

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/11
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Sometimes the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. Key words within the question indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the task. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for a **news story** for your **local newspaper** about your school winning an award for becoming **more environmentally friendly** and to focus on the **importance of schools becoming more environmentally friendly**. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is an essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Weaker responses are often characterised by loss of grammatical control in attempts to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; other common errors were writing in sentence fragments or in very lengthy run-on sentences. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should not be overambitious in their choice of less common lexis, unless the precise meaning of the selected word is properly understood.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or impeded by errors (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In stronger responses to **Question 1(a)**, candidates focused clearly on the question, writing the text for credible news stories in an appropriate tone. Weaker responses often lacked an appropriate tone for a newspaper and merely described what the school had done to become more environmentally friendly.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who maintained a close focus on their linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly, or entirely, on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis, by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (descriptive piece, review or magazine article), a clear focus on the question, and included appropriate stylistic conventions as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were largely narrative rather than descriptive, some responses to **Question 3** were simply recounts of the circus show with little in the way of critique or personal opinion, and some **Question 4** responses were repetitive and in need of variety and balance.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

Your school has recently made several changes to become more environmentally friendly, and it has won an award as a result. Your headteacher has asked you to write a news story about winning this award, which will be published in the local newspaper.

- (a) Write the text for the news story, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on the importance of schools becoming more environmentally friendly.**

Most candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the task and engaged well with the subject matter by showing, in many cases, a sound knowledge of the various harms caused to the environment through 'man-kind's actions and behaviour'. However, some candidates took the audience to be their schoolmates, and the publication to be their school magazine. Candidates presented a range of measures to create an environmentally friendly school: metal cutlery, solar power, electric (rather than petrol fuelled) buses and a move to digital educational resources (to save on paper). Most candidates understood the conventions of a newspaper article and frequently included structural and presentational devices such as headings, subheadings and quotations.

Stronger responses captivated their audience through meaningful headlines such as 'Our Green school wins an award,' 'Bay is graded A for award,' 'Local High school says, 'Let it grow!' and 'G. Holmes Braddock are turning over a new leaf!' They mentioned the award won during the introduction, before swiftly and succinctly detailing why the move towards eco-friendly schools is beneficial, in consistently delivered, well-organised reports. The name of the establishment in receipt of the award was included in the opening section, together with a summary of why the award had been given. Candidates included quotations from both principals and students regarding the state of both the inside and outside of their establishment, and the need for change. Responses were well organised and provided additional information about the ways in which changes had been implemented. Candidates used pluralised pronouns to convey a collective approach, as in: 'We noticed there was a lot of trash. We needed to do something about it. Our school was a mess!' Ideas were lively and credible and included: a move to paper plates at lunch time; recycling and penalties for anyone seen dropping litter; a gardening group; and a 'Ride your bike to school' scheme. The use of emotive language further helped to convey enthusiastic, credible responses, such as: 'Hundreds of millions of pounds of plastic are killing our species. WE HAVE TO ACT now.'

Some lively responses incorporated humour within the report. For example, one candidate, in a very upbeat and engaging report, shared with the community how the school's new gardening project was progressing: 'Our plants have grown taller. Our tomatoes have increased in size by 3.5 inches – we've never seen so much growth!' Other stronger responses were more formal but equally effective, for example: 'The recognition highlights a growing movement among educational

institutions to prioritise sustainability. As centres of learning and influence, schools play a vital role in shaping environmentally conscious citizens. By embedding green practices into everyday routines, they help foster a culture of responsibility and resilience.'

Weaker responses either did not engage fully with the requirements of the question, for example lacking reference to the award, or included quite simple lists of changes made in the school. Some weaker responses focused almost entirely on winning the award, how it was won and the benefits of winning the actual award, such as acquiring funding which could then be reinvested back into the school. Some did not reference the importance of schools becoming environmentally friendly, or if they did, it was a final comment attached to the response, almost as an afterthought. Many weaker responses were in need of details such as school name, award name or name of the awarding body. There were also frequent errors; for example, one candidate wrote: 'Schools with a cleaner campus will most likely receive more candidates boosting the popularity for that school, no one wants to sit around and learn in a dump, they want to feel at home which is what we aimed to do when we made our school environmentally friendly.'

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set by your headteacher.

This cohort of candidates generally struggled with this task. One approach that worked well for some candidates, however, was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answers and explaining the effect on the audience. However, most responses were limited in detail and evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

In most stronger responses, candidates approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure, going through the content of the email and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. These candidates included a range of features in their responses, such as anaphora and pathos, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave examples and attempted to analyse how the writer's stylistic choices relate to audience and shape meaning, for example: 'Inclusive language is used to highlight collective action. References to "learners and staff", "school community" and "our entire community" emphasize that sustainability is a shared responsibility.'

Stronger commentaries employed a reflective tone, which showed a thoughtful and analytical approach, for example: 'The article positions the school as a role model. Expressions like "serves as a model" and "a blueprint for others" frame the school as a leader in sustainability. This not only celebrates the school's success but encourages other institutions to adopt similar practices, fulfilling the task's focus on the wider importance of environmentally friendly schools.' Such candidates provided specific detail, for example in this candidate's comments on their use of vocabulary: 'The use of friendly, positive language such as "momentous achievement", "excited" and "rang true" creates a truly spirited feeling, evoking the joy felt by the writer, a student, at their school's achievement. The enthusiasm helps infect the audience with similar feelings of pride for the local school.'

Weaker commentaries were often very short or general, listing lots of features without adequate analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. Weaker responses sometimes identified some basic language and structural features but needed more in the way of analysis. Some candidates made some valid points in their commentaries but without examples to back them up, such as in this example: 'I used group of three and statistics to write an interesting story for the newspaper.' Quite frequently, candidates included obvious points such as: 'I wrote in the first person', or 'The new story has sub-headings to divide it up.' Many included the mention of linguistic devices without a clear explanation, for example: 'Longer sentences make it easier to understand opposed to short sentences which would be choppy.' Some candidates merely listed linguistic features they said they had used without any supporting evidence, for example: 'I used positive words in my report' and 'The author used repetition to convey meaning.' Often there was little attempt to explain how a technique's use furthered the writer's purpose, other than making vague assertions about keeping the reader interested or to connect with the reader.

There were also, once again, many examples of candidates merely paraphrasing their leaflets or focusing solely on their structure, with little or nothing on language.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Descriptive piece

Write a descriptive piece called *The Basement*, about the rooms below an old house which have not been used for many years. In your writing, focus on light, colour and smell to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Some candidates used a narrative frame, which was sometimes successful, but the narrative style occasionally replaced more relevant, descriptive content. Quite a lot of candidates described the journey to the old house and other rooms in the house in detail, only moving on to describe the basement for a part of their response.

Stronger pieces kept the focus on describing the basement, rather than other parts of the house. One way that candidates achieved higher levels was using advanced vocabulary and phrasing which kept the focus on the light, colours and smells in the basement, for example: 'A staircase descended into darkness, steep and narrow, the steps warped and uneven. I hesitated, flashlight in hand, then stepped down. The air changed immediately. It was colder, heavier. My breath fogged in front of me, and the smell intensified; mildew, rust, and something sweetly rotten, like fruit left to die in a sealed jar.'

The strongest responses demonstrated rich vocabulary and figurative language throughout, with vivid imagery and striking similes. For instance, one candidate described the narrator's entry to the basement like this: 'The wooden stairs creaked under my feet as I stepped down into the basement. A chill ran through the air, brushing against my skin like the breath of something ancient. The smell of mildew and dampness grew stronger as I took each step.' Such moments elevated the work by offering the reader both imaginative flair and concrete detail, hallmarks of higher-level descriptive writing. Candidates who succeeded in this task usually demonstrated stronger technical control, particularly with grammar, spelling, and sentence variety, and were disciplined in maintaining focus on setting rather than drifting into narrative.

Weaker responses lacked cohesion, drifted into narrative, or relied too heavily on generic description. Even where some descriptive language was attempted, it was often vague, for example: 'It is really dark unless this light switch works, lighting up a lamp with a broken bulb where it sits of the floor full with dust. The light only shines half the hallway as it flickers once in a while. The doors, they all lead to rooms.' Such candidates tended to rely on basic vocabulary and struggled with sentence control, leading to repetitive phrasing and grammatical inconsistency.

Very weak responses frequently showed misinterpretation of the task, shifting into full-blown narrative mode with minimal, or superficial, descriptive content. These responses often focused on plot-driven action rather than atmosphere or setting, resulting in a loss of focus on the descriptive requirements of the task. They also changed tenses frequently and were imprecise in their direction and sense of writing style. They described how the narrator had travelled to the basement, and sometimes peopled their description with characters who had lengthy backstories and engaged in conversations, again drifting from focus on description.

Question 3 – Review

You recently went to see a circus show. You decide to write a review of the show, which will be published on an entertainment website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates who chose this topic showed understanding of the review form, using the correct conventions to indicate their response as such. Some candidates wrote from the point of view of a relevant reviewer, like a parent taking their children to the circus. Typical reviews focused on a variety of aspects of the circus show such as the tent, the cleanliness of the site, the food options, the level of comfort, the performers and the most thrilling acts. They also commented on the suitability for a family, in terms of cost and by giving an overall rating or recommendation. After an introduction, reviews were often structured chronologically, which was generally successful. The majority managed reasonably well to balance recounting their experience with the evaluative comments required in a review. Some candidates opted to use subheadings.

Writers of stronger reviews engaged their audience from the outset, often making their opinion clear in the title. For example, review opened with the arresting title, 'Cirque Lumina: Where Wonder Happens.' This was followed by an opening sentence which immediately engaged the audience: 'When the lights first dimmed inside the grand tent of Cirque Lumina, a hush blew like wind through the crowd. The air smelled faintly of popcorn and sawdust, that familiar carnival scent that promised both nostalgia and excitement.'

Stronger responses often included subheadings to focus clearly on areas for review, while some included a comments section, with associated email address, for readers to write into, thereby fulfilling form and stylistic aspects of real-world reviews of this type. Such candidates also used appropriate less common lexis, such as 'aesthetically' and 'mesmerising.' They often started with some contextual information, such as: 'I must say, when I heard about this circus show coming to town, it sounded like quite an outing for my family of four. My kids love to explore new things.' They described the circus action vividly, often with a sense of awe, as in this example: 'The first stunt was amazing. From my perspective it seemed like the main purpose of the stunt was to try to wake up the audience. It was night time and everyone was yawning and stretching. The stunt involved a man with a beaten up shirt in flames, juggling what it seemed like fire proof balls with a metallic look to them. Talk about turning up the heat!'

Weaker responses displayed a less confident control of grammar, with limited features of a review. In weaker responses the review often started with details of the journey, which led to a disproportionate amount of time spent on further details involving ticket prices and food – the latter dominating as much as two thirds of some responses. One candidate discussed some relevant aspects of the circus but provided only limited details: 'Animals from the circus shows will often be showing off tricks that you will never imagine. Most of them knowing how to balance on a single string of rope or having to balance balls on their heads. The seating is comfortable and fresh including fine leather seats.'

Weaker responses often reviewed the facilities – such as parking and food – in some detail, with less commentary on the acts. Many used inaccurate expression with little or no paragraphing and minimal description or critique of the show itself. For example, one candidate wrote: 'So I booked the hotel, I booked a room that accommodated six people, it had two queen size beds with a sofa that turns into a bed. So me, my husband, my two boys and my two girls. Ages 45, 43 12, 9, 6 and 7. It provided free breakfast, lunch and dinner which I thought was a steal since my kids are always hungry.'

Question 4 – Magazine article

In class, you have been discussing whether designer clothes are a waste of money. You decide to write an article on the topic, which will be published in your school magazine. Write between 600 and 900 words.

This question provided a range of responses, some quite engaging and well-planned but some lacking organisation and demonstrating general ideas about designer clothes. As this was an article, many candidates created suitable headings, such as: 'Designer Clothes: Yay or Nay?'; 'Are designer clothes worth it? Or are they a waste of money?' There was a degree of acceptable informality across responses, given that the audience was readers of a school magazine. Most responses were paragraphed appropriately and some used discourse markers and subheadings. Most candidates wrote using a register that was appropriate to an audience of their peers, with many mentioning well-known brands and exploring a range of reasons why designer clothes were a waste of money.

