

IGCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE 4360, NOVEMBER 2005

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Paper 1: Drama and Prose

General Comments

There were answers offered on only a few of the texts. 'A View From the Bridge' was the most popular play by far; other answers were in response to questions on 'Julius Caesar' and 'A Doll's House'. In the Prose Section most candidates answered questions on 'Pride and Prejudice' and 'The English Teacher' with a few answers on 'Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress' and one or two on 'Stories from Around the World'.

Section A: Drama

Generally speaking, candidates knew their material very well. Candidates must have the confidence to offer personal opinions when asked to do so; such opinions must show evidence of thought and must be backed up with reference to the text in question. In this session many of the candidates did make considerable efforts to substantiate their answers with close reference to and quotation from the texts.

Candidates who did well were those who worked hard to focus on the terms of the question. Examiners cannot reward material that does not answer the question. Some candidates need to realise that examinations do not require candidates to write everything that they know about a particular topic or character; they do require candidates to answer the set question.

Section B: Prose

It is very important that candidates understand the context in which the novels are set. If this understanding is absent candidates can easily respond in very inappropriate ways. This lack of understanding of context was particularly noticeable in some of the answers on 'Pride and Prejudice'.

Most candidates were able to show a close knowledge of the texts but sometimes their style of writing slipped into the informal. There appeared to be an enthusiasm amongst some candidates for using rhetorical questions and making repeated exclamations about characters and situations, for example, "How stupid is Mrs. Bennet?"

As, is often the case, weaker candidates fell into the error of narrating far too much of the stories of the novels without confining themselves to writing only about those aspects which directly answered the question. Similarly, weaker candidates' answers were often very descriptive instead of being analytical. Able candidates responded to questions in more thoughtful ways offering interesting insights which were well substantiated.

Paper 2: Poetry

General Comments

The vast majority of candidates answered question 1. Candidates answering either question needed to focus more clearly on the exact terms of the questions. Candidates are never asked to write about the poems in a general way, there is always an instruction which directs the candidate and which needs to be addressed. In the case of question 1 candidates were required to compare two poems and assess each one's success in expressing a person's feelings for another person. There were candidates who ignored this instruction and simply wrote about each poem in a fairly general way. Clearly, such responses cannot be awarded high marks. Better candidates, however, were able to write lively, thoughtful answers which showed a good level of appreciation and understanding. All candidates would be well advised to make use of the support offered to them in the directions suggested in the bullet points.

Paper 3: Coursework

On the whole the candidates showed clear engagement with the poems and an attempt to focus on the task tackled. The tasks themselves were often too general, along the lines of *Discuss the poems with reference to the theme of* which inevitably led to wide-ranging and generalised criticism, despite the extensive use of quotation. Candidates will find that they will be helped to achieve a more precise, but no less thorough, analysis with a more specific question that narrows the focus to a particular aspect of a theme.

The strongest candidates focused on the task from the first introductory paragraph; the less strong simply listed the poems to be dealt with or gave general descriptions of them, which meant they wasted some time before the proper answer began.

The Summer 2005 Report noted that there was a degree of 'feature spotting' evident in the coursework and, unfortunately, this was also the case in this session. Weaknesses in analysis were often praised in the assessors' annotations and were too generously rewarded. In several cases, an introduction doing no more than listing the poems was rewarded with the comment 'Excellent introduction'.

In some of the folders identically worded critical phrases appeared too frequently, even as part of the 'personal' response. It is important that the candidates demonstrate their real understanding of the ideas discussed by developing them further individually and integrating the critical phrases fully into the context of their own writing. Too often, emotional response was not backed up by analysis.

It was pleasing to see that some candidates seemed to have appreciated the poems and gained a lot from studying them.