogs doing what they are supposed to. Most candidates who attempted this passage question demonstrated some understanding of Heathcliff and how he is presented; they tended to be less clear on interpreting Lockwood's character and the presentation of *Wuthering Heights* itself, however. These candidates tended to focus on surface interpretation only; better candidates were able to engage with the implications conveyed through the language.
- 14 Heathcliff is an elemental figure of great strength and imagination in the grip of great passions. He disdains everything to do with polite society, and hence Linton. Linton is an educated and civilised

gentleman who is physically timid and fearful of anything which is beyond reason, such as Heathcliff's violent passions. He sets great store by the values of polite society and detests what he sees as the boorishness of Heathcliff. Good answers explored the way in which the two characters are presented in some detail, commenting on the contrasting imagery associated with them even when they are children. Many considered them only from Catherine's point of view and thereby limited themselves to a narrower section range of reference, but generally there were some conscientious attempts to develop ideas.

- 15 Catherine is at this moment likely to be thinking that she is at long last at peace with herself, that both she and Hareton were brutalised by life at Wuthering Heights, and that neither saw the better and gentler qualities of the other. Now she has discovered that love is possible, life with Hareton is a truly delightful prospect. Some understanding of Catherine's situation and feelings in a voice communicating her blissful state of mind was looked for. This question was not as popular as the others, but those who attempted it generally understood the character and what she has been through. A few candidates confused the two Catherine's.

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

- 16 Nyasha's state is precarious, brought about by her regime of hard study and self-neglect. She perceives herself to be contending against oppressive hierarchies of gender and race. She is a teenage schoolgirl challenging a system which has assimilated her parents and her only confidante is her younger cousin, the narrator. Differentiation came from the extent of response to the power of the descriptive writing throughout the extract, but particularly in the third paragraph where Nyasha's mood moves from frail vulnerability through bitter sarcasm to blazing anger. There was a genuinely personal response to many answers and real engagement with Nyasha's condition. Equally impressive was the way the overwhelming majority of candidates of all abilities dealt with the underlying causes of it. There was some inappropriate use of the word 'colonialism' which left a somewhat naive impression, but the concept itself was well understood and candidates were able to recognise her loss of identity and notion of being caught between two cultures and the demands of each. One danger was that, in explaining a relatively sophisticated theory, some answers moved away from the passage and become more generalised or abstract in nature. 'Deeper implications' were handled better than actual analysis of language in this context.
- 17 Life on the homestead is hard work and the living conditions are squalid. The narrator shows some affection for it, nevertheless; for example for the company of other children and for the river. Nhamo's reluctance to return once he had gone away to school is commented on unfavourably by the narrator, but she herself only visits infrequently after she follows in his footsteps. The rivalry between the narrator and her older brother looms fairly large in the early chapters, and was seen by the very few candidates who attempted this task as colouring our impressions of her early life.
- 18 Lucia's job offers her the prospect of more independence from the men in her life, which she will welcome. She is likely to be grateful to Babamukuru and determined to try to better herself. Although she does not share the views of the younger girls that she has compromised herself, her subsequent comments are rather more equivocal. She does retain some of her feistiness in her comments about Tambudzai's parents' wedding. Some strong answers displayed a mixture of gratitude and pragmatism in an appropriate voice.

ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

- 19 Arun's whole life has been dominated by examinations and by cramming. His father has perhaps unreasonable expectations and may be thought to be reliving his life through Arun, and will not be deterred from his plans for him. He is being subjected to emotional blackmail by both parents. His physical appearance has been modified by study. Good answers considered Uma's sympathetic viewpoint. Differentiation came from commentary on key words and phrases, e.g. 'manic determination', 'scholarly toil', 'worn down', 'ground down and 'stricken look'. There was incredibly strong sympathy universally felt for Arun, indicating real engagement with the novel. What stood out was the recognition of his sister's sorrow for her brother in nearly all responses.
- 20 Though it was expected that most candidates would choose to write about the American part of the novel, it was acceptable to consider the preparation and eating of food in India at the wedding banquets etc. and also in the way that some of the women are used almost as kitchen slaves after their weddings. There were very few answers to this question, but those there were usually showed they recognised how Desai contrasts the rich/overindulgent society of the USA with a more

restrained Indian society, though both societies make food a central element of family life. Differentiation came through attention to the writing – the gross descriptions of the barbecue and so forth.

