

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/01

Paper 1 (Open Books)

## General comments

In the Drama section the most popular texts were *The Crucible*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and, above all, *Macbeth*. In the Poetry Section there was far more work on *Songs of Ourselves* presented than on the Keats selection. In the Prose section, Golding and Lee were by far the most favoured of the authors; by contrast answers on Cross, Dunmore and Hardy were rarely encountered.

Where there was evidence of numbers of candidates seeming to struggle with a task, this usually seemed to be because of a task's asking the candidate to approach the material from a slightly novel angle or being centred on a part of the text which had been studied only very sketchily. For instance, the few answers on **Question 21** betrayed little idea of how to write about the power simple language can generate. The extract task on *Macbeth* revealed sometimes a lack of knowledge, in that some candidates, for example, thought that Macbeth had not yet been crowned King. Also, many missed entirely the irony of the language of the two speakers. In **Question 47** too many simply ignored the need to delineate how the writer achieves surprise and simply narrated the story.

However, in the main the tasks produced a body of work which drew often very positive comments from the Examiners. Once again, there seemed to be the impression that the quality was continuing to improve. It is becoming increasingly rare to encounter work which merits very little reward. The overwhelming majority of candidates seemed to have benefited at least to some degree from their reading and most showed some knowledge of the detail of the text. Often there was clear evidence of something very much better than this. In some Centres the quality of work was very high indeed. Candidates answered the question directly and immediately, no longer wasting time by writing preambles doing no more than say what the candidate are going to write about. Very often lively minds were clearly at work, minds which were confident in expressing and supporting an opinion. In the passage-based (asterisked) questions it was rare to encounter work which did not engage to some extent with the detail of the passage. Empathic tasks clearly continue to widen their appeal and once again sometimes provided a spur to an imagination not always evident in the rest of the script. Also, there continues to be a growing realisation that, if they wish to be considered for high reward, candidates are expected to engage with literary language, to show that they can grasp how writers work with words.

Poetry continues to present the greatest challenge to candidates and this was shown on many scripts by the poetry essay receiving the lowest of the three marks. Some candidates simply revealed the 'message' of the poem but even some of those who clearly recognised the need to engage with words did little better, noting figures of speech without proceeding to the point of probing *why* the words in that order were powerful in their effect. Perhaps Centres need to highlight further the importance of words such as *vivid*, *memorable*, *powerful*, *dramatic* in any question. It was not only in their poetry task that candidates regularly ignored the requirement, at least if high reward is to be given, to demonstrate that they have more than a knowledge of theme and character. They need to show themselves as able to respond to the *words* of a text and to analyse why those particular words have so engaged them.

It is pleasing to report that once again there were few rubric infringements.

## Comments on specific questions

*A Small Family Business*

### **Question 1**

This was the most popular question on the play, and there was quite a varied response to it. In a number of instances there were lively reactions to the dark humour; in others it was clear that candidates could cope

with what was shocking but could not quite grasp the humorous aspects of the frenetic scene. It was far too long in establishing the context when there was so much material available in the extract itself.

### Question 2

The very few answers to this were from candidates who largely struggled and found it difficult to locate material.

### Question 3

This was popular and there were a number of convincing assumptions of Poppy's character, giving her voice a mixture of astonishment and fascination with what has been revealed, and highlighting her growing attraction to the material offerings of corruption. Some, though, did not quite grasp the revelatory nature of the moment and were disappointingly low key.

*A Raisin in the Sun*

### Question 4

This was quite often efficiently done but in this answer (and in **Question 5**) the response to the *drama* was limited. Some candidates in effect wrote a character sketch of Beneatha with occasional reference to the extract.

### Question 5

Most answers here showed some knowledge of the content and were able to draw out just how central the insurance money is to everything. Conversely, very few conveyed the ways in which Hansberry made this vividly dramatic.

### Question 6

There were very few answers to this question, and most had difficulty in gauging just how much at this stage Mama would know.

*The Crucible*

### Question 7

This was a very popular task and often done very well. Many candidates relished the many opportunities offered by the passage to engage with the drama and for once probed Miller's language. There were, though, others who did little more than describe, often ignoring dialogue and at best simply quoting stage directions.

### Question 8

Examiners found some thoughtful answers here, though not very many fully engaged with her as a dramatic figure. It was slightly surprising to find quite a few incapable of sympathising with her in any way, though, of course, a well argued case was accepted. Others did little more than write a character sketch, ignoring the parameters of the task.

### Question 9

Only a few seemed to understand fully what an unpleasant man Miller makes of Parris. Indeed, some gave him the voice and the thoughts of a pious and well meaning pastor with not a hint of the man's cowardly malevolence.

*As You Like It*

Most Examiners saw little or no work on this play. What there was was usually competent. In **Question 11** some engaged answers were seen and the extract task was usually efficiently done, though few fully revealed the drama of the scene. There were a few effective assumptions of Orlando's character.