Stronger responses had a strong personal voice used more complex language. They were structured clearly and effectively and addressed both sides of the issue, considering the social pressure associated with fashion, and used clear, article-style features such as subheadings and rhetorical questions. One successful piece used the sub-headings 'Limited Batches', 'Popularity', 'It's the same designs' and 'Ecological Impacts' and strictly adhered to them. Such writing demonstrated a clear awareness of purpose and readership, and their arguments were well supported. In stronger responses, candidates gave clear and sometimes enthusiastic opinions, often citing cost and fashion trends as reasons to avoid buying designer clothes; such responses were objective, with occasional anecdotes. Stronger responses consistently embraced their audience, posing questions such as 'Are you willing to support these insanely high prices-waste your money?' There were quite passionate claims of designer brands affecting teenagers' morale, such as in this example: 'Designer clothes provide sway to those without confidence but offer no help to anything other than the self-esteem of those wearing them.'

There were signs that some candidates were underprepared for a discursive task, and many responses lacked ideas, vocabulary and a clear argumentative framework, showing little sense of writing for the school magazine. Such responses often relied on assertion and repetition rather than developed reasoning. Quite a lot of weak responses to this question were notably short of 600 words, so points lacked development. Some candidates wrote without clear control of the English language, such as in this section of one candidate's article: 'How many times do you need to wear it in order it to "Get your moneys worth" beause, you can only wear it periodically to fit in to todays society while with, bags, shoes, an jewlery, it is a different story.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/12 Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Sometimes the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. Key words within the question indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the task. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for a **leaflet** to advise **new candidates** about **ways to reduce spending** and to focus on the idea that university candidates **can live well without much money**. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is an essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Weaker responses are often characterised by loss of grammatical control in attempts to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; other common errors were writing in sentence fragments or in very lengthy run-on sentences. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
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General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or impeded by errors (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger candidates focused clearly on the question, writing the text for engaging leaflets, in an appropriate tone. Weaker responses often merely listed advice to new students.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who maintained a close focus on their linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly, or entirely, on content of their piece of writing and therefore only provided minimal analysis, by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (story, speech or review), a clear focus on the question, and included appropriate stylistic conventions as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** lacked in sense of drama or suspense, some responses to **Question 3** needed to be more clearly situated in the form of a speech, while some **Question 4** responses were simply recounts of the beach clean-up event, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You belong to a group at university which advises new students on how to manage their money. You have offered to produce a leaflet which explains how students can live well without much money.

- (a) **Write the text for your leaflet, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, give advice about ways to reduce spending, and focus on the idea that university students can live well without much money.**

Candidates generally understood the target audience and wrote with an advisory tone appropriate to new students. Advice was given on many aspects of student life, often from a first-person viewpoint, and covered practical areas such as diet, budgeting, social life, transport, accommodation and accessing academic resources. Most responses were well organised and demonstrated a clear awareness of the conventions of a leaflet, including headings, concise bullet points and persuasive language. However, the quality of advice varied: some answers lacked a clear focus on the idea of *living well* rather than simply *saving money*.

In stronger pieces, candidates effectively managed pacing by creating short, succinct and thought-provoking questions or viewpoints, which alternated between longer expanses of detailed and informative text. The result was an engaging, immersive and expansive response to the question prompt, not only giving advice on ways to reduce spending, but also focusing on the second aspect of the question, that students can live well. Stronger responses often included named groups which formed part of the university set up to help and advise new students. The opening section of the leaflet not only used language to welcome new students but provided information regarding the group. For example, one candidate wrote: 'We at Money Managers understand your pain as a new candidate – broke, penniless and that's just for starters! Do not worry, we are here to help.' Imagined groups included: 'The Broke Candidates' Foundation', 'Savers Club', 'Finance Candidate Division' and 'New U Candidate Council.' Clear and effectively structured responses accurately employed first-person, first-person plural and second-person pronouns in the opening section of the leaflet, for example: 'Are you finding it hard to manage funds? We're here to help. As candidates ourselves, we understand the struggles.'

Stronger responses often consistently used sub-headings to clearly delineate each piece of advice, began paragraphs with topic sentences and clearly prioritised two or three pieces of useful advice to concentrate on. Stronger responses effectively employed emotional and comforting language, resulting in more detailed advice. Imperatives and exclamatory sentence types were frequently employed: 'Do not succumb to peer pressure'; 'Worry Not!'; 'Prioritise essentials. Limit luxuries.' Such candidates used a variety of sentence structures, typically simple structures followed by compound/complex structures where advice was more developed. There were examples of

conscious crafting of language, where precise language choices entertained the reader: 'We do not need ephemeral dopamine boosters to live well. Instead of partying, eating out every day, learn how to cook; embrace the beauty of nature with a walk in the park.'

Weaker leaflets introduced the topic with overlong paragraphs, detailing how students' lives would change in general. They often lacked in topic sentences or paragraphs and made suggestions that lacked credibility. Others listed the benefits of being thrifter without clearly suggesting how this could be achieved. Expression was inaccurate in many responses, while some candidates wrote quite accurately but with a limited range of language, as in this example: 'No matter how small amount you have, a good life on campus is guaranteed, just do not waste money on unnecessary stuff. Whenever you wanna use your money ask yourself 'IS IT A WANT OR A NEED'.

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

One approach that continued to work well for candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answers and explaining the effect on the audience. However, many responses were limited in detail and provision of evidence from their **Question 1(a)** response in their commentaries.

In most stronger responses, candidates approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure by going through the leaflet's content and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features, such as an inverted triangle structure and pathos, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and analysed how the writer's stylistic choices relate to audience and shape meaning, using terminology to enhance their analysis, for example: 'Firstly, as the target audience is new students I decided to create a conversational but confident tone, whilst maintaining a formal air throughout. I did this successfully by using cliché phrases, for instance, "easier said than done". This keeps the leaflet accessible and relaxed. I also used imperative verbs to ensure a formal air is kept up. For instance, "use items" and don't panic!" Stronger responses did not include lengthy pre-ambles but started analysing the news report from the very beginning, as in this example: 'To present myself as a fellow young adult, I used irony and sarcasm regularly throughout the leaflet, such as punchy, humorous subheadings like "Loco for Local", as well as playful jabs, such as "check first with the backbone of our economy, yeah?". My sarcastic tone further disarms the reader, painting myself as their friend, which ensures that not only the entire text remains interesting but that they also trust in my advice.'

Weaker responses were often very short or general, listing lots of features without adequate analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. In weaker responses, candidates sometimes identified some basic language and structural features but seemed to struggle more with analysis. Some candidates made some valid points in their commentaries but without examples to back them up, such as in this example: 'I used similes and statistics to write an interesting leaflet.' Quite frequently, candidates included fairly obvious points, such as: 'I wrote in the first person', or 'The leaflet has headings to divide it up clearly.' Many included the mention of linguistic devices without a strong explanation, for example: 'I used a rhetorical question "You wouldn't want to end up broke do you?" as to show that this question is not meant to be asked as the reader already knows the answer.' Some candidates merely listed linguistic features they said they had used without any supporting evidence, for example: 'My text contained figures of speech such as alliteration'; 'I used persuasive tone to convince the young candidate to try sport and personification, similie, metaphor, simple sentence were used.' Often, responses were in need of explanation of how a technique's use furthered the writer's purpose, beyond vague assertions about keeping the reader interested or to connect with the reader.

There were also, once again, many examples of candidates merely paraphrasing their leaflets or focusing solely on their structure, with little analysis of language. Many weaker responses were filled with generalisations, such as in these two examples: 'Punctuations are heavily used throughout my text like commas and question marks and! These punctuations make the text look more presentable.'

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Story

Write a story called *Freedom?* about a prisoner who has a chance to escape. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates were able to provide some sense of drama and suspense, often by employing emotive language or withholding information. However, many candidates shifted the narrative perspective throughout the text, and many ‘cliff-hanger’ endings did not effectively conclude the narrative arc of the story. Most of the stories referred to escape from prison, by a variety of methods, sometimes using a flashback structure. Quite often, the escape was organised by a friendly cellmate or kindly guard who recognised that the prisoner was innocent of their crime, had done enough time and was a good person. A few wrote about the prison of the mind, weight issues and the prison of a body. Successful candidates created a sense of drama and suspense, providing detailed descriptions of the characters, setting and general atmosphere. However, some stories were incomplete.

In stronger responses, candidates crafted suspense through controlled pacing, sensory detail and a focus on internal conflict, which enhanced the drama of the escape scenario. They demonstrated some planning, an awareness of the narrative arc, along with an effective use of backstory and a convincing resolution. They produced effective and well-executed stories with some evidence of conscious crafting of language, integrating atmospheric details confidently, and created interesting characters with crimes that ranged from shoplifting and murder to being wrongfully accused. One effective piece of imagery described a prisoner’s tattoos: ‘An ink snake coils around the man’s shaven head before its fangs slither underneath the bright orange jumpsuit.’ Some candidates set the scene inside the prison at the outset, quickly centring attention on a character who was either bullied, isolated or feared. One candidate structured the entire response around a singular, quiet male whose movements, including facial expression, puzzled prisoners, guards and the reader. Authorial voice was strong, with the writer positioning themselves in the dark, like the reader: ‘Davidson. A sharp grin on his wrinkled face; cracked blood-stained lips which mirrored a dry river that has a lot of secrets beneath the surface. Waiting. What was he waiting for? You will soon find out.’

Stronger stories successfully introduced drama by detailing the prisoner’s physical reactions to events, thereby *showing*, rather than simply *telling* the story: ‘A rustling sound. His head whipped to the right, and not even a flinch emerged when the glare of white light fell onto him, illuminating his foreboding expression,’ and, ‘Time ceased to be measured by the clock, replaced by the rhythm of the wind and the flashes of lightning that briefly illuminated the cell in stark, white light.’

Weaker stories lacked narrative cohesion and plot development strategies, and many were lacking in terms of drama or suspense. Many candidates wrote with limited control of their writing, which impacted on their clarity of expression. Common issues included shifts of narrative viewpoint, incoherent storylines and inconsistent tense control, often along with frequent errors of other kinds. For example, one candidate wrote: ‘His biggest regret was getting into the drug-filled car with his gang “brothers”, the car that brought him to a ten-year prison sentence for possession and plan to distribute. As he lifts the weights over his body, that’s all he thinks about, that and his family, he has a daughter back home that is now 6 years old, all he does is thinks about reuniting with her outside the walls, but that would not be for another six years.’

There was a tendency for candidates to reproduce the plot or structure of streamed miniseries, action films or television dramas. This approach often leads to formulaic storytelling with limited originality and reduced opportunity for crafted language. There were also many cases of short work and many cliff-hanger endings which did not effectively conclude the narrative arc of the story.

Question 3 – Speech

You are going to take part in a debate at school about whether competitions are good or bad for those taking part. Your headteacher has asked you to open the debate by giving a speech on the topic. Write the text for your speech, discussing both points of view and creating a sense of interest in the debate. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Candidates explored the merits or otherwise of competitions by presenting the audience with factors for consideration. In terms of structuring their opening, many candidates referred to individual experiences of failure, including the disappointment of failing an exam, which was seen as part of the competitive educational environment they had to navigate. In terms of style, most candidates opted for a degree of informality in the opening section of their address.

Stronger responses demonstrated understanding and application of the context of a debate opening. They provided both perspectives before handing over to the debate teams to continue the discussion. They also indicated a strong understanding of the intended audience: 'Good evening parents, teachers, fellow students and all invited guests. I was advised by the headteacher to open up today's debate.' Stronger responses included a variety of discourse markers to separate ideas, including 'However/on the other hand/Although', and provided logical reasons for the advantages and disadvantages of competition, for example: 'Have any of you ever felt this way? This utterly disheartening feeling of inferiority, that could lead to disinterest in the competition or even confidence problems in oneself, is one of the main topics we are going to discuss in this debate.' Some candidates used hooks to create an interesting opening for the debate, such as: 'I am sure that we have all heard the saying, "A little competition never hurt anyone." But what if it did?' Some used personal anecdotes to create relatability: 'It is a day I will forever remember in my life, the day I decided to participate in a national spelling bee competition.'

