

Principal examiner reports for teachers

Principal examiner reports for teachers summarise what candidates did well and what candidates needed to improve for this examination series only.

This report is to be used in conjunction with the question paper and mark scheme.

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Resource	Where to find it
Grade descriptions – Grade descriptions describe the level of performance typically demonstrated by candidates achieving the different grades awarded for a qualification.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Syllabus and specimen materials
Schemes of work – Schemes of work are designed to support you in your teaching and lesson planning.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Lesson planning – Guidance on how to plan a lesson.	Lesson planning
Resource plus – There may be additional resources such as teaching packs containing lesson plans, resources and worksheets and videos for aspects of your syllabus.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
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Exemplar candidate responses	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/11 Drama and Poetry

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates who performed particularly well in the **(a)** questions clearly had at least a sound knowledge of events, themes and characters and their relationships to each other (Albee, John and Shakespeare).
- In the **(b)** questions, many candidates covered the whole of the passage, selecting key points rather than giving equal weight to every line, resulting in a clearer, more competently analytical approach.
- The majority of candidates showed evidence of appropriate preparation in selecting relevant material with which to address the given tasks and often had at least a straightforward knowledge of their two texts.
- Some candidates confidently drew interesting, sometimes perceptive, contrasts between characters, particularly in the Albee and John responses.
- Many candidates integrated references to language, rhythm and imagery into an overall interpretation, leading to more relevant points and a more structured approach.

What candidates needed to improve

- When discussing dramatic texts, candidates could have shown more understanding of the effects of dramatic devices behind ideas of 'presentation', remembering that an audience would be present during a performance and dramatic devices are designed to produce particular dramatic effects, often communicated through careful stage directions.
- The ability to analyse a text could be further developed, to improve confidence when applying and discussing a wide range of literary methods and their effects, for example a clearer understanding of dramatic irony.
- Creating a more balanced response to **Section A** questions: giving detailed attention to both poems instead of reducing the second to a brief, concluding paragraph, as seen in Songs and Angelou would improve structural approach.
- Some candidates need to focus more on the detail of the given passages in option **(b)** questions, instead of using an overly summative approach which leads to narrating and explaining rather than analysing.
- Incorporating a more secure contextual knowledge into relevant sections of essays would help some candidates develop a clearer basis for argument and analysis. A little more understanding of the characters' circumstances at particular points in the text would help in developing fuller responses in drama essays, for example.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Drama

EDWARD ALBEE: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

Question 1

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Explored Honey as both comic relief and a deeply vulnerable character, considering how audience sympathy for her shifts throughout the play.
- Analysed Albee's dramatic methods, including dialogue, silence, physical behaviour and Honey's positioning within the stage action.
- Considered Honey's function as a foil to Martha and the ways in which her apparent innocence exposes the failures within both marriages, connecting them through wealthy

fathers and the lack of children and therefore a failure to live up to an idealised version of woman as mother.

- Understood that Honey was seen as less a character than a representative of the submissive woman admired at the time and noted her characterisation through the choice of name and the physical description as 'slim-hipped'.
- Considered her fear of childbirth, reliance on drink, and the 'hysterical' marriage dynamic (including her claim to be pregnant).
- Analysed the significance of her peeling off labels in the bathroom and how her addiction to alcohol revealed more of who she really was, culminating in the outburst of 'violence' and the 'desperate' desire she expressed to have children showing a conflict between her own feelings and societal expectations.
- Explored the effects on the audience of the revelations of why Nick married her, her fear of childbearing and the use of 'slimness' as a euphemism.

Limited responses

- Retold Honey's actions throughout the play with limited discussion of audience response, rather than simply describing her personality.
- Made generalisations on context without using it to inform the response.
- Offered a two-dimensional character study, often focusing on one aspect only such as her drunkenness and saw her as young, sweet and naive with no intelligence or power.
- Considered the symbolism of her name and her 'hips' in simple terms, sometimes, for example, suggesting she was the perfect body shape for childbearing.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Explored how comedy operates alongside discomfort and emotional cruelty, recognising the extract as an example of dark comedy which is used as a weapon throughout the play.
- Focused on the language choices for example, the belittling of Nick through the diminutive, subservient 'houseboy'; the sexual 'gigolo' and the mocking praise of 'attaboy'.
- Analysed interruptions, repetition, timing and shifting power dynamics to show how comic moments simultaneously heighten tension and how comedy becomes uncomfortable, building tension toward the revelation that the 'son' is non-existent.
- Knew the text in terms of references to the liaison between Nick and Martha and the comment in response to 'screw baby' and the references to the 'son' of George and Martha being imaginary.
- Made informed reference to absurdist theatre and were aware of 'the games' and how George initiates the final game.
- Understood Martha and her relationship with Nick.
- Analysed how comedy was used alongside conflict and tension and made the scene comical and light-hearted, as well as dark and disturbing.
- Used context wisely, for example linking the American Dream to the extract through societal expectations of marriage and wives.

Limited responses

- Treated the extract in isolation, not showing awareness of the wider text.
- Identified humorous moments without exploring their dramatic effects in detail, with some responses only describing events, then stating they would make the audience laugh.
- Worked sequentially through the extract, paraphrasing with minimal analysis.
- Had some misunderstandings about characters and their relationships.
- Wrote brief answers and/or failed to address the extract's ending.
- Misunderstood the role of stage directions within the drama genre and misread some points, such as the use of 'baby', seen as an indication that Martha or Honey was pregnant.
- Found it difficult to understand some of the mockery and sarcasm, suggesting, for example, that Nick was George's son.

ERROL JOHN: Moon on a Rainbow Shawl

Question 2

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Compared contrasting expectations of marriage across different generations and social circumstances.

- Explored how marriage is presented as both emotional fulfilment and economic necessity within the community.
- Related the issue of marriage to the contexts of poverty and low expectations, for example, celebrating Mavis for her realism.
- Distinguished between the attitudes appropriately, so that for example, Mavis and Rosa saw marriage as an escape route from societal stigma while for Sophia it was for love and required a grim stoicism.
- Used historical and geographical contexts appropriately to inform their arguments.
- Analysed some of John's dramatic methods with perception and confidence to support the arguments made.

Limited responses

- Produced general essays about relationships and characters without maintaining the focus on marriage.
- Relied heavily on plot summary and narrative with limited discussion of John's dramatic methods.
- Explored the key idea of marriage in an undeveloped way, for example seeing it only as a shackle or a 'trap'.
- Offered narrative accounts of relationships, giving limited attention to John's methods and choices.
- Presented unsupported personal responses as arguments, for example, treating characters as real people rather than analysing dramatic construction.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Explored the contrast between Epf's practicality and Rosa's aspirations through dialogue, gesture and stage directions.
- Considered how humour and everyday domestic interaction reveal underlying tensions within their relationship.
- Made effective use of contextual details.
- Analysed how John exposes Epf's hypocrisy, contrasting his friendliness and warmth to Esther with his selfishness, cruelty and misogyny towards Rosa.
- Analysed John's presentation of Rosa here in the context of her later actions and her relationship with Old Mack.
- Analysed the development of conflict and the rapidly changing emotional atmosphere, commenting for example, on how John's use of interruptions and escalating accusations heightened tension.
- Understood the scene's dynamics, for example the use of music to explore stagecraft effectively.
- Connected the extract's significance to the wider play, including textual context around pregnancy and marriage.
- Understood the contrast between Epf's cold, resolute self-preservation and Rosa's naivety in telling the police about the hat and believing the revelation of her pregnancy will reverse Epf's decision to leave.

Limited responses

- Had a limited knowledge and understanding of the text, for example discussing Epf and Rosa as a husband and wife.
- Confused the nature of their relationship, leading to inaccurate interpretations of character motivation.
- Focused primarily on events rather than analysing dramatic presentation.
- Worked through the scene descriptively with limited analysis, often commenting on characters as real people.
- Showed limited understanding of stage directions within the dramatic genre.
- Treated this as an unseen, not knowing details of who Epf, Rosa, Charlie and Old Mack are in the play as a whole.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Tempest

Question 3

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Examined Caliban's dramatic function in challenging ideas of civilisation, power, colonialism and legitimacy.
- Communicated an understanding that Caliban functions as the play's moral mirror, forcing the audience to question what it actually means to be 'civilised' and to ask ourselves who the real monsters in the play are.
- Considered how Shakespeare uses Caliban to create both sympathy and unease, resulting in a complex audience response.
- Explored ways in which he is a victim of colonialism, brutally abused by Prospero and damaged to the extent of believing he cannot be independent, needs a master even if it is the lowly Stephano and Trinculo.
- Addressed Caliban's awareness of beauty and the complexity of his relationship with Prospero by referring to 'this isle is full of noises' with its possible implications and commenting on the significance of 'this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine'.
- Considered his desires toward Miranda and how these complicate his role, suggesting that while he is a victim, it still does not excuse his savage behaviour towards Miranda.
- Analysed a range of Shakespeare's dramatic methods, including language, stage directions and physical appearance, showing the effects of these choices.
- Integrated appropriate contextual points to support and develop their arguments.

Limited responses

- Listed everything they knew about Caliban rather than focusing on his dramatic significance or Shakespeare's presentation.
- Gave a one-sided view, focused on Caliban's personal qualities without considering his wider contribution to the play's meanings and dramatic effects.
- Treated Caliban solely as a symbol of colonial oppression without considering his dramatic role within the action of the play.
- Had limited knowledge and understanding of the play so that textual detail and quotation was restricted and generalised, with some details of the play unclear for example that Prospero killed Sycorax.
- Showed limited contextual awareness, often giving only unrelated generalisations about Shakespeare's Globe or Elizabethan attitudes.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Had a confident and secure knowledge of the passage and its significance to the play, for example identifying the context of the extract and explaining that the storm was a consequence of Prospero's magical powers.
- Understood how traditional hierarchy was subverted and the effects of that in terms of the play's wider concerns, recognising that the clash was based around status and power.
- Identified the extract's dramatic impact as the opening scene, for example the possible audience shock at the power reversal as the courtiers' usual authority is challenged by the boatswain and the storm.
- Analysed Shakespeare's creation of tension by discussing such methods as rapid exchanges, fragmented dialogue, conflicting authority, sound effects and stage directions.
- Analysed the use of language, for example explaining how the language of Sebastian and Antonio characterises them as violent and disrespectful and the importance of that in the play's development.
- Demonstrated awareness that the extract is intended for performance, discussing vocal delivery, movement and audience expectation, with some sense that this is a play and so the sinking, shouting and praying at the end would have created suspense and tension for the audience.
- Considered Shakespeare's use of pace, interruptions, verse and prose, entrances and exits, and shifting power relationships to explain how the dramatic tension develops.

Limited responses

- Read the extract as prose rather than dramatic dialogue, overlooking theatrical effects, often interpreting the passage as a reader not as part of a play meant to be watched/performed.
- Placed too much emphasis on punctuation details, such as Shakespeare's use of exclamation marks and not enough on the actual words or delivery.
- Had limited awareness of Prospero's creation of the storm and subsequent events.
- Gave general descriptions of what happened in the scene with all the exits and entrances, but without considering their effects.
- Misunderstood significant details, for example seeing Gonzalo as a troublemaker and suggesting his comments around the Boatswain and hanging were threats rather than reassurances.
- Approached the passage as an unseen, dealing with it as a story about some people on a boat in a storm arguing.

JOHN WEBSTER: The Duchess of Malfi

Question 4

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Had a confident and secure knowledge of the play so that Antonio was recognised as an honourable and loyal character, often contrasting him with the corrupt court.
- Explored how Webster uses Antonio to set the moral standard for the play before we meet the Cardinal and Ferdinand so we can trust him as a moral observer.
- Contrasted Antonio's virtue with the brothers' vices, relating it to historical context and Jacobean tragedy and exploring how his moral judgements become his vulnerability within a corrupt world.
- Analysed his role as a paradigm of virtue in contrast to Bosola's ambiguity and drawing appropriate parallels between their intertwined narratives.
- Explored how Webster shapes audience sympathy through Antonio's relationship with the Duchess, emphasising his genuine love for her.
- Analysed the effects of Webster's dramatic methods, such as language, imagery, tone and stagecraft, using appropriate quotation and examples to support the arguments.
- Used context appropriately, for example to show how in the Jacobean society obsessed with bloodlines, Antonio and his foil, Bosola, represent the changing world order and social development.

Limited responses

- Showed straightforward knowledge of Antonio's character attributes with limited discussion of dramatic methods.
- Had some difficulty in supporting points with suitable examples or quotations.
- Had some difficulty in analysing Webster's dramatic methods.
- Showed limited contextual awareness, often giving only unsupported generalisations about Webster's plays and Jacobean attitudes.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Explored Webster's use of dramatic irony, imagery, dialogue and character interaction to heighten audience engagement.
- Considered how the extract contributes to wider concerns of corruption, power and morality.
- Analysed language for example as a way to understand Julia's wit and ambiguity.
- Commented on the tension between Julia and the Cardinal and recognised the importance of the extract within the play.
- Analysed Webster's use of language, for example the falconry references to show how Webster chose language to suggest and emphasise psychological domination.
- Understood the significance of this extract to the audience's understanding of the Cardinal: from his hypocrisy as a holy man of the Church hunting down his sister for her 'lechery' contrasted with the passage where we see he has a mistress.
- Discussed the significance of the exchange with Delio at the end of the passage and the news brought by Julia's husband.

Limited responses

- Responded with narrative summaries and limited close analysis of the details of the passage, such as the significance of stagecraft.
- Had a limited knowledge and understanding of who's who in the extract and the relationships, for example Delio's significance and role, here and in the play generally.
- Summarised the dramatic narratives of the Cardinal and Julia in detail, often seeing them as real people rather than constructs, with only intermittent reference to the passage itself.
- Identified some of Webster's dramatic methods by name and example, without analysing their effects or significance.
- Had a generalised sense of the textual context, without placing the passage precisely within the structure of the dramatic plot.

Section B Poetry

MAYA ANGELOU: And Still I Rise

Question 5

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Chose appropriate poems, the selection of which allowed candidates to compare contrasting representations of family relationships across different contexts, balancing discussion across both poems while making meaningful comparisons.
- Explored both supportive and fractured family relationships without assuming family life was presented positively throughout and demonstrated a sound understanding of Angelou's presentation of family life, with many exploring themes of love, resilience and identity while recognising that family can also involve absence, conflict and sacrifice.
- Discussed some of Angelou's concerns appropriately and with sophistication, such as generational trauma, family metaphors, working-class reality, raising a family in poverty and the role of women.
- Demonstrated a good understanding and knowledge of Angelou's contextual background by referring, for example, to the Black Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and her contribution to the African American community. Other candidates discussed her abusive past and how it has likely influenced her poetry.
- Developed informed and persuasive arguments with supporting references to poems and appropriate quotation.
- Analysed some of Angelou's poetic methods with understanding of the effects of rhythm, rhyme, language and imagery.

Limited responses

- Had some limited personal response and relevant opinions, though often unsupported by quotations or examples from the text.
- Discussed a range of topics such as racism, slavery or women's oppression rather than family life, as required by the question.
- Selected poems they had prepared rather than ones most applicable to topic, which limited the development of relevant arguments.
- Relied on paraphrase or summary with limited attention to poetic methods and only occasional comparison between the chosen poems.
- Discussed contextual details, such as Angelou's background, without linking the points relevantly to the given task.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Focused on the presentation of the singer as unable/unwilling to sing, linking this to constraint, frustration, and unrealised/unused gifts and talents, exploring the presentation of the singer as both an individual performer and a symbolic artistic voice.
- Analysed Angelou's poetic choices such as rhythm, repetition, imagery symbolism and language in detail, with perceptive discussion of the effects of her choices.
- Analysed imagery and sound in detail, for example how the religious imagery and religious lexis contribute to the tone of disappointment.
- Discussed the notion of struggle against different things – racism, domestic abuse, personal confidence, for example – to explain how Angelou presents resilience, dignity and emotional strength despite rejection.

- Showed informed understanding of relevant biographical and historical context, which was used to support and develop the interpretation.
- Linked imagery to different kinds of silence: emotional, creative and metaphorical for example and were aware of her use of physical features – throat, tongue and lips – to create emotion and effects, linking these ideas to her overarching concern of the inability to realise dreams.
- Selected relevant knowledge of the details of the poem to support arguments and had confident understanding of the poetic references.

Limited responses

- Focused on paraphrasing the poem rather than analysing poetic methods, for example translating unfamiliar words such as ‘benison’, sometimes correctly, but without comment on their poetic effects.
- Had some limited knowledge of Angelou’s work and background generally, but not the set poem, leading to writing a more unfocused essay on her concerns.
- Attempted links to slavery or contextual points from Angelou’s life without firm textual grounding or support, with some contextual details discussed that were not always relevant to the set poem.
- Discussed the poem as an unseen and offered an unsupported personal response, reading the poem literally, with little sense of the context, for example misinterpreting the title as the singer refusing to sing for someone named ‘Al’ rather than recognising it as the dedication.
- Misinterpreted some aspects of the poem, for example arguing, without textual support, that the poem shows that the singer is dead or that she has chosen not to sing due to her oppression as a Black woman.
- Identified and exemplified from the poem some poetic methods such as caesura and enjambement, without analysing their effects or integrating the references into the argument.

From WILLIAM BLAKE: Songs of Innocence and Experience

Question 6

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Selected appropriate poems to explore Blake’s contrasting treatment of institutional religion and genuine spiritual faith.
- Recognised and understood Blake’s use of paired poems to expose conflicting and contrasting perspectives.
- Analysed closely symbolism, biblical imagery and voice, with apt supporting examples and quotations.
- Explored the complexities of Blake’s presentation of organised religion, spiritual innocence and moral corruption while supporting arguments with close analysis of poetic methods, such as language, verse form, rhyme and rhythm.
- Integrated appropriate, brief contextual points into their well-structured interpretations.

Limited responses

- Treated Blake as simply promoting Christianity without recognising his criticism of organised religion.
- Relied on general contextual knowledge, with limited relevant textual support.
- Discussed poetic content with limited analysis of poetic methods and their effects.
- Did not have an appropriate balance between chosen poems or used inappropriate poems, such as the set poem from **(b)** question.
- Discussed other of Blake’s concerns such as child labour and industrialisation with restricted focus on the terms of the question.
- Summarised the poems as narratives with limited awareness of the poetic genre.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Commented on the verse form and the effect of repetition, such as the parallel structures in the first stanza and the ways in which they draw attention to the difference in attitude, choices and consequences (friend vs foe, told vs told it not; did end vs did grow).
- Identified and analysed Blake’s specific techniques such as anaphora and the use of first person, as well as the extended metaphor of cultivation and growth to explain the development of anger.

- Understood the relationship dynamics and analysed how structure and language shaped the reader's response to its development. Structure was well commented on by some candidates. For example, 'the structure of four quatrains with an AABB rhyme scheme created a singsong feel at odds with the darkness of the message within the poem'.
- Developed symbolic readings of the garden via the Garden of Eden (serpent, temptation), linking to revenge and punishment, while integrating context effectively, such as Blake's religious beliefs.
- Interpreted the apple in a number of interesting ways, such as snow white and the poison apple, the apple of discord and Czech mythology, as well as the biblical reference to Eve and the serpent.
- Explored how in the corrupted mind of the speaker, the foe becomes a despised trespasser (*stole*) and how Blake presents the chilling sadistic triumph and moral degradation of the speaker who has no remorse or horror, just malicious victory (*glad*) at the death of his foe, making the simple rhyme chillingly playful.

Limited responses

- Focused only on the ending, overlooking the gradual development of the relationship and tended to misunderstand how Blake presents the speaker's anger being kept alive and nourished with negative emotions.
- Discussed only the biblical reference to the apple, offering a limited interpretation based on lessons from Genesis – forbidden fruit – rather than answering the question.
- Had only a limited knowledge of poetic methods and literary features, with which to support their personal response.
- Discussed the poem line-by-line, without offering an overview of the poem, leading to limited development of an appropriate argument.
- Had some misunderstanding of the meaning of the poem, such as seeing the 'garden' literally and ignoring its implications, assuming the friend and foe were the same person and seeing the tree as an actual tree.
- Had some difficulty distinguishing between the responses to friend and foe or the symbolism of the apple.

From SYLVIA PLATH: *Ariel*

Question 7

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Knew and appreciated Plath's poems and developed a strong personal response to the given task, supported by well-chosen and appropriate poems. Candidates who directly compared poems tended to be most successful.
- Integrated appropriate contextual points, without losing focus on the specific poems and the given task.
- Explored Plath's different attitudes to Death, such as how she presents it as both terrifying and transformative. Some responses argued that she presented death as being connected to suffering and more of a psychological phenomenon rather than a physical one.
- Analysed Plath's poetic methods, such as language, imagery and verse form in detail, with perceptive awareness of the effects of her choices.
- Commented closely on Plath's use of symbolism (for example 'poppies') and linked their comments into an informed personal interpretation.

Limited responses

- Relied excessively on Plath's biography at the expense of textual analysis.
- Assumed every poem directly reflected the poet's personal experiences, with a consequent limited awareness of Plath's poetic constructs.
- Summarised and paraphrased their chosen poems with only limited commentary and analysis relevant to the question.
- Made general contextual points with insufficient connection to the specifics of the task or the poems chosen for discussion.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Explored the speaker's conflicting and complex emotions towards motherhood, recognising both tenderness and uncertainty and explored the poetic tensions, for example between ideals of motherhood and lived reality.
- Interpreted the poem with secure knowledge and understanding of its meaning and effects, with a confident grasp of details such as references to the gold watch and the museum.
- Analysed Plath's poetic choices, such as imagery, sound patterns and shifting tone to explain the developing relationship between mother and child, with confident understanding of the effects of her choices.
- Closely analysed the structure of the poem and its emotional complexity, such as the contrast and conflict between emotional distance and growing attachment.
- Tracked imagery sensitively noting nuances of both positive and less positive shading, such as the effects of 'flat pink roses,' 'Victorian nightgown,' and 'cow-heavy and floral'.
- Integrated appropriate brief contextual points into an effectively structured argument, focused on the details of the set poem.

Limited responses

- Assumed the poem presented only maternal happiness. These answers were often assertive, and either unsupported or appended quotations which suggested the opposite meaning.
- Focused on paraphrase and summary of the poem, with only limited analysis of Plath's poetic methods and their effects and insecure knowledge and understanding of key images and references such as the 'fat gold watch' and the museum.
- Discussed contextual, biographical points at length with a consequent loss of focus on the set poem.

from **Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2**

Question 8

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Selected poems offering contrasting experiences of personal, emotional or environmental changes, which could be psychological, biological or geographical.
- Discussed the meaning of their selected poems, with knowledge and understanding, aware of possible nuances and appropriate contexts.
- Structured essays effectively with, for example, sustained comparisons of the two poems throughout rather than discussing each poem separately.
- Developed and explored interpretations of the effects of change such as how it may produce both loss and renewal or misery and delight.
- Considered and contrasted in detail the different poetic methods chosen by the poets, particularly language, imagery and poetic structure, with sustained focus on their effects.
- Integrated appropriate contextual points into their well-structured arguments.

Limited responses

- Relied on paraphrase rather than literary analysis and misremembered some of the details of the poems and offered little or no contextual support.
- Chose inappropriate poems for the given task and wrote unbalanced essays, which were sequential discussions of individual poems, with limited comparison and in some cases where one of the chosen poems was discussed only briefly.
- Limited responses were focused on describing changes without analysing their poetic effects or the poets' specific choices.
- Were aware of specific techniques (most commonly enjambment, rhyme and caesura) and exemplified them, but without considering why the poet may have chosen them or analysing their effects.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Discussed the poem with secure knowledge and confident understanding of its meaning and Collins's concerns, supported by close reference to the poem and appropriate contexts, commenting for example on the contrast between the speaker's human assumptions and the mysterious self-possession of the cows.