*Macbeth***Question 13**

This question was extremely popular, and there was a great range of achievement in responses to it. A number of candidates dealt well with the ironies in the speeches, bringing out the inferences of what is said, both as to the fear experienced by the speakers and the implications of what was said in regard to Macbeth's future. Responses also made very clear the limitations of a considerable number of candidates, even as to a basic grasp of chronology. For example, some thought that Macbeth was not yet king. Quite a few struggled to grasp the veiled nature of the conversation, at times misunderstanding Lennox's meaning and some totally ignored the lord's contribution. It was clear that rather too many candidates were lost once they were asked to probe a scene in which the main protagonists do not appear, however dramatic and significant that scene might be.

**Question 14**

Like the previous question, this discriminated sharply. Many realised that this task demanded a close knowledge and grasp of the drama of the latter part of the play and that Macbeth was as central to the answer as Lady Macbeth. Many, of course, were more comfortable dealing with the obvious parallels between the statement and the sleepwalking scene but were also able to point to the inexorability of Macbeth's path of violence in the search for security. Conversely, other candidates introduced content of hardly any relevance to the question, describing the events leading up to Duncan's murder. Sometimes even those who did write about the last part of the play did so without making any attempt to communicate the vividness of the drama, just relating what happened.

**Question 15**

There were some effective assumptions of Macbeth's character which had him in the afterglow of victory and looking forward to the glory that is his. Coupled with this often went some ambitious thoughts. However, some candidates gave far too high a profile for these nascent feelings, ignoring the crucial role of the Witches in bringing them to the forefront of Macbeth's mind. A few read the question so cursorily as to place him after he had met them.

*A Streetcar Named Desire***Question 16**

This was a very popular question on a very popular text and was often done well. The better answers balanced their answers between the two sisters, bringing out the striking differences of personality shown in the extract by looking closely at the dialogue and action with all its implications for the future. Inevitably the majority of answers tended to concentrate on Blanche, sometimes to the extent of almost ignoring the extract by giving the Examiner a 'prepared' essay on the elder sister.

**Question 17**

Responses to this task likewise showed how this text seems to encourage candidates to engage naturally in debate. Of course, many strongly deplored Stanley and set out good reasons why an audience should do so. However, there were an encouraging number who could see the world from his point of view and found something with which one could sympathise, especially when juxtaposed with Blanche's make-believe universe.

**Question 18**

There were some moving assumptions of Stella's character, capturing splendidly her mixture of emotions as she is caught between a rock and a hard place. Some, though, gave insufficient emphasis to the importance of Stanley and the baby in her acceptance that Blanche must go. Also, the voice was at times too much like the melodramatic tones of her sister. Ultimately Stella knows what she wants.

*Songs of Ourselves***Question 19**

This was by far the most popular choice of the questions on the set poems in the anthology. There was some very good work on view. Most answers had at least some concept of the poem's basic meanings. Particularly impressive in some answers was the attention which was given to the gradations of tone in the poem and how those gradations are conveyed in its structure. However, some struggled to achieve a balance between meaning and means. Some answers simply repeated like a mantra that we should live for the present after every reference to the poem; others examined poetic devices with very little reference to the poem's development of meaning. Uncertainty was shown by many candidates when it came to proceeding from the general to the particular as, for example, in the frequency with which 'we drop our youth behind us like a boy' was quoted as an entity, thus spoiling the point of the simile extending into the next line.

**Question 20**

Most candidates showed some knowledge of their chosen poem but only a minority really focused their answers as required by the question, in other words to approach the poem from a particular angle. There was more evidence of this in 'Plenty', though here quite a few failed to bring out the paradoxical nostalgia for hard times family memories evoke in the poet. There was some very successful work on 'Mid-term Break' in which Heaney's capacity to communicate the family's feelings on that day were delicately caught, but quite often Examiners read a run through of the poem with only the barest nod in the direction of the question.

**Question 21**

This was the least popular question on the selection. While there was an occasional strikingly successful answer to it, few answers made any attempt to show how simple language can communicate powerfully. It would appear in a number of cases that little time had been devoted to study of these particular poems.

*Keats*

There was very little work presented on these poems and when it was it was usually in answer to **Question 22**. Sadly little quality work was read. The Examiners found much misreading and at best most candidates sought refuge in regurgitating 'learned' study aid material without a trace of any personal engagement with some of the greatest poetry in English. At worst, Keats was reduced to a drug and alcohol addict.

*Things Fall Apart***Question 25**

The majority tackled this extract task and at the very least most had relevant things to say. Some looked hard at the detail of the passage and drew out its significances well. However, rather too many produced a 'prepared' essay on the book's main protagonist, only occasionally connecting it to the extract, while others did little more than paraphrase the passage.

**Question 26**

Some Examiners found impressive, well argued work on this subject, which looked at the full range of possibilities offered by the novel. Some answers did not range widely enough as far as supporting material was concerned, whilst others read what they wanted to read, being sure that Achebe must be presenting the missionaries simply as evil colonialists setting out to destroy a fine way of life.

**Question 27**

There were some very touching assumptions of Ekwefi's character. It was clearly a part of the novel which encouraged personal engagement, though a few did not read the question carefully enough. They charted the mother's present terror at the prospect of losing her daughter.

*Pride and Prejudice*

There was not a great deal of work seen on this novel but what there was, mainly on **Question 28**, was at the very least competent, sometimes a good deal more than that. Clearly candidates relished the rich vein of ridicule in the extract and pilloried the reactions of most of the characters, rather unkindly in Charlotte's case,

perhaps. Few tackled **Question 29** but some made really quite a convincing attempt to capture voice and his chastened state of mind at this point in the novel.