- 21 Aruna would be reflecting on Uma's marriage/wedding and all the efforts Mama went to. She would be thinking about the bridegroom, Haresh, and the ceremony, about Uma's letters home and Papa's reactions. Differentiation came from understanding of Aruna's character – pretty, vivacious, cleverer than Uma - and the creation of a convincing voice, sometimes sympathetic, sometimes mocking. Aruna mostly seemed unsympathetic towards her sister, being rather gleeful in many cases. Better answers wove in appropriate details from the text to show reasons for Aruna's opinion.

KIRAN DESAI: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

- 22 Sampath's journey to work is hell through the chaos of early morning Shahkot, in which crowds from every conceivable occupation are intent on getting to work in the heat. It is made worse for Sampath by having Pinky to put up with and the final obstacle of the wire which every morning he forgets to duck under. Engagement with the ways in which the writing conveys this hellish vision was looked for, and there was some good teenage empathy with Sampath (similar to that which was evident in responses to Arun in *Fasting, Feasting*).
- 23 Mr. Chawla thinks his son to be a grave disappointment. He is lazy, has no ambition and is decidedly odd at times. Sampath thinks his father to be dedicated to making his life unbearable, and trying to make him into something which he cannot and does not want to be: in a word like his father. Response to the humour of the writing was a feature of better answers to this question. Candidates knew where in the novel to go for this question, and most were able to tune in to comedy in the early scenes.
- 24 There were far too few answers on this question to make general comment appropriate..

F SCOTT FITZGERALD: *The Great Gatsby*

- 25 The context is important here, and the understanding that this is a turning point in the novel. Gatsby's pretended unconcern about Nick's invitation of Daisy is completely false; the whole of the past five years has been building to this moment of reunion and all his hopes are centred on it. Candidates commented on Daisy's lack of awareness, Nick's excitement, and Gatsby's nervousness and pretended casualness, and the embarrassment of all three. Differentiation came from the focus on 'vividly', exploration of the language and dialogue, and close reading of the extract. This was the most popular question on the entire paper, and there was a wide range of performance, but in general the focus upon the passage was impressive. There was careful and effective examination of character dynamics, movement and speech, as well as the symbolism of the clock. References to the text were well-chosen and relevant. Though mixed, it was rare to read a very poor response to this question, with most recognising at least some of the ways tension is created and sustained.
- 26 This was another popular choice. Most tried to put both cases forward, but broadening the scope to include Myrtle and Jordan was usually a mistake; though the question does not insist upon it, there was clearly more mileage in focusing solely upon Gatsby's obsession with Daisy. It is the heart of the novel and its symbolism in terms of chasing the unattainable, particularly in the era the novel is set in, provides ample scope in itself to demonstrate a critical understanding of the author's concerns. Candidates considered the early days of the relationship before Gatsby goes off to war, Gatsby's dreams of a reunion with Daisy and his obsession with her, Daisy's character and marriage, and Nick's viewpoint. Balance was not required, but was usually the sign of a good answer. Less successful answers tended to be unclear what was meant by 'self-deception', and often just wrote about 'deception' or deceit in general.
- 27 Jordan might be thinking about the last meeting with Nick and Myrtle's death and its effect on her, Nick's behaviour at the time, and his relationship with Gatsby and with Daisy. Though she never seems to have expectations about Nick there will be a blow to her vanity. Jordan is usually quite jaunty and direct, but at this moment Nick says her voice is 'harsh and dry' rather than 'fresh and cool'. This was far less popular than the other *Gatsby* questions. The relatively few candidates who attempted it understood the character, and were usually able to convey her pragmatism and her slightly wounded vanity.