- Understood the speaker's philosophical engagement with the cows, including their 'universal' quality and relationship with time, recognising the speaker's mixture of curiosity, admiration and self-reflection.
- Analysed the gradual shift from observation towards broader reflection, by exploring Collins' conversational tone, humour and vivid imagery, showing how these shape the reader's response.
- Analysed in detail Collins's use of imagery, poetic structure, first-person voice, sensory detail and the physical/geographical grounding of the cows and commenting, for example, on the humorous exaggeration and the shift towards respect for the animals' dignity and presence.
- Explored the effects of Collins's language choices, for example those suggestive of violence and suffering that the speaker uses to describe the sounds of the cow and understood that this is metaphorical language.
- Integrated effective references to context and apposite quotations from the poem into a well-structured essay, focused on the given task.

Limited responses

- Had insecure knowledge of the meaning of the poem, leading to a misunderstanding of the situation and narrative interpretations unsupported by the text. For example, some candidates suggested the cows were being slaughtered or the poem described a cow giving birth.
- Identified some poetic methods such as enjambement and caesura without analysing them in terms of a contribution to the poem's overall effect. Some candidates misread the tone of the poem and described events in a 'cartoon'/slapstick way for example believing the speaker was being chased by the cows or was terrified of their disappearance.
- Explained the meaning of the poem in simple terms, focused on the surface narrative without considering how the poet develops ideas across the poem's length.
- Had limited appreciation of Collins's poetic choices, treating the poem as a narrative rather than a poetic construction.
- Asserted that the speaker is shocked or curious without identifying specific ways in which the poet shows the speaker's reactions.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/12 Drama and Poetry

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates who performed particularly well in the **(a)** questions clearly had at least a sound knowledge of events, themes and characters and their relationships to each other (Albee, John and Shakespeare).
- In the **(b)** questions, many candidates covered the whole of the passage, selecting key points rather than giving equal weight to every line, resulting in a clearer, more competently analytical approach.
- The majority of candidates showed evidence of appropriate preparation in selecting relevant material with which to address the given tasks and often had at least a straightforward knowledge of their two texts.
- Some candidates confidently drew interesting, sometimes perceptive, contrasts between characters, particularly in the Albee and John responses.
- Many candidates integrated references to language, rhythm and imagery into an overall interpretation, leading to more relevant points and a more structured approach.

What candidates needed to improve

- When discussing dramatic texts, candidates could have shown more understanding of the effects of dramatic devices behind ideas of 'presentation', remembering that an audience would be present during a performance and dramatic devices are designed to produce particular dramatic effects, often communicated through careful stage directions.
- The ability to analyse a text could be further developed, to improve confidence when applying and discussing a wide range of literary methods and their effects, for example a clearer understanding of dramatic irony.
- Creating a more balanced response to **Section A** questions: giving detailed attention to both poems instead of reducing the second to a brief, concluding paragraph, as seen in Songs and Angelou would improve the structural approach.
- Some candidates need to focus more on the detail of the given passages in option **(b)** questions, instead of using an overly summative approach which leads to narrating and explaining rather than analysing.
- Incorporating a more secure contextual knowledge into relevant sections of essays would help some candidates develop a clearer basis for argument and analysis. A little more understanding of the characters' circumstances at particular points in the text would help in developing fuller responses in drama essays, for example.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Drama

Question 1

EDWARD ALBEE: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

(a) Comprehensive Responses

- Pointed to Albee's dialogue and stage direction to show that families can be 'significant', or they can fail. Many responses saw the play as a comment on American society and the pressures it places on individuals and their families.
- Saw Albee's presentation of family not as a haven of comfort, but as the ultimate psychological battleground.
- Cited Albee's presentation of family as the basic building block of American society: one which the dramatist was intent on demolishing. Some defined family broadly, such as the married

couples of the play, or their extended family, or as work families within the university dynamic, and explored how these groupings shaped personal lives.

- Made links to absurdism and existentialism, seeing the family institution as a mere construct, devoid of meaning, as hollow and hypocritical. Some saw the family as a site for illusion, conflict and emotional survival.
- Explored family as a social ladder to be climbed, such as marrying into wealth, as George and Nick do, where, as one candidate notes: 'marriage is manipulated to be the result of cold calculation'.
- Developed appropriate contrasts, such as Martha and George's destruction of their illusion in their imaginary son versus Honey and Nick's terror and impotence as a family. Other candidates argued that the young couple are the reverse of the older, outwardly chaotic couple because they are chaotic on the inside. Candidates explored how children (real or imagined or in utero) structure family dynamics and saw Albee's engineering of the imaginary son as a dynamic to enable an artificial family.
- Showed awareness of the contexts of gender and the patriarchal system, sometimes seeing the role off-stage fathers played in continuing to dominate the social order.

Limited Responses

- Were less able to provide textual quotation to support their ideas and treated the couples separately, without wider conceptual exploration of meanings.
- Reduced the question to simple discussions of the American Dream and offered reductive gender stereotypes of the period, unaware that the 1960's was the advent of mass birth control and the sexual revolution.
- Discussed the characters as if they were self-motivating, rather than Albee's constructions, used to show how the family unit of his time was changing. Often responses were plot-driven, with limited reference to dramatic detail of stage action.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Offered good focus on George, on the extract and often with knowledge and quotation from the wider text.
- Saw George as 'the director of metatheatrical games, in the scene showing how smoothly he can reassert his dominance and the moral high ground that he gave up to Martha in Act 1'. Many responses saw George as a father figure in the scene, citing the tensions and possible similarities between the men.
- Developed discussions of George and Nick into explorations of masculinity and power. Some candidates saw George as attempting to helpfully instruct Nick, others saw his 'façade of helpfulness' or that he was living in the illusion of his superiority. Others saw that Nick's 'performative perfectness' begins to come apart here.
- Presented various interpretations, for instance that Albee sets the men up in opposition and gives an audience the difficult task of not sympathising with either: George as the perverted mentor figure, subverting the trope of the wise, older academic guiding the newcomer, Nick as the hard-headed scientist, devoid of empathy.
- Explored Albee's use of language incisively, seeing George as agitator and controller of the conversation and the impact of stage directions to add dramatic action to the scene and also the effectiveness of ellipsis and dramatic pause, used here to shape the experience of the watching audience.
- Analysed George's final monologue as representing existential dread, like *Waiting for Godot*, or prophetic, foreshadowing the fall of the New Carthage.
- Noted the comic elements of the scene alongside its tensions and underlying threat, citing George's intelligence and sarcasm in 'Albee's use of an emotionally complex and changing tone'.
- Integrated social context into responses, such as the competitive and inefficient American environment of the period, with its gender bias and limited expectations for women.

Limited Responses

- Did not cover the whole extract, often missing George's final monologue, which gives the scene its focal point.
- Reduced discussion to an argument of which character they preferred and believed, rather than seeing them as devices of Albee's making, or saw Nick as the weaker man, George as dominant here.

- Were not always able to contextualise the extract, to show what the audience know at this point in the play, and what their expectations are, as they watch this scene, for the ways in which the plot could resolve.

Question 2

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

(a) Comprehensive Responses

- Focused on the dramatist's use of stagecraft, dialogue and stage directions to demonstrate the desires of his characters.
- Developed responses that were character-driven and focused on Epf and the way he battled to control desire over responsibility. Some answers saw his desire to help Esther as driving the plot of the play and as his redeeming feature.
- Discussed the desires of Sophia (to protect her family) and considered the contrasting desires of Epf, Sophia, Esther, Charlie and Mavis, reflecting on how their ambitions affected relationships and created dramatic tension in the play.
- Integrated references to the social context of the lived experience of the characters as the reason their desires would not be met. The yard play form was noted and analysed, and candidates saw the environment as the main factor for destroying all hopes and desires.

Limited Responses

- Offered an open discussion of what the characters wanted and how they did or did not achieve their desires, for example how Epf had to leave to achieve his. There was limited quotation or specific detail from the text to support the opinions offered.
- Condemned characters for their choices without seeing them as dramatic constructs or considering the dramatist's purposes for the characters.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Offered interesting discussions of the extract's tensions and focused on Epf's situation as a fallen hero, here preparing to abandon Trinidad and Rosa.
- Analysed the dramatic tensions created through stage directions, dialogue and Sophia's emotional state following Charlie's arrest.
- Developed responses focused on 'tension', the stage directions detailing weather and the *mise-en-scene*. They also paid attention to the stage directions on Sophia's costume and how John uses this to reflect her internal state.
- Offered sympathetic analysis of Sophia, carrying the burden of family matriarch with her husband imprisoned and her daughter missing. With some candidates seeing the scene as exemplifying 'the remorseful trajectory of Sophia's life'. Some responses also contrasted Epf's hope for a new future with Sophia's anxiety for her family, noting how John in this scene juxtaposes hope and despair.
- Had knowledge of recurring motifs, such as time, water, moon, music, with secure analysis of the effects of John's choices: water, usually seen as a relief and hope, signifies the opposite here; moon, usually signifying light is here entrapment; time, in 'checks his watch' and the chiming clock, is running out for the women; music, reflected in Epf's choice of American tracks, is taking him away from his culture.
- Analysed John's juxtaposition of character tension, exemplified by Mavis and Epf: whereas Mavis and Prince take monumental steps towards their respective dreams, Epf has to give up something to get something, his ambition coming at a great cost.
- Focused on the contrasts between the dynamic presentations of Mavis and Sophia, with interesting interpretations developed around women's roles, feminism, freedom and duty.
- Analysed the scene's structure, with the opening showing Mavis's success and the close showing Sophia's failure and John's complex staging of the scene comprising different visual events to hold the audience's attention, setting the characters, and their outcomes, up for comparison.

Limited Responses

- Reduced 'tension' to those felt by the characters, not the audience.
- Either focused in some detail on character analysis of Mavis and Prince, without seeing the staging of the extract or Epf's presence on the stage or Sophia's entrance, or ignored the first page, only focusing on Epf and Sophia.

- Needed to explore in fuller detail the motifs of the scene – the ‘rain has stopped’ the clock chiming, ‘her shoes are damp’ – all features designed by the dramatist to create tension, evoke sympathy and prepare an audience for the outcome of the play.

Question 3

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*

(a) Comprehensive Responses

- Discussed the concerns the dramatist had for the presentation of this female character. They therefore saw Miranda evolving through her encounters with her father, her lover and her tormentor, Caliban, as well as her status as the only woman on the stage.
- Analysed Shakespeare’s characterisation of Miranda discussing her innocence, compassion and developing independence. Her relationships are significant to the play: with Prospero, she is the dutiful daughter transitioning into an autonomous adult; with Caliban, she is a fierce defender of virtue and civilization; with Ferdinand, she is a candid, egalitarian partner in love and, when she meets Mankind, she is the optimistic symbol of a new generation, ready to heal the fractures of the past.
- Identified Miranda as a vehicle through which Shakespeare explored the role and plight of women in his society, seeing her faults as socially enforced and her achievements as a signal that change, for women, was possible.
- Recognised her brief moments of defiance earlier in the play, despite being subservient to men through love or duty: she has empathy and care, she occasionally defies her father, she is at times a pawn.
- Referred to gender context, alongside some historical context of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, where women’s roles were confined.
- Supported discussion points with textual references, such as Prospero’s ‘the fringed curtains of thine eye’ offering allusion to both stage curtains and a puppet show for Miranda as a controlled character. Some responses questioned the reliability of Miranda’s love at first sight, given her lack of exposure to wider experience.

Limited Responses

- Offered discussion of character without textual quotation or accurate knowledge of textual action or detail.
- Focused on narrative of character and her relationships, without considering ‘different relationships’ or the methods through which Shakespeare ‘presents’ these to an audience.
- Reduced her character to a gender stereotype, offering reductive generalisations of how badly women were treated in years gone by, without solid contextual understanding or knowledge, such as Queen Elizabeth I’s lengthy rule and authority or Shakespeare’s penchant for strong female characterisation.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Situated the extract in the wider text, detailing what the audience know so far of the plot and the inherent dramatic ironies of the scene, such as Prospero’s ‘not so much perdition as an hair/Betide to any creature’ reminding the audience of Ferdinand’s survival and Prospero’s wider project of punishing those who had banished him.
- Divided the ‘companions’ as either treacherous or compassionate, drawing on later textual knowledge of sub-plots and attempts to kill the king and citing the elevated register of Francisco and Gonzalo in juxtaposition to Sebastian and Antonio’s crude and disrespectful language.
- Identified contrasting characterisations, such as whilst Antonio and Sebastian show flippant disregard for Alonso’s grief, Gonzalo and Francisco are positive in their outlook, with some confident analysis of Shakespeare’s presentation of Alonso, not as a king, but as a parent, presented to the audience as a distraught father, mourning the literal and metaphoric loss of his children.
- Focused on language and saw Francisco’s speech as ‘like an eyewitness account’ with its rich recreation of the shipwreck and the presentation of Gonzalo’s ability to observe carefully and think critically, for instance his optimistic simile ‘our garments now seem as fresh...’ which opens the scene.
- Had secure understanding of the characters’ context, seeing their return from the wedding presaging the supposed funeral of Ferdinand and the mock punishment of the King as reflecting other treacheries found in the play.

Limited Responses

- Offered a surface reading of the scene's action and some engagement with characters' language without wider explanation of who they are and how they have a role in the wider action of the play.
- Demonstrated some knowledge of the shipwreck's impact and some interrogation of the comic aspects of language, without integrating this into discussion of the more serious tone of the extract or Shakespeare's concerns in the wider play.

Question 4

JOHN WEBSTER: The Duchess of Malfi

(a) Comprehensive Responses

- Focused on the conflict between characters, with further subdivisions of inner conflict and personal conflict - particularly in reference to Bosola - also explored.
- Detailed different kinds of conflict, such as political, familial, psychological and moral and considered how these conflicts contribute to the tragic development of the play.
- Supported ideas with appropriate contextual material such as Webster presenting his own era and that of the play as rich in conflict, of both humanity and the corruption of society. For instance, the class conflict seen in the Duchess's marriage was shown as subverting the rigid Jacobean social hierarchy, or the moral inner conflict of Bosola, presented by the dramatist through his frequent soliloquies.
- Developed a range of interpretations that identified the familial conflict of Malfi's rulers as central to the outcome of the play with Webster's juxtaposition of Antonio's genuine merit against the inherited, corrupt power of the Arragonian brothers an important contrast. Responding to the 'different kinds of conflict' of the question offered candidates greater scope for exploring the corruption versus integrity conflict which is at the heart of the drama.
- Cited the drama's historical context as written in the aftermath of the English Reformation, a time of political instability and moral ambiguity, reflected in the play's characters and action.
- Analysed Webster's language in detail, with appropriate quotation to support comments on the effects of words, imagery and verse form.

Limited Responses

- Discussed family conflict only, simplified to the brothers' weaknesses and the Duchess's pride.
- Had limited ability to provide textual detail to support a line of argument.
- Had limited appreciation of the text as a play, concentrating on the plot of the play as a narrative structure without an audience.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Began by contextualising what the audience already knows of character and plot as the scene opens, which led to fruitful discussions of the Duchess's peril and Bosola's conscience at this stage in the play.
- Noted the way Webster allows Ferdinand to disclose his true character in the scene – not to his sister, but to Bosola, recognising that their relationship is unequal and dangerous; a power structure where the superior was the commander, the inferior the spy.
- Focused on the imbalance of dialogue in the scene to represent Ferdinand and Bosola's social difference and how the end of the passage - when Bosola indicates his ability to contend against Ferdinand, which some answers saw as foreshadowing later events. Candidates also saw Bosola's questioning of Ferdinand's intentions as early evidence of his ethical concerns.
- Explored language appropriately: for example the series of rhetorical questions which Webster uses to mark the difference in their authority. Some responses explored the nuances of meaning implied in Webster's choices to good effect.
- Recognised the imbalance in the relationship, though some found the interesting detail of Bosola's questioning as foreshadowing their final conflict.
- Offered contextual readings that explored how the class system forces people into corruption and sin.

Limited Responses

- Responded to the question's character focus by summarising what the audience knows about Ferdinand and Bosola, often without seeing the role of the Duchess and her significance at the start of the scene.
- Had a limited sense of the textual context of the passage, with some misreadings of what the audience and the characters on the stage know at this point in the play.
- Demonstrated a limited understanding of dramatic methods and the effects of some of Webster's dramatic choices in the passage, such as the various exits and entrances.

Section B Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: And Still I Rise

(a) Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated secure knowledge of the text by selecting apt poems where nature plays a distinct symbolic or structural role, such as *Still I Rise/California Prodigal/My Arkansas/Woman Work* and showed the points where the poems' features contrasted or met to reflect the poet's concerns.
- Explored how Angelou uses the natural world as an allegorical framework for freedom, resilience or relief from exhausting domesticity whilst also sustaining a comparison of the selected poems and integrating contextual discussion usefully into the analysis.
- Acknowledged the poet's social and geographical contexts in terms of her lived experience in rural America, with sensitive awareness of the way this experience was reflected in and added to the effects of her poetry.
- Analysed some aspects of Angelou's poetic methods, such as how she used natural elements sun/rain/wind as symbols and to explore the subversion patterns of human oppression. Other comprehensive responses developed confident appreciation of her use of verse form, structure, voice and settings and often explored the effects of her choices.

Limited Responses

- Listed instances of Angelou referring to weather or animals without developing an overarching argument in response to the question.
- Had some difficulty maintaining a balance between the two poems, treating them separately and not drawing links between the meanings produced by them.
- Selected poems where references to nature were incidental, leading to descriptive rather than analytical discussion.
- Had some difficulty connecting the poet's context to their chosen poems' themes.
- Recognised some of her poetic features such as language and imagery as important without considering their effects on the reader.

(b) Analyse Angelou's presentation of attitudes to work in the following poem.

Comprehensive Responses

- Comprehensive answers quickly established an overview of the poem's content: that this was a work song linking the suffering of oppressed people with their need to register their poetic protest as an expression of communal solidarity.
- Recognised the poet's insistence of dignity in work against the dehumanisation of slavery and servitude. Candidates saw the poem as a rejection of exploitation, as one response notes, it is like 'a slave-hymn, living through daily terror with incomparable resistance'.
- Established that Angelou is writing, post-slavery, of universal, generational suffering. Candidates were often engaged and personally invested in their response to the poem and its meanings, such as 'she transforms personal and historical experiences of oppression into a powerful expression of identity, resilience and self-affirmation.'
- Evaluated the structural shifts between personal declarations 'I was born to work' and ancestral legacy 'Papa drove steel' to show communal defiance against dehumanisation and a celebration of collective working, and linked this to Angelou's familial and generational framing of papa/mama, brothers/sisters.

- The structure of the poem was often seen as mimicking attitudes to work: it is repetitive, familiar in its uniformity and monotony and with steady and energetic rhythm in its lines.
- Analysed some of her poetic methods such as the voice, often identified as distinctly southern in accent, with its double negatives 'ain't no' and colloquialisms readily used to make its declarations. Other responses discussed enjambments which allow the speaker's voice to be uninterrupted, contrasted to the historical context where black voices have been silenced and oppressed.
- Discussed confidently the chant-like, syncopated refrain of the poem/work-song, analysing repetition and the choral effects of 'one more round/let's heave it down' to convey physical, repetitive labour, and the circularity of the poem which ends where it began, to symbolise the universal relationship one has with life's labour, often identifying the refrain as the collective voice.
- Offered multiple interpretations, such as a Marxist reading, exploring class oppression, supported by the points where Angelou distinguishes between fulfilling labour and capitalist exploitation – 'work itself is not the enemy, exploitation is'.

Limited Responses

- Offered a literal paraphrasing of the poem rather than a literary analysis of it, sometimes interpreting the voice or the persona only as a slave worker, with a consequent loss of understanding of parts of the poem.
- Discussed the poem's meaning in a straightforward way, though some candidates confused 'work' with 'slavery', ignoring how Angelou explicitly separates the pride of a 'job well done' from the subjugation of being a 'slave' or 'mule'.
- Listed various poetic devices such as caesura, repetition and enjambement without exploring their effects or linking these choices to the overall meaning of the poem.
- Made reference to general contextual points linking to Angelou's background or slavery, without integrating the references into their interpretations.

Question 6

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

(a) Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated secure knowledge and understanding by selecting the two poems carefully, for instance, exploration of child labour in *The Chimney Sweeper*, poverty and charity in *Holy Thursday* or a criticism of the powerful and greedy in *London*.
- Defined and understood the idea of 'social injustice' and linked elements of this to language and verse form, with apt discussion of the geographical setting of the poems such as 'chartered Thames', as an emblem of systemic injustice.
- Used the poems to explore Blake's criticism of institutional religion and poverty alongside social inequality, while integrating points about Blake's multi-layered use of irony and the subversion of institutional power (Church/Monarchy/State), contrasting the genuine spiritual purity of children with the corrupt social systems constructed by adults.
- Analysed some of Blake's poetic methods, such as language and imagery, verse form and structure and poetic voice, with appropriate supporting references to and quotations from the poems and in some cases a perceptive appreciation of the effects of these choices.
- Offered other interpretations and perspectives on the poems, such as Marxist and New Historicist approaches, to discuss the ways Blake exposes systems of political and religious power which perpetuated inequality during the Industrial Revolution. Other contextual focuses were the Dissenter's Movement, or the Romantics, both showing the social resistance to injustice inherent in Blake's day.

Limited Responses

- Chose two poems with which they were familiar rather than poems appropriate to the task, limiting the relevance of the interpretations offered to the given task.
- Offered generalised historical overviews on the Industrial Revolution or child labour without linking this to the poems and textual analysis.
- Asserted ideas such as that 'the children were sad' rather than evaluating the poetic methods used by Blake to generate pathos.
- Relied on knowledge of the meaning and events of the poems rather than analysing his poetic methods in detail.

- Had a general awareness of Blake's concerns and some historical contexts, which was not fully integrated into the essays nor used to develop the arguments presented.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated knowledge and understanding by explaining the situation within the poem and offered a critique of Blake's concern with the dogmatic institutions of his era, analysing how they corrupt and destroy innocence and love.
- Analysed the boy's rational, natural theology of the opening stanzas, noting how his innocent logic exposes the artificial nature of religious dogma, developed in some essays into exploring Blake's use of voice in the poem, where the child's persona of the opening stanzas speaks, to challenge a key Christian commandment.
- Explored how Blake criticises organised religion by means of irony and symbolism, recognising the dramatic contrast between innocent questioning and institutional authority.
- Recognised the poetic voices and the virtual audience within the poem, the adults who witness the situation and 'all admir'd' it'. Other responses analysed the rigid quatrains as just as tight as authority was, or the justified repetition of 'weeping' to show how the boy is shackled and scarred.
- Analysed Blake's poetic methods, such as language and imagery, verse form and structure and poetic voice with perception, such as how the language and verse form demonstrated the innocence of the child contrasted to the cruel zeal of the priest, often interpreted as representing the suppression of reason as a threat to authoritarian power.
- Noted such significant details as the stark tonal shift of the third stanza as the priest's 'trembling zeal' turns violent, to recognise the tragic irony of the phrase 'priestly care' or the horrific imagery of the child bound in an 'iron chain' and burned in a 'holy place' standing as a critique of religious tyranny.
- Integrated apt contextual references into their interpretations, which were also supported by appropriate and telling use of quotation.

Limited Responses

- Offered readings of the poem which were at times superficial and literal, showing limited engagement with imagery, symbolism and motif.
- Approached the poem as an unseen, with limited knowledge and understanding of its meaning or of Blake's concerns, often paraphrasing or explaining the events in the poem, without fully appreciating the tone or the context.
- Had limited awareness of Blake's poetic methods, though some responses did identify specific poetic features such as enjambement, rhyme and repetition without exploring their effects or considering why Blake had made these poetic choices.

Question 7

Sylvia Plath: Selected poems from ARIEL

(a) Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the text to select appropriate poems such as *Tulips/Lady Lazarus/The Applicant/Sheep in Fog/The Munich Mannequins*.
- Engaged with the task by offering creative interpretations, moving from physical landscapes to explore domestic, psychological and institutional settings which were at times seen as psychological landscapes rather than physical locations.
- Argued that the poet presents sterile, bleak, often empty settings, where a melancholic state of the 'foggy afterlife' is explored. Other successful arguments saw that Plath rarely uses setting as a neutral backdrop, but instead as living extension of the speaker's internal torment, entrapment or alienation.
- Explored different interpretations of the poems, including feminist readings, arguing that domestic settings are spaces of entrapment while natural settings offer possibilities of transformation or rebirth.
- Understood how the context of the poet's life was subtly woven into the poetic structures, as Plath used shifting landscapes to mirror the instability of identity, her mental state and convert a place of comfort into a place of pain, such as hospital environments.
- Supported arguments and interpretations with apposite quotations and examples from the poems chosen.