#### *The God Boy*

Far too few responses to this text were seen to make general comment appropriate.

#### *The Siege*

This was a 'minority' text which had only a small take up, but there were pockets of worthwhile writing to be found on it. **Question 34** most often featured and candidates who really looked at the detail of the extract and attended to the angle of the task often achieved impressive results, bringing home just how vividly Dunmore conveys the terrors and the dangers of the situation. In **Question 35** some candidates were quite insightful on how Anna and Marina's relationship changes through the novel and just a few were quite touching in their depiction of Levin's thoughts as he journeyed to the front.

#### *Lord of the Flies*

### **Question 37**

The popular passage-based task was a sharp discriminator. At best candidates really probed Golding's writing, bringing out the way the setting and the description of Simon all contribute to the heavy significances of this moment. They grasped both the horror of the description of *The Beast* and poignancy of Simon releasing at last the sad remains of the parachutist. Many were rather less successful, relying on generalities about the past and the immediate future without looking in much detail at the extract. Some were very uncertain of the detail. A few seemed to think that what Simon found was simply a parachute and others were even unable to fix the extract to a particular point in the novel.

### **Question 38**

There were a few impressive answers to this question, bringing out the full range of the part the island plays in the novel. Others were content simply to describe aspects of the island without much evidence that they saw it as more than an inert setting to the action and it was common for answers to be very narrow in the range of the detail used.

### **Question 39**

This was a popular empathic task but the quality of response varied greatly. The best recognised that here the moment is crucial. They conveyed dramatically Ralph's rising desperation and panic and captured his boyish voice as his power evaporates. Unfortunately, rather too many had him in a most unlikely philosophic mood with a voice quite unlike Ralph's, in effect pondering the meaning of the happenings on the island and how he had arrived where he was. Others did little more than narrate the recent events of the novel.

#### *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Far too few responses to this text were seen to make general comment appropriate.

#### *To Kill a Mockingbird*

### **Question 43**

Most of the work on this extract at least recognised its significance in the novel and brought out the numerous ways in which it illustrated the racism of Maycomb society. Quite a few recognised the need to engage with the writing and to show how Gilmer's quick-fire cross-examination creates such extreme tension as the duel with Tom develops. Conversely a number failed to engage with the detail of the language, being content to describe and simply assert the drama of the scene. Some spent much time writing generally about the facts of the trial and about Tom Robinson with little reference to the extract and it was not uncommon to find a very uncertain grasp of the basic facts of the scene. For instance, some thought Gilmer was the judge.

**Question 44**

This popular question was often done well. Many candidates clearly felt very strongly about this dejected man and knew how to support their views with trenchant detail. Others tended to produce a character sketch without reference to the ways in which Lee manipulates the reader, and it was quite common for the range of reference to be somewhat limited.

**Question 45**

This was the least popular of the tasks on this text and, while there were some character assumptions which captured Dill's quirky nature, quite a few struggled to place him in the moment and to find a convincing voice. Some showed a lack of detailed knowledge, constantly having him return to the Boo Radley escapade.

*Into the Wind*

**Question 46**

There was often a great deal of lively identification with Jane Turner's feelings of humiliation in this extract. Various details were held up as evidence of just how distraught she was. However, it was perhaps this close identification with the subject that meant that only a minority really brought out the irony in the writing. It was often noted how the first person created immediacy but Jane's assumptions were rarely treated with the amused scepticism the author intends. Few questioned whether Jane's humiliation was quite as public and whether everyone's interest in her was as great as she assumed it must be. Also, many candidates did not really bring out her growing resentment.

**Question 47**

The work here was sometimes slightly disappointing. The question seemed to attract rather too many answers which simply tracked through the short story with scant attention to the way the story is crafted to surprise the reader. What was required, but was only sometimes received, was a detailed analysis of the crucial moments in the story, not a general narrative with the occasional reference to moments of surprise.

**Question 48**

Again, this task produced a varied response. Some caught very well the father's mixture of anger, uncertainty and remorse, sometimes bringing out, for instance, his recognition of what smacking the child might do to his relations with his wife and his awareness of the difficulties which his absence and present lack of work have created. Others much less convincingly simply went down the road of the martinet parent intent on beating some sense into the boy, in one or two cases even to the point of suggesting that he needed some military discipline.



# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/02

Coursework

## General comments

In general this was a very successful session for the coursework component and Centres are to be congratulated on the work and on its presentation. All Centres receive a short individual report on their work; the present report is essentially an attempt to paint an overall picture and highlight some key matters of administration.

The assignment word-length in the syllabus is for guidance only. This year it was pleasing to note that teachers seemed to be clearer about its being just that, and to find evidence that able candidates in particular were being encouraged to write at a suitable length for the scope of their ideas. (For future reference, teachers should note that CIE has reviewed the guidance length given; the syllabus for 2011 will broaden the scope by stating (again as a guide only) 600-1000 words for each assignment. This is applicable to work submitted in 2009 and 2010. This will be advised in our Circular to Schools.)

While the majority of Centres offered at least one text that was not on Paper 1, it would very pleasing if one came across more folders in which *neither* coursework text was on the paper. After all, one of the aims of coursework is to encourage wider reading.