Stories of Ourselves

- 28** Successful answers gave at least some brief reference to the predicament that Lord Emsworth finds himself in. Differentiation came from the extent to which the wit and humour of the writing was appreciated: the arrivals of 'rough and knobbly physique', the description of Donaldson as a 'Roman Emperor', the reference to the magazines of people who take correspondence courses, and so forth. Some accomplished work conveyed good understanding of how comedy works.
- 29** The key words here were 'memorably' and 'the power that one character has over another'. *The Son's Veto* proved the most popular and successful choice. What distinguished the better responses to this time being taken to try to explore the character of the son himself. The vast majority went into great detail about his mother, but the boy was left a rather faceless symbol of sheer malignancy. There was a vague understanding often that his veto of his mother's dearest desire was to maintain his own social status, but this was not explored. In particular, the hypocrisy of a Christian minister in showing such little charity whilst preaching, no doubt, about love and fellowship makes him an incredibly odious character. There are issues of class and education and obligation. The father's domination of his son in *The Fly in the Ointment* centre on the importance of money. There is the lover's power over the narrator in *The Sandpiper*. The differentiator was the definition of what is meant by power and the way in which candidates went beyond mere narrative of their chosen story to engage with the writing and with the author's purpose.
- 30** There were far too few responses to this question to make general comment appropriate.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0476/02

Unseen

Key Messages

- Clear focus on the question and the bullet points will help to ensure concentration on the writing, prompting a response to individual details and also to the overall impression of the writing.
- Candidates should arrive at some judgements about the overall mood and tone of a text during their initial reading, and before they start writing. This will give their interpretations greater consistency and cohesion. Responses are stronger if candidates have planned them, with a strong idea of how they will end their essays.
- Literal understanding is important, as well as engagement with figurative meaning. Candidates should begin by establishing what is clearly stated, before speculating about possible implied meanings.
- The last line of a poem or final sentence of a prose extract is often the key to a lucid appreciation of the whole text.
- Candidates should be prepared for answering on poetry and prose; their choice between them should depend on the text on the question paper which appeals to them more.

General comments

On the evidence of the majority of scripts, teaching for this component has equipped most candidates with the knowledge and understanding of genre needed to tackle very different styles of writing from exam series to exam series. It has provided most candidates with a robust quotation-and-comment technique allowing them to begin to analyse the writers' craft, and has developed their skills of argument, so that they can present personal responses which are nevertheless firmly grounded in awareness of the question set and the writers' purposes.

Past reports have highlighted the need to plan answers before writing; the advisability of an overview of the whole text in the opening paragraph, and a clear sense of interpretative direction throughout; the vocabulary and tools which could be used to make responses to prose as analytical as those to poetry; and ways of using syntax and structure to make overall sense of poetry. This last piece of advice remains highly relevant: candidates this series could have avoided misinterpretations of lines of poetry if they had been aware that their meaning is explained by reading them within the context of the whole stanza instead of in isolation.

There is scope for Centres to pass on more advice to candidates about the requirements of this paper, and to give some specific guidance on responding to the two genres under exam conditions. The question is given in bold type, and always encourages a personal response and reaction. It also expects candidates to consider the overall impact of the whole text, as well as to explore details of the writing. Candidates should therefore not begin writing until they already have quite a good idea of what they want to say. The best answers were usually about three sides long and had been planned.

It was encouraging to see more candidates choosing prose passages this series.

The bullet points are advisory not compulsory, but they do give candidates relevant help. They help them to focus successively on aspects of the writing, and the writer's choice of detail, and on evaluation of the overall cumulative impact. They also help candidates to read the texts carefully and in sequence, instead of a more random spotting of 'semantic fields' (words taken out of context, in many cases), poetic or narrative devices, or speculative character- or situation-based comment. Of course, some very good candidates find their own way into the text, without needing the lead or steer provided by the bullets, but most discover that they

provide a helpful framework. The final bullet point often allows candidates to consider the way a passage ends, and how this can inform the mood and tone of the whole extract, and the way in which a reader reacts or responds to it.