Limited Responses

- Discussed biographical contextual material regarding Plath's mental health or marriage with limited relevance to the task.
- Treated settings as solely literal description of her real-world homes or hospitals without much focus on the technical mastery of the poetry itself.
- Made inappropriate choices of poems resulting in unconvincing responses, often speculating on the nature of the setting and only referring to the poems in a summative or generalised way.
- Identified some poetic methods generally without exploring their effects or integrating the analysis into the flow of the interpretation.

(b)

Comprehensive Responses

- Analysed how the poet depicts the sense of a journey in a war-torn landscape by using lexical choices and allusion, with many responses exploring by apt contextual pointing how this physical journey reflects Plath's life and the persona's propulsion toward self-annihilation and rebirth.
- Discussed the nightmarish, mechanised landscape of war and industrial violence, writing on the zoomorphic and terrifying personification of the train 'gigantic gorilla interior' and 'Krupp, black muzzles' for examples.
- Explored the speaker's profound loss of agency, connecting the line 'I am a letter in this slot' to the brutal, depersonalising realities of wartime transport.
- Interpreted the journey as simultaneously physical, historical and psychological, with perceptive analysis of the violent industrial imagery alongside the repeated war imagery which creates an overwhelming sense of inevitability. As one candidate offered: 'Plath presents herself as having become the train itself, full of menace and power'.
- Offered various interpretations of the train. For example as a metaphor for patriarchal society, where the speaker is carried towards an identity she cannot control or where the speaker is 'powerless when faced with the unstoppable force of the train and Time'.
- Analysed the use of questioning in the poem, seeing that simple questions connote the speaker's innocence and vulnerability. Poetic methods such as imagery were closely analysed, as well as the poem's form and its development as a single stanza. Other responses noted how 'Anaphora suggests the slowness and tedium of the journey', whereas the use of dashes creates propulsion and movement to add to the rhythm.
- Considered appropriate biographical context, for example when Plath conflates her suffering and the Jewish genocide to show her shame for and oppression by her father.

Limited Responses

- Appeared confused about the poem's meaning, offering generalised interpretations broadly linked to some aspects of Plath's biography.
- Attempted literal paraphrasing, which severely limited responses, for example through confusion over the surreal imagery, or when trying to decide where the speaker was physically.
- Discussed the poem and the poet generally, rather than analysing the poem in detail and had limited understanding of the literary features in the poem and their effects.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

(a)

Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated secure knowledge in selecting appropriate poems and had sufficient understanding to identify literal and metaphorical journeys and not simply travel as movement from one place to another.
- Offered various interpretations of the task and the poems from discussing emotional journeys in *I Have a Rendezvous with Death*, *The Exequy* and *Excelsior* to actual journeys for instance in *The Migrant* and *Excelsior*. These responses also offered a balanced focus on the selected texts and an integrated comparative approach.
- Analysed and structurally contrasted the poems, with some perceptive discussions of how form (such as enjambment, line lengths, caesura) directly mimics the sensation of movement, travel or stagnation.

- Integrated appropriate contextual points into their interpretations and supported arguments with apposite quotation and reference to the poems.

Limited Responses

- Had sufficient knowledge for narrative summaries of their chosen poems, which were often a retelling of the events of two journeys, with limited and generalised discussion of the poet's use of language and imagery.
- Offered personal responses in which journeys the candidate had made were summarised, with only limited relevance to the task or connection to the selected poems.

(b)

Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated secure knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning and the poet's concerns and clearly linked the wasp's physical recovery in the sun to the poem's deeper theological transition toward spiritual salvation and divine grace. Such responses focused on the whole poem and its structure. The wasp, initially without faith is revived and inaugurated into religion and acceptance; both the poem and wasp have 'accumulated momentum'.
- Analysed Taylor's extensive use of anthropomorphism and personification, tracing the wasp's actions as it 'chafes' 'rubs' and 'combs' itself, as showing how small physical movements are elevated to human-like rationality. Other responses discussed the anatomical imagery and the use of rhyme, such as blast/wasp, which has a harmonised musicality and noted how the soft pronunciations suggest harmony in nature, despite small turbulences.
- Recognised the sustained personification and appreciated Taylor's celebration of resilience within the natural world, arguing for example how the rhyming couplets signified order and connectivity.
- Integrated contextual material appropriately such as the religious context or the poet's social context. For example 'as a puritan, he lived a modest life and just like the wasp, suffered from cold'.
- Recognised the mock-heroic treatment of the wasp and argued that Taylor elevates an apparently insignificant creature through epic language. Some interpretations saw the poem as a meditation of human perseverance disguised as natural observation.
- Explored Taylor's poetic methods in detail, with awareness of the metaphysical context for example when discussing language, verse form and tone. Other responses were sensitive to the nuances of meaning in simple phrases, for example 'as if' and 'offering for all'.

Limited Responses

- Interpreted the poem literally, reducing the wasp to an insect and ignoring its symbolic and theological scale.
- Demonstrated limited knowledge of the poem's meaning and the poet's context as a religious man.
- Had some difficulty interpreting the archaic vocabulary and syntax of this 17th century text.
- Wrote descriptive essays about an insect warming in the sun and missing the central religious allegory and the complex mechanics of the extended concept.
- Identified some of Taylor's methods and offered limited analysis of their effects, which was not always linked to an overarching view of the poem's meanings or the poet's concerns.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/13 Drama and Poetry

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates who performed particularly well in the **(a)** questions clearly had at least a sound knowledge of events, themes and characters and their relationships to each other (Albee, John and Shakespeare).
- In the **(b)** questions, many candidates covered the whole of the passage, selecting key points rather than giving equal weight to every line, resulting in a clearer, more competently analytical approach.
- The majority of candidates showed evidence of appropriate preparation in selecting relevant material with which to address the given tasks and often had at least a straightforward knowledge of their two texts.
- Some candidates confidently drew interesting, sometimes perceptive, contrasts between characters, particularly in the Albee and John responses.
- Many candidates integrated references to language, rhythm and imagery into an overall interpretation, leading to more relevant points and a more structured approach.

What candidates needed to improve

- When discussing dramatic texts, candidates could have shown more understanding of the effects of dramatic devices behind ideas of 'presentation', remembering that an audience would be present during a performance and dramatic devices are designed to produce particular dramatic effects, often communicated through careful stage directions.
- The ability to analyse a text could be further developed, to improve confidence when applying and discussing a wide range of literary methods and their effects, for example a clearer understanding of dramatic irony.
- Creating a more balanced response to **Section A** questions: giving detailed attention to both poems instead of reducing the second to a brief, concluding paragraph, as seen in Songs and Angelou would improve the structural approach.
- Some candidates need to focus more on the detail of the given passages in option **(b)** questions, instead of using an overly summative approach which leads to narrating and explaining rather than analysing.
- Incorporating a more secure contextual knowledge into relevant sections of essays would help some candidates develop a clearer basis for argument and analysis. A little more understanding of the characters' circumstances at particular points in the text would help in developing fuller responses in drama essays, for example.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

EDWARD ALBEE: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

(a) Comprehensive Responses:

- Showed a good understanding of the text and context and how the two marriages portrayed either challenged or reinforced contemporary attitudes.
- Recognised the complexity of the relationship between George and Martha with one candidate pointing out that Nick and Honey were often observers, acting as 'an extension of the audience.'
- Developed some sharp comparisons between the seasoned, co-dependent marriage of George and Martha and the transactional, superficial relationship of Nick and Honey.

- Analysed marriage not as a stable background element, but as an evolving psychological battleground built on shared illusions.
- Demonstrated how Albee uses bitter dialogue and structural game-playing (*'Humiliate the Host'*, *'Get the Guests'*) to show that both relationships rely on deceit to survive.
- Highlighted how the younger couple's flaws actively mirror and forecast the deep-seated resentments of the older generation.

Limited responses:

- Discussed characters more as real people and less as literary constructs.
- Would have benefited from a fuller understanding of Albee's dramatic mechanisms to reveal deeper issues which might have produced a more comprehensive response, as opposed to moral judgements, for example, *'George and Martha are mean to each other'*.

(b)

Comprehensive Responses:

- Were able to put the passage in context and discuss the effect of the scene on the audience, showing understanding of the dynamics between the characters.
- Picked up on the dark humour such as George's final words, referencing the theatre of the absurd.
- Covered the whole of the passage, selecting key points rather than giving equal weight to every line.
- Identified and discussed the profound tonal contrast between Martha's erratic, vocal panic (*'YOU ... CAN'T ... DO ... THAT!'*) and George's terrifyingly calm, systematic declarations (*'our son is dead'*).
- Analysed the stage craft and movement, noting for example how Nick physically restrains Martha visually heightened the feeling of domestic containment and helplessness.
- Analysed George's use of the *Kyrie eleison* prayer as a liturgical weapon to finalise the destruction of their shared myth.

Limited responses:

- Were only partly focused on the stage directions and Albee's use of capitalization, for example, with limited understanding of a dramatic performance. More confidence in this aspect might have enabled some candidates to treat the play as more than just a written text.
- Tended to summarise rather than consider Albee's use of language, which might have led to greater acknowledgement of the audience's response.
- Greater textual knowledge and development would enable candidates to treat the son's death less as a literal biographical fact, without missing the underlying reality that the 'son' was a mutual fiction being ritually executed by George. This misunderstanding led some candidates, for example, to misread Martha's anger as literal grief.

Question 2

ERROL JOHN: Moon on a Rainbow Shawl

(a)

Comprehensive Responses:

- Gave highly insightful socio-cultural commentary, with candidates evaluating how domestic roles are shaped by financial scarcity.
- Compared Sophia's maternal, long-suffering protectiveness over Charlie, Mavis's transactional independence, and Rosa's vulnerable reliance on Ephraim.
- Linked these varying attitudes directly to limited systemic power, demonstrating how John uses domestic conflict to show women either resisting or succumbing to male instability.

Limited responses:

- Offered purely narrative summaries of the individual arguments in the yard, with insufficient organisation of their responses around a clear thesis, so that essays became unfocused and generalised.
- Did not consider John's dramatic methods and concerns in sufficient detail, such as specific feminine attitudes, for example, or the dramatic effects of those clashes, which might have allowed for more developed arguments.
- Discussed contexts in general terms rather than finding specific points to support the interpretation offered.

(b) Comprehensive Responses:

- Perceptive responses focused on the symbolism of the moon as a motif for upward mobility and escape.
- Analysed John's sensory language: for example, contrasting the grating, oppressive reality of Eph's job ('howling hurricane') with Esther's idealised innocence ('hiss of the wires').
- Unpacked John's use of tender stage directions, noting for example how Eph handing the sleeping baby to Esther acts as a visual passing of paternal care and generational hope.

Limited responses:

- Treated the extract as a conversation about trolleybuses or childcare, with limited focus on the deeper underlying tensions and development of characters, with limited contextualisation of the passage to the wider text.
- Analysed John's dramatic methods too generally, for example ignoring Eph's soft, whispering tone – perhaps exploring his need to escape the yard, clashing with Esther's innocent assumptions about his career advancement.

Question 3

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Tempest

(a) Comprehensive Responses:

- Established clear contrasts between Prospero/Miranda and Alonso/Ferdinand, showing secure knowledge and understanding of the text.
- Evaluated how parental authority is used by Shakespeare to shape the audience response to his concerns, such as dynastic politics, and to develop the dramatic structure of the play.
- Highlighted Prospero's role as both a loving father and an orchestrator of Miranda's fate, noting how Shakespeare uses staging to show her moving from isolation to public prominence.
- Compared Prospero's role with that of Alonso and his guilt-ridden grief over Ferdinand, arguing that filial relationships can serve as primary catalysts for forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Integrated appropriate textual and contextual references in support of their interpretations.

Limited responses:

- Demonstrated a summative approach, tending to explain ideas rather than analyse Shakespeare's presentation.
- Showed a partial appreciation of Shakespeare's dramatic methods, with occasional discussion of the effects of his language choices.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated at least a competent knowledge and sound understanding of the passage and explored the textual context appropriately.
- Analysed Shakespeare's dramatic methods thoughtfully, such as setting, staging and action, as well as exploring the effects of language choices in creating tension and as a tool of characterisation.
- Focused on theatrical stagecraft with theatrically aware responses from well-prepared candidates, demonstrating perceptive understanding of the genre. For example, discussing how the initial '*solemn and strange music*' and '*gentle actions*' create a false sense of security that is suddenly broken by the sensory shock of '*thunder and lightning*' and the vanishing banquet.
- Analysed particular moments in the passage fully, such as Ariel's terrifying personification as a Harpy with a sharp focus on verse delivery, with some candidates noting how his rhythmic, unyielding language exposes the '*three men of sin*', shifting the psychological balance of power.

Limited responses:

- Tended to offer summaries of the passage and retell the story of the three men of sin in detail, with only occasional reference to the detail of the passage.
- Might have focused more on the dramatic structure of the episode, including the importance of the Harpy's speech to the meaning and effects of the play.

- Showed some knowledge of the plot of the play, though were at times unsure about the magical elements, which were discussed as simple entertainment rather than a calculated moral trope designed by Prospero.

Question 4

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

(a) **Comprehensive Responses:**

- Selected relevant moments from the play to support a structured and focused response to the question, often successfully grappling with the grim, fatalistic themes of Jacobean tragedy.
- Highlighted the stark contrast created by Webster's dramatic choices between the Duchess's stoic, Christian dignity in her final moments (*'I am Duchess of Malfi still'*) and her brothers' cowardly, undignified breakdowns when facing their mortality.
- Analysed how Webster uses a lexical field and landscape of dark imagery, executioners, and tombs to show death as both an engine of terror and a tool for ultimate spiritual liberation.
- Integrated appropriate contextual references, while maintaining focus on the play and the task.
- Demonstrated secure knowledge and understanding of the text and confident appreciation of Webster's dramatic methods.

Limited responses:

- Summarised the deaths of the characters in turn, often in impressive detail, with only some reference to the different attitudes that Webster is creating.
- Analysed some aspects of Webster's methods, such as language and imagery, with occasional supporting quotation, though often revealing a limited appreciation of the drama genre and the concept of theatrical performance.
- Presented relevant personal responses to the question, without fully supporting ideas with specific examples and quotations from the play.

(b) **Comprehensive Responses:**

- Securely placed the passage within the play as a whole and were able to develop arguments rooted in the contextualisation.
- Focused on Webster's linguistic choices and their effects. For example the verbal intimidation used by the brothers such as Ferdinand's disturbing, aggressive imagery (*'rank pasture'*, *'give the devil suck'*) and his physical brandishing of his father's poniard as explicit threats of domestic containment.
- Highlighted the Duchess's calculated, ironic defiance in her asides and concluding soliloquy (*'I winked and chose a husband'*), showing how her language establishes her as an active, independent protagonist.
- Understood the significance of the passage in terms of the play's plot and Webster's characterisation of the Duchess and her brothers.

Limited responses:

- Relied on simple character description, such as labelling Ferdinand as *'crazy'* and the Cardinal as *'cold'*.
- Summarised what happened to the Duchess in the play as a whole, as well as her relationships with her brothers, though focus on the detail of the passage was in some cases uneven.
- Made general points about Webster's concerns in the play, with occasional supporting quotation from the passage.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

Maya Angelou: *And Still I Rise*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment on performance
- (b) **Comprehensive Responses**

- Demonstrated secure knowledge and understanding of the poem and the text, often making appropriate contextual connections.
- Focused on Angelou's use of personification to present the natural world as '*patient and irrepressible*'.
- Produced some insightful analysis and sensitive response to imagery, for example discussing the effects of the change of tone at the ending of the poem with the '*golden riot*' and '*defiance*'.
- Analysed how Angelou creates the sensory contrast between the stale, decaying weight of history ('*gelid breath*', '*dead masters*') and the vibrant, explosive defiance of nature ('*poppies dance/In golden riot*', '*Sunlight casts defiance*').
- Analysed Angelou's poetic methods and their effects, including verse form, structure and language.
- Supported arguments with appropriate quotation from the poem and references to the wider text.

Limited responses:

- Showed limited familiarity with the poem and had some difficulty writing on form, structure and language, offering a literal, prose-like summary of a walk through California.
- Focused on other concerns rather than the natural world, with a consequent loss of focus on the given task.
- Sometimes misinterpreted details of the poem, such as abstract terms like '*phantasmatalities*' or '*antiquitous faces*'.
- Were at times unaware of the poem's thematic tension between the constraints of the past and the creative liberation of the present, which might have led to more developed responses.

Question 6

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

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

(b) **Comprehensive Responses**

- Demonstrated secure knowledge of the poem's meaning and confident understanding of Blake's concerns.
- Tracked the speaker's emotional evolution from vulnerability to paranoid isolation, with understanding of the psychological and defensive shifts within the poem.
- Analysed the tone of the poem effectively. For example the ironic transition in stanza 3, where the speaker's defence mechanism turns into a self-imposed prison ('*arm'd my fears/With ten thousand shields and spears*').
- Effectively linked the final image of 'grey hairs' to Blake's concern about the tragic waste of life caused by suppressing desire and rejecting genuine spiritual connection.
- Supported their interpretations with appropriate contextual points and relevant references to the wider text.
- Explored Blake's poetic methods thoughtfully, with insightful commentaries on language, imagery, use of the first person, dialogue and verse form.

Limited responses:

- Had limited knowledge of the poem's meaning and Blake's concerns, for example treating the poem as a literal fairy tale about an actual angel.
- Were able to identify some poetic features and give examples, such as enjambement and caesura, with some limited sense of their significance to the poem's overall effects and meaning.
- Considered contextual issues such as religion and industrialisation, though with only occasional relevance to the given poem.

Question 7

SYLVIA PLATH: Ariel

(a) There were too few responses to be able to make general comments on responses to this question.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated secure knowledge of the poem's meaning and confident understanding of Plath's concerns in the poem and in the wider text, often highlighting the shift from light-hearted domestic delight to sudden, shocking violence in the final stanza.
- Analysed Plath's poetic methods, including language, imagery, verse form and speaker, with some perception such as noting the bizarre, surreal atmosphere Plath establishes by framing balloons as '*oval soul-animals*' that disrupt '*dead furniture*'.
- Focused appropriately on the closing imagery—the child left staring at a '*world clear as water*' with a '*red/Shred in his little fist*'—interpreting the popped balloon as a profound allegory for the shattering of childhood innocence and the entry into a fragmented adult reality.
- Integrated appropriate contextual points into a well-structured and focused interpretation of Plath's presentation, recognising for example her use of voice and tone to establish the shifting mood and linking that to other poems such as *Poppies*.

Limited responses

- Paraphrased the events of the poem, with occasional misreadings of details such as 'yellow cathead'.
- Listed and exemplified poetic features such as alliteration or personification without explaining their impact on the poem's meaning and effects.
- Treated the scene as a literal depiction of a post-Christmas living room, missing the undercurrents of danger and instability that typify this poem and Plath's work generally.
- Imposed a darker and more sinister interpretation on the poem as a result of wanting to share knowledge of other of Plath's concerns from the wider text, though not particularly relevant to the set poem.

Question 8: Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

(a) There were too few responses to be able to make general comments on responses to this question.

(b) Comprehensive Responses

- Demonstrated at least a sound knowledge of the poem's meanings and competent understanding of Masfield's concerns, often focusing on the unyielding absorption of the human form into the natural landscape.
- Analysed Masfield's poetic methods in detail, for example his use of sibilance and soft, comforting diction ('*laid at ease*', '*holy spell*', '*sleeps well*') to show that nature provides a peaceful, sacred sanctuary that stands in stark contrast to the violence of human warfare.
- Evaluated the structure of the poem and Masfield's use of poetic form to create the chilling transition where the '*kingly one*' is systematically reduced to '*pitiful bones*' and a '*skeleton*' by the relentless, indifferent cycles of sun, rain, and growing plants.
- Focused appropriately on Masfield's choices of language and imagery, with secure understanding of the effects of his choices on the reader.

Limited responses

- Retold the story of the poem, with occasionally an insecure grasp of Masfield's concerns or speculative personal responses about what had happened to the knight.
- Listed basic poetic devices like the rhyme scheme without explaining their effects, such as how the rhythmic, song-like flow mimics the steady movement of the wind and tides that frame the knight's final resting place.
- Were more focused on the poetic narrative than on Masfield's presentation of the knight, leading to generalisations and unsupported assertions.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/21 Prose and Unseen

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates selected key knowledge and demonstrated understanding of their chosen text and responded with understanding to the unseen extract.
- Candidates used careful analysis of the writers' methods, showing how their choices of language, form and structure shape the reader's understanding.
- Personal response developed thoughtful interpretations of texts and questions.
- Essays were structured clearly, addressing the questions in an organised way.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates need to select relevant references and quotations in order to avoid narrative summary.
- Answers to passage-based questions should focus clearly on the writing of the selected extract.
- Candidates should carefully discuss the writer's choices of language, form and structure and how they shape meaning for the reader.
- Knowledge of the whole text will inform the discussion of the extracts in the passage-based questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: The Inheritance of Loss

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates demonstrated developed knowledge and understanding of the novel's non-chronological structure, discussing the use of flashbacks, fragmented narration, and jumps in perspective which shape the reader's experience.
- Candidates showed effective recollection of particular shifts in time, identifying ways in which Desai juxtaposes scenes in the past and present to illuminate each other, showing, for example, how the depiction of Jemu's experiences in England gives readers a developed understanding of his character.
- Responses explored ways in which the changes in time are used to show causes and effects, create ironies and produce suspense at different points in the novel.
- Some responses widened the discussion of time to include historical time, discussing the ways in which India's colonial history informs the present of the novel.

Limited responses

- Candidates wrote about what happened at different times in the novel without considering how Desai creates the shifts between them, and the effects of these changes.
- Some responses relied heavily on narrative summary, rather than selecting specific references to support an answer to the question.
- Some responses moved away from the question of shifts of time and discussed changes in settings instead, particularly Kalimpong and New York.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates commented on the structure of the passage, showing appreciation of ways in which Desai accentuates the violence by opening this section with the reassurance of the SDO and the initial boredom of the policemen.
- Aware of the drunk's innocence, candidates discussed how Desai shocks the reader with the suddenness and level of violence, picking up the effects of phrases such as 'reduced him to a pulp'; 'bashed his head until blood streamed down his face'; 'practising their torture techniques' and 'his eyes had been extinguished'.
- Responses were informed by awareness of the context of the passage within the novel, recognising that the police practise their 'torture techniques' for dealing with the GNLF rebellion, which links to the drunk's screams which 'heralded the end of normal life on the hillside.' These responses were also aware that the judge's visit to the police concerns the theft of his guns by members of the GNLF.
- There were thoughtful comments on the characterisation of the SDO, with his pompous self-importance and his treatment of his 'plants exactly as if they were babies' making a striking contrast with the violence of his subordinate policemen.

Limited responses

- Some responses did not comment on the first part of the passage, not recognising that the SDO is an officer of the police force. This meant that Desai's contrast between the different sections of the passage was not recognised.
- Candidates described the action of the passage without focusing clearly on Desai's choices of language, form and structure.
- Some responses noted that the violence described is shocking, without showing how Desai creates this shock through her writing choices.

Question 2

Stories of Ourselves

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates chose to write about stories which were clearly appropriate to the question, and selected references appropriately. These included 'The Yellow Wallpaper', 'The Son's Veto', 'My Greatest Ambition', 'The Door in the Wall' and 'Of White Hairs and Cricket', though other stories were also used successfully.
- Responses focused clearly on how the authors presented characters' responses to change. The use of narrative perspective, for example, was often an important factor, with several of the stories using a first-person narrator to give psychological insight, while the third person often focalised the experience of the central character.
- Other responses explored the importance of other elements such as symbolism, imagery, dialogue, setting and structure, considering ways in which these highlight the characters' responses to change.
- Responses used a comparative structure to highlight key features of each chosen story by finding similarities or contrasts between them.