Standards of task-setting have improved, but there is continuing concern about a minority of Centres and candidates whose achievements are perhaps still being limited by poorly framed tasks. A stimulus for the assignment which does not require of the candidate explicit engagement with the writer's craft makes high reward difficult to achieve. It is worth saying again that this crucial shift of an assignment's focus can often be effected very easily. For example, instead of asking candidates simply to write about *Outsiders in Mice and Men*, one might frame the task along the following lines: *Explore how in 'Mice and Men' Steinbeck vividly conveys that most of the ranchers are outsiders.* This gives ample opportunity for the more able to engage with the author's *writing* and makes clear that failure to do so is likely to limit the reward given.

Overall there was much quality work on display, some of it very impressive indeed. It was clear that the majority of candidates had approached their assignments with seriousness and industry. Just occasionally there was a feeling of over-dependence on commonly prepared material which somewhat diminished the possibilities for individual thought and opinion. The wish to prevent candidates from floundering is entirely understandable. However, this is the component where the candidate really has an opportunity to construct a personal response and argument and teachers must be careful not to prevent that.

As last year, the presentation of the folders was largely excellent. They were without fail clearly packaged and no Centre failed this time round to carry out the basic administration tasks. In the great majority of cases the Candidate Record Card comments were helpful to the Moderator. Occasionally one still came across references to the candidate's personal industry and character which can have no relevance to the assessment here. On one occasion the Moderator was faced with a teacher comment of four words, none of them helpful. Otherwise, almost without exception this session essays were properly annotated and there was often a wealth of useful comment arising out of internal moderation.

Some Candidate Record Cards did not have the candidate number in the allotted box. In some cases it needed to be made clear on the Card what the final moderated mark was. Sometimes it was the original total before moderation, and occasionally one was faced by as many as three possible marks, none having been crossed out.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/03

Alternative to Coursework

## General comments

The direct form of engagement that Unseen work promotes means that the individual voice of the candidate emerges clearly. Candidates found much to interest and even move them in the material on this session's paper. Some candidates wrote about their own experiences of bereavement, displacement and growing up and away from their families, and some even wrote about their own experiences of lions. Many wrote with sensitivity and perception, and with thorough attention to detail, when appreciating the impact of the situations the writers describe.

However, although the questions encourage a personal response and connection with the texts, this is an exercise in literary criticism, and appreciation of the impact of the texts needs to be grounded in detailed analysis of the techniques of the *writing*. While very few candidates had difficulty shaping a response to the basic narratives of both poem and prose, higher level skills were less evident. Principally, these must include: analysis of how the reader's response is guided by language; synthesis of observations in order to form an interpretative overview; and evaluation of the overall tone and mood of the text

Centres might do more to encourage candidates to address more explicitly the stem question. The bullet points have proved helpful in shaping the candidates' response and allowing them, successively, an entry point, an aspect of the writing to focus on from the middle of the piece and some ideas about how to shape a concluding evaluation. However, they should not distract them from answering the main question. This asks for a personal response, but also for detailed attention to how the *words* or *writing* shape the reader's response to the sentiments of the text. Successful candidates addressed both parts of the question explicitly and at the same time. They made use of copious quotation, embedding short quotations within their own sentences. They followed quotation with comment on language features which were especially striking, significant or effective. Thus evaluation of the overall impact of a text was focused on the tone of the writing, and how this influenced the mood of the reader.

Many answers were unnecessarily long and repetitive, which suggests that candidates may also require guidance about the best use of the reading time. Many began writing their answers too quickly. Although some wasted time on a first draft, which was then followed by an almost identical final version, others plunged into a narrative response to the text, or lengthy preparatory ruminations about the question, before considering what they really wanted to say about the impact of the writing. Candidates should avoid rewriting the question or bullet points in an opening paragraph, or repeating the same point several times: there is no reward for this. They would be better advised to annotate their question paper during the reading time and shape an essay plan; this should avoid redundancy or repetition and allow a focus on answering the question with clear evidence from the text, informed by an overview of the literary impact of the passage as a whole. More successful candidates have an incisive overview of what the text is about from the opening sentences of their essays, and then go on to analyse how their response was directed by the writing.

The poetry question was more popular than the prose, attracting responses from about two-thirds of the candidates in this session (although the prose was more popular across some Centres, especially those in South America).

## 1. Poetry

The extent to which candidates appreciated the demands of the second part of the question varied from Centre to Centre. The great majority of candidates rightly shaped a response which focused on the actions and sentiments of the lion-keeper, mostly praising him for his loyalty and care. Better candidates developed their commentary, explaining, for example, why it was good of him to cut up the meat and beg in the market-place. They saw the significance of the war context, clearly distinguished between poet and lion-keeper, and appreciated the structure of the poem. Many saw how the poem is structured around the repeated 'who's,



although there was a tendency to see these as questions (or rhetorical questions) instead of integrating the title of the poem syntactically into each stanza, making the poem a reflection on the situation and identity of the keeper.

Candidates tended to view the story of the lion-keeper as a linear narrative. Only the most able spotted the subtle shift of tense in the final stanza and therefore read the earlier verses as a memory. Good candidates saw the isolation of both keeper and captive in an abandoned zoo, while the bombs fell and it was necessary to beg for food.