A good critical response needs to demonstrate overall understanding of the mood and direction of the whole text, which may not be clear from the outset. It is for this reason that we recommend reading the text carefully twice before beginning to plan and write. Weaker responses often show a fuller understanding of a complex text only halfway through the essay, and some candidates can be so unsure about how to interpret a text that they 'hedge' and provide two contradictory interpretations within their response. Examiners who mark this paper are not looking out for misreadings to penalise, but for insights which they can reward. The higher marks are likely to go to interpretations of the texts which show consistency and cohesion, and have a clear argumentative direction, supported by comment on textual details.

Well-integrated and brief quotation tends to illustrate the best responses, when quotation is used as an opportunity to comment on the impact of words or images on the reader, instead of simply allowing paraphrase. Centres with significant numbers of more successful candidates have clearly encouraged their candidates to voice independent arguments, support these with quotation and then comment on how the writer's use of language makes a deep impression on the reader, exploring implied as well as explicit meaning. However, it is important not to detach words and phrases from their context: their sense within the syntax of the sentence they are drawn from remains important. Literary response is not simply about word association. In the case of poetry, it is important to read over line-endings, in order to be sure who a word or phrase refers to, and how its implications are related to its sense within the whole stanza. Similarly in prose responses, a clear understanding of syntax and sentence structure can help to establish not only meaning but also mood, as sentence variation can often determine the reader's response. It helps to work through passages in chronological sequence, as the structure of a text is part of its meaning, which often depends on a process of gradual revelation. The last line of a poem, or the final sentences of a prose passage often help readers to determine the direction of a text, and so to have a clearer understanding of their initial tone. It is easier to find your own way through a map if you are clear about your final destination; similarly, the ambiguities or uncertainties of a piece of writing are easier to disentangle if you know the end point to which they are directing you. If candidates are taught to identify the mood of the final words or last sentence, they may find it easier to clarify the tone of the whole text.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Adrienne Rich's 'Song' expresses a series of ideas, images and emotions which are unusual, especially for teenagers. The success of responses to this question tended to depend on the extent to which candidates could appreciate the tone, and striking independence of both the writing and sentiments expressed. For many candidates, the idea of celebrating being alone or being different seemed to be too alien to contemplate seriously: they often thought the poet must be expressing emotions of sadness or depression, or that the speaker of the poem must be in bad faith. Although the first bullet – 'the ways in which she challenges the idea of loneliness' – should have been a help, some read this as 'the challenges of loneliness' or 'challenges the idea that she could be anything but lonely'. Those who had read and understood the final line of the poem would have appreciated from the outset that the poem is celebrating knowing who you are and having a 'gift', so its overall tone is very different from the depressive or suicidal note that many insisted was dominant. Stronger responses did observe that the poem begins as a conversational dialogue, and that the tone is unconventionally colloquial. While more speculative answers saw this as a sign of schizophrenia, or a symptom of someone so isolated that they only had themselves to talk to, those who could focus more on language and tone were able to detect the note of sarcasm or irony in the speaker's response. This made more sense to those who were able to read the stanza as a whole, and realised that the speaker's declaration of loneliness extended across the line ending and into the extended simile. Many stronger responses included incisive comment on the unusual beauty and surreal clarity of the first image. The plane is lonely but 'level', it has a clear aim, transcends the Rockies and heads for a different element, an airfield not made by men, but in the blue yonder. Thus this was a poem which demanded that candidates read it non-literally, and often in ways which ran counter to their intuitions. Many of the stronger answers thought about the title 'Song' and appreciated that a lyric expresses a single emotional moment, but often in ways which are complex and emotive rather than literal. This poem is a 'Song' and not a 'Lament', so it does not simply express sorrow about loneliness.