Limited responses

- Responses tended to take a narrative approach to the selected stories, describing the changes and the characters' responses, rather than considering how the authors present these.
- Responses considered the changes in the stories without sufficient focus on how characters respond to those changes.
- Some responses showed limited specific knowledge, leading to a lack of detail and few specific references or quotations.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates showed awareness of the importance of the narrative perspective in the selected passage, closely observing the behaviour and speech of the narrator's father and the Maori visitors.
- Candidates analysed Shadbolt's portrayal of the tension between the father's response to the Maoris and the way the Maoris themselves are described and behave. They contrasted the father's hostility in his refusal to shake hands and demanding dialogue with the affability and courtesy of Tom Taikaka.

- Responses explored the presentation of the Maoris' appearance, with 'tattoos on their chins' and 'sharktooth necklaces', which marked them out as different from the European settlers while also remaining true to their traditions and culture. This was often accompanied by careful discussion of the care taken over the old man at the centre of their company.
- Responses were often informed by appropriate references to the colonial context of New Zealand and some made reference to the rest of the story and the outcome of the Maoris' visit.

Limited responses

- Some responses showed limited knowledge of the wider story, which affected the development of the understanding of the selected passage.
- Some responses showed less secure understanding of the context, suggesting that the story took place in Australia, America or Ireland.
- Responses tended towards a narrative approach, or identified techniques without developing analytical comment about how they shape meaning.

Question 3

EVELYN WAUGH: A Handful of Dust

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates demonstrated secure knowledge and understanding of the novel's treatment of divorce laws in the 1930s context. They focused particularly on the absurdity of the Brighton arrangements with Millie, including the discussion with the lawyers, the presence of the detectives and Millie's child.
- Responses were supported by detailed knowledge and understanding of the rest of the novel, with apposite references to Brenda's letter to Tony, the self-incrimination required for divorce, and the gender bias in settlements. There was often thoughtful comment on the episode where Reggie St Cloud attempted to persuade Tony to agree to a settlement.
- Responses discussed Waugh's use of irony and fragmented narrative style, creating shifting perspectives which highlight the complexity of divorce, with sensitive personal response to Tony's eventual fate in Brazil.
- Candidates discussed various aspects of Waugh's satire, including characterisation, setting and dialogue, which highlight aspects of the legal system in a critical but humorous way.

Limited responses

- Responses recounted the decline in the relationship between Brenda and Tony and their separation, without focusing clearly on ways in which Waugh presents the divorce laws and the legal system.
- Some responses focused on Beaver as a catalyst for Brenda's wish for a divorce without tying the discussion closely to the question.
- Some responses showed less detailed knowledge of the novel as many stated that Brenda and Tony are divorced, whereas Tony refuses the divorce in the novel.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates appreciated the selected passage's juxtaposition of Brenda and Tony and the resulting comparisons and contrasts between their positions and activities. This was recognised as a key narrative technique which guides the reader's response to the characters.
- Responses noted Waugh's portrayal of both characters as unfulfilled. Brenda is presented as bored in London and separated from its social activities, while Tony endures hardship in a doomed and unsuccessful expedition.
- Candidates paid close attention to Waugh's portrayal of the social emptiness in London, paying particular attention to the hypocrisy of the dialogue highlighted by the italicisation of 'wish' in l.11.
- Responses contained careful analysis of Waugh's satirical depiction of Dr Messinger and his expedition. They noted Messinger's 'readings every hour' and his sterile notes, while his comment about 'A discovery of genuine scientific value' when his notes are contradicted drew much attention. There was careful discussion of the humour in the 'hopeless' dialogue with Rosa and the physical difficulties encountered by Tony and Dr Messinger.

Limited responses

- Responses used the passage as a springboard into wider and more general discussion of the relationship between Brenda and Tony, their separation and Tony's adventure in Brazil, without close attention to the writing of the selected passage.
- Other responses described the action of the selected passage without examining how Waugh's choices of language, form and structure present Tony's and Brenda's different experiences.
- Responses were less clearly informed by the rest of the novel and were not clear why Tony and Brenda were in separate places or what had impelled them there.

Question 4

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates demonstrated secure knowledge of Caesar and their understanding of his role in the novel, primarily as the catalyst for Cora's escape from the Randall plantation.
- Responses were supported by details from the chapter 'Caesar', in which Whitehead informs the reader of the character's journey, his reading and his foiled dream of emancipation, which fuels his urge to escape.
- Responses were supported by precise references and quotations, showing a detailed knowledge of the text. There were references to the dialogue at the plantation, the journey in Fletcher's cart, the escape from the hog hunters, the underground railroad and Caesar's and Cora's time in South Carolina.
- Caesar's character was often seen as a symbol of escape and freedom, but also of the inherent dangers. Candidates referred to the way Cora hears of his death from Ridgeway, and noted that he has a sustaining role for Cora well beyond his death and their experiences in South Carolina.

Limited responses

- Candidates wrote general summaries of Caesar's character and some of his actions without support from detailed references to particular parts of the novel.
- Responses contained limited awareness of Whitehead's methods of characterisation and plotting.
- Responses were restricted to discussion of Caesar's character without developing the role he plays within the novel's structure.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Responses showed awareness of the significance of this extract and the arrival of Royal into the narrative, even though he is not named in the passage. They contextualised the passage within Cora's travels with Ridgeway after her capture in North Carolina and recognised how the extract leads to the Indiana section of the novel and Ridgeway's final appearance.
- Candidates contrasted the attitudes of the 'runaway' and Ridgeway towards Cora, with the former extending courtesy towards her while the latter answers for her and claims ownership. They noted that Royal gives Cora agency for the first time, giving her options and thus drawing sympathy from the reader.
- Responses analysed Whitehead's language of violence in the fight, with the metaphor of the 'black flower' of Boseman's blood and the 'grunting and hollering'. They recognised the crux moment for Cora, who 'could run', but whose intervention rescues 'the man from town'. There was much comment on the ironic appropriateness of her use of her chains as a weapon and many linked her 'scream' like 'a train whistle echoing in a tunnel' with the underground railroad itself.
- Royal's exchange with Ridgeway about 'property', 'White law' and 'other ones' was discussed both within the context of the novel and contemporary America, demonstrating an informed awareness of contexts.

Limited responses

- Some candidates did not identify Cora's rescuers and therefore did not recognise the significance of their intervention in this passage. Some also misattributed lines of dialogue to different characters, leading to a misunderstanding of the dynamics of the passage.
- Responses narrated the events of the passage without considering how Whitehead's choices of language, form and structure shape meaning for the reader.
- Some responses spent too long on small parts of the passage, like the metaphor of 'a black flower blooming suddenly on his belly', and neglected other parts of the selected extract.

Section B Unseen

Question 5

Unseen Prose

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates noted the effects of the narrative perspective of the passage, noting the use of the pronouns 'our' and 'we', placing the narrator within Madame Koto's community and voicing a communal view of her rather than a strictly personal one.
- Many responded well to the humour of the passage, noting ways in which it presents Madame Koto's attempt to drive her car, her accidents and the cleaning of the vehicle. Some suggested a misogynistic portrayal of the character while others focused on her role as a 'pioneer' who achieves more than many men.
- Responses contained thoughtful analysis of people's responses to Madame Koto and her car, noting phrases such as 'We couldn't believe it' and 'We still clung to our disbelief'. Many argued that the cry 'Hide your children!' suggests a greater degree of amusement than real danger, especially when coupled with 'The mad tortoise is coming!'
- Candidates focused on the appearance of the car and its comic resemblance to a tortoise with Madame Koto's face as 'the third eye'. They argued that this zoomorphic description undercuts the wonderment at her owning a car, but that it is comically elevated again with the almost religious 'ritual' of washing the car to which 'everyone was summoned'. There was thoughtful discussion of the hyperbolic mythic statements from the 'great herbalist' and the people about driving 'even to the moon' and 'a calabash'.

Limited responses

- General points about Madame Koto, her car and the humour of the passage were not supported with specific details, quotations and analysis of the writing.
- Where quotations were selected, they were accompanied by explanations of meaning rather than analysis of method and effects on the reader.
- Responses gave a narrative summary of the events of the passage rather than engaging with the author's choices of language, form and structure and the ways in which they shape meaning for the reader.

Question 6

Unseen Poetry: 'Come Into Animal Presence'

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates considered both elements of the question, exploring the poet's presentation of the animals and the speaker's reverent response. They explored the tension between human ignorance and animal purposefulness, with relevant analysis of personification of the animals and their disregard for 'human approval'.
- Responses commented on the tone of the opening imperative, inviting the reader into a special, even sacred 'presence'. Structural discussion also included the effects of the rhetorical questions at the beginning of stanza 2 and the way in which the second stanza returns to the same animals for further consideration.
- Candidates focused on the various ways in which the poet presents the animals in the first stanza, with particular comment on the adverb 'intricately', the verbs 'not disdains' and 'disregards', and the adjective 'insouciant', separating them from human affairs. The subversion of conventional views of the 'serpent', being more 'guileless' than 'man' and having 'no blemish', drew thoughtful comments.
- The second stanza's questions, which develop to a consideration of the 'sacred', led to careful analysis and interpretation. Most saw the animals' self-containment as evidence of the 'sacred', which is as inviolable as 'bronze', making their presence 'holy'.

Limited responses

- Responses described the animals represented in the poem without fully considering the ways in which they are presented.
- Technical features such as rhetorical questions were identified without developing comments on their use and effects.
- Responses contained few references to poetic technique, lacking discussion of versification or stanza construction.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22 Prose and Unseen

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates selected key knowledge and demonstrated understanding of their chosen text and responded with understanding to the unseen extract.
- Candidates used careful analysis of the writers' methods, showing how their choices of language, form and structure shape the reader's understanding.
- Personal response developed thoughtful interpretations of texts and questions.
- Essays were structured clearly, addressing the questions in an organised way.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates need to select relevant references and quotations in order to avoid narrative summary.
- Answers to passage-based questions should focus clearly on the writing of the selected extract.
- Candidates should carefully discuss the writer's choices of language, form and structure and how they shape meaning for the reader.
- Knowledge of the whole text will inform the discussion of the extracts in the passage-based questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: The Inheritance of Loss

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Responses were firmly focused on one of the novel's central characters, selecting key aspects, episodes and references to explore ways in which Desai presents Biju. While some concentrated on his experiences in New York, many considered the importance of his relationship with his father and the way this contributes to Desai's concerns with parents and their children in the novel.
- Candidates discussed the efforts the cook makes in order to send Biju abroad and commented on the episodes where the cook's pride in his son is most clearly expressed. This was often coupled with Desai's presentation of their unhesitating joyous embrace towards the end of the novel, the relationship contrasting with, for example, Jemu and his parents.
- Responses discussed Biju's desperation for the green card in the USA, and used detailed knowledge of the various restaurant jobs he undertakes and the conditions in which he lives. Candidates noted the contrast with Saeed Saeed and the references to the Indian diaspora in New York, leading to Biju's disillusionment with America.
- Candidates analysed the symbolic importance of Biju's return to Kalimpong, stripped of all his American belongings and purchases by the GNLF, so that he returns to his father cleansed of his American experience.

Limited responses

- Responses concentrated on Biju's experiences in New York, often in a narrative fashion, without considering the wider context of his emigration from India and the hopes and aspirations of his father.
- Biju as a character was discussed without support from specific references to important episodes from the novel.
- Biju's character was described without paying attention to ways in which Desai presents his character to the reader using the language and structure of the novel.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates showed clear understanding of ways in which Desai presents the cook as a simple, impoverished but proud man in the passage, and portrays his family through his possessions and fragments of his dialogue.
- Responses noted the meagreness of the cook's belongings – his 'narrow bed', his 'few clothes', 'a single razor blade', a 'sliver of cheap brown soap', a 'cardboard case' with 'a broken watch'. Candidates noted how the reader's sympathy is guided by Desai's references to the policemen's 'scorn' and Sai's 'pained... heart'.
- Candidates noted that the novel contains few references to the cook's wife, and in this passage her death is quickly narrated as an 'accident' during her domestic duties, representing the fragile nature of life amongst India's 'destitute'.
- Candidates demonstrated developed understanding of the cook's view of his son, Biju, 'brimming with pride'. Their responses included discussion of Desai's use of the cook's dialogue. The pairing of 'a naughty boy' with 'exclaim with joy' was noted, along with the cook's anecdotes about Biju, his photograph of his son and his stored collection of his letters from America, all indicative of his love for and pride in his son.

Limited responses

- Responses omitted the way Desai uses the perspectives of the policemen and Sai and missed their importance to the reader's understanding of the passage.
- Responses presented a summary of the main aspects of the passage and lacked close analysis of ways in which it is written, missing the question's imperative to 'Comment closely on Desai's presentation'.
- Responses contained general discussion of the cook and Biju without a clear focus on the selected passage.

Question 2

Stories of Ourselves

(a)

Comprehensive responses

- Responses were focused on appropriate stories which often hinged on significant discoveries made by their characters. These included, among others, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', 'The Door in the Wall', 'To Da-duh, in Memoriam', 'Of White Hairs and Cricket' and 'Games at Twilight'.
- Candidates focused on the significant realisation, often considering its place within the stories, leading to a consideration of the authors' manipulation of narrative structure in order to shape the reader's response.
- As well as considering the structure of the stories, candidates demonstrated appreciation of the writers' use of language, imagery, dialogue and characterisation, as appropriate to the selected stories. In this way, they paid close attention to the ways in which the writers portray the moments of discovery.
- Responses contextualised the moments of discovery within the stories in order to discuss their effects on the characters, while also considering the reader's understanding. The responses were also often informed by relevant consideration of social, political and geographical contexts.

Limited responses

- Candidates chose appropriate stories and recognised the key moments within them, but approached them in a narrative fashion, offering summary rather than analysis.
- Some responses did not show detailed knowledge of the selected stories and demonstrated limited ability to focus on key episodes from them.
- Contextual knowledge was sometimes incorporated into responses without clearly developing its relevance to the discussion or the stories.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates were able to select appropriate detail from the passage to explore Wallace's memories of his school days. There was thoughtful analysis of ways in which Wells conveys the pressured social world of school, with 'I blabbed' and 'he told my secret' as well as the potential threat of 'half a dozen bigger boys', even though Wallace feels 'a little flattered' by their 'attention'.
- Responses were informed by an understanding of class and the expectations of success in the Edwardian period. Candidates noted the use of surnames for the pupils, identifiers such as 'Crawshaw major, the son of Crawshaw the composer' and vocabulary such as 'blabbed' and 'fellows' as indicative of this world.
- Responses showed developed analysis of Wallace's speech, including the language describing his shame – 'cheeks flushed, ears hot, eyes smarting, and my soul one burning misery and shame' – and the use of dashes punctuating the speech to suggest his hesitancy in speaking about such memories and his desire to be accurate.
- Candidates showed thoughtful appreciation of the structure of the story and the role of Redmond, commenting on the framed narrative and noting the way in which Wells uses Redmond's responses to help verify and tease out Wallace's narration.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused on the central idea of the story rather than writing specifically in response to the question and extract. This produced general and narrative-based responses which lacked a detailed grasp of how language, form and structure work in the passage.
- Responses were based on a narrative account of the passage, sometimes using illustrative quotations, but lacking close commentary on how Wells presents Wallace's schooldays.
- Candidates wrote about the events of the passage without clearly acknowledging that the schooldays are memories described in Wallace's dialogue.

Question 3

EVELYN WAUGH: A Handful of Dust

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Responses demonstrated detailed knowledge of Mrs Beaver's character, selecting key references from the novel, such as her relationship with her son, her property and design business and her plans for chromium-plating rooms at Hetton.
- Candidates had a clear understanding of her role in the novel, noting that her encouragement of John Beaver's affair with Brenda is a key catalyst in the plot and the breakdown of Brenda and Tony's marriage.
- Candidates understood that Waugh presents Mrs Beaver as a symbol of the modernity of London which lacks morality and values, a direct contrast with Tony and Hetton. This was supported by references to her exploitation of Brenda by encouraging her acquisition of the London flat for her affair with Beaver, and by her crass plans for modernising Hetton.
- Responses explored Waugh's characterisation of Mrs Beaver, considering his use of plot structure, description and dialogue.

Limited responses

- Responses described Mrs Beaver's character and her relationships, especially with her son John, unsupported by quotations or specific references to key episodes from the novel.
- Points about Mrs Beaver, such as her representing modernity, were asserted without support from the text.
- Some responses were based on limited knowledge of the novel and limited clear knowledge and understanding of Mrs Beaver's character and role.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates appreciated the comedy of Waugh's presentation of Princess Abdul Akbar, analysing her speech in particular. They noted the social hypocrisy indicated by the italics, her immediate familiar and incorrect naming of Tony, her reference to her own status as the wife of a 'Moulay' and her self-absorbed recollection of her 'scars'.
- Responses showed clear understanding of Waugh's satire in the way in which Princess Abdul Akbar is presented. They commented on the absurdity of her own self-promotion, 'preceded by a heavy odour of musk', her parading of how 'unhappy' she is and the memory of

her 'scars'. They focused appropriately on the speech about her title, which emphasises her supposed status as 'far higher' than a 'Princess' even when avowedly denying that status.

- Responses were informed by knowledge and understanding of the context and situation, that Brenda has sent Jenny to attempt to seduce Tony to offset her own guilt at her affair. This led to careful analysis of her behaviour in the passage, as Waugh presents her as over-familiar and flirting with Tony, as she 'shook out her hair' and asked, 'Shall I purr, Teddy?' They noted how the comedy is increased by Tony's lack of any response to these advances.
- Responses were supported by close reference to the selected passage, with detailed analytical comment on Waugh's choices of language and structure, considering their effects on the reader's understanding and response.

Limited responses

- Candidates wrote about Jenny Abdul Akbar, sometimes acknowledging her attempt to seduce Tony, but without appreciating Waugh's humour and satire.
- Responses discussed the character and the passage in general terms without reference to the context and the purpose of Jenny Abdul Akbar's visit, and therefore missed the significance of the extract.
- Candidates wrote about the passage without detailed reference to Waugh's choices of language, form and structure or consideration of their effects on a reader's understanding.

Question 4

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates wrote with knowledge and understanding about the novel's major character, guided by the introductory quotation about Cora being the 'symbol of freedom'. This encouraged discrimination and careful selection of key episodes from the novel to support the argument.
- Responses focused on Whitehead's portrayal of Cora's resilience as she continues her quest for freedom after escaping from the Randall plantation. They made reference to her overcoming obstacles such as the hog hunters; the escape from Ridgeway in South Carolina; her survival in the attic in North Carolina; her endurance once captured by Ridgeway and her ultimate escape from him after the destruction of Valentine Farm. Many considered the significance of her final journey on the underground railroad where Whitehead depicts her moving the car through her own physical effort.
- Candidates noted the way in which Whitehead uses the structure of the novel to narrate Cora's search for freedom. They discussed how her journey to freedom takes her through several states, which divide up the novel, and that each represents a different aspect of freedom or the restriction of freedom, with South Carolina's deceptive freedom attracting much thoughtful comment in particular.
- Responses were informed by relevant references to historical context, noting ways in which Whitehead makes references to historical events and transforms them within the narrative. Some candidates also made comparisons with contemporary political and social contexts.

Limited responses

- Candidates described Cora's character and recounted some of the events of the novel without fully noting the angle of the question created by the initial quotation.
- Responses demonstrated recall of the characters and events of the novel without attention to ways in which Whitehead presents them in the narrative.
- In some responses, Cora was treated as a real person, rather than explicitly as Whitehead's narrative construct.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates demonstrated thoughtful understanding of the violent nature of Whitehead's presentation of Ridgeway's past. They explored Whitehead's presentation of Ridgeway's relationship with his father and the extent to which white supremacy in America was entrenched within society from childhood onward. Candidates developed these ideas in the wider context of slavery, white supremacy, and the American Dream.
- Responses explored ways in which Whitehead uses Ridgeway's childhood to add nuance to his characterisation, transforming a seemingly one-dimensional villain into the embodiment of American white supremacy and manifest destiny. Some candidates developed these ideas to include an understanding of Ridgeway's struggle to fit into society as a young adult.
- Responses were supported by detailed analysis of Whitehead's language in his presentation of Ridgeway's father's physical work, noting aspects such as the sequence of verbs in 'Melting, hammering, dancing'. They also referred to Ridgeway's judgement of men in other professions, with a farmer described as 'like an imbecile', a shopkeeper selling 'dull merchandise' and 'the wealthiest men' who 'provided no inspiration', showing Ridgeway's dissatisfaction. Many looked closely at the implications of his comment that 'If you weren't a little dirty at the end of the day, you weren't much of a man.'
- Candidates wrote with understanding about Whitehead's presentation of Chandler, noting that he is described as 'a brawler and a bully' and 'the local terror', who becomes a role model for Ridgeway, who is 'a hulking fourteen, six and a half feet tall, burly and resolute.' Candidates carefully analysed this vocabulary of physicality and its suggestions of violence.

Limited responses

- Responses summarised the passage and gave a general view of Ridgeway's past without commenting closely on Whitehead's choices of language and imagery and the way they shape meaning for the reader.
- Sometimes candidates focused on a limited number of particular phrases to the detriment of a balanced consideration of the whole passage. The description of the elder Ridgeway as 'blacker than an African devil' was sometimes given extended discussion to the detriment of other aspects of the extract.
- Responses showed limited understanding of the significance of the passage in the reader's understanding of Ridgeway's character.

Section B Unseen

Question 5

Unseen Poetry: 'Daughter'

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates developed thoughtful personal interpretations of the poem, which varied widely, but were carefully supported by detailed analysis of its language, imagery and structure. They recognised its structure as a form of a sonnet and analysed how the form is used.
- Responses carefully discussed the relationship between the speaker and the daughter, often noting the undefined 'Daughter' of the title before the poem begins 'My daughter...' The first-person perspective was explored, creating a tone of confession about an uneasy relationship with the daughter. The depiction of the girl's muteness also drew much attention, suggesting self-absorption in her own world as well as a lack of communication.
- The brother also drew a lot of attention, as candidates interpreted the daughter's refusal to 'go down' either as a sign of her care and concern for her brother or a sign of her fear, supported by the parent's admission that 'I can't tame/her brother.'
- Candidates responded thoughtfully to the poet's use of imagery, exploring particularly the 'two adder snakes' of her plaits and the second stanza's extended portrayal of the daughter as a mermaid. They discussed the complexities and nuances of snake imagery and offered different views of the mythic idea of the mermaid and why she 'swiftly swims away from me' at the end of the poem.

Limited responses

- Candidates offered imaginative interpretations of the poem without supporting them with close reference, quotation and argument.
- Candidates wrote about the content of the poem with limited attention to its poetic features.
- Responses were supported with limited exploration of the poem's language, imagery and structure. It was often described as free verse, as candidates overlooked its use of sonnet structure.

Question 6

Unseen Drama

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates engaged with the dialogue between Mary Louise and the anonymous 'Man', some discussing the implications of this nomenclature. They teased out ways in which the playwright develops their relationship through the dialogue, with the bulk of speech transferring from Man to Mary Louise as the extract progresses. Some suggested a relationship which develops into flirting, a parallel with the figures in Mary Louise's writing.
- Candidates noted the significance of the few stage directions, with the Man's '*Grins*' suggesting his impertinence and a teasing quality to his speech, while Mary Louise's '*Evasively*' shows hesitancy just before her extended speeches of explanation.
- Responses discussed the characterisation of the Man, commenting on his mysterious knowledge of Mary Louise and her writing career. They commented that despite his unusual knowledge, he is presented as unthreatening and actually encourages Mary Louise to open up about her writing problems.
- Responses included careful discussion of Mary Louise and her writing, noting the ways in which the playwright shows her ambition by coming to New York to write, and also her frustration with the progress of her conventional love story. There was some interesting discussion of the gender roles in her story and Mary Louise's fierce defence of her heroine. Thoughtful comments were made about the way she talks of her characters as if they are real people.