Higher skills were really demonstrated by a closer look at the emotive effect of, for example, the vocabulary of the third and fourth stanzas. Here evaluation of the choice of words such as 'plunge', 'glowing' and 'pungent', sometimes led candidates to a deeper understanding of the intimate power of the relationship portrayed by the poet and of the sensuous appeal of the language of the poem.

More successful candidates also realised that the lion was protecting and comforting the keeper in stanza four rather than vice versa. They appreciated the reciprocity of the relationship, and how closely it mirrored a human relationship. They were therefore able to see why the clichés (or euphemisms) of consolation in the fifth stanza are empty, and could appreciate how the change of tense, negatives – 'knew no way' – and loss of identity (no longer a 'keeper' but 'an old man') in the final stanza dramatise the depth of his bereavement. The best candidates invariably commented on the imagery of how he must 'walk out of sunlight', some contrasting this darkness with the golden glow of the lion's fur.

Weaker candidates sentimentalised the poem a little. Some of the weaker candidates even suggested that they envied the keeper. Some drifted into paraphrase, over-simplified the keeper's feelings or generalised about pets or loss or love. The third bullet point is intended as an invitation to comment on the overall emotive impact and possible symbolism of the poem, rather than encouragement to produce a sentimental response to the situation and drift away from the words of the text.

Stronger candidates were expected to read the text as a poem. There was disappointingly little comment on sound effects or rhythm, although the image of mutual comfort 'as the bombs fell' and then the emptiness of a city without even this form of maimed pride, received some pointed commentary. The meaning of the text must be kept in mind throughout a candidate's interpretation; the text should not be used as a starting point for more tangential reflections on mortality or morality, but its language, structure and imagery used to explain its impact on the sensitive reader. One especially strong answer saw the lack of proper names for the keeper, the zoo, the war or the nation as a structural feature which gave the poem universality.

## 2. Prose

Similar requirements exist for the accurate appreciation of prose. The focus needs to be on the language with which the writer communicates his sentiments, rather than the situation itself. Here too, weaker responses were often too long and insufficiently focused on the demands of the question. This time, it was the first bullet point which candidates often misread or over-complicated and candidates spent far too much time trying to identify exactly what the writer's feelings were. A more sophisticated approach would have accepted his complex and contradictory emotions at face value, but filtered through the perspective of memory and first person reminiscence. He makes it clear that his homesickness had 'no particularly logical reason' and his writing therefore explores more subliminal anxieties about the passing of time, growing up and moving on to another chapter in life.

Good candidates were able to appreciate this because they had taken time to acquire an overview of the passage as a whole before beginning their detailed commentary. Unfortunately the majority pored painstakingly over the first two paragraphs, phrase by phrase, trying to reduce them to something more logical. Sadly, the effort of so doing meant that they had precious little time left to explore the narrative of the departure, as encouraged by the second bullet point.

Many picked up the 'dreamlike' and 'unreal' references and made elementary explanations of the use of such words, although a few insisted on reading them positively. A few explored the nature of the description of the coast, some seeing it as a description of beauty, reflecting his love for Jamaica. But more convincing were those explorations which saw in his use of words like 'formless', 'peter out' and 'muddy' a reflection of the writer's melancholy. A few saw both elements and built up a sophisticated commentary on the author's mixed feelings. There was some confusion as to what the author actually did see from the boat. Perceptive candidates surmised that it might be only in his imagination that he could see the lights of his own house, because he wanted to so much, but whether this was so or not was open to argument. What is quite clear is that he could not see his actual family – it was dark and they were probably back at home.

The paragraph which allowed most discrimination between candidates was the sixth. Here the writer used a series of similes or comparisons to communicate to the reader his sense of being cut off from his past in a way which seemed to render him passive and powerless. Many read this too literally, confusing narrative and reflection: although the writer's use of the present tense in his last sentence here (and at the end of the passage) should give this away. The 'friends waving goodbye from the airport terrace' were therefore evoked to illustrate a descriptive or narrative point. Some thought he left on an aeroplane. It was disappointing often to find that in otherwise quite articulate answers, comments on this set of comparisons were neglected. When they were tackled straight on, the responses were often very astute. These candidates saw how the comparisons reinforce the ideas of separation and an impenetrable barrier between past and present. There were some excellent interpretations of the ghost image from the very few who mentioned it at all.

Stronger candidates also read the 'widening gulf of dark sea' metaphorically as well as literally and were able to link this to the extended metaphor of the sea and his relationship with the sea in the final two paragraphs. However, many were unable to pick the idiom of 'all at sea' and to link this description with the powerlessness of his emotional journey. The rhythms of the prose sometimes enact this sense of panic: the four short sentences beginning 'They didn't even know....', or the repetition of "some" in 'someone or something or somewhere'. Candidates might be aware that strength of feeling can be communicated by such rhythmical means in prose as well as in poetry. The direct address to the reader, and changes of tense and person also deserved more comment.

