

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Ordinary Level

Paper 2010/01

Paper 1

General comments

Despite the reduced entry following the inception of the 2015 Singapore paper, the standard achieved by candidates in this examination was quite comparable to that of previous years. There was clear evidence of enjoyment and understanding of texts studied and much to commend in the hard work of candidates and the length and detail of their answers. Particularly pleasing to note were some good responses to *After The First Death* and, to a lesser extent, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

As in previous years, passage-based questions continue to be very popular, though candidates sometimes fail to pay sufficient detailed attention to the printed passage itself. Very often what is required is a close analysis of some aspect of the material but candidates offer only a general overview of what is printed on the paper before launching into a generalised answer on the text in question.

Texts most frequently offered were *Romeo and Juliet*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Global Tales*, *The Joy Luck Club*, and *After the First Death*. A significant number of Centres opted for *Lord of the Flies* in **Section A** of the paper, but very few offered Hardy's *The Woodlanders*.

Once again a significant number of candidates failed to observe the rubric and this inevitably had an adverse effect on their grade. The most common infringement was to answer more than five questions on the paper. Sometimes candidates offered many more than five answers, all very short and lacking in substance, and this made it virtually impossible for them to achieve a pass mark. As has been made clear on many occasions, Examiners do mark everything submitted but they can only credit the five best answers which conform to the printed rubric, and thus candidates' time would have been better employed concentrating on the production of substantial and detailed responses to five valid questions.

Comments on specific questions

Romeo and Juliet

Question 1

Most candidates were quite familiar with the context passage and all but a small handful secured a mark on the first part of the question. Occasionally candidates offered a mood of Capulet rather than a characteristic in answer to part (f), and at times candidates who quite readily spotted examples of Juliet's ability to conceal her intentions from her father were not as convincing in giving reasons for the justification or otherwise of her actions. The irony of the last two lines of the passage was clearly understood by the vast majority of candidates, but several failed to express their answers carefully enough and merely implied material that properly needed stating. As is often the case some candidates spent too long and wrote too much in answer to the context question. The instruction is clear: the individual parts are to be answered as briefly as possible.

Question 2

This question was not as popular as the alternative **Question 3** on this text. Many who answered this question did so rather superficially, missing or misinterpreting the subtleties of Mercutio's character, especially his views on Tybalt's character and skills. Very few candidates were thorough enough in their exploration of the appearances of Tybalt in the play, what was learnt of his character from these, and to what extent these justified Mercutio's judgement of him. Too often candidates continued to talk about Mercutio in part (b) instead of Tybalt. Better candidates, however, produced balanced and well-detailed responses to this question.

Question 3

This question was very popular and few candidates offering this text failed to score reasonably well on this question. Good answers were balanced, well detailed, directed carefully to the terms of the question, and revealed a fresh personal response to what was asked. Many run-of-the-mill answers merely catalogued events caused by fate, and those caused by Romeo's character, but failed to argue and merely asserted their opinion. Many answers failed to score as highly as they may have done through lack of detailed textual reference in support of opinions offered.

Lord of the Flies

A small but significant minority of candidates offered this text, and answers showed a wide range in quality. Most candidates who studied the text seem to have enjoyed it, however, and had a good basic understanding of theme and character. The context question did not cause too many problems, though some candidates had difficulty in identifying the 'feeling' in part (e) and, more especially, the character pointers in part (f). In **Question 5** candidates generally spent too long explaining events which led up to the printed passage (despite clear instruction to keep this brief), then spent too little time considering its 'important' and 'frightening' aspects. Part (b) was generally handled in too little detail. Aspects of Piggy's character clear in the passage were not rigorously enough identified and compared with what we learn of him elsewhere in the novel. Better candidates balanced their material well and gave a considered and thoughtful response to both parts of the question, supported with relevant wide-ranging detail from the novel. **Question 6** elicited a number of good responses, but here too many candidates wrote in very general terms about the character of Jack and that of Ralph. Most did appreciate the 'love' and 'hate' between the characters but found it more difficult to give a sustained analysis of how their relationship changed.