Limited responses

- Candidates discussed the two characters and what they say without acknowledging that the passage is from a play, omitting discussion of its dramatic features.
- Responses discussed the content of the speeches with limited attention to the language and structure of those speeches, which hampered understanding of characterisation and the developing dynamic of the scene.
- Candidates mistook Mary Louise's speeches about her characters to refer to actual people of her acquaintance.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/23 Prose and Unseen

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates selected key knowledge and demonstrated understanding of their chosen text and responded with understanding to the unseen extract.
- Candidates used careful analysis of the writers' methods, showing how their choices of language, form and structure shape the reader's understanding.
- Personal response developed thoughtful interpretations of texts and questions.
- Essays were structured clearly, addressing the questions in an organised way.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates need to select relevant references and quotations in order to avoid narrative summary.
- Answers to passage-based questions should focus clearly on the writing of the selected extract.
- Candidates should carefully discuss the writer's choices of language, form and structure and how they shape meaning for the reader.
- Knowledge of the whole text will inform the discussion of the extracts in the passage-based questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: The Inheritance of Loss

(a) Comprehensive responses

- There were too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

Limited responses

- There were too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates were able to place the passage towards the end of the novel, noting that it shows Biju's perspective on India at the airport after his long absence in America. They showed developed understanding of ways in which Desai presents the airport through the descriptions of the passengers.
- Responses selected from the range of characters, noting how Desai indicates the contrasts between them, for example one who had 'taken lessons on wine' and others who 'were still maintaining their culture', the 'funky Bhangra boy' and 'computer boys who'd made a million'. This was developed into discussion of how the crowd includes traditional Indian characters but is dominated by those who have been influenced by the west in their international travel.
- Candidates considered Desai's inclusion of the student and his 'bright blonde', and the reactions to them, as well as the attitudes of the businessmen returning from their adopted homes in Ohio and South Dakota as further illustrations of the urge to adopt and imitate European and American values and denigrate Indian traditions and standards.
- Responses were supported by careful analysis of Desai's writing in the passage, looking at her use of language, her use of hyphens to create comic compound phrases and her use of dialogue.

Limited responses

- Candidates showed limited awareness of the context of the passage, missing Biju's presence and perspective.
- Responses frequently mistook the men from the Air France flight to be American and wrote about racism and white supremacy, missing Desai's satirical portrait of these Indian émigrés.
- Responses described the scene in the airport without commenting closely on ways in which Desai presents it, omitting analysis of her choice of language, form and structure.

Question 2

Stories of Ourselves

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates chose appropriate stories and demonstrated clear knowledge and understanding of them by choosing specific references and supporting answers with quotations. 'The Yellow Wallpaper' was the most popular story chosen, often alongside stories such as 'The Prison', 'The Door in the Wall', 'Five Twenty' or 'Real Time'.
- Responses covered both aspects of the question, identifying the significant event as well as the transformative effect it has on the lives of the character(s).
- Responses gave careful focus to ways in which the event and character transformation is presented in the selected stories. For example, some noted that the reasons for the narrator's isolation in the room are never made explicit in 'The Yellow Wallpaper', while the effects become apparent through the increasingly dislocated narration. Others commented, for example, on how the magical description of the garden in 'The Door in the Wall' serves to permeate the rest of the story and Wallace's adult life until his death in search of it.
- Candidates used the instruction to 'Compare' to structure coherent arguments which balanced the two selected stories.

Limited responses

- Candidates chose to write about stories which they knew well, but did not help them answer the specific question.
- Candidates relied on narrative summary of their chosen stories with limited focus on the question's focus on 'ways in which' the events and transformation are presented.
- Responses demonstrated limited detailed knowledge which limited the inclusion of specific references and quotations.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Responses noted how Thorpe's narrative subtly puts the war in a position which underpins the passage, and indeed the whole story. They built on the significance of his father's return from town at the beginning, recognising that he has negotiated his son's avoidance of war service, confirmed in l.15: 'But I never went to Germany.'
- Responses explored ways in which the passage reveals the narrator's father's 'delicate game', giving service to the German occupiers but also to the resistance movement, who 'never paid'.
- Candidates recognised the significance of the narrator's father's hatred of the Germans and the reference to '17' was recognised as an allusion to the First World War. They also recognised the significance of references to 'the *maquisards*' and 'Petit Ours', which sometimes were developed with acknowledgement of the fate of Petit Ours at the hands of the Germans, and the resistance member's implicit threat which leads to the narrator's tampering with the German officer's car tyre.
- While the anecdote about Mme Renouvin is not directly connected with the war, candidates noted that it foreshadows the later death of Cécile in the German officer's car following the narrator's sabotage.

Limited responses

- Some responses suggested that the passage presents little about the experience of war, missing the key references and allusions which are made to the Germans, the narrator's avoidance of Germany and the narrator's father's 'delicate game'.
- Responses showed insecure understanding of the passage and were not able to place it successfully within the context of the whole story, missing the structural ways in which it presents the experience of the war.

- Responses relied on narrative summary without consideration of ways in which Thorpe's choices of language, form and structure shape the reader's understanding of the experience of the war.

Question 3

EVERLYN WAUGH: A Handful of Dust

(a) Comprehensive responses

- There were too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

Limited responses

- There were too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates wrote with understanding about John Beaver and were able to place his character and the passage confidently in the context of the novel, connecting the reference to Mrs Beaver to this character's presence in her son's life throughout the novel, and the way her influence is shown to shape his behaviour.
- Responses explored the ways in which Mrs Beaver's dialogue in the second paragraph shapes the reader's understanding of John Beaver's reputation, noting the way her characterisation of him as 'shy and reserved' and being 'so sensitive' might contradict the reader's judgement of him.
- Candidates noted ways in which Waugh shows that Beaver's affair with Brenda is public knowledge, from the 'morning telephone', his mother's dialogue and the welcome he receives at Brat's at the close of the passage. They commented thoughtfully on the ironies of the shift from 'the joke figure they had all known and despised' to 'an equal, even... a successful fellow competitor.'
- Responses developed these observations to discuss Waugh's satire of the hypocrisy and lack of morality in London society, seeing that John Beaver is a character created to demonstrate that shallowness.

Limited responses

- Candidates gave an outline of the changes in John Beaver's reputation without commenting closely on ways in which Waugh presents those changes in the writing of the passage.
- Some candidates were unsure of the chronology of events, supposing that Beaver becomes a 'joke figure' after his relationship with Brenda begins, rather than recognising that this is how he was perceived beforehand.
- Some responses omitted consideration of the first paragraph of the passage, as they did not recognise its relevance to the question. Some missed the reference to Beaver in l.12, or began writing about the passage from that point.

Question 4

COLSON WHITEHEAD: The Underground Railroad

(a) Comprehensive responses

- There were too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

Limited responses

- Responses showed recognition that Whitehead's novel begins on the Randall plantation in Georgia, from which Cora escapes, giving the novel its initial impetus.
- Some candidates were able to refer to some specific instances of the brutality of the Randall plantation.
- Responses made references to events on the Randall plantation, but with limited attention to the ways in which these are presented by Whitehead's choices of language, and the effects these have on the reader's understanding.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates demonstrated clear understanding of the ironies of this passage and Cora's situation in the Museum. They commented on the presentation of Cora's conversation with 'Skipper John' and the way in which it humorously introduces her intelligent understanding of the 'inaccuracies and contradictions' of the displays, and her understanding that the 'true disposition of the world' is much harsher than that presented by the museum.
- Some responses noted that Whitehead's use of Cora's memory of Michael reciting the Declaration of Independence, positioned at this moment in the text, highlights the connection being made between the apparently progressive South Carolina and the explicitly oppressive nature of life on the Randall Plantation. This was often developed into broader comment on the nature of South Carolina's administration and its 'faux progress and masked oppression', as one candidate wrote.
- Responses analysed the jarring contrasts in Whitehead's language in the passage, emphasising the falseness of the Museum's presentation of slavery. The 'pats on the head', and 'fine leather boots' were considered alongside 'chained belowdecks, swabbing his body in his own filth.' They noted the aggressive ironic humour of 'No slave had ever keeled over dead at a spinning wheel or been butchered for a tangle.'
- Candidates analysed the language Whitehead uses to describe the visitors to the Museum, focusing on 'monsters' and the animalistic 'greasy snouts', arguing that Whitehead, through Cora, judges the bystanders just as harshly as the architects of the oppressive system.

Limited responses

- Candidates recognised the significance of the location of the passage and were able to comment that although Cora has obtained some sort of freedom in South Carolina, it is partial at best. Some responses noted that her role in the Museum connects Cora to her past trauma and that of all enslaved people.
- Candidates noted the unflattering presentation of the Museum visitors without closely analysing the language Whitehead uses to depict them.
- Responses noted the differences between the Museum's presentation of slavery and the reality, with limited reference to the language of the passage or other conflicting parts of the novel.

Section B Unseen

Question 5

Unseen Prose

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates had much to say about the structural elements of the passage, noting the shift between the lengthy paragraph, the single sentence paragraph and the final sentence separated into individual lines. They commented on the drumming, rhythmic repetition of 'All across the country' and analysed the ironic way in which that repetitive structure, combined with antitheses, serves to emphasise the divisions within the country. Some, for example, noted the implication of patriotism in the 'flags in the rain' juxtaposed with the implication of hatred in the 'swastika graffiti'. They commented on the effects of contrasts such as 'people felt unsafe' and 'people were laughing their heads off' after some undisclosed event, but that nevertheless 'the haves and have nots stayed the same'.
- Responses explored the detail contained within the first paragraph, considering ways in which the writer explores the financial, political and psychological aspects of life in the country. Some responses developed analysis of the structure of the ideas within this paragraph in detail, considering, for example, the significance of the rhetorical triplet depicting the politicians who 'lied', 'fell apart' and then 'vanished', the last overlapping with the promises and money which also 'vanished.'
- Responses carefully discussed the changes in the structure, noting that the long paragraph's final iteration of 'All across the country' ends with unpunctuated repetition of 'money' and 'no money', creating particular emphasis on comparative wealth.
- Responses explored the detail of the final lines of the passage, considering the significance of the word 'line' and its connotations of borders and divisions, with some developing this analysis to consider the difference between 'better not cross' and 'don't cross' as well as the closing phrase 'here/there' and the power of the forward slash in that phrase in relation to the idea of lines and divisions.

Limited responses

- Candidates noted the pattern of repetition and contrasts but paid less attention to what those contrasts highlight. This limited the development of the candidates' response to what the passage suggests is happening within the country.
- Responses noted the changes in structure within the passage and explored how that could represent the division in the country. Some responses suggested that the use of short sentences and separate lines serves a similar purpose.
- Personal engagement with the ideas presented within the passage was often evident, although on occasion this led to speculation about the specific situation depicted in the passage or the identity of the country described that was not always carefully and convincingly supported with textual detail.

Question 6

Unseen Poetry: 'A Companionship'

Comprehensive responses

- Some responses explored the significance of the title of the poem, arguing that the implications of the word 'Companionship' guide the reader's initial understanding of the poem and the relationship it presents.
- Candidates considered ways in which the structure of the stanzas is carefully crafted to show the ways the relationship persistently falls short, with the opening line of each promising a unity which is then undermined by the metaphor's development which follows.
- Some responses considered how enjambment is used not to create continuity but to disrupt it, looking at how new lines change the image, such as 'ridden/on two flat tyres' and 'hissing/but failing'.
- Candidates commented thoughtfully on the differing tones of the stanzas and their metaphors, often finding a rueful humour in the 'bike', uneasy violence in the 'stags', lament in the 'unharvested' apples and regret in the final 'sometimes nearly.'

Limited responses

- Candidates recognised the unfulfilled nature of the relationship and were able to select quotations from the poem to support this. They showed a tendency to explain the metaphors without analysing the subtleties of their implications.
- Some responses considered the structure of the ideas appropriately, noting that each stanza presents an image of togetherness before the following lines undercut it. Other responses noted the repetition of the word 'Often' to show the frequency of failed attempts at togetherness.
- Responses described the relationship and its difficulties without teasing out the various effects of the poet's choices of language, imagery and structure.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/31 Shakespeare and Drama
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Key messages

What candidates did well

- There was close and detailed knowledge and understanding of the texts, and candidates were able to substantiate their responses by analysing specific moments and passages.
- Throughout the answers, these candidates showed that they were thinking about the texts as plays. They demonstrated an ability to discuss genre and staging convention as frameworks for the particular text studied.
- Contexts and critics featured only when they were relevant to the larger arguments being put forward.
- There was a close focus on literary methods, with language, tone and dramatic action clearly discussed.
- Personal response came from the originality and coherence of arguments, not from general enthusiasm for the text.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates need to remember that an answer does not have to be comprehensive. Nonetheless, throughout an essay, points need to be supported by particular, detailed reference.
- It is always useful with B answers for candidates to take a strategic rather than line-by-line approach.
- In B-type questions, candidates did not always recognise that the passage presented must be the constant and steady focus of a response, even if other parts of the text are examined.
- At times, candidates wrote at great length: this served to show that they needed to select material more carefully so that it was clearly relevant to their arguments.
- Candidates were not always willing to deal with the texts as drama.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Hamlet

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These answers offered thoughtful and nuanced discussion of Hamlet's relationships with his friends. They noted that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's betrayal of Hamlet is a symptom of Denmark's rottenness.
- Many responses dealt with Hamlet's relationship with Horatio, exploring the fact that Horatio is the only person that Hamlet really trusts. Some answers also made the point that at the end Horatio is entrusted with the business of telling (and shaping) Hamlet's story for posterity.
- The responses drew confidently on wider literary perspectives and on relevant contexts, ranging across the whole play.

Limited responses

- There was often a difficulty with identifying suitable characters for discussion. Ophelia was a fair focus, but Laertes and Gertrude need particular arguing if they are to be seen as friends.
- There was quite a lot of narrative or descriptive writing.
- Textual support for points was often limited.
- Characters were often talked about as though they are 'real' people.
- Critics and contexts were often used randomly, as a matter of duty rather than as a help to define a candidate's own views.

- Contexts sometimes ran away with an answer, either because they were irrelevant or excessive.
- There was little focus on the text as drama.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Dealt well with the ambiguity of the ghost, noting that it might be a devilish temptation to Hamlet. Religious contexts of the tension between Catholic superstition and Protestant realism were often used to clarify the argument.
- There was clear discussion of the various motives, both religious and familial, that the ghost gives to Hamlet for his revenge.
- There was understanding that Hamlet is already suggestible by the time the scene opens.

Limited responses

- These responses often spoke about the ghost as though it is a fantasy on Hamlet's part. It is not: other characters see it and recognise it to be Hamlet's father. What it says, however, is entirely for Hamlet's ears and may be a 'coinage' of his brain.
- Discussions about contemporary religion often overwhelmed answers without adding particular illumination to a discussion of this particular moment.
- The particulars of the passage were often neglected in favour of a more general discussion of revenge in the play.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Taming of the Shrew

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These responses recognised that the courtship between Petruchio and Katherina is much more genuine than that of the other lovers because they are really exploring each other's personalities to find out if they are mutually compatible.
- The responses understood that the courting of Bianca is an entirely conventional trope of the times, with its disguises and flowery language, thus showing a relevant understanding of context.
- The responses recognised that Bianca and Lucentio hardly know each other by the end of the play, whereas Petruchio and Katherina have a much more solid foundation for their future relationship.
- Some responses made useful connections between the Sly scenes and the main action of the play.
- There was considerable use of particular examples.
- Candidates referred to critics only when they were useful to an argument.

Limited responses

- These responses usually showed some knowledge of the fundamental relationships in the play.
- Some responses dealt with the question almost entirely in terms of narrative.
- A number of candidates did not really understand the concept of courtship.
- Petruchio's courtship of Katherina was often superficially treated, with little reference to the text and little acknowledgement that the two are testing each other.
- Contexts and critics, when used, were often only tangentially relevant.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses understood that the speech given is central to an overall interpretation of the play. They saw that Katherina's tone might well undermine the content of what she says, either by suggesting that she is resentfully subdued or that she is putting on her show of obedience as a shared joke with Petruchio.
- The most perceptive answers examined Katherina's rhetorical strategies – the extended similes of 'fountain troubled' and feudal obedience – to debate whether she is tamed, performing, or subverting expectations, and what this reveals about Petruchio's method and the relationship between the two.
- There was full response to the easy rapport ('Come on, and kiss me, Kate') between the lovers, which indicates that they are playing a game with the 'headstrong women'.

- Many responses took the view that if Katherina is to have a peaceful life as Petruchio's wife, she must constantly perform and perhaps keep her true opinions to herself – a perfectly legitimate interpretation of this moment.

Limited responses

- Many of these responses talked in general terms about Katherina's taming, without really making reference to this particular moment. This often led to a narrative approach.
- Some answers paid little attention to the dramatic context of the passage and its positioning at the end of the play.
- The responses usually took Katherina's speech at face value.
- These responses often simply gave a summary of the extract.
- Contexts of the conventional relationships and society's expectations in Shakespeare's time were often made in general without being fully applied to the extract's power dynamics.

Question 3

LYNN NOTTAGE: Sweat

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These responses made reference to particular scenes that depict the friendships of Tracey and Cynthia as well as Jason and Chris.
- There was clear response to the struggles of economic hardship and the various ways in which this places characters' friendships under stress in the play.
- There was often extensive discussion of the bar as a witness to friendship and how Stanley tries to maintain the space as neutral, even though it is often the setting for tension.

Limited responses

- There were often lengthy discussions of economic contexts, without much reference to how these are embodied in the play's action.
- The question asked for candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of 'dramatic effects' and yet this emphasis was not fully considered.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses commented on Brucie's plight and Cynthia's lack of interest during the course of the extract.
- They saw and analysed how Bruce's rehabilitation is consistently undermined by Cynthia's sharp, monosyllabic demands for a 'pay stub'.
- There was close attention to the language and tone of the scene, with short sentences often cited as a sign of the tension between Brucie and Cynthia. Effective responses analysed the terse, clipped dialogue between Cynthia and Brucie, showing how silences and monosyllabic 'K.' convey emotional distance and the erosion of family/friendship networks under addiction and unemployment.
- Tone and action were discussed, with Tracey's interjections and the 'warm hug' with Cynthia showing how solidarity and rivalry are juxtaposed here and illustrating how Nottage uses small gestures to map shifting alliances at the bar.

Limited responses

- A number of responses placed the incident in the context of the play whilst not really responding to the back and forth of the conversations given.
- There was a tendency to fall back on background, contextual information, rather than focusing on the details of language and tone of the extract presented.
- There was only limited understanding of the role of stagecraft or of the way the physical space of the bar shapes the encounter.

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: *Long Day's Journey Into Night*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These responses showed knowledge and understanding of the Tyrone family dynamic, evaluating how O'Neill uses structural repetition to show how the characters are trapped by their individual and collective past.
- There was clear focus on the dramatisation of the rapid shifts between defensive cruelty and deeply felt guilt that demonstrated how language is used in the play both to wound and as a shield to protect the speaker.
- The responses also analysed elements of staging, and in particular the lighting and the oppressive references to the fog as being physical manifestations of the psychological conflicts.

Limited responses

- In these answers there was often a catalogue of the family's irritations with each other or of the various arguments they have without an attempt to analyse the structural progression of the argument or O'Neill's overall dramatic purpose.
- Many scripts read more like case studies of addiction than literary analyses of a theatrical script.
- A number of scripts outlined the causes of and motivations for conflict without really moving towards how they are manifested in the action of the play.
- Quotations tended to be restricted, with most of the focus being on the generic insults traded between the brothers.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses paid careful attention to the extended stage directions as giving hints about a suitable 'reading' of the scene. They responded to the detailing of Mary's physical deterioration and her 'unnatural brilliance.'
- They were aware of the unequal balance of power between Mary and Cathleen, who is used not as a conversational partner ('an excuse to keep talking') but as a silent sounding board to help an audience understand Mary's descent into drug-induced nostalgia.
- Many responses discussed the status of Cathleen (another addict in the play who shows the effects of drink), noting that she is more concerned with her own thoughts than with listening to what Mary is saying.
- There was clear understanding of the fog as a metaphor and as a symbol of Mary's desire for emotional erasure.

Limited responses

- These responses often gave an account of the scene without focusing on O'Neill's dramatic methods.
- The concerns of the play (family tension, addiction etc.) were usually acknowledged. However, discussions tended to be general and not fully focused on what is going on at this particular moment.
- Elements of the autobiographical background to the play were often adduced simply as an extra: they did not add to a candidate's elucidation of this particular scene.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: *Kongi's Harvest*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These responses saw Segi as a politically significant figure who challenges Kongi's authority, the patriarchy, and represents resistance to oppression.
- They looked carefully at the symbolic importance of women (and the female) in relation to power, fertility, cultural continuity, and national identity.
- In all responses at this level there was clear and continuous reference to detail, and a careful analysis of how the female characters are presented dramatically as active participants in political and social change, rather than as passive observers.

Limited responses

- Responses tended towards the descriptive rather than the analytical.
- There was a tendency to treat the female characters as secondary because of their comparatively limited stage time.
- The answers often offered limited detail or contained too much background information that was only loosely connected to the question.
- The political and symbolic importance of the women was not always fully considered, and the focus was almost entirely on a character study of Segi.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- These responses were able to unpack the sharp tonal collision between the state-sanctioned bureaucratic authority of the Superintendent and the organic, musical majesty of Oba Daniola. They saw clearly that Daniola is a representative and symbol of cultural continuity.
- There was firm understanding of the satirical techniques that Soyinka is using in the passage.
- Many responses paid close attention to the stage directions and explained how the Superintendent's physical act of seizing the lead drummer's wrist symbolises the state's violent silencing of native culture.
- There was clear analysis of how the translated Yoruba lyrics function dramatically to assert traditional values over modern totalitarianism.
- Contextual background was only used when necessary to illuminate this particular scene.

Limited responses

- There was little discussion of the poetic structure of the songs, drums and new yam imagery, despite their obvious dramatic pertinence and their centrality to the play, both here and elsewhere. Many responses simply paid little attention to lines 5 – 18.
- There was much summary of the passage, with little close analysis of the satirical depiction of the Superintendent as a 'slave in khaki.'
- These responses tended to either pay limited attention to links elsewhere in the play or, at the other extreme, tended to offer a general view, without close reference to the passage.
- The responses showed limited awareness of dramatic methods.
- Contexts and historical background often replaced close analysis of the passage presented.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32 Shakespeare and Drama
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Key messages

What candidates did well

- There was close and detailed knowledge and understanding of the texts, and candidates were able to substantiate their responses by analysing specific moments and passages.
- Throughout the answers, these candidates showed that they were thinking about the texts as plays. They demonstrated an ability to discuss genre and staging convention as frameworks for the particular text studied.
- Contexts and critics featured only when they were relevant to the larger arguments being put forward.
- There was a close focus on literary methods, with language, tone and dramatic action clearly discussed.
- Personal response came from the originality and coherence of arguments, not from general enthusiasm for the text.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates need to remember that an answer doesn't have to be comprehensive. Nonetheless, throughout an essay, points need to be supported by particular, detailed references.
- It is always useful with **(b)** answers for candidates to take a strategic rather than line-by-line approach.
- In **(b)** type questions, candidates sometimes did not fully appreciate that the passage presented must be the constant and steady focus of a response, even if other parts of the text are examined.
- At times, candidates wrote at great length: this served to show that they needed to select material more carefully so that it was clearly relevant to their arguments.
- Candidates were not always willing to deal with the texts as drama.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Hamlet

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These responses considered both Ophelia and Gertrude, contrasting the two and their roles in the play, showing how Shakespeare uses them to illuminate different aspects of loyalty, love and power in the Danish court.
- There was often clear discussion of how the women influence Hamlet's actions or serve to give us insight into his emotional development.
- There was much discussion of the role of women in society at the time, with Gertrude's need to remain near the centre of power often seen as a key motivation. Ophelia was often seen as a victim of others' expectations.
- Many responses looked at the symbolism associated with the women – Gertrude's poison and Ophelia's flowers – to deepen the discussion.
- Some responses pointed out relevantly that we see the women through men's eyes and through their language and that they themselves have a lack of agency in the play.
- There was much interesting and informed discussion about Gertrude as either innocent of, or a co-conspirator in old King Hamlet's death.
- Contexts of a modern feminist interpretation were carefully raised and subtly argued.