Stronger responses showed evidence of planning and fully explored both sides of the argument, in a neutral or objective manner. Competition was viewed by some as a phenomenon shaped by history and culture. One candidate referenced the value of discoveries such as the moon landing and the invention of the light bulb, 'born out of a competitive streak in someone's nature.' Counter arguments included the ideas of motivation, building resilience and inspiration, for example in this candidate's thoughtful comment: 'The point is, competitions test the abilities that will help you in real life. They do not test memory, they test precision and accuracy. This trains you for the future as there will be some pressuring situations that you will need to handle as soon as possible.'

Weaker responses tended to include subjective and highly specific (therefore limited) practical examples without further development or elaboration, and they often provided a summative and conclusive opinion, which was not required by the question prompt. In such responses, candidates often focused on one or two elements of competition only, or they were in need of greater audience engagement. Many were essay-type responses which put forward arguments, thus missing the intended purpose of the task. Other weaker responses were hindered by poor control of language, for example: 'Due to many students entering a competition with only an idea to won this had led to many candidates going through depression if they do not won. Therefore, as much as competitions encourage candidates to work hard some results may end up leading some children to fall into depression.'

Question 4 – Review

You recently took part in a one-day beach clean-up event which was organised by an environmental group. You decide to write a review of the event, which will be published in your local newspaper. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Some candidates struggled to balance the evaluative requirements of a review with a description or narrative based on the event. Often, peripheral matters were fixated upon, or the register was diluted and became narrative. Some spent too much time considering one aspect of the event, such as the lunch (or lack thereof) provided on the day. Such candidates, who relied heavily on an anecdotal style, sometimes gave rather lengthy preambles at the start, covering details regarding meeting on the beach with commentary on the appearance of the event leader and other participants.

Stronger responses typically demonstrated several effective strategies. They began with an engaging heading that captured attention and clearly stated the review's purpose, for example: 'Community's way of giving back' and 'SAVE OUR OCEAN.' Candidates who planned their responses were able to structure their reviews with effective subheadings, such as: 'The Plastic Plague', 'Mans's Mass Murder on The Beach' and 'Key Takeaways (not a burger wrapper in sight!).' They used language to reflect the participant's sense of horror at the scale of the problem, with words and phrases which helped to produce both a very realistic picture and a serious mood: 'Plastic bottles assaulted the sand'; 'Bottle caps blended with ancient shells etched a mosaic of man-made destruction.' In such clear and effective responses, candidates integrated their feelings about the issues and the organisation of the event at various points of the response.

Stronger responses described the event in a paragraphed, chronological structure and provided clear recommendations. They used an engaging, informative tone and focused on reviewing key elements of the clean-up such as the setting, the organisation, the equipment provided and the event leader. Concluding sections were often personal in terms of the reviewer's change in attitude and desire to continue with the work, as seen in this example: 'It was poignant for me to see how the plastic crisis has turned our beautiful beaches into a dumping ground. I discovered the value in living and striving for a greater cause.'

Weaker responses were often purely anecdotal, with details such as numbers in the group, the weather, the equipment provided and the importance of forging friendships. Food often featured, but details about the state of beaches and environmental issues were scant. The review portion was sometimes tacked on at the end in a rather ad hoc fashion, which detracted from achievement of the task's purpose. Weaker responses were generally basic, with many simply describing the tasks performed during the clean-up without providing reflection or personal insight. Key points for improvement would be: use of more complex language, less repetition of ideas, greater awareness of the intended audience and reader engagement, and inclusion of an evaluative perspective.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/13
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Sometimes the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. Key words within the question indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the task. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for a **news report** for your **local newspaper** about **a plan to close a local food market in your town** and to focus on the **opinions of local people** about the plan. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is an essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Weaker responses are often characterised by loss of grammatical control in attempts to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; other common errors were writing in sentence fragments or in very lengthy run-on sentences. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should not be overambitious in their choice of less common lexis, unless the precise meaning of the selected word is properly understood.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or impeded by errors (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In stronger responses to **Question 1(a)**, candidates focused clearly on the question, writing the text for credible news reports in an appropriate tone, making use of quotes from local people. Weaker responses often lacked an appropriate tone for a newspaper.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who maintained a close focus on their linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly, or entirely, on content of their piece of writing and therefore only provided minimal analysis, by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (review, story or essay), a clear focus on the question, and included appropriate stylistic conventions as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were simply recounts of the visit to the restaurant, with little in the way of critique or personal opinion, some responses to **Question 3** lacked in sense of drama or suspense, while some **Question 4** responses were repetitive and in need of variety and balance.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

You have just heard that there is a plan to close a local food market in your town. You decide to write a news report about this, which will be published in your local newspaper.

- (a) Write the text for the news report, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on the opinions of local people about the plan to close the market.**

Most candidates demonstrated control of the newspaper form, opening with a suitable headline, such as: 'Town folk left reeling in wake of New Mayor's Legislation' or 'Closing Of Beloved Market.' They provided convincing reasons for potential closure of local food markets, including unaffordable increases in rent, poor food hygiene standards, increased and unsustainable traffic due to popularity of the market, or competition from larger supermarkets and stores. Most candidates included contrasting opinions on the closure from a variety of local people. Some candidates also used effective subheadings to organise information clearly. Most candidates wrote in the third person and adopted an appropriately objective tone, showing an awareness of the typical style of a news report.

Stronger responses included thoughtfully crafted headlines, with candidates often coming up with some alliteration, as in this example: 'Catastrophe Strikes Clevedon'. They also opened their news reports effectively, as in this example: 'The Old Packhouse market has been long considered the soul of KeriKeri. Every week, hundreds of locals gather to buy and sell fresh produce, meats and other goods. Alas, it seems that this is to be the case no more, as plans to close it have been given the green light.' They were particularly effective in addressing the second element of the prompt, consistently incorporating a range of local residents' opinions and presenting them through varied language choices and balanced perspectives. For example, one candidate wrote: "This market has been nothing but a blessing to our community," says George Brett, a local vegetable farmer who often sells his produce at the market. "People come from all over the region to buy their food here. It puts more money into our community than out, if you ask me." Another detailed report included opinions from people who supported change and displayed a degree of informality in the style of writing to add authenticity, as in these two examples: 'This place is past its sell by date' and 'How that Mayor has the gall I do not know. It's a right hullabaloo!' Some candidates used emotive backstories to create pathos for the audience: 'As a father of 5 children, Santiago had opened Santiago's Cheaps to support his growing family. Over the course of many years, he had cemented his store in the minds of the locals as the go-to food market.'

Weaker news reports tended to show reliance on recycled phrasing, resulting in repetitive quotations and limited development. Weaker responses often employed an inappropriate register, for example: 'Once a month, the food market gives local people a chance to collab and know each others.' A number of news reports were short. Many demonstrated a struggle with linguistic control, with errors throughout, as in this example: 'Our goverment decided to close local food market in the

town, the reasons of this decision are first, these food market's food not healthy enough and there is no standard. And second one is there is no need for us to have little food markets.'

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

One approach that continued to work well for candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answers and explaining the effect on the audience. Two main improvements to be made would be to ensure that adequate detail is provided and that evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response is used to support commentary.

In most stronger responses, candidates approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure by going through the news report's content and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Such candidates included a range of features in their responses, such as an inverted triangle structure and pathos, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and analysed how stylistic choices relate to audience and shape meaning, using terminology to enhance their analysis, for example: 'Emotive language is used though the appeal of pathos of "point of tears" to indicate that the loss of the market is so great that people began to cry, allowing those who may not attend this market to empathise with those who did, or to provide relatability to those who did attend.' More successful responses eschewed lengthy pre-ambles, instead starting with analysis of the news reports from the very beginning, as in this example: 'Immediately in the title of the news report, "Bye-bye Food Saver?", that rhetorical question gives the impression to the audience of a potential mystery as it is not a solid "yes" or "no" which is going to leave the audience curious about the contents in the news report, making the audience persistent in reading the news report.'

Weaker responses were often very short or general, listing lots of features without adequate analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. Such candidates sometimes identified some basic language and structural features, but seemed to struggle more with analysis. Some candidates made some valid points in their commentaries, but without giving examples to back them up, such as in this example: 'I used statistics to deliver a reliable and trustworthy news report.' Quite frequently, candidates included fairly obvious points, such as, 'I wrote in the third person' or, 'The report is structured in short paragraphs to make it easy to understand.' Many responses would have been improved with the provision of stronger explanations for linguistic devices, e.g. 'I also use the metaphor such as "the kids going around waving their paper" and "did not bear any fruits". The purpose is to engage the reader without directly addressing it.' Candidates should be reminded that, to do well in this item, they need to explain how a technique's use furthers the writer's purpose, beyond vague assertions about keeping the reader interested or to connect with the reader.

There were also, as in previous years, many examples of candidates paraphrasing their news stories, or focusing solely on structure without addressing language. Many weaker responses were filled with generalisations, such as in these two examples: 'I used the phrase "sad faces" to create an image in the reader's mind' and, 'I have used a lot of quotations to paint a picture of the scene in the reader's mind.' Other responses were extremely short, and in a few cases the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

The winner of a well-known TV cookery show recently opened a restaurant which you have just visited. Write a review of the restaurant, which will be published on a local entertainment website called *What's On*. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates showed engagement with the task and many wrote enthusiastic reviews, offering opinions on the restaurant's décor, service, food and atmosphere. Most showed an awareness that this was a review and that there needed to be some balance expressed with a final verdict. The majority of candidates included an overall rating and recommendation and most wrote in an entertaining, lively style, appropriate for a local entertainment website.

Stronger engaged the attention of the reader from the outset, sometimes utilising a range of linguistic features: 'Ever wanted to be in the vicinity of a celebrity? Well, do that and enjoy the food prepared by the winner of Hell's Kitchen, Maria Evelyn, at the Bahamas Brew.' A strong sense of voice was often a feature of a successful and sustained critique. One candidate incorporated humour in the review because of a disappointing experience with Spanish Tortilla de Patatas: 'The anticipation in tasting the dish was high as the reviewer stated Jamie Oliver and Gordon Ramsay had raved over the dish. The reviewer's hopes were dashed as there were only two slices! This is false advertising so watch out!'

Stronger reviews focused on various elements that make up a fine dining experience, with comments well integrated into the account of the experience. Some demonstrated excellent immersion into the culinary world in highly realistic reviews, as in this example: 'The next four dishes were truly an explosion of flavour in my mouth. Each bite was as if you threw everything delicious in my mouth and washed it down with msg. He has done it again; he turned something everyone in the culinary world despised into something dream-like.' Not all reviews were positive, although this negative approach was also effective in stronger responses: 'The loaded nachos came soggy and cold; all the cheese had solidified and the chips were stale. The quesadilla came cold as well so the family each had one bite before leaving it. The "birria tacos of hope" were, disappointingly, more like the birria tacos of doom and despair.'

In weaker reviews, a disparaging perspective combined with a lack of structure resulted in a response resembling a stream of consciousness rather than a traditional review. Sometimes review comments were left to the very end or were absent altogether.

Question 3 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *The third time he heard the noise, he knew he had to do something about it.* In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Stronger responses were written with control and development. These responses were focused on characterisation and setting to enhance their narratives and to build the appropriate atmosphere. A number of stories started with imaginative noises, often waking a character in the night. Stronger responses had evidence of atmospheric details with a degree of emotional tension, as in: 'It started as a whisper, faint and intermittent, like the scratch of fingernails against the glass.' Stronger responses also created places of danger which the central character unknowingly at first inhabited: 'the interior of the house sat cold, angry.' Such responses used imagery and linguistic techniques to achieve drama and suspense effectively, such as in: 'The heavy clouds, grey and dense, smothered the stars leaving the land nearly pitch black on this dreary night.' Additionally, showing the character's feelings and reactions rather than merely stating them made for a more engaging response: 'With timid steps he made his way from room to room again. Investigating this mysterious sound was the only way to ease his mind. But was easing his mind worth the potential danger? Was easing his mind going to be the cause of death on his tombstone? He sure did not hope so.'

Stronger stories successfully built drama and suspense through effective description of small details, such as in this example: 'The third time he heard the noise, he knew he had to do something about it. He would simply go insane if he did not. He would stand there in the shower, water trickling down his skin like cold tendrils, raising goosebumps and pooling on the white tiles pressing against his damp feet. He would simply stare and stare at the dirty white shower curtain, heart hammering in horror as the unknown noises taunted him just beyond the curtain.'