The penultimate paragraph caused many problems. The repetition of 'lucky' signals strength of feeling, even if it is a reaction to the irony of his feeling miserable when he had every reason to be happy. Many candidates misread his ironies as a change of mood, concluding that he had cast his sad feelings behind and was looking forward to his trip. Clearly, such candidates had ignored other signs to the contrary, most obviously the fact that he 'cried'. However, a sensitive reading would have responded more accurately to the tone of this part of the passage and the early repetition was an indicator of this conflict of feeling.

It was good to read that many candidates thought this passage was interesting because of its relevance to their own situation, although some clearly felt out of sympathy with his sentiments and felt he should have a more positive attitude to change! It is good for candidates to relate writing to their own experience of life, as long as they manage to maintain the balance between a personal response and attention to what is unique of the writer's experience and his expression. Happily, although candidates responded to both questions personally – often touchingly so – they did explore what the authors had to say. The intensity of their personal involvement also generated some powerful written expression.

Once again, it was enormously encouraging to see evidence of the original thought, and interest in literature, which this paper encourages and evinces.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/04

Paper 4 (Closed Books)

## General comments

In the Drama section the most popular texts were *The Crucible*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and, above all, *Macbeth*. In the Poetry Section there was far more work on *Songs of Ourselves* presented than on the Keats selection. In the Prose section, Golding and Lee were by far the most favoured of the authors; by contrast answers on Cross, Dunmore and Hardy were rarely encountered.

Where there was evidence of numbers of candidates seeming to struggle with a task, this usually seemed to be because of a task's asking the candidate to approach the material from a slightly novel angle or being centred on a part of the text which had been studied only very sketchily. For instance, the few answers on **Question 21** betrayed little idea of how to write about the power simple language can generate. The extract task on *Macbeth* revealed sometimes a lack of knowledge, in that some candidates, for example, thought that Macbeth had not yet been crowned King. Also, many missed entirely the irony of the language of the two speakers. In **Question 47** too many simply ignored the need to delineate how the writer achieves surprise and simply narrated the story.

However, in the main the tasks produced a body of work which drew often very positive comments from the Examiners. Once again, there seemed to be the impression that the quality was continuing to improve. It is becoming increasingly rare to encounter work which merits very little reward. The overwhelming majority of candidates seemed to have benefited at least to some degree from their reading and most showed some knowledge of the detail of the text. Often there was clear evidence of something very much better than this. In some Centres the quality of work was very high indeed. Candidates answered the question directly and immediately, no longer wasting time by writing preambles doing no more than say what the candidate are going to write about. Very often lively minds were clearly at work, minds which were confident in expressing and supporting an opinion. In the passage-based (asterisked) questions it was rare to encounter work which did not engage to some extent with the detail of the passage. Empathic tasks clearly continue to widen their appeal and once again sometimes provided a spur to an imagination not always evident in the rest of the script. Also, there continues to be a growing realisation that, if they wish to be considered for high reward, candidates are expected to engage with literary language, to show that they can grasp how writers work with words.

Poetry continues to present the greatest challenge to candidates and this was shown on many scripts by the poetry essay receiving the lowest of the three marks. Some candidates simply revealed the 'message' of the poem but even some of those who clearly recognised the need to engage with words did little better, noting figures of speech without proceeding to the point of probing *why* the words in that order were powerful in their effect. Perhaps Centres need to highlight further the importance of words such as *vivid*, *memorable*, *powerful*, *dramatic* in any question. It was not only in their poetry task that candidates regularly ignored the requirement, at least if high reward is to be given, to demonstrate that they have more than a knowledge of theme and character. They need to show themselves as able to respond to the *words* of a text and to analyse why those particular words have so engaged them.

It is pleasing to report that once again there were few rubric infringements.

## Comments on specific questions

*A Small Family Business*

### **Question 1**

This was the most popular question on the play, and there was quite a varied response to it. In a number of instances there were lively reactions to the dark humour; in others it was clear that candidates could cope

with what was shocking but could not quite grasp the humorous aspects of the frenetic scene. It was far too long in establishing the context when there was so much material available in the extract itself.

### Question 2

The very few answers to this were from candidates who largely struggled and found it difficult to locate material.

### Question 3

This was popular and there were a number of convincing assumptions of Poppy's character, giving her voice a mixture of astonishment and fascination with what has been revealed, and highlighting her growing attraction to the material offerings of corruption. Some, though, did not quite grasp the revelatory nature of the moment and were disappointingly low key.

*A Raisin in the Sun*

### Question 4

This was quite often efficiently done but in this answer (and in **Question 5**) the response to the *drama* was limited. Some candidates in effect wrote a character sketch of Beneatha with occasional reference to the extract.

### Question 5

Most answers here showed some knowledge of the content and were able to draw out just how central the insurance money is to everything. Conversely, very few conveyed the ways in which Hansberry made this vividly dramatic.

### Question 6

There were very few answers to this question, and most had difficulty in gauging just how much at this stage Mama would know.

*The Crucible*

### Question 7

This was a very popular task and often done very well. Many candidates relished the many opportunities offered by the passage to engage with the drama and for once probed Miller's language. There were, though, others who did little more than describe, often ignoring dialogue and at best simply quoting stage directions.

### Question 8

Examiners found some thoughtful answers here, though not very many fully engaged with her as a dramatic figure. It was slightly surprising to find quite a few incapable of sympathising with her in any way, though, of course, a well argued case was accepted. Others did little more than write a character sketch, ignoring the parameters of the task.