Limited responses

- Some responses only dealt with one of the women. Others gave character studies or accounted for what the women do, without seeing their significance in terms of the play's themes.
- Answers were often narrative rather than analytic.
- The women tended to be treated as real people, rather than characters who are created and shaped by an author for a particular purpose.
- More could have been done to talk about particular moments in the play, particularly in terms of the language that the women use, or the misogynist language that is often used of them.
- Contextual background about the roles and expectations of women at the time often led candidates away from detailed examination of what is actually being presented in the play.
- The question used the phrases 'present' and 'dramatic effects' as prompts. They were often overlooked.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- These responses were aware that both long speeches are soliloquies.
- The answers showed a clear understanding that this is the moment when the audience learns about the depths of Claudius's crime and his ambiguous feelings about what he has done.
- Links were often successfully made to other moments in the play, particularly with reference to Claudius's confident public persona which was contrasted to his private vulnerability. Useful links to Claudius's reaction to the play within a play often helped to substantiate this view.
- The dramatic irony of the scene was clearly understood and addressed.

Limited responses

- Some responses only dealt with part of the extract: there was commentary on Hamlet's reaction to Claudius, without close examination of the speech itself.
- Other responses dealt with Claudius's speech as overheard, which, of course, it is not.
- There was little acknowledgement of the last two lines of the extract.
- Candidates often made the point that Hamlet's speech is another example of his propensity to delay, without recognising that at this point an additional, theological reason for delay is presented.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Taming of the Shrew

(a)

Comprehensive responses

- A wide variety of different sorts of deception were located, with disguise seen as the most obvious. But there were discussions, too, of how characters conceal their motivations, with the most interesting responses dealing with the various tensions seen between appearance and reality.
- There was much discussion about how characters hide their true selves and motivations from others, and perhaps from themselves as well, so that they can make their lives bearable.
- There was discussion of dramatic irony, seen through the fact that we, the audience, know what truly motivates characters.
- For some candidates, exploration of the conventions of commedia dell'arte and the use of boy actors in Shakespeare's time illuminated the issue.
- Answers that focused on the language of the play – the imagery and puns, for example, showed how verbal wit enacts deception and seduction at the same time at crucial moments in the play.

Limited responses

- These responses often simply listed examples of deception.
- There was little close response to particular scenes or moments.
- Many responses were limited by an attempt to structure the writing through narrating the plot of the play, rather than taking a strategic view.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses contextualised the extract in terms of Katherina's interactions with other men in the play up to this point. This was usually contrasted with Petruchio's engagement with her at this moment, debating how far they meet as equals or how far he coerces her.
- There was close reference to the language of the passage, with clear recognition that the combative tone used by both, together with the matching imagery, the verbal banter and echoing, might suggest that these two already have a lively connection that shows them as equals in many respects. There was also clear understanding of the opposite view – that Petruchio's language is an exercise in domination and intimidation.
- The comic nature of the banter was clearly understood and explicated.
- Critical opinion, when used, was integrated and helped with the candidate's interpretation of both the scene and the play as a whole.

Limited responses

- There was a tendency towards seeing the passage in isolation, with some recourse to narration.
- The language and action were not discussed in terms of the comedy presented at this moment.
- In these responses the action of the scene tended to be seen one-dimensionally: sometimes as an example of Petruchio bullying Katherina; or at the other extreme as an example of their fighting.
- There was often no clear understanding of how deception is a conventional mechanism in a comedy.

Question 3

LYNN NOTTAGE: Sweat

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Responses at this level showed how hardship is made dramatically tangible through stage business, with the bar tab, talk of bunions, frozen hands, and Stan's injury all showing that the economic pressure is viscerally present throughout.
- There was much discussion of the structure of the play, with candidates linking the scenes set in 2000 with their relative economic prosperity and security to those of the 2008 flash forwards where it is obvious that the characters have been worn down by the slow grind of poverty and uncertainty.
- Nottage's own discussions of her aims often provided a useful context.
- There was often discussion about how much of the play's impact comes from Nottage's complete lack of sentimentality in her presentation of characters.

Limited responses

- Context was often general and not seen in terms of the presentation of financial hardship through the drama of the play.
- The economic situation was sometimes seen simply as a background issue, not as the driving force behind all the tensions displayed.
- The significance of the bar as both a trap and a sanctuary was often missed.
- There was considerable narrative in some of the responses and limited awareness of how Nottage uses the 'In the News' interjections to shape our response to what we are watching.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Responses in the higher levels were able to see how hopes and dreams emerge through Cynthia's ambition, Tracey's scepticism and the workers' desire for a better future.
- There was interesting and detailed discussion of both the language and action and the ways in which structural irony of the scene exposes the fragility of aspiration.
- The responses looked closely at how Cynthia's individualistic ambition ('More money. More heat') collides with Tracey's traditional solidarity ('Management is for them. Not us.') and Stan's laconic realism ('That place hasn't changed since I walked in there in '69.')
- Answers often analysed the evocative imagery of physical wear and tear such as Cynthia's mention of 'bunions the size of damn apples' by seeing hopes and dreams in terms of escape, not aspiration.

Limited responses

- These responses often identified characters' ambitions and dreams without then seeing how the overall pattern of failure suffuses both this scene and the play in general.
- Many responses did not see the dramatic irony created by later events in the play.
- The responses often took the scene at face value as being a discussion about job opportunities.
- There was little focus on the tone and realistic feel to the conversation presented, even though it is, in fact, scripted.
- More discussion of how envy and self-limitation are presented would have been useful at times.

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: Long Day's Journey Into Night

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These responses demonstrated how Tyrone's artistic compromises and Jamie's cynical Broadway failure shape the family's deep identity crisis.
- Answers often discussed the various ways in which all members 'stage' themselves in a rather over-dramatic manner, using theatrical posturing on a daily basis to deceive themselves and hide from the reality of their situation.
- There was often insightful discussion of Mary's attitude towards her husband's profession and the sacrifices that it has forced her into making.
- Successful responses were able to note that the characters often allude to the theatre and particularly the works of Shakespeare (Jamie's 'The Mad Scene. Enter Ophelia' in Act 4, for example) in order to try and characterise and control their feelings. They were aware of the metatheatrical devices of the play.

Limited responses

- A number of responses talked about O'Neill and the theatre rather than about the characters and their attitudes.
- Some answers simply catalogued Tyrone's career as an actor rather than seeing acting and the theatre as being fundamental to the creation of theme, action and dialogue.
- There was little close and detailed discussion of the text.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- The passage allowed the candidates to unpick the complexity of Jamie and Edmund's relationship, recognising that love, guilt, jealousy and self-loathing all exist simultaneously in the passage.
- There was clear understanding of Jamie's confession as both an expression of affection and a warning about his own self-destructive nature.
- Tone and action were central: Jamie's 'hard, tortured laugh', his collapse into sleep, and Edmund who 'buries his face in his hands' were used to show how O'Neill's stage directions evoke despair in the two of them.
- Many responses made links to elsewhere in the play, suggesting that this is the climax of confession, where masks finally slip. There was discussion of Tyrone's entrance and 'A sweet spectacle for me' to show how the father-son dynamic perpetuates the cycle of mutual antagonism and despair. This was usually seen as a demonstration of how the older generation has failed the younger generation by failing to engender emotional robustness in either of the children.
- Responses recognised that Jamie's drunkenness means that the drink might be speaking on his behalf and that much of what is said would not be said if he were sober. They recognised that elsewhere Jamie defends his brother robustly.

Limited responses

- Some answers saw Jamie as simply malicious, thus overlooking the affection, honesty and tone of much of what he says about his brother, both here and elsewhere.
- The dialogue was often summarised rather than analysed in terms of O'Neill's dramatic techniques.
- Many responses could have been more fulsome in considering what Tyrone's presence adds to O'Neill's presentation and perspective on the brothers in this extract, particularly because the ambiguity of his response to them ('pitying' as well as 'stern and disgusted') was not deeply explored.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: Kongi's Harvest

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates compared Kongi's insecure, megalomaniacal image-obsessed tyranny with Oba Daniola's traditional, organic, yet structurally compromised royal authority which is itself ineffective in terms of the people as a whole, as it relies on the Yam festival and tradition rather than confronting the realities of the modern world.
- The responses demonstrated perceptive understanding of how Soyinka uses satire to expose how dictators manipulate public imagery.

Limited responses

- These responses often relied heavily on historical context and showed only limited understanding of the text and Soyinka's dramatic methods.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses focused clearly and in detail on the sharp comedic satire of the scene.
- There was usually closely argued attention to the intellectual jargon used by the Reformed Aweri in their attempt to conceal their real lack of authority by creating an 'image' for themselves.
- The responses linked ideas presented here to the action of the play as a whole, seeing that the group's arguments are a perfect mirror of Kongi's shallow and hollow state propaganda.

Limited responses

- There was often a tendency to treat all the speakers as a single group, even though they have quite different voices and aspirations.
- The passage was frequently seen on its own, with no reference to bigger issues that are embodied elsewhere in the play.
- Many responses relied on narrating the scene, rather than taking a strategic view of what is being presented in this scene and its dramatic significance.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/33 Shakespeare and Drama
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Key messages

What candidates did well

- There was close and detailed knowledge and understanding of the texts, and candidates were able to substantiate their responses by analysing specific moments and passages.
- Throughout the answers, these candidates showed that they were thinking about the texts as plays. They demonstrated an ability to discuss genre and staging convention as frameworks for the particular text studied.
- Contexts and critics featured only when they were relevant to the larger arguments being put forwards.
- There was a close focus on literary methods, with language, tone and dramatic action clearly discussed.
- Personal response came from the originality and coherence of arguments, not from general enthusiasm for the text.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates need to remember that an answer does not have to be comprehensive. Nonetheless, throughout an essay, points need to be supported by particular, detailed references.
- It is always useful with **(b)** answers for candidates to take a strategic rather than line-by-line approach.
- In **(b)** type questions, candidates sometimes did not fully appreciate that the passage presented must be the constant and steady focus of a response, even if other parts of the text are examined.
- At times, candidates wrote at great length: this served to show that they needed to select material more carefully so that it was clearly relevant to their arguments.
- Candidates were not always willing to deal with the texts as drama.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Hamlet

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These candidates did not allow themselves to fixate on the obvious 'To be or not to be' speech; nor did they restrict themselves wholly to Hamlet's speeches.
- Many candidates evoked Claudius's soliloquy as a means of making Hamlet's ambiguous feelings more explicit.
- The soliloquies also offered many candidates the opportunity to explore and exploit the Renaissance context and consider the philosophical angles of the play in this light.
- The responses showed how Hamlet's sharing of his thoughts with the audience acts to shape our reaction towards him as we chart his indecision and soul-searching.
- There was a clear sense of how the soliloquies mark Hamlet's psychological development in the play.
- The answers were well aware that a variety of interpretations of the soliloquies are possible.

Limited responses

- Some candidates seemed unsure about what a soliloquy actually is and simply wrote about moments when a character speaks lengthily.
- There were a number of answers that dealt with the soliloquies in a piecemeal way, selecting phrases without fully recognising how they fitted into the larger pattern of the play.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These answers were able to see the complexity of Hamlet's relationship with his mother (and vice versa), one which goes well beyond his mother's recent actions.
- The responses addressed the imbalance of dialogue and Hamlet's dominance.
- Many candidates recognised that Hamlet's vivid imaginings of his mother's sex life tell us more about his psychology than they do about the reality. They noted that Gertrude's remark about the 'coinage of your brain' applies not only to Hamlet's evocation of a ghost but also to his overactive imagination in other matters.
- There were occasional moments where candidates turned to Gertrude's 'What shall I do?' as a means of noting that Gertrude may not be the loose woman of Hamlet's imaginings.
- Many responses talked about Hamlet's misogyny and its consequences for Ophelia.

Limited responses

- There was quite a strong tendency to focus on Hamlet's Oedipal feelings towards his mother, and this tended to widen the discussion, moving the focus away from the detail of this particular passage. Although this was an attempt to interpret, it was plain that the Freudian idea had not been internalised by the candidates and was presented as an add-on, rather than demonstrated through textual analysis.
- Many responses chose to deal with the passage chronologically, rather than strategically, which meant that there was little sense of the action of the scene as a whole.
- Some answers showed a strong tendency towards narration.
- There was often much focus on contextual thoughts about women's role in society at the time that took away from a close reading of the passage given.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Taming of the Shrew

(a) Not enough responses to comment.

(b) Not enough responses to comment.

Question 3

LYNN NOTTAGE: Sweat

(a) Not enough responses to comment.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses were able to link the personal lives of the characters to the economic context of the times.
- There was much useful discussion of the colloquial language of the passage and of how the underlying tensions between characters are presented, both here and elsewhere in the play.
- The responses were able to link this scene to other difficult moments and comment on the two-time frames of the play.

Limited responses

- There was often much discussion of the economic pressures that the characters face, and this took focus from the passage given.
- There was usually understanding of the characters and their roles in the play.
- The responses did not always deal with the detail of the scene presented, particularly in terms of tone and language.
- There was a good deal of description in these answers, rather than close analysis of what is going on at this particular moment.

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: Long Day's Journey Into Night

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Responses at this level were able to demonstrate how none of the characters hold themselves accountable for the family's situation. Most responses noted that there is irony in the fact they blame each other, ignoring their own culpability.
- There was clear acknowledgement and exposition of moments when resentment is used as an excuse for individual behaviours.
- Many responses were able to use biographical detail with sensitivity and also talk about the images and symbols in the play.
- These responses were able to see how this particular day shows the family's fragility at its most extreme, with the whole family losing a grip on the realities of the present moment.

Limited responses

- These responses often showed understanding of the play's action and characters, without quite ever moving on to the dramatic presentation of blame and resentment.
- The responses often commented on Tyrone's meanness and took this as the main driver for the rest of the family's resentments, without seeing that the issue is, of course, present in all of the play's relationships.
- Some responses only dealt with a limited range of characters and gave a descriptive account.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These answers were able to focus clearly on Edmund's 'maudlin' state and the fact that his whole speech is overemotional and may not reflect what he would say when sober.
- There was usually a complex response to the way in which Edmund builds up a picture in the speech which evokes his desire for self-extinction and absence of being through his trance-like evocation of the ship and the sea.
- There was clear analysis of the range of Edmund's emotions and acknowledgement of his gloomy sense of failure in the closing lines.
- Some responses noted that all of what Edmund says comes from him 'seeking to hide behind a maudlin manner' and that he is actually staging what he says quite deliberately in order to manipulate his father.
- The responses ranged across the whole play in order to make sense of this particular moment.
- There was often useful discussion of the stage directions and their implications.

Limited responses

- At this level, answers often missed the significance of Edmund's speech being so frank because he has had too much to drink.
- There was usually understanding of his character in a general way, though responses needed closer engagement with the language and action of this particular moment.
- There was a tendency towards character study rather than analysis of Edmund at this particular moment.
- References across the text were limited.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: Kongi's Harvest

- (a) Not enough responses to comment.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses showed clear understanding of where the extract falls in the play and of the symbolic significance of the scene.
- There was sensible comment on the underlying feeling of unease in the scene.
- Ideas about harvest articulated here were often related to the bigger issue of the Yam festival and the fertility of the country that dominates the action of the play as a whole.
- The political background was handled with sensitivity.

Limited responses

- Answers at this level tended towards narration.
- The responses understood the basic action of the scene.
- There was often a good deal of background historical and contextual information, which did not always illuminate what is going on at this particular moment.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/41

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

What candidates did well

- They developed answers with strong, supported personal arguments, demonstrating engagement and insight.
- They kept the question in view, particularly on **(a)** responses.
- They demonstrated understanding of authorial intent and how this relates to effects and meaning.

What candidates needed to improve

- They should refer to specific details from texts, whether quotation or reference, to support points made.
- They should analyse aspects of form, structure and language as integral to arguments and relevant to genre, rather than as an 'add on'.
- They should demonstrate deeper and more relevant engagement with elements of context – literary, social, historical and cultural.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored a range of significant friendships across the novel, most commonly those between Elizabeth and Charlotte, Elizabeth and Jane, and Darcy and Bingley, while some also considered the changing relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy and the contrasting friendship between Darcy and Wickham.
- They analysed how Austen presents friendship as both a source of support and a means of revealing differences in values, judgement and social attitudes, explaining how friendships contribute to character development and the novel's wider concerns.
- Candidates examined the effects of Regency social expectations, demonstrating how class, wealth, gender and social hierarchy shape the formation, maintenance and limitations of friendships throughout the novel.
- They explored how social pressures place strain on particular friendships, especially Elizabeth's relationship with Charlotte, recognising how Charlotte's marriage alters their friendship while reflecting contemporary expectations of women's choices.
- Candidates supported their arguments with detailed textual knowledge and well-chosen references from across the novel, using a range of friendships to construct a comparative discussion rather than focusing on a single relationship.
- They analysed Austen's narrative methods, including dialogue, irony and satire, to explain how she shapes readers' responses to friendships and exposes the social conventions that influence them.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding confidently, recognising how Regency social hierarchy, gender expectations and the economic realities of marriage influence the presentation of friendship without allowing context to dominate their discussion.
- They occasionally strengthened their interpretations through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints, using these to refine rather than replace their own analysis.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused on a narrow range of relationships and sometimes selected examples that were not convincingly presented as friendships within the novel.
- They discussed individual friendships descriptively but did not fully explain their wider significance to Austen's presentation of character or society.
- Candidates relied on broad contextual comments about Regency society without linking them closely to the presentation of friendship.
- They focused more heavily on narrative summary than on analysing Austen's methods, with limited discussion of language, narrative voice or irony.
- Candidates occasionally supported their discussion with inaccurate or imprecise textual references, including quotations influenced by film adaptations rather than the novel itself.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates developed balanced evaluations of Mr Bennet's character, recognising both his wit and perceptive judgement alongside his failures as a husband and father.
- They analysed Mr Bennet's presentation in the extract through close attention to dialogue, irony and characterisation, explaining how Austen shapes readers' responses to his attitudes and behaviour.
- Candidates supported their arguments with well-selected references from elsewhere in the novel, including Mr Bennet's response to Elizabeth's refusal of Mr Collins, his views on Darcy, his handling of Lydia's visit to Brighton and his reaction to her elopement.
- They explored the consequences of Mr Bennet's emotional distance from his family, explaining how his inaction contributes to Lydia's behaviour and the difficulties faced by the Bennet family.
- Candidates considered alternative interpretations of Mr Bennet, recognising that his humour and intelligence coexist with shortcomings as a parent, while some also offered sympathetic readings of Mrs Bennet in light of the family's financial insecurity.
- They integrated contextual understanding effectively, explaining the significance of the entail, inheritance, marriage and women's financial dependence in shaping Mr Bennet's attitudes and family relationships.
- Candidates occasionally strengthened their discussion through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints, using these to support balanced evaluation rather than simply reinforcing one interpretation.

Limited responses

- Candidates accepted Mr Bennet's words and behaviour at face value without considering Austen's irony or the complexity of his character.
- They focused heavily on Mrs Bennet or other members of the family, moving away from the central focus on Mr Bennet.
- Candidates relied on narrative description and personal opinion rather than analysing Austen's methods of characterisation.
- They made only limited reference to the wider novel, restricting their ability to evaluate Mr Bennet's significance across the text.
- Candidates referred to contextual ideas in broad or generalised terms without explaining how they shape Austen's presentation of Mr Bennet.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

(a)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates developed a comparative discussion of attitudes towards marriage across both the *Prologue* and the *Tale*, recognising marriage as a central means through which Chaucer explores power, authority and gender.
- They analysed the Wife of Bath's presentation of her five marriages, explaining how Chaucer uses her experiences to challenge and debate contemporary assumptions about marriage and relationships.
- Candidates explored the Wife's desire for sovereignty within marriage, recognising how this concern is developed through both the *Prologue* and the *Tale* and linked to wider questions of authority and female agency.

- They analysed Chaucer's rhetorical methods confidently, commenting on the Wife's persuasive arguments, manipulation of authority and use of biblical and literary references to shape readers' responses.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding effectively, explaining how medieval attitudes towards marriage, gender roles and the marriage debate inform Chaucer's presentation while recognising that the text often subverts contemporary expectations.
- They considered differing interpretations of the Wife of Bath, with some exploring the extent to which Chaucer presents her as a proto-feminist figure while recognising the complexity of this interpretation.
- Candidates supported their arguments with detailed textual knowledge and apt references from both the *Prologue* and the *Tale*, occasionally strengthening their discussion through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused primarily on the Wife of Bath's marriages without fully exploring Chaucer's wider presentation of marriage as a social and literary concern.
- They discussed the Wife's character descriptively rather than analysing Chaucer's rhetorical methods or narrative techniques.
- Candidates referred to medieval gender roles in broad or generalised terms without explaining how Chaucer develops or challenges these expectations.
- They relied heavily on narrative summary and explanation of events rather than analysing language, structure or writer's methods.
- Candidates made only limited use of evidence from across both the *Prologue* and the *Tale*, restricting the breadth of their discussion.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates analysed Chaucer's presentation of the Wife of Bath with close attention to her rhetorical skill, recognising how her confident voice shapes readers' responses throughout the extract.
- They explored how the Wife performs and manipulates ideas of authority, gender and experience, explaining how Chaucer uses her character to question accepted assumptions about women's roles.
- Candidates examined Chaucer's use of imagery and symbolism, including animal imagery and references to clothing, explaining how these contribute to the Wife's presentation and reinforce wider concerns with identity, sexuality and social status.
- They explored the significance of the Wife's position as a successful cloth merchant, linking this to medieval society and to Chaucer's presentation of wealth, independence and female authority.
- Candidates analysed the extract within the wider context of the *Prologue* and *Tale*, recognising how the Wife's arguments anticipate or reinforce broader concerns with sovereignty, marriage and power.
- They integrated contextual understanding effectively, exploring medieval attitudes towards women, marriage and misogyny while recognising how Chaucer both draws upon and challenges contemporary expectations.
- Candidates occasionally strengthened their discussion through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints, supporting sophisticated interpretations of Chaucer's methods and purposes.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused primarily on the content of the extract rather than analysing Chaucer's methods of presentation.
- They described the Wife's views and behaviour without fully exploring the significance of her rhetorical techniques or imagery.
- Candidates referred to contextual ideas in general terms without explaining how they illuminate Chaucer's presentation of the Wife.
- They made only limited reference to the wider *Prologue* and *Tale*, restricting their discussion of the extract's significance.

Question 3

GEORGE ELIOT: *Middlemarch*

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) **Comprehensive responses**

- Candidates placed the extract securely within the wider novel, exploring the development of Dorothea and Casaubon's relationship and explaining how the passage reflects the wider concerns of their marriage.
- They analysed Dorothea's motivations for marrying Casaubon, recognising how Eliot presents the contrast between her idealism and the reality of her married life.
- Candidates examined Eliot's presentation of marriage within its Victorian context, explaining how expectations of women and wives influence Dorothea's experiences and shape readers' responses to her situation.
- They analysed Eliot's literary methods closely, exploring the significance of imagery, particularly the contrasting patterns of light and darkness, and the metaphor of the 'lamed creature' to explain Dorothea's emotional and psychological development.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding effectively, linking Victorian attitudes towards marriage, education and women's roles to Eliot's presentation without allowing context to dominate their discussion.
- They supported their arguments with relevant references to the wider novel, demonstrating how the extract develops Eliot's recurring concerns with marriage, aspiration and personal fulfilment.