Weaker responses tended to be limited in terms of narrative characteristics, with more of a focus on a series of events, some not entirely connected to the opening prompt. These could have been improved with in-depth planning and development of detail. Such candidates struggled to create strong characterisation and setting: 'A 25-year-old male living in the 2 bedroom house in the dingy apartment building. The floor covered in rundown greyish-black grout stuck between the tiles, wallpaper peeling to reveal the textured moldy wall.' With improved planning, candidates would be more successful in developing their plots and building tension. Often, these responses consisted of an opening or fragment rather than a full narrative.

Grammatical weaknesses and poor sentence demarcation were common, especially in weaker scripts that combined multiple issues, including lack of cohesion, inaccurate punctuation, and inconsistent tenses. A typical example read: 'He reluctantly awoken, eyes wide open now ready to deal with whatever it was banging on on his entrance. It has kept him up all night. At first it was just light taps which was easy to ignore.' These errors disrupted the reader's engagement and impeded meaning. Additionally, candidates

should be encouraged to make good use of the required word count to achieve character and plot development.

Though candidates consistently opened with the sentence, at times it still felt like an add-on. The requirement to write with a sense of drama and suspense had not been internalised by many candidates. Many stories toppled over into horror, a life spent as a hospital guinea pig for experimental operations, or melodrama and gore, such as: 'He let out a scream. Blood, blood, and more blood'. Other responses showed an attempt to write with 'drama and suspense', but did not manage to sustain this.

Question 4 – Essay

Your class has just had a debate on whether having a daily routine is good for you, or whether routine is boring. Your teacher has asked you to write an essay on the topic, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates attempted to present both sides before offering an opinion. Many would have been more successful with increased formality, as required for an essay, with some more speech-like responses including phrases like: 'Let's look at ...'. Other responses were more like magazine articles. Most candidates explored the topic to some degree but struggled to present a solid and well-reasoned opinion, as required by the task. In several cases, arguments presented were contradictory, which undermined the quality and coherence of the writing.

Stronger essays presented balanced arguments with clear examples, sometimes making effective use of statistics, for example: 'A recent survey by the University of Chicago showed that 78 per cent of meticulous planners were growing bored with their routine. Unless something unexpected occurs, these people experience the same monotonous day repeatedly. What kind of a life is that?' Such responses used some cohesive devices and maintained a suitably formal tone, for example: 'Daily routines are a vital part of our lives. They have a positive effect on the brain in the sense that routine decreases decision fatigue, leads to less overthinking, procrastinating and indecisiveness, and builds discipline.'

Stronger work was structured logically, using discourse markers such as 'On the other hand', 'furthermore,' and 'it is not always as simple as that' to clearly link and contrast points. These candidates also used a range of language to craft a persuasive and reflective tone, with well-developed ideas that went beyond surface-level reasoning. One wrote: 'A daily routine, when designed by yourself and adjusted after feedback, is not a prison.' It continued with detailed examples of how the candidate has used such routines to streamline their learning. One such example referred to their desire to improve their reading of English: 'Instead of promising myself to read "a lot" at weekends, I added one rule to my mornings: read 10 pages every day while eating breakfast. Ten pages seemed too small to matter, but after three months I had read three books. The small, daily step became automatic and the total result was big. This is how routines work: they turn motivation, which goes up and down, into behaviour, which continues.'

Weaker responses often showed misunderstanding of the task. Sometimes, candidates launched straight into argument without introduction. For instance, one candidate began by writing: 'Daily routine allows the structure of important tasks and responsibilities. It allows you to make sure everything in your day is managed. I like the idea of not stressing over whether or not I have forgotten something. It would let me get everything I need done. Making every day just as productive as the last.' Others were characterised by vagueness and unclear line of argument: 'Social media is very addicting and you do not get much out of you just scroll on your phone endlessly like your half Zombie. Which makes you feel even worse compared when you wake up. Your daily routine is allowed to be flexible and does not need to be timebound base it off of your day to day life.' Errors in sentence construction, grammar, and spelling were frequent, often impeding meaning. In order to achieve highly in this exam, candidates need to show awareness of appropriate structure and form, and to write with clarity and cohesion.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- 1 Candidates need to develop analysis beyond a checklist approach to reach the higher levels of assessment.
- 2 Many successful essays have a clearly organised and purposeful structure.

General comments

The large majority of candidates this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were almost no rubric errors this session and very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there are still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level. There were responses to nearly all of the questions on the paper. Answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on most of the texts attempted by the candidates, with the most popular choices being *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in **Section B: Poetry** and *The Underground Railroad* in **Section C: Prose**.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session.

- 1 Many candidates, particularly, though not exclusively, when answering **(b)** passage questions, adopt a checklist approach when considering the writer's style. For example, in poetry essays the plan will list caesura, rhyme, alliteration and metaphor. The candidate will give one or two examples of these methods in the essay proper, often appropriate and with supporting quotation, but without any analysis of how these methods work or contribute to the poetic meaning. Nor is there any commentary on the effects of these methods on the reader or on the audience. This is a limited approach to literary analysis and more successful responses always integrate perceptive commentary of the writer's choices into their overall argument.
- 2 Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that candidates should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many candidates would improve the overall success of their essays by having a clear structure in mind before starting to write, incorporating an appropriate and focused introduction, a purposeful argument and a controlled apt conclusion. This will often be the consequence of some detailed and thoughtful planning, in which the terms of the question are closely considered, before the material to be discussed in the essay is selected.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a very few responses seen on this question. Weaker answers summarised Esther's character and role in the play generally, with some very weak answers confusing her for Sophia, which limited the success of these responses. The more competent answers considered the passage, often noting the ease of Esther's relationship with Epf and 'her confidence in front of him', which a few candidates noted would be developed later in the play. Epf's positive attitude towards her and her hopeful future was often discussed, though very few answers considered John's dramatic methods in detail. The setting, the contrasting language and the implicit comparison between Mavis and Esther were partially analysed and there was some understanding of the significance of this exchange to Esther's characterisation and to the play more generally.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) The minority of candidates who chose this question was nearly always able to place the passage in a precise context, with weaker responses offering detailed narrative summaries of the action to this point in the play. Other weaker responses summarised the two characters and what happened to them in the rest of the play. In both cases, too little attention was given to the detail of the set passage. More focused responses were alive to the 'two conflicting agendas the characters bring to the debate', with some considering the dramatic tension that this conflict created. More competent answers, aware of Angelo's preceding 'soul searching in his soliloquy', as one candidate suggested, explored his characterisation in detail as he 'shifts from a figure of justice and authority into a bullying hypocrite'. Other candidates were 'shocked by his threats of torture', and his demeaning of Isabella's situation. Good answers considered some of Shakespeare's concerns in detail: justice, morality, authority, religion and social and gender inequalities were popular discussion points. More successful answers explored Shakespeare's dramatic methods in detail, for example language and imagery, often contrasting his legalistic choices such as 'arrest', 'warrants' and 'accusation' with her 'more emotional and broken speech patterns', as one essay noted. Others considered the setting, as well as the possible action: 'what, we wonder, does Angelo physically do as he declares himself', one candidate considered. Good answers explored the effects of Isabella's closing soliloquy, in terms of her characterisation and in 'setting up the dialogue with her brother and the Duke's intervention later on,' as one essay noted. More perceptive responses analysed, for example, Isabella's excusing Claudio's sin as 'prompture of the blood' though 'she fails to see Angelo in the same light.' Other strong responses explored the nuances of her comment 'more than our brother is our chastity,' with some seeing her as self-centred or even self-obsessed, though others thought this was how 'a would-be nun should react'. At this level, many candidates were able to explore the ambiguities of the play with sophisticated and thoughtful arguments, often concluding that this was 'why the play was a problem.'

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with over half of the candidates choosing the text, the vast majority of whom tackled the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** This was the minority choice on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with only a few responses seen. Weaker answers summarised some of the events of the play and what the main characters did, with success determined by how well the candidate had selected relevant material. Those who focused on the failing marriages of Brick and Maggie and Big Daddy and Big Mama were often able to shape their response appropriately, with others focusing more on some of the 'critical problems' such as Brick's drinking, Big Daddy's cancer and 'the tension created by the conflict over the estate and the money', as one candidate suggested. Better answers considered 'family tensions' more closely, with some interpreting 'family' as the brothers and their wives, whereas others thought of it as 'children and relationships with parents'. Each approach offered plenty of scope to address the task, though only more competent responses discussed Gooper's comment with any confidence. At this level, the consensus was that there was little 'evidence of the best coming out of any of them', though some candidates argued convincingly that Big Mama is 'the one character who is genuine in her devotion to Big Daddy in his time of need'. Good answers focused on Williams's presentation of the various tensions: Maggie's characterisation was a popular discussion point, with her lack of 'family in the shape of children, a particular cause of tension for her'. as one essay argued. Other dramatic methods discussed were Williams's use of stage directions, the contrasting (and conversely) similar husband/wife dialogues, the use of settings and symbols, particularly the bedroom and Brick's crutch and Mae and Gooper's children, 'often the cause of conflict at inopportune moments', as one candidate noted. Very good answers supported such arguments with detailed and precise references to the play and often with a perceptive sense of appropriate contexts.
- (b)** Candidates with a clear understanding of the dramatic context to this passage were able to respond with confidence. Some weaker answers were unclear as to what had already been revealed which limited their interpretation of the relationship in the passage. Other weak answers summarised the overall situations of the two men in the play in detail, but with a consequent loss of focus on the passage itself. Better answers at this level were aware of Brick's knowledge of Big Daddy's cancer and were able to discuss 'why Brick feels so uncomfortable as Big Daddy reveals his desires to him', as one candidate argued. Competent answers did explore what is revealed about Big Daddy's state of mind in the passage but kept in mind how 'this might affect Brick's view of his father', with the desire for other women and his dislike of Big Mama often explored in interesting ways with engaged personal response. Good answers always kept the focus on Williams's dramatic presentation, considering the language of both men in detail, especially 'Brick's caginess and Big Daddy's easiness with his son', as one candidate noted. Other dramatic methods considered were the setting, the action (particularly the closing of the door – often well linked to the wider text) and the stage directions. Other good responses analysed Brick's 'respect and politeness to his father', while others thought there was some development of Big Daddy's character in his 'musings about humans and pigs' but also in his 'willingness to expose his true feelings to his son, something he would never do to Gooper', according to one. Very good responses developed such arguments by close reference to the detail of the passage, as well as integrating references to the wider text, most notably how this 'father-son chat develops into Brick's confessions about Skipper and Big Daddy learning the truth about his cancer'. Where such interpretations were supported by apposite quotations and awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