### Question 9

Only a few seemed to understand fully what an unpleasant man Miller makes of Parris. Indeed, some gave him the voice and the thoughts of a pious and well meaning pastor with not a hint of the man's cowardly malevolence.

*As You Like It*

Most Examiners saw little or no work on this play. What there was was usually competent. In **Question 11** some engaged answers were seen and the extract task was usually efficiently done, though few fully revealed the drama of the scene. There were a few effective assumptions of Orlando's character.

*Macbeth***Question 13**

This question was extremely popular, and there was a great range of achievement in responses to it. A number of candidates dealt well with the ironies in the speeches, bringing out the inferences of what is said, both as to the fear experienced by the speakers and the implications of what was said in regard to Macbeth's future. Responses also made very clear the limitations of a considerable number of candidates, even as to a basic grasp of chronology. For example, some thought that Macbeth was not yet king. Quite a few struggled to grasp the veiled nature of the conversation, at times misunderstanding Lennox's meaning and some totally ignored the lord's contribution. It was clear that rather too many candidates were lost once they were asked to probe a scene in which the main protagonists do not appear, however dramatic and significant that scene might be.

**Question 14**

Like the previous question, this discriminated sharply. Many realised that this task demanded a close knowledge and grasp of the drama of the latter part of the play and that Macbeth was as central to the answer as Lady Macbeth. Many, of course, were more comfortable dealing with the obvious parallels between the statement and the sleepwalking scene but were also able to point to the inexorability of Macbeth's path of violence in the search for security. Conversely, other candidates introduced content of hardly any relevance to the question, describing the events leading up to Duncan's murder. Sometimes even those who did write about the last part of the play did so without making any attempt to communicate the vividness of the drama, just relating what happened.

**Question 15**

There were some effective assumptions of Macbeth's character which had him in the afterglow of victory and looking forward to the glory that is his. Coupled with this often went some ambitious thoughts. However, some candidates gave far too high a profile for these nascent feelings, ignoring the crucial role of the Witches in bringing them to the forefront of Macbeth's mind. A few read the question so cursorily as to place him after he had met them.

*A Streetcar Named Desire***Question 16**

This was a very popular question on a very popular text and was often done well. The better answers balanced their answers between the two sisters, bringing out the striking differences of personality shown in the extract by looking closely at the dialogue and action with all its implications for the future. Inevitably the majority of answers tended to concentrate on Blanche, sometimes to the extent of almost ignoring the extract by giving the Examiner a 'prepared' essay on the elder sister.

**Question 17**

Responses to this task likewise showed how this text seems to encourage candidates to engage naturally in debate. Of course, many strongly deplored Stanley and set out good reasons why an audience should do so. However, there were an encouraging number who could see the world from his point of view and found something with which one could sympathise, especially when juxtaposed with Blanche's make-believe universe.

**Question 18**

There were some moving assumptions of Stella's character, capturing splendidly her mixture of emotions as she is caught between a rock and a hard place. Some, though, gave insufficient emphasis to the importance of Stanley and the baby in her acceptance that Blanche must go. Also, the voice was at times too much like the melodramatic tones of her sister. Ultimately Stella knows what she wants.



*Songs of Ourselves***Question 19**

This was by far the most popular choice of the questions on the set poems in the anthology. There was some very good work on view. Most answers had at least some concept of the poem's basic meanings. Particularly impressive in some answers was the attention which was given to the gradations of tone in the poem and how those gradations are conveyed in its structure. However, some struggled to achieve a balance between meaning and means. Some answers simply repeated like a mantra that we should live for the present after every reference to the poem; others examined poetic devices with very little reference to the poem's development of meaning. Uncertainty was shown by many candidates when it came to proceeding from the general to the particular as, for example, in the frequency with which 'we drop our youth behind us like a boy' was quoted as an entity, thus spoiling the point of the simile extending into the next line.

**Question 20**

Most candidates showed some knowledge of their chosen poem but only a minority really focused their answers as required by the question, in other words to approach the poem from a particular angle. There was more evidence of this in 'Plenty', though here quite a few failed to bring out the paradoxical nostalgia for hard times family memories evoke in the poet. There was some very successful work on 'Mid-term Break' in which Heaney's capacity to communicate the family's feelings on that day were delicately caught, but quite often Examiners read a run through of the poem with only the barest nod in the direction of the question.

**Question 21**

This was the least popular question on the selection. While there was an occasional strikingly successful answer to it, few answers made any attempt to show how simple language can communicate powerfully. It would appear in a number of cases that little time had been devoted to study of these particular poems.

*Keats*

There was very little work presented on these poems and when it was it was usually in answer to **Question 22**. Sadly little quality work was read. The Examiners found much misreading and at best most candidates sought refuge in regurgitating 'learned' study aid material without a trace of any personal engagement with some of the greatest poetry in English. At worst, Keats was reduced to a drug and alcohol addict.

*Things Fall Apart***Question 25**

The majority tackled this extract task and at the very least most had relevant things to say. Some looked hard at the detail of the passage and drew out its significances well. However, rather too many produced a 'prepared' essay on the book's main protagonist, only occasionally connecting it to the extract, while others did little more than paraphrase the passage.