Limited responses

- Candidates restricted their discussion largely to the given extract and made only limited reference to the wider novel.
- They focused on explaining the events of the passage rather than analysing Eliot's methods of characterisation or narrative presentation.
- Candidates identified literary features such as imagery or metaphor but did not consistently explain how these contribute to meaning or shape readers' responses.
- They referred to contextual ideas in broad or generalised terms without linking them closely to Eliot's presentation of marriage or Dorothea's experience.
- Candidates relied more heavily on narrative description than close analysis of language, imagery and narrative methods.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Jude the Obscure*

(a) **Comprehensive responses**

- Candidates explored Hardy's presentation of marriage by comparing a range of relationships across the novel, recognising how different marriages expose the tensions between love, social convention and personal fulfilment.
- They analysed the marriage between Sue Bridehead and Phillotson within the wider context of the novel, explaining how Hardy presents the conflict between individual desire and Victorian expectations of marriage.
- Candidates contrasted Sue and Phillotson's marriage with Sue's relationship with Jude, exploring how these relationships develop Hardy's critique of conventional marriage and restrictive social values.
- They examined Jude's marriage to Arabella alongside other relationships in the novel, recognising how Hardy presents deception, social pressure and economic necessity as influences on marriage.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding effectively, explaining how Victorian attitudes towards marriage, divorce, education and social respectability inform Hardy's presentation without allowing context to dominate their discussion.
- They supported their arguments with well-selected references from across the novel, constructing comparative discussions that reflected Hardy's wider concerns with marriage, freedom and personal aspiration.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused primarily on Sue and Phillotson's marriage without considering its significance alongside other relationships in the novel.
- They discussed Victorian attitudes towards marriage in broad or generalised terms without linking these ideas closely to Hardy's presentation.
- Candidates relied more heavily on narrative summary than analysis of Hardy's methods of characterisation and narrative construction.
- They made only limited reference to the wider novel, restricting their discussion of Hardy's presentation of marriage as a recurring concern.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates placed the extract securely within the wider novel, recognising the significance of Old Father Time's presentation in light of his later actions and the tragic development of the narrative.
- They analysed Hardy's characterisation of Old Father Time closely, exploring how his detached behaviour, sombre outlook and emotional isolation contribute to the novel's tragic vision.
- Candidates examined Hardy's use of imagery and language, including colour imagery and elevated diction, explaining how these methods shape readers' responses to the child and foreshadow later events.
- They explored the significance of the child's apparent indifference within the passage, recognising how Hardy uses this presentation to develop wider concerns with suffering, pessimism and human vulnerability.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding effectively, linking Victorian attitudes towards childhood and the conventions of tragedy to Hardy's presentation while maintaining a clear focus on the text.
- They supported their arguments with relevant references to the wider novel, demonstrating how the extract contributes to Hardy's exploration of fatalism, family relationships and social responsibility.

Limited responses

- Candidates overlooked the significance of important details within the passage, including Old Father Time's response to the kitten, limiting the depth of their interpretation.
- They focused primarily on describing the events of the extract rather than analysing Hardy's methods of characterisation and narrative presentation.
- Candidates commented on Arabella's reactions or other characters without fully explaining how these contribute to Hardy's wider concerns.
- They relied more heavily on explanation than close analysis of language, imagery and symbolism.
- Candidates made only limited reference to the wider novel, restricting their understanding of the extract's significance within Hardy's tragic narrative.

Question 5

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: selected sonnets

(a)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates developed a comparative discussion across a range of sonnets, constructing a clear argument in response to the question rather than treating each poem separately.
- They analysed Shakespeare's presentation of personal experience alongside universal concerns, recognising how themes such as love, time, ageing and human relationships transcend the poet's individual circumstances.
- Candidates supported their discussion with detailed textual knowledge, selecting apt references from across the prescribed sonnets to develop well-balanced comparisons.
- They examined Shakespeare's poetic methods confidently, analysing imagery, structure, language and the sonnet form to explain how these shape meaning and readers' responses.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding effectively, exploring Renaissance ideas about love, friendship and patronage where these illuminated their interpretation of the poems.
- They occasionally strengthened their discussion through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints, using these to refine their interpretations rather than replace textual analysis.

Limited responses

- There were no reports of limited performance on this question.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates developed conceptual arguments organised around the central concerns of the sonnet rather than producing line-by-line commentaries, maintaining a clear focus on Shakespeare's presentation throughout.
- They analysed Shakespeare's poetic methods confidently, exploring the significance of the actor metaphor, shifts in tone across the quatrains and the impact of the concluding couplet in shaping meaning.
- Candidates examined the structure of the sonnet closely, explaining how the progression of ideas and the relationship between the quatrains and couplet reinforce the speaker's emotional development.
- They analysed imagery and symbolism in detail, explaining how Shakespeare uses dramatic, theatrical and emotional imagery to present vulnerability, self-consciousness and the difficulties of expression.
- Candidates supported their discussion with well-selected references to other sonnets, particularly those from the Fair Youth sequence, demonstrating an appreciation of recurring themes, methods and relationships across the collection.
- They integrated contextual understanding effectively, exploring Renaissance literary culture, poetic conventions and attitudes towards patronage and performance where these enhanced their interpretation of the poem.
- Candidates occasionally strengthened their discussion through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints, using these to refine and extend their analysis.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused primarily on explaining the content of the sonnet rather than analysing Shakespeare's poetic methods.
- They interpreted the actor metaphor in a largely literal way without fully exploring its wider significance within the poem.
- Candidates identified features of the sonnet form but did not consistently explain how structure contributes to meaning or shapes readers' responses.
- They made only limited reference to other sonnets, restricting their appreciation of the poem's place within the wider sequence.
- Candidates referred to contextual ideas in broad or generalised terms without linking them closely to Shakespeare's presentation or poetic methods.

Question 6

from WALT WHITMAN: Leaves of Grass

(a)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates developed a comparative discussion across a range of poems, exploring Whitman's presentation of hope as a recurring concern throughout the collection.
- They supported their arguments with detailed references to poems such as *I Sing the Body Electric*, *I Hear America Singing* and *O Captain! My Captain!*, demonstrating how Whitman presents both optimism and disillusionment.
- Candidates analysed how Whitman presents hope in relation to America, recognising the significance of democracy, national identity and the country's future within the wider collection.
- They explored how poems presenting loss, suffering and disappointment provide a meaningful contrast to Whitman's more optimistic vision, demonstrating an appreciation of the complexity of his presentation.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding effectively, explaining how Whitman's transcendentalist beliefs, the American Civil War and his hopes for the nation inform the collection without allowing context to dominate their discussion.
- They analysed Whitman's poetic methods confidently, explaining how imagery, symbolism, free verse and narrative voice contribute to his presentation of hope and renewal.
- Candidates supported their discussion with relevant comparisons across the collection, constructing conceptual arguments rather than treating individual poems separately.

Limited responses

- Candidates discussed appropriate poems but relied largely on straightforward explanation of content rather than close analysis of Whitman's methods.
- They identified ideas of hope within individual poems without developing a comparative discussion across the wider collection.
- Candidates referred to contextual ideas in broad or generalised terms without explaining how they contribute to Whitman's presentation.
- They relied more heavily on narrative summary than analysis of language, imagery or poetic form.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored Whitman's presentation of grief with detailed analysis of the extract from *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, maintaining a clear focus on how the speaker's emotional experience develops throughout the extract.
- They analysed Whitman's use of narrative voice, imagery and symbolism, explaining how these methods convey loss, memory and emotional growth.
- Candidates explored the symbolic significance of the he-bird, with some perceptively linking the presentation of grief to wider interpretations of Whitman's identity and personal experience were supported by the text.
- They examined Whitman's presentation of emotion through vivid natural imagery and symbolism, recognising how the poem connects individual grief with broader ideas about love, loss and renewal.
- Candidates integrated contextual understanding effectively, referring to Whitman's transcendentalist beliefs, personal experiences and wider literary concerns where these illuminated their interpretation.
- They supported their arguments with relevant references to other poems in the collection, demonstrating an appreciation of Whitman's recurring concerns and poetic methods.
- Candidates occasionally strengthened their discussion through thoughtful engagement with wider interpretations while maintaining close attention to the language and effects of the poem.

Limited responses

- Candidates demonstrated sound understanding of the speaker's grief but focused more on explaining events than analysing Whitman's poetic methods.
- They made only simple or generalised references to Whitman's biography or personal experiences without linking these closely to the poem.
- Candidates relied on straightforward commentary on imagery without consistently explaining how it contributes to meaning or emotional effect.
- They made only limited reference to the wider collection, restricting their discussion of Whitman's recurring concerns and characteristic methods.
- There were insufficient lower-level responses across the reports to identify any broader recurring patterns.

Section B

Question 7

J M COETZEE: *Waiting for the Barbarians*

(a)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored the relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl with nuance, recognising the unequal power dynamic and questioning the limits of the Magistrate's liberal humanism.
- Candidates analysed the relationship within the context of empire and colonialism, considering how power, guilt and oppression shape the interactions between the characters.
- They discussed the symbolic significance of the Magistrate's washing of the girl's feet, with some linking the imagery to Christian ideas of redemption and sacrifice.
- They analysed language and symbolism in detail and supported their interpretations with critical perspectives, including postcolonial readings such as Edward Said's concept of otherness and Mark Sanders' view of the Magistrate's 'white saviour complex'.

- They embedded contextual understanding of apartheid and colonial oppression to explore the novel's wider concerns.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused on the unequal relationship between the Magistrate and the girl but supported their ideas with only broad or general reference to the text.
- They treated the relationship as either wholly positive or wholly negative without recognising its ambiguity.
- They referred generally to empire or colonisation but developed contextual ideas only briefly.
- They concentrated on the Magistrate's position of authority or the girl's identity as a 'barbarian' without exploring Coetzee's wider purposes.
- They demonstrated only a general awareness of postcolonial concerns.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates who responded analysed how the passage creates an atmosphere of unease by contrasting its calm surface with the violence that underpins imperial authority.
- They explored the Magistrate's self-delusion, sense of victimhood and moral uncertainty, linking these ideas to the novel's wider concerns with blindness, surveillance and authoritarian power.
- They connected the passage to Coetzee's critique of empire and the limitations of liberal humanism.
- They embedded contextual understanding and, in some responses, analysed the passage closely while linking it to the wider novel.

Limited responses

- Candidates relied mainly on narrative explanation and identified examples of unease without developing detailed analysis.
- Some treated the passage primarily as atmospheric description rather than exploring its symbolic significance.
- They analysed Coetzee's methods only briefly.
- They made few links between the passage and the wider novel or its critique of imperial power.

Question 8

LOUISE GLÜCK: The Wild Iris

(a)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored grief across the collection by selecting a range of poems and establishing a focused argument from the outset.
- They examined different forms of grief, including bereavement, loss of faith, ageing, failed relationships and transience.
- They analysed the recurring imagery of blooming and decay to explore cycles of suffering, renewal and mortality.
- They supported their ideas with close analysis of language and considered multiple interpretations of the poems.
- They embedded contextual understanding of Glück's personal experiences and her engagement with questions of faith and suffering.

Limited responses

- Candidates discussed grief in general terms without exploring its distinctive presentation across the collection.
- Some responses analysed language only briefly or presented ideas as a series of disconnected observations.
- Some referred generally to Glück's personal experiences without developing these ideas, such as her well-documented writer's block.
- They showed only limited awareness of the collection's engagement with theological questions in terms of power and impermanence.
- Occasionally candidates attributed experiences or sources of grief to Glück that were not supported by the poems.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates analysed in detail the presentation of the Creator figure in *Early Darkness*, exploring ideas of detachment, disappointment, anger and divine indifference.
- They compared the presentation of the Creator with other poems in the collection, including *The Wild Iris*, *Clear Morning*, *Vespers* and *Midsummer* with the best answers illustrating their answers with quotation from these other poems.
- They analysed the opening rebuke and recognised it as characteristic of Glück's presentation of the Creator throughout the collection.
- They embedded contextual discussion of Glück's questioning of traditional religious belief and her subversion of religious imagery.
- Many supported their interpretations with close language analysis and, in some cases, with relevant critical viewpoints.

Limited responses

- Candidates recognised the tone of the Creator but analysed the poem only briefly.
- They paraphrased quotations rather than exploring Glück's language in detail.
- They made only limited or imprecise reference to other poems in the collection.
- They interpreted the poem primarily as a straightforward religious text without recognising its complexity or subversion of accepted ideologies and beliefs.
- They sometimes struggled to identify the narrator of the poem.

Question 9

KATHERINE MANSFIELD: Selected Stories

- (a)** There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates analysed the passage as characteristic of Mansfield's presentation of gender, social expectations and emotional repression.
- They explored the relationship between Mrs Kember and Beryl, considering ideas of rebellion, confidence and female self-expression.
- They examined Mansfield's subtle narrative methods, including her characteristic 'small noticings', alongside careful analysis of dialogue and characterisation.
- They linked the extract to events elsewhere in *At the Bay* and to other stories, including *Prelude*, *Something Childish* and *Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding*.
- They embedded contextual understanding of Modernism, changing attitudes towards women and, in some responses, Freudian ideas about the human psyche.
- They supported their interpretations with feminist readings and relevant critical perspectives.

Limited responses

- Candidates concentrated mainly on the surface events of the passage without exploring Mansfield's wider concerns.
- Some made only brief reference to Mr Kember or considered him in isolation from the wider story.
- They analysed Mansfield's methods only generally and sometimes interpreted the passage simply as a scene about undressing.
- They referred only briefly to Mansfield's wider collection.
- They made some general observations about gender roles or Mansfield's sexuality without developing these ideas or providing support.

Question 10

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored Morrison's presentation of freedom through relationships between Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, Denver, *Beloved* and Halle.
- They examined how slavery shapes love, motherhood and family relationships throughout the novel.
- Some explored the imagery of the choke cherry tree scar and its representation of repression and the pain of losing freedom.
- They analysed Sethe's infanticide and its consequences, considering differing interpretations of freedom and choice alongside Morrison's wider concerns and characterisation.
- They explored Paul D's emotional journey from repression towards renewed capacity for love.
- They embedded contextual understanding of slavery, collective trauma and Morrison's dedication to the 'sixty million and more', with some reference to the historical case of Margaret Garner.

Limited responses

- Some candidates referred generally to slavery without developing its significance for Morrison's presentation of relationships or use of themes and imagery.
- They focused mainly on Sethe and *Beloved* without exploring a wider range of relationships.
- Some discussed freedom only in broad terms with limited analysis of Morrison's methods or use of examples from the text.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates analysed Morrison's presentation of Sethe's suffering through detailed language analysis, including the symbolism of the chokecherry tree.
- They explored the relationship between Amy Denver and Sethe, recognising the differences between indentured servitude and slavery.
- They embedded contextual understanding of slavery, including the Fugitive Slave Act, while supporting their interpretations with relevant critical perspectives.

Limited responses

- Candidates treated the passage mainly as a description of physical suffering rather than exploring its wider symbolic significance.
- They selected quotations with only brief explanation or reference to the question.
- Some responses referred only occasionally to the wider novel; often in broad terms.
- They did not always analyse the significance of the chokecherry tree in sufficient detail.

Question 11

GABRIEL OKARA: *Collected Poems*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored the presentation of renewal, hope and transition, analysing the tension between endings and new beginnings in *New Year's Eve Midnight*.
- They examined contrasts between nostalgia, disappointment and optimism throughout the poem, making some use of the lines, 'to all my hopes and mute yearnings of a year and ghosts hover round dream beyond dream'.
- They analysed significant imagery, including the symbolism of the river, and linked it thoughtfully to its wider use across the collection.
- They compared the poem with others such as *Piano and Drums*, *The Dreamer*, *A Boy's Dream*, *Call of the River Nun*, *Prayers and Rituals* and *The Fisherman's Invocation*.
- They embedded contextual understanding of postcolonial Nigeria and the tensions between hope and disillusionment.

Limited responses

- Candidates concentrated on isolated language features, such as enjambment, without developing convincing interpretations.
- They summarised the speaker's changing feelings rather than analysing the poem as a crafted literary text.
- They paid limited attention to significant details, including the third stanza and references such as *Nunc Dimittis* or 'heart-canopied paths'.
- They made little or no reference to poems elsewhere in the collection.
- They referred only generally to postcolonial context without considering finer details or specific facts.

Question 12

NATASHA TRETHEWEY: Native Guard

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored the significance of historical, domestic and symbolic settings across the collection.
- They analysed how Trethewey uses settings to explore memory, trauma, racial history and the recovery of forgotten voices.
- They supported their discussion with detailed reference to poems such as *Theories of Time and Space*, *Southern Gothic*, *Pilgrimage* and *Photograph: Ice Storm*.
- They embedded contextual understanding of the Civil War, racial inequality, family history and the significance of photography as a recurring motif.

Limited responses

- Candidates discussed settings in general terms without exploring their wider significance.
- They summarised individual poems with only occasional reference to language.
- They made general observations about Trethewey's experiences or racism without integrating these ideas into analysis.
- They recognised that settings often reflected conflict but developed this only briefly.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates analysed the extract as an exploration of remembrance, historical injustice and the recovery of forgotten voices.
- They examined imagery, structure and the diary-like form in detail, linking these methods to Trethewey's wider purposes.
- They embedded contextual understanding of the Civil War, the Native Guard and the historical erasure of Black soldiers.
- They compared the poem with others in the collection and explored recurring concerns with memory and representation.
- They supported their interpretations with close analysis and, in some responses, relevant critical viewpoints.
- They recognised the significance of the repeated reference to names 'decking the page of history' and connected this to the wider collection's concern with historical remembrance.

Limited responses

- Candidates treated the poem primarily as a historical narrative rather than as a literary text, missing opportunities for literary appreciation.
- They commented briefly on imagery or religious allusions without developing their significance.
- They recognised the diary-like structure but explored its effects only generally.
- Some referred only briefly to the wider collection.
- They narrated contextual material rather than integrating it into analysis.
- They did not fully explore the poem's engagement with remembrance, historical erasure and representation.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

What candidates did well

- They developed answers with strong, supported personal arguments, demonstrating engagement and insight.
- They kept the question in view, particularly on **(a)** responses.
- They demonstrated understanding of authorial intent and how this relates to effects and meaning.

What candidates needed to improve

- They should refer to specific details from texts, whether quotation or reference, to support points made.
- They should analyse aspects of form, structure and language as integral to arguments and relevant to genre, rather than as an 'add on'.
- They should demonstrate deeper and more relevant engagement with elements of context – literary, social, historical and cultural.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored how pride functions as both an obstacle and a catalyst in the development of Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship, showing how both characters must confront and overcome their own pride before reconciliation becomes possible.
- They analysed Darcy's pride as rooted in class, wealth, social status and self-respect, while recognising Elizabeth's pride in her intelligence, judgement and powers of discernment, avoiding a simplistic interpretation of Darcy representing pride and Elizabeth prejudice.
- They supported their arguments with detailed references to key episodes, including the Meryton assembly, Darcy's first proposal, his explanatory letter, Elizabeth's reflections following its receipt and Darcy's changed behaviour towards the end of the novel.
- They recognised the significance of Wickham's influence in reinforcing Elizabeth's prejudice and explained how Austen presents Darcy's letter as the turning point in Elizabeth's reassessment of both Darcy and herself.
- They explored how Austen presents personal growth through humility, recognising that both characters are required to acknowledge uncomfortable truths about themselves before they are able to achieve mutual understanding.
- They integrated contextual understanding of Regency society by explaining how class, gender, family reputation and expectations of marriage influence the characters' attitudes and decisions without allowing contextual discussion to dominate their argument.
- They analysed Austen's narrative methods confidently, discussing dialogue, free indirect discourse, the epistolary form, satire and the presentation of contrasting characters, particularly Lady Catherine de Bourgh, to explain how readers' responses develop alongside Elizabeth's.
- They selected well-chosen textual references and quotations to support close analysis of language, characterisation and narrative development throughout the novel.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused on straightforward character studies of Darcy or Elizabeth rather than exploring how pride shapes the development of their relationship across the novel.
- They simplified the novel by presenting Darcy as representing pride and Elizabeth as representing prejudice, with only limited appreciation of Austen's more nuanced characterisation.
- They relied on general discussion of class, marriage or women's position in society without linking these ideas closely to Austen's presentation of the characters.
- They described events rather than analysing Austen's language, narrative methods or structural choices, and often included only brief or general textual references.
- They sometimes treated the characters as though they were real people rather than considering Austen's purposes in shaping readers' responses.
- They occasionally demonstrated insecure contextual understanding by confusing Regency England with other historical periods or by relying on details from screen adaptations rather than Austen's novel.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates placed the extract securely within the wider novel, recognising the significance of Lydia's elopement for the Bennet family's reputation and for the marriage prospects of her sisters.
- They explored the contrasting reactions of Lydia, Elizabeth, Jane, Mr Bennet and Mrs Bennet, explaining how Austen uses differing family responses to reveal attitudes towards responsibility, reputation and marriage.
- They analysed Lydia's dialogue alongside the narrator's commentary to show her immaturity, self-absorption and complete lack of awareness of the consequences of her behaviour.
- They examined Austen's language closely, commenting on significant phrases such as '*Lydia was Lydia still*' and explaining how understatement, irony and narrative comment shape readers' responses.
- They discussed Lydia's behaviour within the wider context of the novel, recognising how Mr Bennet's detachment and Mrs Bennet's preoccupation with marriage contribute to her lack of judgement.
- They explored how family relationships throughout the novel illuminate the passage, making relevant connections with Elizabeth and Jane's relationship, Elizabeth's attempts to influence her father and the contrasting attitudes of different members of the Bennet family.
- They integrated contextual understanding by explaining the importance of female reputation, family honour, marriage and social expectations in Regency society, using context to illuminate Austen's presentation rather than as background information.
- They supported their discussion with detailed references to both the extract and the wider novel, analysing language, dialogue and narrative methods throughout.

Limited responses

- Candidates restricted their discussion largely to the extract and made only limited reference to the wider novel when considering the significance of Lydia's return.
- They focused primarily on describing Lydia's character or Mrs Bennet's determination to marry off her daughters without analysing Austen's methods.
- They accepted Lydia's cheerful attitude at face value or interpreted Elizabeth's response simply as jealousy rather than recognising her concern for her family's reputation.
- They relied on contextual discussion of marriage without connecting these ideas closely to Austen's presentation of family relationships in the passage.
- They paraphrased events or described the characters' actions rather than analysing language, tone or narrative technique.
- They sometimes overlooked the implications of Lydia's elopement for the Bennet family's social standing and the future prospects of her sisters.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored how symbolism contributes to Chaucer's presentation of power, authority and gender relationships, supporting their ideas with relevant references to both the Prologue and the Tale.
- They discussed how figures such as the Queen and the Old Woman symbolise female authority, wisdom and experience, and considered how these characters challenge patriarchal assumptions.
- They recognised that the knight's journey symbolises a movement from male dominance towards an understanding of female sovereignty, while acknowledging the complexity of Chaucer's presentation.
- They integrated contextual understanding of medieval attitudes towards marriage, gender and authority to illuminate Chaucer's concerns without allowing context to dominate the discussion.
- They supported their interpretations with relevant textual evidence and commented on Chaucer's narrative and poetic methods where appropriate.

Limited responses

- Candidates made broad assertions about symbolism without supporting their ideas with detailed textual evidence.
- They focused primarily on the content of the Tale rather than considering how Chaucer presents symbolic ideas through literary methods.
- They offered simplified interpretations of Chaucer's presentation of women, sometimes describing him as either wholly supportive of or opposed to feminist ideas without recognising the text's complexity.
- They made only general contextual references to medieval society, marriage or the position of women, with limited connection to the question or the text.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored how Chaucer presents the knight's apparent masculinity and authority before gradually undermining both through the events of the Tale.
- They discussed the significance of female sovereignty, recognising that the knight's education centres on learning to respect women's authority and choice.
- They analysed how Chaucer draws on and subverts the conventions of the Breton lay and the ideals of chivalry to shape readers' responses to the knight.
- They recognised the irony of the knight's eventual concern for his own autonomy after previously denying agency to the young woman he assaulted.
- They integrated contextual understanding of medieval gender roles and expectations to illuminate Chaucer's presentation of power and marriage.
- They supported their arguments with close analysis of language, narrative methods and the wider text rather than relying solely on the extract.

Limited responses

- Candidates concentrated on recounting the events of the extract rather than analysing Chaucer's presentation of the knight.
- They discussed the knight's behaviour in straightforward moral terms without considering Chaucer's narrative methods or literary techniques.
- They made only general or superficial contextual references and did not relate these closely to the argument.
- They offered limited discussion of the wider Tale or the significance of female sovereignty in shaping the knight's development.