- (b) Nearly every candidate showed at least a basic knowledge of the poem's meaning and some understanding of Angelou's concerns. Those candidates aware of the context to Arkansas itself were able to integrate contextual support into their arguments, often with detailed reference to Angelou's biography and also the wider text. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, often without reference to the specifics of the task, but were nonetheless often engaged and offered interesting personal responses. More competent answers did explore the tension in the poem, recognising 'the racial and historical context that Angelou is alluding to', as one candidate noted. The poet's language and imagery choices were often well discussed at this level, with many sound analyses of the references to trees and blood, for example, as well as the effects of 'writhes' and 'brooding'. Strong answers considered a wider range of poetic methods, including the verse form, the poetic rhythms and the 'harsh and disturbing alliteration' was noted. The contextual allusions were very well analysed at this level and often seen as 'a key element in the rising tension', according to one. Angelou's skill in 'suggesting so many reasons for the tension in the air with the briefest word', as one candidate put it, was well analysed in the strongest responses, particularly the links between history and nature. Others at this level considered her use of time and symbols with perceptive understanding. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to this poem, with contextual points integrated into their argument, the responses did very well.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- (a) There were only a few responses seen to this question. Just about every response had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the poem with which to address the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant examples of loyalty generally, with an understandable focus on Sir Gawain and his relationships with Lady Bertilak, King Arthur and Lord Bertilak/the Green Knight. Better answers at this level did shape their arguments, at least implicitly, to consider Armitage's presentation, often contrasting 'the Bertilaks' deviousness and untrustworthiness' as one candidate suggested, with Gawain's 'true knightly behaviour in taking the place of Arthur despite knowing the inevitable outcome'. More successful responses developed such basic contrasts through detailed commentaries on, for example, the nature of a knight's loyalty, with some interesting discussions about chivalry and the knightly code, enabling answers at this level to show both textual and contextual knowledge and understanding. Good answers looked closely at Armitage's methods, with confident, and at times perceptive, explorations of characterisation, symbols and poetic language, 'for Gawain is always described in positive terms as he fends off the temptations of the lady', as one candidate argued. Very good answers also developed their analyses to consider the effects of Armitage's choices, how the 'positive tone and religious language ensure the reader's response to Gawain and his situation throughout the poem', as one essay argued. Where such points were supported by apposite quotation and some contextual awareness, the responses did well. Few candidates even at this level were confident in discussing Armitage's alliterative techniques, but those who were, and could explore the effects appropriately, often did very well.
- (b) This was the less popular choice of question on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Weaker answers tended to summarise the events leading up to the hunting of the boar or to paraphrase the actual hunt, with only a basic personal response. For example, 'the hunt is violent and bloodthirsty and shows lord Bertilak for what he really is', as one candidate suggested. Better answers at this level were able to give a more precise context, explaining why, for example, 'the hunting of the boar is important because it contrasts with what is happening in the castle between the lady and Gawain'. More competent answers considered some of Armitage's poetic methods in detail, particularly his use of language in describing the hunt, with its 'richness and energy', as one candidate noted. Others noted the use of sound and action 'to create the atmosphere of the hunt in the reader's mind'. Good answers analysed the effects of these poetic choices and were aware of the significance of the extract to the text as a whole. Very few candidates were confident in discussing Armitage's alliterative verse or its effects. Very good answers developed the links to the wider text well: 'the ideas of hunting and its underlying excitement and danger is reflected in Armitage's concerns in the whole poem, where Gawain is the prey, likely to come to a similarly bloody death.' Where such interpretations were supported by precise reference to the passage, with some awareness of effects, the responses often did very well.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment about performance.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem with only intermittent reference to the question and in some cases gaps in basic knowledge, suggestive of the poem being read as an unseen. Better answers at this level had sufficient knowledge to explain the shifting narrative focus as 'the speaker moves from his own view into praising God's power to overcome grief', as one candidate suggested. More competent responses often went through the poem stanza by stanza, offering personal responses on 'the effects of the different kinds of sorrow and how faith can overcome them', as one candidate argued. Most essays noted the 'range of sorrow across the human and the natural world', as one essay put it. Responses at this level also considered some of Blake's poetic methods. For example, 'his use of sad words such as "tears" and "woes" and "grief" create a mood of sadness in the reader', which is then contrasted with 'the joy of God's support in times of trouble'. Stronger answers considered poetic form, as well as rhythm and versification, often considered to be 'child-like and reminiscent of a nursery rhyme'. Where such points were supported by appropriate reference to the poem, the essays became more confident, though only a very few answers were able to analyse the effects of Blake's choices. Stronger responses were often able to support points with quotations from the wider text as well as some appropriate context, most typically about Blake's usual attitudes to religion and children.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment about performance.
- (b) Nearly every response had relevant, personal opinions to share about the woman and her situation. Some very weak responses lacked basic knowledge and understanding of the overall meaning, ignoring or misinterpreting the former lover for example. Better answers at this level retold the events in the poem, with the tone variously described as 'sad and nostalgic' or 'melancholic and relaxing', though nearly all candidates were sympathetic to 'her situation and her lost love and life', as one essay described it. More competent responses were more nuanced in their assessment of the woman. For some, the presentation was 'negative because of the mindless monotony of her existence', whereas other candidates noted the setting: 'A park, which is open and unemotional at the same time, makes her loneliness even stronger' or as another essay suggested 'she can be seen but not heard, she is a part of the landscape'. The woman's life as a young mother was often remarked on. For example, some candidates thought 'The stagnation of the woman is emphasised by the simple tonality and matter of factness of voice', and even her 'sitting position is an indication of inactivity and disinterest in her life'. Stronger answers considered some of the poetic methods in detail. Her clothes were often analysed and being 'out of date' were thought to 'demonstrate the woman's exhaustion and how little time she has for herself', as one essay argued. For some candidates, 'Harwood uses understatement to bring the woman out as socially reduced and emotionally lifeless'. This led to strong answers analysing the presentation of the ex-lover, 'oblique and suggestive in depicting his suaveness contrasted to her shabbiness', as one put it. The most successful responses were fully analytical, exploring, for example, the rhyme scheme and the structuring of the poem to great effect, though only a few candidates were confident enough to discuss the sonnet form and consider why Harwood might have chosen to use it in this particular poem.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 10

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 11

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 12

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- 1 Candidates need to develop analysis beyond a checklist approach to reach the higher levels of assessment.
- 2 Many successful essays have a clearly organised and purposeful structure.

General comments

The large majority of candidates this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were almost no rubric errors this session and very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there are still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level. There were responses to nearly all of the questions on the paper. Answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on most of the texts attempted by the candidates, with the most popular choices being *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in **Section B: Poetry** and *The Underground Railroad* in **Section C: Prose**.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session.

- 1 Many candidates, particularly, though not exclusively, when answering **(b)** passage questions, adopt a checklist approach when considering the writer's style. For example, in poetry essays the plan will list caesura, rhyme, alliteration and metaphor. The candidate will give one or two examples of these methods in the essay proper, often appropriate and with supporting quotation, but without any analysis of how these methods work or contribute to the poetic meaning. Nor is there any commentary on the effects of these methods on the reader or on the audience. This is a limited approach to literary analysis and more successful responses always integrate perceptive commentary of the writer's choices into their overall argument.
- 2 Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that candidates should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many candidates would improve the overall success of their essays by having a clear structure in mind before starting to write, incorporating an appropriate and focused introduction, a purposeful argument and a controlled apt conclusion. This will often be the consequence of some detailed and thoughtful planning, in which the terms of the question are closely considered, before the material to be discussed in the essay is selected.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

- (a) The few answers seen on this question all revealed at least a basic knowledge of Epf's character and his role in the play. Weaker answers tended to summarise his relationships, some focusing on Sophia and most focusing on Rose. His 'abuse of her attraction to him', as one candidate styled it, was often discussed, leading some better answers to link this to his relationship with his grandmother and how he treated her. Other competent responses also connected him with Charlie, because of his acceptance of Sophia and Esther. More competent responses explored the complexities of his relationships, 'tender and thoughtful at times, as he is with Esther, and yet brutal and untrusting with Rosa'. Some candidates pointed out that 'her relationship with Old Mack gave him grounds for suspicion'. The very few stronger answers did consider John's methods and how Epf is presented, both physically ('Mavis's desire for him indicates how attractive he is') and linguistically. Those responses which did attempt analysis of John's language had secure knowledge and understanding, enabling them to 'show how limited Epf is intellectually', as one suggested. Others thought this was also revealed in his belief that 'going to England would solve his restlessness'. However, most responses were at least able to see how his lack of trust and his fear of being trapped were revealed in the various relationships and where such arguments were supported by close textual references the answers were at least firmly competent.
- (b) There were only a very few responses to this question. Weaker answers summarised what happens to Mavis and Sophia throughout the course of the play, with only sporadic focus on the given passage. Better responses at this level did consider their relationship, at least implicitly, with the majority focusing on their 'all too obvious hatred for each other', as one candidate noted. They were seen as either opposites or in some responses as 'quite similar, in that both women are feisty, struggling to survive and stand up for themselves'. Most candidates had strong opinions to share about the two women and the more these were supported by reference to the passage and some awareness of John's methods, the more competent the answers became. Language, setting and action were the most common methods discussed, though only occasionally were candidates able to consider the dramatic effects of John's choices. The strongest responses were able to see the passage in terms of the whole text, though appreciation of relevant contexts was only intermittent.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) Nearly every response was able to find relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers often listed the various potential marriages and explained what had happened to the couples in them during the course of the play. Success at this level was determined by the depth of the textual knowledge and how far the candidate was able to show understanding of the characters involved. Better answers, at least implicitly, contrasted the reactions of Lucio and Claudio, for example, whilst other responses considered 'the gender divide in the play, where Mariana was pleased to get her husband, despite his failings, though Angelo would see it as a punishment for his wrongdoing', as one essay suggested. More competent responses focused on the attitudes – Claudio and Juliet were often seen as a 'loving couple, embracing marriage as a positive outcome of their relationship', whereas other candidates saw the similarities in their position to Lucio and Kate Keepdown and discussed the opposing reactions. The Duke was often criticised for his 'manipulations, particularly in forcing marriage onto unwilling men', but other responses wondered if his 'real motivation for keeping Isabella chaste was only revealed in his unanswered marriage proposal'. Good answers developed such arguments in considering some of the wider themes of the play, with money and social status often seen as the driving force in many of the attitudes to marriage: 'Hence Claudio's delay and Angelo's breaking off with Mariana', as one candidate argued. For other strong responses, 'attitudes to marriage, in this play, seem to follow attitudes to sex and morals', as one essay argued, explaining why Isabella is 'reluctant to accept the Duke's offer'. Very good responses always kept Shakespeare's presentation firmly in mind, exploring how the language and imagery used by the various characters is the best guide to their attitudes. Lucio's coarseness and Angelo's materialistic vocabulary were well analysed, as well as Isabella's 'almost too pious and holy comments', as one candidate put it. Other successful responses noted

the various contrasts Shakespeare creates, as well as discussing his use of dramatic action and symbols. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text the responses did very well.

- (b) Weaker responses tended to retell the Duke's role in the play as a whole, often in accurate detail, but with too little focus on the particulars of the passage. Better answers at this level were aware that this was near the beginning of the play and that 'the Duke was explaining what he was about to do in Vienna', as one candidate suggested. His role as a 'fake friar, starting at this point in the play' was much discussed and there was awareness of his apparent ambivalence towards Angelo. More competent responses were able to unpick the various threads of his characterisation here, with many candidates unimpressed with his 'failures as a duke, his cowardice in getting Angelo to do his dirty work and his wish to sneakily test Angelo', as one essay summarised it. Other sound answers linked this passage more precisely to the wider text – the testing of Angelo, the moral corruption of the city and the Duke's role as a friar were often explored. Better answers at this level often noted how these different concerns were 'reflected in the Duke's characterisation, as well as being the main drivers in the play's plot'. Good answers developed such arguments by considering the Duke's language in particular in the passage: his 'constant use of the first-person pronoun, his assumption of authority over Friar Thomas and his deviousness' were well analysed. Other good responses noted his use of imagery, the 'o'ergrown lion' and the 'twigs of birch' suggesting a certain 'violence in his personality', though others thought his 'exaggerations about the nurse and baby, for example, were indicative of his desperation to excuse himself', as one candidate suggested. Nearly every answer at this level discussed his manipulative deceptions, with some seeing his disguise as a friar as Machiavellian in 'using religion to hide his real purposes'. Very good answers were able to integrate contextual points into their arguments, showing perceptive awareness of the significance of Shakespeare's characterisation of the Duke at this point in the play.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