The Woodlanders

Very few candidates offered this text and it is, therefore, unwise to comment in anything but general terms on responses to it. In **Question 7 (g)** some candidates seemed to have had difficulty in understanding and therefore identifying 'aspects of character'. Very few answers were submitted to **Question 8** but those answering **Question 9** were often able to sympathise to an extent with Felice Charmond. Credit, as ever, was given to any well-argued and well-supported stance offered by candidates.

The Calling of Kindred (Section D)

Question 10

A limited number of Centres submitted work on this text and there were also, it would seem, some candidates who answered **Question 10** as an unseen, possibly in desperation. This may well have contributed to the wide range in the quality of overall response to this text. Some very good work was seen in response to *Beeny Cliff* (**Question 10**), but often this was undermined by a much weaker response to *Loch, Black Rock, Beautiful Boat* in answer to part (b) of the question. Many candidates did not know this poem very well and very many had difficulty in comparing and contrasting it with *Beeny Cliff*. Good answers were able to comment on language, imagery and tone of the poems and how this differed.

Question 11

This question was not very popular and candidates who attempted it struggled to direct their material to the terms of the question. Some candidates had a fair knowledge of the poems in question, particularly *Creation of Fishes* and *The Tiger*, but tended merely to paraphrase them rather than focus on the language and imagery.

Question 12

This question was more popular than the previous question but answers revealed similar flaws: too little direction of the material to the terms of the question set, and too little focus on the writers' use of language. Occasionally candidates selected inappropriate poems to discuss in the context of this question and this proved self-penalising. Most candidates answering this question needed to make much clearer what they found thought-provoking about their selected poems, and needed to refer in much greater detail to the language of the poems to explain why they felt as they did, having read the poems.

After the First Death

More candidates than in previous years, it seems, submitted answers on this text and quite a wide range in quality of response was detected. **Question 13** proved difficult for the vast majority of those who attempted it and was generally done rather poorly, especially in comparison with **Question 15**. In part (a) some candidates found it difficult to pick out from the passage relevant themes of the story as a whole and discuss them. Others talked in general terms about the themes of the novel but failed to relate them to the printed passage. In part (b) most candidates struggled to trace in any detail the relationship between Ben and his father. Only on rare occasions were there examples of good detailed knowledge and understanding of the text fully directed to the terms of the question. Such responses, of course, scored highly. **Question 14** was quite popular though the responses were very often too generalised and referred too little to specific detail in the text. Most candidates clearly were able to deplore terrorists in general whilst recognising some sociological reasons, particularly his unhappy childhood, which made sympathy for Miro readily possible. Some also felt sympathy for Artkin, though were less convincing in supplying reasons. Too often both terrorists were dealt with together, as a whole, and this seemed to limit candidates' answers. **Question 15** was by far the best answered of the three on this text. Candidates had a good knowledge of the character and were able to give a sustained and well-supported emotional response to Kate Forrester.

July's People

Very few candidates offered this text. There were so few examples of responses to **Question 16** that it is impossible to make any comment here on performance. In answers to **Question 17** candidates generally appreciated the change in attitude of July but few managed to give close reference to the text in support of what they had to say. **Question 18** seemed the best-answered question on this text and was more often handled by candidates with a greater degree of confidence. Maureen was the most popular choice of character, and candidates tended to concentrate on the physical problems she encountered, overlooking for the most part her isolation and psychological strain. Answers, however, were often well up to pass standard.

To Kill a Mockingbird

This novel again proved a success with candidates and most of them seem to have enjoyed studying it even though some of the answers to the questions set revealed gaps in their knowledge of the text.