Weaker answers seemed unable to separate the lyrical from the literal and tried to construct a narrative. They ignored tenses and modal verbs in the second stanza, and did not appreciate that the road journey of

the second simile is also in the continuous presence and that the 'little towns' are part of a conditional past which the speaker has rejected. These responses often thought that she was thinking about death or loneliness, when it is precisely the loneliness of conventional small town existence which is rejected in this image. Stronger responses noted the distinctive landscape of this stanza as well as the previous one, and appreciated the note of freedom and pioneering spirit of the voyaging speaker. If the journey 'day after day' and 'mile after mile' is a monotonous one, it is a monotony she appears to welcome.

Some of the best responses noticed a parallel between the unconventional sentiments expressed in the poem and its unconventional form and structure, and made interpretative capital out of its freedom from the constraints of rhyme and syntax, never really coming to an end, or even more than a momentary pause. Others noticed that the poem has a series of oppositions – 'lonely and level', 'across the Rockies' to the ocean, 'across country' rather than stopping in towns, from 'dawn's first breath' to 'the last red light of the year', not ice or mud but wood – and appreciated this as part of the speaker's oppositional and challenging character. Some found a lonely beauty in being the 'one awake' and extended the metaphor to see those 'wrapped in sleep' as in a cocoon, unable to experience the heightened perception of the woman in the poem. Others just saw her as mad or sad, unable to connect with others, even in the city. For some candidates the notion of enjoying waking up early to appreciate the 'first breath' of dawn was clearly very surprising.

The last stanza certainly posed the most questions and its ambiguity and complexity allowed most latitude for individual insights and interpretation. However, many weaker responses simply left it out altogether. In an unseen exam, this kind of discriminating element can be very useful. Candidates who want to succeed should be encouraged to see that their answers can be selective (there would not be time to be fully comprehensive) but need to cover the whole text. Perhaps some were too baffled to want to tackle these images. Many saw the rowboat as another symbol of transport or movement, even if it is stuck 'ice-fast' – a compound adjective misunderstood by many. Those who saw the boat as a symbol of suicidal isolation and abandonment were often those who believed the 'semantic field' of coldness was extended from the previous stanza into this one. A closer look at the syntax would show that the poet rejects coldness here in favour of a 'gift for burning'. Many saw this as self-destruction or self-immolation, but it was truer to the tone of the poem to pick up the mood of celebration, and the idea of self-knowledge, allowing the whole poem to be read with a more confident tone and direction, right from its opening. One or two very strong answers heard a note of Promethean defiance in these final lines. The poet actually rejects the hypothetical 'ifs'; as many stronger responses put it, there is a difference between loneliness and being alone, and the poem celebrates the gift of solitary experience, with its freedom from dependence or convention, even the convention of a final full stop. As one candidate wrote, 'even her verse form escapes the clutches of conformity.'

Question 2

This question, on an extract from Ian McEwan's novel *The Comfort of Strangers*, encouraged candidates to focus their attention on the characterisation of Robert, and the way in which he entangles himself in the lives of the tourists Colin and Mary. Most picked up the unwanted physicality of his attentions, his unusual appearance and insistent, domineering nature, and the ways in which he appears to be luring the innocent foreigners deeper into his dark and rather seedy world. Some refused to accept the writer's rather Anglo-Saxon attitudes, or stereotyping of Mediterranean machismo, and felt that Colin and Mary were behaving rather snobbishly in trying to reject his help; they fell for Robert's superficial charm and politeness even more than the young couple, and insisted that he was only trying to improve his English and had directed them towards a place to eat with plenty of local colour. This seemed itself rather naïve, given the many hints by the writer that Robert is not what he seems to be on the surface. He is a 'squat figure' who emerges from the darkness as if summoned, and stands 'blocking their path'. His smile and bonhomie seem as artificial as the 'self-consciously precise' English which he later apologises for, and the synthetic fabrics of his clothing. Why, amidst the animalistic 'pelt' of thick chest hair, does he display an incongruous 'gold imitation razor-blade' and if he is a local and not a tourist why is he carrying a camera? Surely it is difficult to take any of his confident pronouncements at face value?