- (a) This was the slightly more popular choice on *The Duchess of Malfi*. Nearly every candidate was able to select relevantly from the play in addressing the question. Weaker answers retold the stories of characters they considered to be ambitious, with Bosola, Antonio and the Duchess the most popular choices. Success at this level was determined by how well the candidates shaped their opinions and supporting textual references to the task. Better essays at this level identified different kinds of ambition – such as Bosola's desire for preferment and the Duchess's ambition to remarry a man of her choice. More competent responses contrasted these differences, implicitly at least, discussing Webster's dramatic exploration and often across a wider selection of characters. More successful responses considered ambition as an abstract concept, also discussing its effects on the characters, with some candidates offering interesting and evidenced ideas about the 'corruption that always seems to follow when ambition appears in a character', as one suggested. Other successful responses considered Webster's dramatic methods closely, particularly his use of language and striking imagery. Only the strongest responses were confidently able to consider the effects of these methods. The most successful responses supported such ideas with apposite and accurate reference to the text and, in some cases, appropriate contexts.
- (b) Candidates who had a clear understanding of the context to this passage had a secure framework on which to construct their responses. Weaker answers often summarised the relationship and what happened to the characters throughout the entire play, with too little focus on the detail of the given passage, though often showing a basic knowledge and understanding. More successful answers recognised the significance of this passage in 'revealing a tender and loving couple, so that their tragic ends are all the more upsetting', as one candidate suggested. Competent answers explored the tone of this exchange between the lovers, variously seen as comic, domestic, gentle and sensual. This led some candidates into considering how Webster created the dramatic mood. Language and imagery were confidently discussed in some responses, though only a few candidates could confidently explore the dramatic effects of Webster's choices. Those candidates who remembered the next scene with Ferdinand were best placed to recognise the impact of this scene and to explore how 'the heightened tension in the next scene was in part created by his choices in this scene', as one candidate noted. Answers which supported such arguments with close reference to both the passage and the wider text did very well.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- (a) This was a popular question albeit the minority choice on this text. Every response had relevant opinions on Big Mama as a character and on her role in the play. Weaker responses summarised what happened to her during the course of the action, often showing detailed basic knowledge. Better answers at this level had a basic understanding of her different roles. For example, 'Williams presents her as a loving mother and a devoted wife, lively and funny, so that the audience is always pleased to see her', as one essay summarised it. More competent answers were more nuanced in their opinions, noting the 'disparity in her treatment of her sons, perhaps the root cause of Gooper's attitudes', with other candidates noting her 'unfair accusations of Maggie', as well as 'her disinterest in her grandchildren and her disregard for social conventions in her horseplay with the reverend'. More successful responses were often perceptive about her relationship with Big Daddy. Some candidates saw her as 'a victim of 1950s social pressures,' though others remembered her spending spree and her 'over-the-top jewellery', with good responses analysing how Williams used these methods to shape the audience's response. Her language 'but especially her silences' were also well discussed, 'as these were Williams's main tools in creating pathos for this larger-than-life character', as one candidate argued. These methods were often perceptively analysed with candidates showing detailed knowledge and engaged understanding of the text and, in the strongest answers, an appreciation of its dramatic effects. Stage directions and symbols were often well explored with some strong responses showing a sophisticated grasp of plastic theatre and 'how Williams uses it here to create the complexity in her portrayal', as one candidate put it, citing the bed, the morphine and Gooper's briefcase as telling examples. Very good answers were able to select appropriate material from the whole play, neatly linking textual and contextual support into a seamless argument.
- (b) This was the most popular question in the drama section and nearly every response offered engaged personal opinions about the Pollitt family at this stage of the play. Weaker answers, ignoring the specific task, retold the story of the play, often showing detailed basic knowledge of plot and characters. Better answers at this level were aware of the tensions 'and the conflict caused by Maggie's announcement of her fake pregnancy', as one candidate noted. 'The more open hostility between the sisters-in-law, contrasted with the civil exchange between the brothers' was often discussed. More competent responses were very clear on the context and how 'the pregnancy, the cancer and the battle for the estate were all coming to a climax at this point', as one candidate summarised it. Williams's methods were soundly analysed at this level, particularly his 'use of stage directions and punctuation to make the atmosphere very clear to the audience', as one response noted. Other discussion points were his use of symbols such as the liquor, the 'fierceness' of Maggie's and Mae's interactions with their husbands and the 'shocking effect of Big Daddy's agonised cries'. Strong answers analysed the effects of these dramatic methods perceptively, as well as linking the passage to the wider text appropriately. At this level, answers kept the possible audiences in clear focus, often exploring how a contemporary audience might respond differently than a twenty-first century one. There were some engaged interpretations on, for example, the role of women and the effects of greed and deception on family relationships. These responses always had a sophisticated understanding of the dramatic situation and could respond sensitively to shifts in tone, such as the comedy of Maggie's 'Gracious!'. Analysis was always specific, as were references to the wider text, with appropriate and telling contextual points well integrated into the arguments.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Nearly every response was able to select relevant poems to discuss. Weaker answers tended to retell their chosen poems, often in some detail, though without directly connecting the methods and effects of the chosen poems. Better answers at this level were able to explore, at least implicitly, different types of violence. Racial and domestic violence were widely discussed. Others at this level were able to discuss verbal and physical violence as well. More competent answers often chose contrasting poems to explore how Angelou presents violence, with *My Arkansas* and *A Kind of Love, Some Say* being popular choices. Most

answers saw violence as presented through poems about human relationships, 'since whether in the home or in the streets, Angelou shows violence as a people issue', as one candidate suggested, citing *Men* and *To Beat the Child Was Bad Enough*. Good answers were able to link their chosen poems through analysis of their contrasting methods, enabling some candidates to make interesting points on poetic choices. Other good answers looked at the language and imagery in detail, contrasting the 'ordinariness of the settings with the disturbing memories of racial and domestic violence', as one put it. Very good answers were able to integrate analytical and contextual points into the body of the interpretation and, where supported by precise reference to the poems, the answers did well.

- (b) This was the more popular choice on *And Still I Rise* and nearly every response had relevant opinions about Angelou's presentation of women 'through the many work roles that society expects of them', as one candidate summarised it. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, with little reference to Angelou or her poetic methods. Better answers at this level did notice the different kinds of work 'which might represent different women in a variety of situations', as one essay put it. Domestic and nurturing work was often commented on, with some candidates picking up the 'possible references to slavery in cutting cane and picking cotton'. The work was seen as imposed on the women by men, society or 'historical expectations', as one suggested. More competent answers were able to consider the second part of the poem and what the effects of 'the natural world are on the struggling and hard-pressed women', as one essay wondered. The shift in tone in the poem as well as the changes in language and rhythm were well discussed at this level, with stronger answers able to analyse specific moments in the poem and explore the effects of Angelou's choices. Many argued that 'the misery of the overworked and put upon women was alleviated only by the natural world around them, not by society or their men', with some seeing this as a common theme in Angelou's poetry. Strong answers were alive to her use of the first person and the 'immediacy that creates', while other responses noted that 'the pace created by the short active verbs and the relentless rhythm of the first stanza is completely changed in the closing stanzas', as one essay suggested, 'for the soothing power of nature is reflected in the imperatives and much softer alliteration of the second half of the poem'. The strongest responses developed such analysis of methods and effects perceptively, integrating references to the wider text and appropriate contexts seamlessly into a sophisticated argument.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- (a) There were only a very few responses to this question. Most essays had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select relevant material, though some weak answers did retell the story of Gawain's quest in detail, noting how 'fearful it was for him to know he was going to be executed by the Green Knight', as one candidate put it. Better answers at this level identified different kinds of fear – most commonly fear of death, of failure and of being seen as a coward. More competent answers developed these points, considering their significance to Armitage's plot and methods of characterisation, often supported by appropriate reference to the text. There were very few strong responses to this question, with only occasional references to Armitage's presentation. Popular choices were contrasting characters such as Gawain and Lord Bertilak, the symbolic use of the hunting physically and metaphorically (and the fear of the boar in particular) and 'the use of knightly codes of honour to emphasise what was at stake for Gawain and Arthur's court', as one noted. There was however only occasional reference to Armitage's poetic methods such as alliterative verse and his language choices, which limited the success of some otherwise strong essays.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers summarised the relationship between Gawain and the lord throughout the entire poem, recognising Bertilak's dual role as the Green Knight, though not always appreciating that is not, in the moment of the extract, known to either Gawain or the reader. Better answers at this level, aware of this 'more serious and dangerous backstory', as one candidate put it, did focus on the wager and its significance. More competent responses considered the characterisation here, particularly of the lord and how 'he is welcoming and friendly, with a seemingly high regard for Gawain'. Others noted Gawain's 'more subdued responses, as if more on guard,' which a few candidates thought was 'inevitable given what was hanging over him.' Answers at this level became stronger as candidates considered some of Armitage's methods of presentation: his use of dialogue, the tone and mood of the gathering, the descriptions of the lady and what she would do as well as some of the language,

especially Gawain's 'gracious' and 'truth' and bowing to the lord, were all popular discussion points. Very few answers were able to discuss Armitage's alliterative verse with any confidence or to fully analyse the effects of some of Armitage's poetic choices. This limited the success of otherwise promising essays.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There were very few responses seen to this question. Most responses had at least a basic knowledge of the text and were able to select more or less relevant poems with which to address the task. Very weak answers did attempt to use poems they knew well such as *The Chimney Sweeper*, rather than poems more relevant to the task, with consequent limitations on the effectiveness of their response. Better answers at this level were able to summarise their chosen poems, with *Holy Thursday*, *Introduction* and *Nurse's Song* being popular choices. At this level, there was understanding of Blake's concerns generally, for example 'how song is associated with innocence, happiness and especially children', as one essay suggested. This was often asserted, rather than demonstrated by reference to the text. More competent answers were able to do this and often to integrate specific textual to support the interpretation. Sound answers also considered some of his poetic methods, with candidates showing awareness of Blake's choices of language and imagery, in particular. The very few stronger answers were confidently able to consider some of the effects of Blake's choices, as well analysing a wider range of poetic methods, such as poetic form, versification and rhythm and rhyme. At this level of engagement, candidates often had a secure understanding of relevant contexts and were able to integrate them into their essays seamlessly.
- (b) This was a very popular choice of question. Weaker answers often paraphrased the poem, showing a basic knowledge of the meaning and often a limited understanding of Blake's concerns. Better answers, whilst struggling with the point of view of the narrative, were able to comment on religion and the social context. For example, 'Blake paints how the children had to act mature and skilful in order to survive the harsh living conditions.' There was also personal engagement, with sympathy and at times pity, for the children's plight. More competent essays were able to look beyond the poem and appreciate Blake's bigger picture. Some took a more jaundiced view and, for example, found the last two lines cynical, even nauseating. 'This is a false promise; only death will free the children', as one candidate argued. Most responses at this level responded personally to the first two stanzas but generally offered more conventional 'Christian' readings of the Angel, 'for life is hard but, if we all do our duty and obey authority, we'll be rewarded in Heaven', as one response summarised it. Stronger answers made excellent use of what they knew about context and were thus able to separate Blake's attitude towards organised religion and his own visionary Christianity, implicit in the poem. At this level, those who referenced the Experience poem or were clearly aware of it, usually offered a much more critical and nuanced reading, acknowledging Blake's view of childhood's essential innocence but noting that the criticism of society was presented indirectly in the last stanza. Other stronger responses focused on Blake's anger toward a system that 'offers only illusory hope and the way it tricks the children to endure suffering with the promise of heaven', which Blake implies is a manipulation. There were some excellent analyses of Blake's poetic methods at this level: teasing out his use of different speakers, the shifting in tone between the two parts of the poem, his use of language to create empathy and the 'nursery rhyme like versification' were all popular discussion points. Other responses consider the imagery, noting the Christian implications of the shorn lamb, for example. The most successful responses analysed the effects of such poetic methods in detail, blending quotation from the wider text with specific examples from the given poem, often in effective and well-structured arguments.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) This was a minority choice of question on *Songs of Ourselves*, with nearly every candidate able to select relevant poems on which to base their essay. Some very weak essays used the given poem from the (b) question, with a consequent limitation on their overall success. Popular pairings of poems were *Father Returning Home with an afternoon nap*, *In the Park* with *The Lost Woman...* and *The Buck in the Snow* with *Renouncement*. Basic answers tended to retell their chosen poems, nearly always with a basic understanding of the meaning and some ability to shape ideas to address

the question. More competent answers were fully focused on the task for 'Memory is a fundamental basis for any poem', as one candidate suggested before alluding to Wordsworth's famous aphorism about 'recollection, tranquillity and memory'. Choosing contrasting poems helped candidates structure their essays effectively. For some candidates 'memories are often sad or painful', so the effects 'on poet and reader are usually negative', as one essay argued. But those who found contrasting poems were led into more analytical appreciation, for example 'how Wordsworth depicts his "Phantom of Delight" as a positive fulfilling memory, compared to Harwood's memories of her lost lover'. Another strong response noted Arthur Yap 'peering through a window at his younger self' and contrasting it to 'Dilip Chitre perhaps regretting the way he treated his father', with the sense of loss encapsulated by the poet's speaking of 'stolen childhood' and 'stolen fatherhood'. Strong answers focused on how the poet presented the memories in order to create effects. Popular discussion points were language, poetic form (with one candidate exploring how Harwood's use of the sonnet form 'adds a sharp poignancy to her memories of a lost lover') and the poetic voice. This last was a particularly productive point of analysis, 'contrasting the use of first and third-person speakers to evaluate the depth and sincerity of the emotions evoked by the memories', as one candidate argued. Where such points were supported by close reference to the text and some contextual underpinning, as appropriate, the essays did very well.