Question 19

This question caused quite considerable difficulties for many candidates who sometimes struggled to locate material with which to illustrate the amusing nature of the printed passage in part (a). Most saw some of the seriousness but at times this was limited either to Hitler's persecution of the Jews or the unconscious racism of Maycomb. In part (b) candidates for the most part struggled to remember the rest of the incident in question, but were rewarded for thematic material which they were able to discuss more readily.

Question 20

This question proved popular and more accessible to candidates who generally produced good solid answers here, though the best answers were those that linked material together and offered a considered response.

Question 21

This question proved a little disappointing because candidates failed to consider sufficiently the role their selected characters played within the novel, instead offering mere narrative of what each character did during the story. Only really able candidates seemed to be aware of what this question really required.

Global Tales

Question 22

This collection continues to be popular and this year there were some sound answers submitted as well as a lot of answers that were over-narrative in approach. Part (a) was very often handled well, candidates focusing well on the various feelings experienced by Veronica in the printed passage. Sadly few candidates

were able to match this with sensible selection of material from the story *What Do You Do In Winter* in part (b) of the question. Overall, therefore, responses to this question proved patchy and rather disappointing.

Question 23

This question produced a lot of narrative and often a rather one-sided view of Wilbert in *The Gold Cadillac*. Better answers balanced the admirable and less attractive features of this character and illustrated these with relevant selection of detail from the text.

Question 24

This question elicited far too many narrative answers that were under-directed to the terms of the question. Too often candidates failed to make enough of the lessons each story teaches. Candidates sometimes interpreted the question as meaning teaching a lesson to a character or characters within a story. This approach was, of course, given full credit.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun

Question 25

Not many candidates offered this text but there seemed to be a significant increase from last year. It was handled competently by a number of candidates who were willing in part (a) to work systematically through the passage and select relevant material on which to comment. Many drew parallels between Pizarro and Atahualpa and were able to demonstrate their growing closeness. In part (b) candidates found it more difficult to select relevant detail and answers here were less sustained. Overall, however, some creditable efforts were submitted.

Question 26

This question was not a popular question. It required an awareness of the play as drama and an ability to visualise it on stage. Few candidates were willing to risk this, but those who showed any engagement were generously rewarded. One really committed response to this question scored highly.

Question 27

This question was done quite well by a number of candidates. Good reference to the text characterised their answers. Some candidates, however, were not able to differentiate clearly enough between the two priests, though even these candidates seemed to have a reasonable appreciation of the role of the Church in the conquest of Peru.

The Joy Luck Club

Question 28

This text continues to be popular with Centres and a full range of answers to all three questions emerged. Part (a) was not often handled particularly well, largely because candidates had difficulty in selecting relevant material. Too much emphasis was often placed on retelling the incident with Bing. The second part of this question, the part played by Rose's mother, was often totally ignored or skirted round briefly. Many candidates chose to answer this question but did not seem to know the story in sufficient detail to tackle it fully. Part (b) required a close detailed analysis of the printed passage, but far too often candidates made vague general statements. In many ways this question revealed some poor answering technique in a number of the candidates who attempting it. Those, however, who were organised, thorough, and focused on the terms of the question were able to score high marks here.

Question 29

This question was popular and candidates who were able to offer detailed reference to what their chosen characters said and did throughout the novel were able to score highly, provided they gave plenty of evidence of reasoning for their choice of characters.

Question 30

This question was very much a question where candidates could choose their own ground and some limited themselves by heavy reliance on aspects of the narrative. Many better answers, however, were able to argue that the novel was rich in historical context, had thematic interest and contained interesting characters and much exploration of the mother-daughter relationship, as well as cross-cultural considerations. Most candidates had something relevant to say in response to this question.

Touched with Fire

So few candidates offered responses to this text that it is not possible to comment on their performance in general terms.

Conclusion

The examination paper seemed to be of a comparable level of difficulty to those of previous years and the candidates offered work of a similar standard, though the entry was substantially reduced, largely as a result of the introduction of Paper 2015 in Singapore. Candidates seemed to have enjoyed their chosen texts and frequently conveyed an informed personal response.