**Question 26**

Some Examiners found impressive, well argued work on this subject, which looked at the full range of possibilities offered by the novel. Some answers did not range widely enough as far as supporting material was concerned, whilst others read what they wanted to read, being sure that Achebe must be presenting the missionaries simply as evil colonialists setting out to destroy a fine way of life.

**Question 27**

There were some very touching assumptions of Ekwefi's character. It was clearly a part of the novel which encouraged personal engagement, though a few did not read the question carefully enough. They charted the mother's present terror at the prospect of losing her daughter.

*Pride and Prejudice*

There was not a great deal of work seen on this novel but what there was, mainly on **Question 28**, was at the very least competent, sometimes a good deal more than that. Clearly candidates relished the rich vein of ridicule in the extract and pilloried the reactions of most of the characters, rather unkindly in Charlotte's case,

perhaps. Few tackled **Question 29** but some made really quite a convincing attempt to capture voice and his chastened state of mind at this point in the novel.

#### *The God Boy*

Far too few responses to this text were seen to make general comment appropriate.

#### *The Siege*

This was a 'minority' text which had only a small take up, but there were pockets of worthwhile writing to be found on it. **Question 34** most often featured and candidates who really looked at the detail of the extract and attended to the angle of the task often achieved impressive results, bringing home just how vividly Dunmore conveys the terrors and the dangers of the situation. In **Question 35** some candidates were quite insightful on how Anna and Marina's relationship changes through the novel and just a few were quite touching in their depiction of Levin's thoughts as he journeyed to the front.

#### *Lord of the Flies*

### **Question 37**

The popular passage-based task was a sharp discriminator. At best candidates really probed Golding's writing, bringing out the way the setting and the description of Simon all contribute to the heavy significances of this moment. They grasped both the horror of the description of *The Beast* and poignancy of Simon releasing at last the sad remains of the parachutist. Many were rather less successful, relying on generalities about the past and the immediate future without looking in much detail at the extract. Some were very uncertain of the detail. A few seemed to think that what Simon found was simply a parachute and others were even unable to fix the extract to a particular point in the novel.

### **Question 38**

There were a few impressive answers to this question, bringing out the full range of the part the island plays in the novel. Others were content simply to describe aspects of the island without much evidence that they saw it as more than an inert setting to the action and it was common for answers to be very narrow in the range of the detail used.

### **Question 39**

This was a popular empathic task but the quality of response varied greatly. The best recognised that here the moment is crucial. They conveyed dramatically Ralph's rising desperation and panic and captured his boyish voice as his power evaporates. Unfortunately, rather too many had him in a most unlikely philosophic mood with a voice quite unlike Ralph's, in effect pondering the meaning of the happenings on the island and how he had arrived where he was. Others did little more than narrate the recent events of the novel.

#### *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Far too few responses to this text were seen to make general comment appropriate.

#### *To Kill a Mockingbird*

### **Question 43**

Most of the work on this extract at least recognised its significance in the novel and brought out the numerous ways in which it illustrated the racism of Maycomb society. Quite a few recognised the need to engage with the writing and to show how Gilmer's quick-fire cross-examination creates such extreme tension as the duel with Tom develops. Conversely a number failed to engage with the detail of the language, being content to describe and simply assert the drama of the scene. Some spent much time writing generally about the facts of the trial and about Tom Robinson with little reference to the extract and it was not uncommon to find a very uncertain grasp of the basic facts of the scene. For instance, some thought Gilmer was the judge.

**Question 44**

This popular question was often done well. Many candidates clearly felt very strongly about this dejected man and knew how to support their views with trenchant detail. Others tended to produce a character sketch without reference to the ways in which Lee manipulates the reader, and it was quite common for the range of reference to be somewhat limited.

**Question 45**

This was the least popular of the tasks on this text and, while there were some character assumptions which captured Dill's quirky nature, quite a few struggled to place him in the moment and to find a convincing voice. Some showed a lack of detailed knowledge, constantly having him return to the Boo Radley escapade.

*Into the Wind*

**Question 46**

There was often a great deal of lively identification with Jane Turner's feelings of humiliation in this extract. Various details were held up as evidence of just how distraught she was. However, it was perhaps this close identification with the subject that meant that only a minority really brought out the irony in the writing. It was often noted how the first person created immediacy but Jane's assumptions were rarely treated with the amused scepticism the author intends. Few questioned whether Jane's humiliation was quite as public and whether everyone's interest in her was as great as she assumed it must be. Also, many candidates did not really bring out her growing resentment.

**Question 47**

The work here was sometimes slightly disappointing. The question seemed to attract rather too many answers which simply tracked through the short story with scant attention to the way the story is crafted to surprise the reader. What was required, but was only sometimes received, was a detailed analysis of the crucial moments in the story, not a general narrative with the occasional reference to moments of surprise.

**Question 48**

Again, this task produced a varied response. Some caught very well the father's mixture of anger, uncertainty and remorse, sometimes bringing out, for instance, his recognition of what smacking the child might do to his relations with his wife and his awareness of the difficulties which his absence and present lack of work have created. Others much less convincingly simply went down the road of the martinet parent intent on beating some sense into the boy, in one or two cases even to the point of suggesting that he needed some military discipline.