- (b) This was the most popular question in the poetry section and all but a very few weaker responses had at least a basic knowledge of the poem's meaning and a basic understanding of Carew's concerns. Very weak responses seemed to be responding to the poem as an unseen, often lacking understanding of the overall meaning and structure of the poem. Basic responses were able to pick up the joys of spring, but only better answers at this level could see the contrast between 'the rebirth of spring and the poet's depression over his lover', as one candidate noted. Weaker responses were limited in their comments on literary features. For example 'spring is a fresh start' but Carew presents it 'as a metaphor for what his lover's heart lacks', as one candidate suggested. Some made general points explaining techniques rather than exploring the possible meanings. Some structured their essays around 'feature spotting', often noticing examples of alliteration or caesura or rhyme without offering any analysis of the features. Nearly every response at this level did understand and discuss the message of the last line, with some engaged personal commentaries. More competent responses explored the fact that it was also about a cold-hearted lover, which 'explained the change in mood in the poem', as one suggested. There were also some sound discussions recognising that 'winter has its charms too, not simply spring good and winter bad', for, as one candidate noted 'despite her being locked into January he still wants his lover'. Stronger responses were confident in exploring a wide range of Carew's poetic methods. For some candidates, 'Carew uses the soft assonance to add an uplifting musical tone to move to the beat of spring's natural orchestra', as one argued. Others analysed the 'powerful paradox reinforcing her indifference to nature's transformative seasonal cycles', while some good responses argued that he uses 'pastoral, idyllic descriptions of public love to further emphasise the speaker's private despair' and so to 'show Spring's limited control over love'. The most successful responses were wide ranging in their analysis of poetic methods, with some detailed commentaries on the effects of balance and antithesis in heroic couplets, for example. The strongest essays did not separate the transition to spring from winter and the poet's love life but saw the implications of his heartache throughout the poem, even in the joyful celebration of the rebirth of spring. Where such arguments were supported by close analysis of the poem and some appreciation of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a) There were only a very few responses to this question. Weaker answers retold more or less relevant parts of the novel, focusing almost exclusively on Biju, with only implicit focus on the specifics of the task. Better responses recognised how 'this better life is not actually a better life', with more competent answers recognising the connections to the American Dream, often showing sound contextual awareness, leading some to see the desire to emigrate as 'false'. There were some more confident moments in some responses with one candidate noting that 'Desai presents the desire to emigrate from India as a form of cultural elitism' and linking it to the 'cultural hierarchies in India itself'. Another more confident response suggested that 'while this ambition is understandable, it also reframes Biju's immigration as something larger than himself', going on to draw significance from 'Biju's return emptyhanded to his father and his home'. Essays at this level of understanding were

limited by not fully engaging with 'Desai's presentation', such that only some of his novelistic methods were considered and often only mentioned in passing, rather than being analysed in depth.

- (b) This was the more popular choice on *The Inheritance of Loss*. Most candidates showed sensitivity to how Jemubhai's disappointments and humiliating experiences in England shaped the Judge's character, with engaged personal responses often showing sensitivity to the issues raised, such as the subtle as well as more blatant racism and the difficulties encountered in adapting to a different culture. For example, one candidate suggested that 'the depressive reality of England greatly contrasts Jemubhai's grand expectation of a country he deemed superior'. More competent responses appreciated the subtlety of Desai's presentation: 'Jemu shelters himself from the British until he becomes like them, in order to fit in', when sadly, 'he's indoctrinated into believing the same prejudices as the British'. Another candidate developed this, remarking that 'his silent shaming is the beginning of his hatred for his own culture and himself'. This led to some sound linking to the wider text, with the powder puff, for example, a common discussion point. Other competent responses linked Jemu to Biju for 'neither man is accepted and neither wants to leave as this opportunity won't come again'. Stronger answers considered some of Desai's methods, with many essays discussing the baked beans as a symbol of 'some decency', though some also considered Mr Rice's negative behaviour. The narrative structures were sometimes analysed at this level, for example, 'the non-linear narrative links to the confusion and sense of displacement'. Desai's language choices and use of symbols were often well analysed in the stronger essays, which often supported their arguments with appropriate references to the wider text and a perceptive use of contexts, such as the influence of colonialism. There was engaged appreciation of the novel and Desai's skill as a novelist, particularly as one commented on 'the tenderness with which Desai unfolds the tragic scene.'

Question 10

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

- (a) There was only a small number of responses to this question, though nearly every candidate was able to choose two appropriate stories on which to base their essays. Popular choices were *The Prison*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Door in the Wall*, *The People Before*, *Games at Twilight* and *My Greatest Ambition*. Weaker responses had at least a basic knowledge of the narratives and often a basic understanding of the writers' concerns. There was some ingenuity of interpretation so that in *The Yellow Wallpaper* 'she was confiding in the diary "her only friend" as a substitute for friendship', as one candidate argued. More competent responses offered some engaged personal opinions such as 'humans are nothing without friendships and meaningful connections' or 'friendship gives us purpose in our mundane lives', but generally essays were limited by a lack of focus on the writer's presentation and other than brief reference to narrative voice and the use of contrasts there was not enough analysis to lift the essays into the higher levels of assessment.
- (b) This was the most popular question in **Section C** and most responses showed knowledge of the story and understanding of the situation. Weaker responses had a basic knowledge and understanding, often pointing out 'the signs of impatience', or 'the desire to stay long enough to keep up appearances but then get away in time for lunch', though some candidates responded to 'the lack of concern for the lady who had taken her own life', as one noted. More competent responses explored the significance of the passage as 'a literal and metaphorical journey through Mr Mitra's emotions as he considers how to act appropriately in a complicated situation'. Better answers at this level also looked at the role of tradition and ceremony and its significance in the wider story. Stronger responses explored Chaudri's presentation in detail. There was recognition of the shifting perspective in the third person narrative 'stream of consciousness using caesura, creating a clear separation between his thoughts and the commentary on his thoughts', as one candidate argued. For other candidates, 'the scene is the bureaucratic description of the newspaper that shows grief as filtered through social etiquette and protocol', though some analysed the passage as 'lacking emotive language and using detached, objective diction' so that its 'stream of consciousness cleverly allows readers to engage with the characters' raw and innermost thoughts'. Other essays argued that the 'third-person narrative serves to further distance the reader from Anjali – no one has a real connection to her'. Where such analysis was supported by appropriate examples from the passage and appreciation of the rest of the story, the answers did very well.

Question 11

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 12

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a very few responses to this question. Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to formulate their opinions. Only a small number of stronger responses could place the passage in a precise context. Weaker answers summarised the passage, adding some narrative background about the three slaves and why they were being hunted. Better answers at this level were aware of the significance of Cora's fight with the boy to the rest of the novel as well as 'the terrible fate that awaits the recaptured Lovey', as one candidate remembered. More competent responses considered Whitehead's presentation and some of his narrative methods. Popular discussion points were the third person narrator, the use of action and the way that 'Whitehead depicts Cora as a true survivor and Caesar as a natural leader', as one essay suggested. Stronger responses explored the extended metaphor, 'in comparing slave catchers to hog catchers, the writer dehumanises them into "hogs" to show how the slavecatchers see them', as one candidate argued. Some responses developed this idea noting Lovey's 'howls' and the 'short emphatic use of "bit", "slapped" and "bashed" to reveal Cora's fury', so that 'Whitehead ensures animalistic images are emphasised'. At this level, there was a confident understanding of the writer's concerns: 'Whitehead conveys the worry of the slaves to the reader and explains how critical their success is in the incident, less the brutality of the American regime be released upon them', as one essay argued. Where such interpretations were supported by precise references and some contextual pointing the answers did well.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- 1 Candidates need to develop analysis beyond a checklist approach to reach the higher levels of assessment.
- 2 Many successful essays have a clearly organised and purposeful structure.

General comments

The large majority of candidates this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were almost no rubric errors this session and very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there are still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level. There were responses to nearly all of the questions on the paper. Answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on most of the texts attempted by the candidates, with the most popular choices being *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in **Section B: Poetry** and *The Underground Railroad* in **Section C: Prose**.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session.

- 1 Many candidates, particularly, though not exclusively, when answering **(b)** passage questions, adopt a checklist approach when considering the writer's style. For example, in poetry essays the plan will list caesura, rhyme, alliteration and metaphor. The candidate will give one or two examples of these methods in the essay proper, often appropriate and with supporting quotation, but without any analysis of how these methods work or contribute to the poetic meaning. Nor is there any commentary on the effects of these methods on the reader or on the audience. This is a limited approach to literary analysis and more successful responses always integrate perceptive commentary of the writer's choices into their overall argument.
- 2 Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that candidates should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many candidates would improve the overall success of their essays by having a clear structure in mind before starting to write, incorporating an appropriate and focused introduction, a purposeful argument and a controlled apt conclusion. This will often be the consequence of some detailed and thoughtful planning, in which the terms of the question are closely considered, before the material to be discussed in the essay is selected.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers retold Sophia's story in detail, showing basic knowledge, though with only intermittent focus on the task. Better answers at this level noted her interaction with the other characters 'which brought out how important she is to the community', as one candidate wrote. More competent responses were able to analyse John's methods, principally his characterisation of Sophia through her relationships, with some responses at this level considering language and action. Her various roles as a mother, wife, friend and, for some candidates, a leader were identified and exemplified. Only a very few responses were confident enough to consider the effects of John's dramatic choices, with some candidates appreciating the shifting tone and mood of the passage, 'from comic and light to quite threatening as the robbery is discussed'. This enabled responses at this level to show at least sound understanding, particularly those who remembered the actual perpetrator of the robbery and what that would mean to Sophia and her family.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) Nearly every response was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers focused exclusively on Angelo and the Duke, summarising what each character did, with more successful answers at this level recognising their role in the development of the play's action. Better answers were able to compare and contrast the two leaders, with many candidates recognising 'how they are in some ways very similar in manipulating those around them to get their own way', as one essay suggested. Essays at this level often had secure and detailed knowledge of the play on which to base their interpretations. More competent answers often ranged more widely in the text, with Escalus, the provost and even Mistress Overdone well discussed. Other responses at this level adopted a more thematic approach, considering what elements of leadership each of the characters did (or did not) display. Manipulation and hypocrisy were common discussion points and, for many candidates, though 'Angelo's actions are more abhorrent and criminal, he is at least driven by his unexpected desire for Isabella', whereas the Duke was 'simply hiding behind his disguise and using it to manipulate Isabella and Mariana to control the events in Vienna'. Stronger answers looked closely at 'Shakespeare's dramatic exploration', often noticing the contrasts between the different leaders, Escalus and Angelo, for example, and their attitudes to wrongdoing. These responses also often considered Shakespeare's use of soliloquy, particularly in 'shading the audience's response to Angelo, clearly deeply troubled by his reaction to Isabella', as well as the Duke, whose 'desire to do good does in some way mitigate his meddling and cruelty to Isabella over Claudio', as one essay argued. The most successful answers were able to develop such argument with detailed and apposite reference to the text, often exploring Shakespeare's choice of language and imagery – 'Angelo's legalistic self-justifications' and 'the Duke's fake religious arguments and imagery'. Where such responses integrated appropriate contextual understanding into their arguments the responses often did very well.
- (b) This was a popular choice and nearly every candidate was able to place the passage into its textual context. Weaker answers tended to summarise the situation in detail, with some led into too much background detail in explaining what was happening. The relationship between Mariana and Angelo was the main focus in nearly every response and candidates were alive to the dramatic irony of 'the audience knowing who the veiled woman is, though Angelo and most of those on stage do not', as one essay suggested. More competent responses were able to follow the various 'twists and turns of the plot as we wait for Angelo to be exposed', with many candidates focusing on the 'Duke's unexpected siding with Angelo against Mariana and the Friar'. Candidates who remembered that Isabella has already been arrested and taken away on the Duke's orders were able to explore this latest development more successfully. Stronger answers considered the dramatic action in detail, the 'kneeling woman, the unveiling and Angelo's likely visible shock', were discussed in detail at this level. Other responses analysed the Duke, how from the 'shambling