Good responses went beyond surface meaning and explored the inconsistencies of his appearance and what he tells the couple. They looked in detail at differences between Colin's reaction and that of Mary, and noticed that Colin seems genuinely annoyed and disturbed by Robert, while finding it hard to free himself from his grasp, whereas Mary appears to half-enjoy Robert's slyly flirtatious attentions and hint of innuendo – that 'wink'. Robert treats them differently and that leads to their different responses, which most candidates analysed carefully and with reasonable thoroughness. Many saw elements of the uncanny or supernatural in Robert's physical appearance and 'unremitting' grip and attentions, and were not misled by his semi-apologetic bowing and self-exculpation. Some observed the deeper ironies in his comment on 'a beautiful

language, full of misunderstandings'. They certainly thought he was 'too eager'. Better responses were aware of the writer at work, shaping our response to the characters, and pointing out Colin's weakness, Mary's self-absorbed and enigmatic responses and the hint of the demonic in the portrayal of the tempting Robert.

The best answers were aware of tension between the young couple at the very beginning of the passage, and certainly noticed that Robert has his hand on Colin's shoulder in the final sentence of the extract. He is not going to let his prey escape. Several strong responses noticed the unusual choice of word 'descended' in that last sentence, and suggested that their destination was a potentially hellish underworld. Moreover, it certainly seems to be somewhere Robert thinks of as home territory. Only the better responses seemed to spend enough time on the descriptions of the last two paragraphs, and commented on the 'worn', 'diminutive', 'tottering', 'yellowing', 'cramped and crowded' and therefore labyrinthine nature of the district they have reached. Robert calls it home, and says his wife is in bed: several wondered why Robert is therefore out walking the streets, and noticed that he must have been watching the couple from the beginning.

Above all, this was therefore an exercise in really close reading. Good responses needed to be as alert to description as to dialogue, and have a sense of the narrator's rather prejudicial presence. They had to be prepared to look beyond surface politeness and explore some of the darker depths of implication. They had to follow the writer's hints and suggestions with deductions of their own. This also required some awareness of genre: this was an extract from a novel and not a piece of travel writing, so the hints of devilry can probably be taken rather more seriously, and are not just the figment of Colin's imagination. Instead, some candidates appeared to walk into Robert's trap as easily as Colin and Mary, and wanted to believe he was offering them no more than a good place to eat. The physicality of the language, from Robert's larger-than-life appearance, boisterous attentions and insistence on intimacy to the growing distance and distaste of the cornered couple is disturbing. So is the description of how they find themselves in a dark, dingy and 'shuttered' part of town from which it will not be easy to escape. Robert's laughing collusion with the shopkeeper with his mysterious load of cases is hardly reassuring. Those familiar with the characteristics of the Gothic genre should have noticed elements of the uncanny and larger than life.

The bullet points should have helped candidates to see beyond the surface descriptions and explored the implications of both Robert's appearance and the couple's slightly alarmed reactions. The final bullet point particularly helped them to see the writer at work, creating and sustaining increasing tension throughout the passage, which is only partly resolved when they reach their destination, as that unsettling final sentence makes clear. The doorway may be 'brightly' lit, but the descent is 'steep' and Robert is once again not letting go. If his appearance was something of a joke at first, there seem to be fewer laughs now. As one candidate put it, he is 'the very last person one would wish to encounter in a dark alley.' The tone of the last two paragraphs, as well as the street life they describe, has surely become much darker, and more sensitive responses showed full awareness of the consequent shift in mood, and appreciated the way in which this extract ends on a cliffhanger, as we are unsure what awaits the innocent couple at the bottom of the steep stairs.