mysterious friar he is likely to be now authoritative and commanding', with some exploring possible contrasts 'between him here and in the play's opening' as well as in this scene between him and Angelo. Very good answers analysed some of Shakespeare's methods perceptively. For example, the 'effects of the comic exchange between the Duke and Lucio', and the threatening tone of Escalus's 'we'll do it thoroughly', whereas others thought 'the exit of the Duke, leaving Mariana and by extension Isabella to the vengeance of Angelo', as 'deeply shocking'. Some essays remembered 'Angelo's self-justification for carrying on with Claudio's execution and what that might bode for the women if he is their judge', as one essay argued. The strongest answers kept their focus on the detail of the passage, with some offering sophisticated analyses of the dramatic methods, as well as controlled and thoughtful links from the passage to the rest of the play.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- (a) This was a popular question but very much the minority choice on the Williams play. Nearly every response was able to select relevant parts of the text with which to address the task. Popular choices were Big Daddy's cancer diagnosis, Brick's relationship with Skipper and Maggie's claims of pregnancy near the end of the play. Weaker answers tended to summarise this material, often showing basic knowledge and understanding of why those particular deceptions were important to the characters and, in more successful answers, to the play as a whole. Better answers at this level were able to identify 'different kinds of deception', for example 'Brick's self-deception and Maggie's straightforward lies have contrasting motivations', which, as one candidate suggested 'could be hiding the truth from yourself or from others in the family'. More competent responses developed such ideas in terms of the dramatic methods used by Williams, with the various 'intense dialogues between the warring family members', often discussed. Other sound answers considered the stage directions and how 'Williams uses them to ensure the audience is fully aware of the effects of deception', as one candidate noted, with the violence shown by Big Daddy and Brick often cited as examples of how 'deception poisons all the relationships and leads to a complete lack of trust and understanding throughout the family', as one essay argued. More successful responses explored the nuances of the different kinds of deception in depth, comparing, for example, Brick's attitude to Skipper with Big Mama's 'wilful disbelief in the truth about how Big Daddy feels about her', as one candidate noted. There were many interesting interpretations about the motives for deceiving Big Daddy about his cancer. Some considered it 'positive in not wanting to spoil the party', as opposed to others who saw only 'malicious self-interest and the desire to position themselves to get the inheritance.' Very good responses were always very confident in using textual knowledge to support their arguments, with a sustained focus on Williams's methods and their effects. The most popular choices for discussion were stage directions, language and the use of the setting and symbols, with some candidates showing sophisticated understanding of the effects of Williams's use of plastic theatre.
- (b) Nearly every response seemed to enjoy the opportunity to offer their views of Maggie, often seen as the 'most interesting character in the play'. Weaker answers summarised what happened to her in the play, often showing detailed knowledge and some basic understanding of her characterisation. In some cases, too much time was spent on explaining textual contexts with a consequent lack of attention on the detail of the passage. Better answers at this level had a basic understanding of her relationship with Brick, her desire for his attention and her 'disgust at her nephews and nieces', as one essay suggested. More competent responses explored the nuances of her character in detail: her way of talking and what that revealed about her, for example, was often discussed, along with her 'attractiveness and desirability', as one candidate noted. More successful responses analysed some of Williams's dramatic methods. Stage directions and language were popular discussion points and as the responses became more analytical, they became increasingly successful. Stronger answers nearly always explored the dramatic qualities of the scene, noting how 'Williams's use of setting, action and symbols, such as her dresses, all create this tense and yet intriguing atmosphere', as one candidate summarised it. Other strong responses considered the dialogue, analysing the effects of 'Brick's monosyllabic responses on both Maggie and the audience's view of her', as one candidate wrote. Very good responses

developed such ideas, particularly aware of tone and mood, with some responses exploring 'the intriguing effects from the sensual and sexual undercurrents of two beautiful, semi-naked actors on a dimly lit stage at the start of the play', though other candidates at this level were also alive to the 'humour of the situation and the dialogue'. Such interpretations that focused on the passage and the task, as well as appropriately linking the concerns and characterisation to the wider play, nearly always did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

- (a) Very few responses were seen on this question. The most popular poems chosen were *Momma Welfare Roll*, *To Beat the Child Was Bad Enough* and *Woman Work*. Weaker answers summarised the content of their selected poems, often showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of their meaning. Appropriate selection of relevant poems was crucial to developing a competent response and enabled some sound arguments about the ways in which Angelou presented relationships. Her use of different speakers, contrasting verse forms and choices of language and imagery were popular discussion points and candidates who were able to support their points with accurate quotation from the poems did well. Only a handful of candidates was confident enough to consider the effects of Angelou's choices but those that did showed some thoughtful analytical skills, particularly in teasing out nuances of meaning.
- (b) This was the second most popular choice in the poetry section. Weaker answers tended to summarise the poem with little reference to the specifics of the question, though often revealing a basic knowledge and understanding of Angelou's concerns. Her attitudes to racism and black culture generally were at least implicitly discussed in essays at this level, though a few candidates drifted into recounting biographical context and thereby limiting their focus on the poem and the task. More competent responses were able to explain many of the cultural references in the poem, 'as Angelou lays out the breadth and depth of black culture across a wide range of activities', as one candidate summarised it. Food, music and politics were common discussion points, though some responses at this level did not reference the rest of the poem, in which the range is broadened and developed. At this level there was always understanding of some of Angelou's poetic methods, with language and rhythm the most commonly referenced. Essays became more successful as the range of poetic methods that were discussed widened. For example, there were some confident analyses of 'how Angelou uses the rhymes to drive the ideas forward in an almost dance-like way', as one candidate argued. Other good responses noticed the use of personal pronouns, 'so that the focus shifts from the speaker to the icons of black culture and eventually to the reader and "your lover" and then the whole world', as one candidate suggested. At this level, there was often a secure knowledge of the rest of the poem and the wider selection, with apposite quotation used to evidence the analytical points made. Strong answers were comfortable in exploring the effects of Angelou's choices, with close reading of the poem often supported by telling quotation and appropriate contextual insights.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was a popular choice overall and nearly every candidate had at least a basic knowledge of the poem and some understanding of the significance of this passage. Some weaker answers were unsure of the precise context, though aware there were a 'series of tests of his chivalry that Gawain is subjected to', as one essay noted. Better answers at this level explored the role of the lady as a temptress here, though occasionally slipping into a summary of all of the 'tests' and the 'wager with Lord Bertilak'. More competent answers discussed why the girdle is 'so important in terms of the plot and Gawain's characterisation', with some critical of his weakness in accepting it. Others argued that 'the accepting of the gift was fine but not giving it to the lord was the real disloyal act', as one candidate argued. Essays at this level had sound understanding of Armitage's methods, with the lady's tone and language being popular points of analysis. Others noted how the 'secret agreed between them is reflected by a change in tone, conspiratorial now rather than open as

before', as one candidate noted. Good answers analysed how Armitage presents the lady's change in strategy through her words and actions, as she becomes 'desperate to catch Gawain out in this her last opportunity with him'. Strong answers were confidently able to explore the significance of the exchange and the girdle itself, as a 'symbol of Gawain's weakness, especially as an intimate item of female clothing', as one essay suggested. Only a few strong responses were confident enough to explore Armitage's alliterative verse in detail, though there were some perceptive analyses of its effects in terms of the tone and the mood created. Answers at this level always had a clear grasp of the context and were able to connect the passage appropriately to the wider text.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, though nearly every response selected relevant poems with which to address the task. Weaker responses tended to summarise their chosen poems with only implicit awareness of the whether 'emotions were stirred' or not. Popular choices of poem were both *The Chimney Sweeper* poems, *Little Boy Lost*, *The Tyger*, *London* and *Spring*, though one or two responses were limited through using the given poem in the passage. More competent responses explained how their chosen poems stirred the emotions, often soundly linking arguments by reference to appropriate contexts and showing secure understanding of Blake's concerns. One candidate suggested that 'Blake in fact only wrote when his own emotions were stirred by some injustice, so he was bound to stir his reader's emotions.' Common discussion points were religion and hypocrisy, social injustice, treatment of children and education with most candidates offering engaged personal responses, sensitive to Blake's concerns and finding relevance in them to their own twenty-first century worlds. Stronger answers explored Blake's poetic choices, particularly language, imagery and symbols, and where this was supported by specific examples from the poems, the answers did well. The few essays that reached the highest level always explored the effects of Blake's choices, integrating textual and contextual support seamlessly into a well-structured interpretation.
- (b) This was the more popular choice of question on Blake and work was seen at all levels of assessment. Weaker responses were able to explain the situation but struggled with the meaning and some of the references, for example the beadles. Better answers at this level had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of Blake's concerns. For example, one candidate suggested 'the church is supposed to be the holiest, but God and Blake know this isn't true', though in weaker responses there was a tendency to take the poem at face value. More competent responses questioned his presentation of the beadles, for example, 'the greyness, whiteness and wands suggest he wants to cast doubt on their benevolence', as one candidate argued. Stronger answers explored the presentation of the river, often seeing ambiguity: 'it should be literally and figuratively "pure" and "clean" and hence a visual juxtaposition between the external clean faces and appearance, with its internal sewage'. At this level, there was a confident grasp of relevant contexts and some ability to link this poem to the wider text, though one or two responses were too distracted by other poems, with a consequent loss of focus. Successful responses considered the imagery in detail. Candidates often noted the lamb in the poem and discussed it with varying success from 'the lamb is a recurring metaphor in Blake's poems', to 'Blake describes the children as a "multitude of lambs", a divine symbol of purity, innocence and even Jesus himself.' The strongest responses always considered the effects of Blake's choices, whether in language or versification, whilst supporting their arguments with apposite quotation and specific and relevant context.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were only a few responses seen to this question, with nearly every candidate able to select two relevant poems on which to base their response. *The Buck in the Snow*, *Growing Old*, *Australia 1970*, *In the Park* and *Surplus Value* were popular choices, the last two chosen by candidates who saw that 'death' could be figurative as well as literal. Weaker responses summarised the content of the poems, often showing basic knowledge and understanding but with little sense of the poetry. More competent responses offered commentaries on the speakers' reactions to death, without fully analysing how the poet in fact presented it. For example, writing on *The Buck in the Snow*, one candidate suggested that 'the poet gave the impression of having never directly experienced death before and not knowing what to think of it'. Other essays contrasted the presentations as 'cold and

colourless' or 'savage and violent'. Stronger essays saw that death might be presented as an escape or 'a means of gaining freedom', though others considered that 'people were showing their wild nature and dying like animals', as one suggested. Those taking death in a more figurative sense were able to find some insightful arguments, whether it was 'the death of hope for the mother in *In the Park*' or 'the brother-in-law's decline into poverty and misery as his world crumbled around him', as one candidate put it. Very few candidates were confident in analysing poetic methods, beyond language and imagery, though those that did consider poetic form and versification, for example, especially where points were supported by apposite quotations, did very well.

- (b) This was the most popular question in the poetry section, with answers seen at every level of performance. Weaker answers were unsure of some of the contextual background, for example, missing the monsoon reference and thus mistaking the muddy trousers and dark hands as the stigma of the working class. More basic responses were able to discuss the father's state of mind, though often ignoring his family and the dream of his ancestors and descendants. Many at this level commented on the father's sacrifice exemplified by the 'stale chapati' and 'weak tea' suggesting 'he consumed them, leaving better food for the family', which in more competent responses linked into contextual reading of the father's job and country. Many sound responses used their knowledge of Chitre's life to explain the poem, with telling references to Mumbai urban development at the time of the author's childhood. For example, commenting on 'the relation of poet and father and his enlightenment only on reflection, with regret and possible shame, of his father's struggles and unhappiness', as one candidate summarised it. Stronger responses abandoned a linear structure, adopting a structure based on an often-penetrating analysis of the context and the nature of the father's alienation from his family. This was supported in confident responses by secure analysis, especially of language and imagery. For example: 'the bag falling apart could be a metaphor for the man himself,' and 'the simple details about the household and the commute reflect the struggles and hardships of the father's life.' Stronger responses also considered the narrative voice, 'for Chitre's retrospective gaze is giving voice and dignity, where authentic understanding is only to be arrived at with maturity', as one candidate argued. At this level, candidates were alive to Chitre's depiction of 'a man-made world contrasted to the traditions of the past', as well as the effects of some of his poetic choices: 'this kinaesthetic imagery serves to highlight the father's stagnation in his mind even though he is still moving', according to one. The most successful responses blended understanding of the poem's meaning, with astute contextual awareness and analytical insight producing a well-informed and thoughtful interpretation.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 10

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 11

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

Question 12

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.