Question 3

GEORGE ELIOT: *Middlemarch*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Jude the Obscure*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) **Comprehensive responses**
- Candidates recognised the passage as a moment of psychological and emotional crisis for Jude, exploring how Hardy presents the collapse of his ambitions and his growing sense of despair.
 - They analysed Hardy's use of religious imagery, particularly references to hell, the abyss and spiritual suffering, to illustrate Jude's inner conflict and loss of hope.
 - They explored the symbolic significance of the milestone, recognising how it represents both Jude's youthful aspirations and the painful realisation that his ambitions have remained unfulfilled.
 - They examined Hardy's presentation of Jude's relationship with nature, contrasting it with his increasingly isolated relationships with other people and explaining how imagery reinforces his emotional state.
 - They commented on the significance of places such as Marygreen and Christminster, recognising how Hardy uses these settings symbolically to contrast simplicity and belonging with aspiration and disappointment.
 - They analysed Hardy's characterisation through language and dialogue, recognising how Jude's education and ambitions are reflected in his speech and how these contrast with those of other characters.
 - They integrated contextual understanding of Victorian society by explaining how class, education and religious values restrict Jude's opportunities and contribute to his despair.
 - They supported their discussion with detailed analysis of Hardy's language, symbolism and narrative methods, while making relevant connections to the wider novel.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused primarily on recounting the events of the passage rather than analysing Hardy's presentation of Jude's emotional and psychological state.
- They discussed Jude's disappointment in general terms without exploring the significance of Hardy's imagery, symbolism or narrative methods.
- They referred to Victorian society in broad terms but did not explain how social class, educational barriers or religious expectations shape Jude's experience.
- They identified symbolic features, such as the milestone or religious imagery, but did not develop their significance within the novel as a whole.
- They made only limited reference to the wider novel and tended to rely on description rather than close textual analysis.

Question 5

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: selected sonnets

- (a) **Comprehensive responses**
- Candidates explored the relationship between the personal and the universal in Shakespeare's presentation of love, time and human experience, constructing a clear argument throughout their responses.
 - They selected a range of appropriate sonnets and made purposeful comparisons, using them to develop ideas rather than discussing each poem in isolation.
 - They supported their arguments with detailed textual references and well-chosen quotations, demonstrating confident knowledge of the prescribed selection.

- They analysed Shakespeare's poetic methods closely, discussing imagery, structure, form and language to explain how personal experiences are presented as universal concerns.
- They recognised how Shakespeare's presentation of love, ageing, mortality and human relationships reflects concerns that extend beyond the speaker's individual experience.
- They integrated contextual understanding by referring to Elizabethan ideas about friendship, patronage, love and Petrarchan conventions where these illuminated their interpretation.
- They occasionally supported their discussion with informed critical viewpoints, using these to develop rather than replace their own argument.

Limited responses

- Candidates discussed individual sonnets separately and made only limited comparisons across the selection.
- They focused on the content of the poems without fully exploring how Shakespeare's poetic methods contribute to meaning.
- They made only general references to the personal or universal aspects of the poems and did not develop a sustained argument across their chosen examples.
- They referred to contextual ideas in broad terms without explaining how they influenced Shakespeare's presentation.
- They supported their discussion with only brief textual references and relied more heavily on description than analysis.

(b)

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates developed their responses around clear conceptual arguments, exploring ideas such as the permanence of love, the effects of time and the certainty of the speaker's convictions rather than producing a line-by-line commentary.
- They analysed Shakespeare's poetic methods confidently, discussing the structure of the sonnet, the significance of the final couplet, the rhyme scheme and the use of declarative statements to reinforce certainty.
- They explored the effects of Shakespeare's imagery, including the nautical and astronomical imagery, explaining how these images establish love as constant and enduring despite the passage of time.
- These answers recognised Shakespeare's use of rhetorical strategies, including repetition and negation, and explained how these strengthen the speaker's argument.
- They referred confidently to other sonnets in the prescribed selection, using comparisons to deepen their discussion of Shakespeare's characteristic concerns and methods.
- They integrated contextual understanding by referring to Petrarchan traditions, Elizabethan attitudes towards love and marriage, and, where appropriate, established critical interpretations.
- They supported their discussion with detailed textual references and close analysis of language throughout the poem.

Limited responses

- Candidates paraphrased the content of the sonnet and relied on a line-by-line explanation rather than developing an argument in response to the question.
- They identified poetic features such as imagery or rhyme but did not explain how these contribute to Shakespeare's presentation.
- They made only limited or no reference to other sonnets in the prescribed selection.
- Typical responses referred to contextual ideas in general terms without linking them closely to Shakespeare's methods or concerns.
- They occasionally misunderstood individual words or images, which affected their interpretation of the poem.
- These answers included critical viewpoints that were descriptive or unsupported rather than using them to develop their own interpretation.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Leaves of Grass

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored symbolism confidently across a range of poems, demonstrating how Whitman uses images from the natural world to communicate his characteristic concerns with humanity, democracy, spirituality and perseverance.
- They selected appropriate poems to support a comparative discussion, using detailed textual references to develop a coherent argument rather than treating each poem separately.
- They analysed Whitman's poetic methods closely, commenting on symbolism, imagery, free verse and language to explain how abstract ideas are made accessible through concrete images.
- They integrated contextual understanding by referring to Whitman's transcendentalist beliefs and Romantic influences where these illuminated his presentation of nature, the individual and shared human experience.
- They occasionally strengthened their discussion by incorporating informed critical interpretations that were closely linked to the textual analysis.

Limited responses

- Candidates focused on describing the content of individual poems rather than exploring Whitman's use of symbolism across the collection.
- Some made only general references to nature or symbolism without explaining how these ideas contribute to Whitman's wider concerns.
- They referred to contextual information, particularly Whitman's biography, without linking it closely to the poems under discussion.
- Some typically relied on limited textual support and did not develop sustained comparisons across the prescribed selection.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored Whitman's presentation of war as an intensely personal and human experience, recognising that he celebrates compassion and shared humanity rather than military glory.
- They placed the extract securely within the wider collection, making relevant references to other poems to illustrate Whitman's changing attitudes towards war, suffering and national identity.
- They integrated contextual understanding by explaining how Whitman's experiences during the American Civil War influenced his presentation of the wounded and reinforced his belief in the spiritual connection between people.
- Some analysed Whitman's narrative voice, explaining how the persona guides both younger observers and readers towards a deeper understanding of the physical and emotional realities of war.
- There was examination of Whitman's use of free verse, repetition, vivid imagery and descriptive detail to convey the suffering of wounded soldiers and the compassion of the wound-dresser.
- They commented thoughtfully on the presentation of the wound-dresser, recognising how language, imagery and physical detail emphasise empathy, dignity and human connection.
- They explored significant details within the extract, including the introductory stanza, the presentation of the speaker and the possibility that references such as '*You up there, whoever you are*' invite both the reader and a wider spiritual interpretation.
- Candidates supported their discussion with detailed references to the wider selection, including poems that reinforce Whitman's characteristic concerns with war, democracy and shared humanity.

Limited responses

- Candidates approached the extract as a descriptive account of war and did not fully explore Whitman's wider concerns with compassion, suffering and human connection.
- They adopted a line-by-line or narrative approach, which sometimes limited opportunities for sustained analysis of Whitman's methods and ideas.
- They referred to Whitman's experiences during the Civil War in general terms without linking contextual discussion closely to the language or imagery of the poem.

- They commented on features such as free verse, repetition or imagery but did not always explain how these contribute to the poem's effects.
- They overlooked the significance of the introductory stanza or restricted their discussion to the extract without making relevant connections to the wider collection.
- They relied primarily on biographical information rather than developing detailed textual analysis.

Section B

Question 7

J M COETZEE: *Waiting for the Barbarians*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored how Coetzee presents imperialism as a destructive force sustained by fear, violence and self-deception, demonstrating how the Empire creates the threat of the 'barbarians' in order to justify its own actions.
- They analysed the contrasting characterisation of Colonel Joll and the Magistrate, recognising how Coetzee uses their differing attitudes and actions to explore power, morality and responsibility.
- They examined the presentation of the indigenous people, recognising the irony of their being labelled 'barbarians' and exploring how Coetzee challenges assumptions about civilisation and cultural superiority.
- They analysed Coetzee's use of imagery and symbolism, commenting on recurring motifs such as blindness, pain, torture and the body to explain how they reinforce the novel's concerns with dehumanisation and oppression.
- They explored the significance of language, recognising how Coetzee presents interrogation, propaganda and official discourse as instruments of imperial control.
- They integrated contextual understanding by relating the novel to postcolonial concerns, apartheid and South African politics where these illuminated Coetzee's presentation, while some also drew thoughtfully on critical perspectives such as Edward Said's ideas about 'the Other'.
- They supported their discussion with detailed textual references and close analysis of narrative methods, including the Magistrate's first-person narration and the moral ambiguity it creates.

Limited responses

- Candidates presented imperialism in straightforward or simplistic terms and did not fully explore the complexity of Coetzee's presentation.
- They focused on the actions of individual characters rather than analysing how Coetzee develops broader concerns about power, violence and colonialism.
- They referred to contextual ideas in general terms without linking them closely to the novel's language, symbolism or narrative methods.
- Some answers commented on literary features but did not consistently explain how these contribute to Coetzee's presentation.
- They made only limited reference to the wider novel and relied more heavily on description than analysis.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates placed the passage securely within the wider novel, recognising its significance in developing the Magistrate's changing understanding of himself, the barbarian girl and the nature of imperial power.
- They explored Coetzee's use of the hunting episode as an allegory for power, vulnerability and moral responsibility, recognising the symbolic significance of the waterbuck and the Magistrate's failure to shoot it.
- They analysed the Magistrate's first-person narration, explaining how his reflections, uncertainty and self-questioning reveal the moral ambiguities at the heart of the novel.
- They examined the Magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl, recognising how his reflections expose both his compassion and his continuing imperial assumptions.

- They explored Coetzee's use of symbolism and imagery, recognising that events increasingly acquire symbolic significance as the Magistrate becomes more aware of his own complicity within the Empire.
- They commented on the contrast between the detailed descriptions of the natural world and the Magistrate's growing introspection, explaining how this reflects his developing moral awareness.
- They integrated contextual understanding by relating the passage to the novel's wider concerns with colonial power, guilt, justice and the limits of liberal humanism.
- They supported their discussion with detailed references to the wider novel and analysed Coetzee's narrative methods rather than relying solely on the events of the passage.

Limited responses

- Candidates treated the passage primarily as a description of hunting or of the Magistrate's thoughts without exploring its wider symbolic significance.
- They recognised that the waterbuck or the failed shot carried symbolic meaning but did not fully develop their interpretation.
- They focused on the Magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl without considering how it contributes to the novel's broader concerns.
- They identified features such as first-person narration but did not explain how Coetzee's narrative methods shape readers' responses.
- They made only brief reference to the wider novel and relied more on description than close analysis.
- They sometimes adopted a prepared approach by identifying literary devices without relating them to the specific effects created in the passage.

Question 8

LOUISE GLÜCK: *The Wild Iris*

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates placed the poem securely within the wider collection, recognising it as characteristic of Glück's exploration of the relationship between humanity and the Creator, and making relevant references to other poems, particularly the *Vespers* sequence.
- They explored the speaker's frustration, resentment and dissatisfaction with the apparent absence or indifference of the Creator, while recognising the complexity of Glück's presentation rather than treating it as a straightforward expression of faith or disbelief.
- They analysed the contrast between the gardener's care and responsibility for the plants and the perceived indifference of the Creator, explaining how this develops the poem's exploration of suffering, responsibility and divine absence.
- They examined Glück's presentation of death, mortality and renewal, recognising how these concerns extend beyond the literal experience of gardening to explore wider philosophical and spiritual questions.
- They analysed Glück's poetic methods confidently, discussing free verse, natural speech rhythms, repetition, grammatical parallelism, imagery, sound patterns and the careful manipulation of language to create the speaker's distinctive voice and emotional intensity.
- They supported their arguments with close textual analysis, commenting on the effects of specific words, phrases and images rather than simply identifying literary techniques.
- They integrated contextual understanding by referring to Glück's recurring concerns with faith, religion, suffering and the human search for meaning where these illuminated the poems, while recognising her tendency to challenge conventional religious ideas.
- They supported their discussion with thoughtful references to the wider collection and, in some cases, used contrasting critical interpretations to develop and refine their own arguments.

Limited responses

- Some candidates treated the poem primarily as a literal complaint about gardening or focused on paraphrasing its content without exploring its wider symbolic or philosophical significance.
- They discussed Glück's concerns with faith, religion or personal experience in general terms without supporting these ideas with detailed analysis of the poem.
- They identified poetic features such as enjambment, caesura, simile, alliteration or free verse but did not explain how these contribute to the poem's effects.
- They focused on individual details within the poem while overlooking the significance of the closing accusation or the relationship between the speaker and the Creator.
- They made only limited or no reference to the wider collection and therefore did not fully demonstrate how the poem reflects Glück's characteristic concerns.
- They relied more heavily on explanation of meaning than on close analysis of language and poetic methods.

Question 9

KATHERINE MANSFIELD: Selected Stories

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) **Comprehensive responses**

- Candidates placed the passage securely within the wider story and collection, recognising it as characteristic of Mansfield's presentation of marriage, relationships and social expectations.
- They explored how Mansfield contrasts the sincerity of William's letter with the superficiality of Isabel's friends, analysing how dialogue and narrative methods expose the artificiality of their social world.
- They analysed Mansfield's use of free indirect discourse and shifting narrative perspective, explaining how readers are encouraged both to share Isabel's perceptions and to recognise what she herself does not yet fully understand.
- They examined the presentation of Isabel's changing emotional responses, recognising how the progression from performance to self-awareness shapes readers' understanding of her character and the significance of the ending.
- They explored Mansfield's use of dialogue, irony and delayed revelation, explaining how these methods heighten both the dramatic impact of the passage and its emotional complexity.
- They integrated contextual understanding by referring to contemporary attitudes towards marriage, gender roles, class and Bohemian society where these illuminated Mansfield's presentation, while avoiding allowing context to dominate the discussion.
- They supported their discussion with relevant references to the wider story and, where appropriate, other stories in the collection, demonstrating how Mansfield repeatedly explores the limitations and expectations placed upon women within marriage.
- They occasionally strengthened their interpretations by referring to critical ideas, including modernist narrative techniques, Mansfield's subversion of traditional storytelling and the use of epiphany, where these enhanced rather than replaced textual analysis.

Limited responses

- A number of candidates concentrated on describing the events of the extract or the behaviour of individual characters without analysing Mansfield's narrative methods.
- They treated the passage primarily as a comedy of manners and did not fully explore its wider implications for marriage, identity and social expectations.
- Some misunderstood the significance of William's letter or the references to divorce, leading to oversimplified interpretations of Isabel's emotional response.
- They focused largely on dialogue and characterisation without considering the effects of free indirect discourse, irony or narrative perspective.
- They made only limited reference to the wider story or collection and therefore did not fully address the significance of the passage.
- They relied more heavily on narrative summary than close analysis of Mansfield's language and literary methods.

Question 10

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates explored the ambiguity surrounding *Beloved*'s identity, recognising that Morrison deliberately presents her as both an individual character and a symbolic figure whose meaning remains open to interpretation.
- They considered a range of interpretations of *Beloved*, including her presentation as the reincarnation of Sethe's murdered daughter, the embodiment of the ghost at 124 Bluestone Road and a collective representation of the experiences and memories of enslaved people, particularly those associated with the Middle Passage.
- They analysed *Beloved*'s relationships with Sethe, Denver and Paul D, explaining how Morrison uses these relationships to reveal the continuing effects of trauma, guilt, memory and healing.
- They explored *Beloved*'s role as both victim and threat, recognising how Morrison creates sympathy for her while simultaneously presenting her increasingly destructive influence over those around her.
- They examined Morrison's methods of characterisation, analysing narrative perspective, shifts in voice, symbolism and the lyrical first-person monologues to explain how readers' responses to *Beloved* continually evolve.
- They commented on significant motifs and episodes, including the Middle Passage, recognising how these extend *Beloved*'s significance beyond the individual narrative to encompass the collective trauma of slavery.
- A number integrated contextual understanding by embedding discussion of slavery, historical trauma and African American experience within their analysis, rather than treating context as a separate topic.
- They occasionally strengthened their discussion through thoughtful use of critical interpretations and Morrison's own comments on the novel, using these to develop rather than replace their own analysis.
- Some recognised that *Beloved* ultimately functions as a catalyst for healing, forcing characters to confront painful memories before recovery becomes possible.

Limited responses

- Candidates treated *Beloved* primarily as a realistic character and did not fully explore the ambiguity surrounding her identity or symbolic significance.
- They relied on narrative summary, recounting events from the novel rather than analysing Morrison's methods of characterisation.
- Some discussed *Beloved*'s relationships with other characters without explaining how these contribute to the novel's wider concerns with memory, trauma and healing.
- Several referred generally to the context of slavery but did not connect it closely to Morrison's presentation or the novel's exploration of historical trauma.
- They described *Beloved*'s behaviour as though she were a real person rather than considering Morrison's construction of the character and its effects on readers.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates placed the passage securely within the wider novel, recognising its importance in developing Paul D's understanding of his past, his identity and the lasting psychological effects of slavery.
- A number of answers explored Paul D's reflections on masculinity, explaining how Morrison presents slavery as a force that distorts identity, relationships and self-worth, even under comparatively less brutal forms of enslavement.
- They analysed Paul D's growing recognition that his earlier assumptions about Garner and Schoolteacher were inadequate, recognising how this deepens Morrison's exploration of oppression and internalised trauma.
- Some examined Morrison's narrative methods closely, analysing free indirect discourse, fragmented syntax, rhetorical questions and shifting patterns of thought to show how the passage reflects Paul D's psychological state.
- They explored the significance of recurring motifs, including the 'tobacco tin', tree imagery and Paul's determination to 'love small', explaining how these develop Morrison's wider concerns with emotional survival, love and healing.

- Candidates recognised that the passage marks an important stage in Paul D's emotional development, linking his reflections to his later decision to reclaim agency and imagine the possibility of a future.
- They integrated contextual understanding of slavery throughout their discussion, explaining how Morrison explores its continuing psychological legacy rather than treating it simply as historical background.
- They supported their arguments with detailed references to the wider novel, including Paul D's relationship with Sethe and Morrison's wider exploration of identity, freedom, memory and recovery.
- They occasionally strengthened their discussion by integrating critical and psychological perspectives where these illuminated Morrison's methods and concerns.

Limited responses

- Some candidates described Paul D's thoughts and feelings without analysing how Morrison presents his psychological development through narrative methods.
- They discussed slavery in broad historical terms without explaining how the passage illustrates its lasting emotional and psychological consequences.
- They focused on Paul D's concerns about masculinity but did not connect these ideas to the wider novel or Morrison's exploration of identity and healing.
- Some referred to the wider novel only briefly and relied primarily on narrative summary rather than close textual analysis.
- A number of answers identified motifs such as the 'tobacco tin' or tree imagery but did not fully explain their significance within the novel as a whole.

Question 11

GABRIEL OKARA: Collected Poems

(a) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates selected a range of appropriate poems to explore Okara's characteristic concerns, developing a comparative argument rather than discussing each poem in isolation.
- They analysed how Okara presents corruption, political power and social injustice, explaining how these concerns recur across the collection.
- They supported their discussion with detailed textual references, exploring Okara's language, imagery and symbolism to show how seemingly straightforward language conveys complex ideas.
- They integrated contextual understanding of Nigeria's post-colonial experience where this illuminated their interpretation, recognising how historical and political circumstances shape the poems' concerns.
- They occasionally strengthened their discussion through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints that complemented their own analysis.

Limited responses

- Some candidates discussed individual poems separately without developing a sustained comparison across the collection.
- They identified Okara's concerns with corruption or post-colonial identity but did not support these ideas with detailed textual analysis.
- Some referred to contextual material in general terms without explaining how it contributes to the meaning or effects of the poems.
- They focused primarily on the content of the poems rather than analysing Okara's poetic methods.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates placed the extract securely within the wider sequence and collection, recognising how it develops Okara's exploration of cultural identity, renewal and the relationship between tradition and the future.
- They explored the symbolic significance of the Child-Front and the Back, explaining how these images represent the continuing relationship between inherited traditions and the emergence of a new post-colonial identity.
- They analysed the significance of the celebration and its conclusion, recognising how Okara presents cultural renewal as a process of reflection, continuity and transformation rather than simple change.
- Many examined the imagery and symbolism of the extract closely, commenting on images such as the harmattan, the Child-Front, dance, song and nourishment to explain how they convey both uncertainty and hope.
- They explored the significance of recurring patterns of rhythm, repetition and incantatory language, recognising how these reinforce the poem's engagement with cultural memory and communal experience.
- They integrated contextual understanding by explaining how Okara reflects the challenges of post-colonial Nigeria and the search for cultural identity following political and historical change.
- They supported their discussion with relevant references to the wider sequence and collection, demonstrating how the extract develops concerns that recur throughout Okara's poetry.
- They occasionally strengthened their interpretations through thoughtful engagement with critical viewpoints where these illuminated the poems' methods and concerns.

Limited responses

- Candidates found the symbolic significance of the Child-Front and the Back difficult to interpret, which limited their understanding of the extract as a whole.
- They worked through the poem sequentially, demonstrating sound understanding of individual images without fully explaining their wider symbolic significance.
- They identified features such as free verse, imagery or simple language but did not explain how these contribute to Okara's presentation.
- They referred to contextual ideas in general terms without linking them closely to the language, symbolism or wider concerns of the collection.
- They made only limited reference to the wider sequence or collection and therefore did not fully develop the significance of the extract.
- They relied more heavily on explanation and paraphrase than on close analysis of Okara's poetic methods.

Question 12

NATASHA TRETHEWEY: Native Guard

- (a)** There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates placed the poem securely within the wider collection, recognising its characteristic exploration of memory, family relationships, domestic violence and the reliability of evidence.
- They explored the significance of the photograph, recognising the tension between its apparent objectivity and the hidden truths that it conceals, and explaining how Trethewey challenges assumptions about photographs as reliable records of the past.
- They analysed the contrast between the beauty and tranquillity of the setting and the disturbing reality gradually revealed within the poem, explaining how this juxtaposition intensifies the emotional impact.
- They examined Trethewey's presentation of memory and trauma, recognising how the poem explores the relationship between personal experience, absence and the reconstruction of the past.
- They analysed Trethewey's poetic methods confidently, commenting on imagery, structure, juxtaposition, rhyme, enjambment, repetition and the use of questioning to explain how meaning is gradually revealed.

- They explored the significance of the repeated question 'Why?', recognising how it reinforces the speaker's continuing search for understanding and the unresolved nature of grief and domestic abuse.
- They integrated contextual understanding by referring to Trethewey's personal experiences and the domestic abuse and death of her mother where these illuminated the poem, while avoiding allowing biography to dominate the discussion.
- They supported their discussion with relevant references to other poems in the collection, particularly those concerned with memory, photographs, evidence and family history, demonstrating an appreciation of Trethewey's recurring concerns.
- They occasionally strengthened their interpretations through thoughtful engagement with critical or feminist perspectives where these enhanced their analysis of the poem.

Limited responses

- Candidates restricted their discussion largely to the given poem and made only limited reference to the wider collection.
- They treated the poem primarily as a description of a photograph and did not fully explore its wider concerns with memory, evidence, trauma and domestic violence.
- They relied heavily on biographical information without linking it closely to Trethewey's poetic methods or the effects created within the poem.
- They identified poetic features such as imagery, questioning or structure but did not consistently explain how these contribute to meaning.
- They referred to context in general terms or inaccurately, which limited the effectiveness of their discussion.
- They relied more heavily on narrative explanation than close analysis of language, structure and poetic methods.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Key messages

What candidates did well

- They developed answers with strong, supported personal arguments, demonstrating engagement and insight.
- They kept the question in view, particularly in (a) responses.
- They demonstrated understanding of authorial intent and how this relates to effects and meaning.

What candidates needed to improve

- They should refer to specific details from texts, whether quotation or reference, to support points made.
- They should analyse aspects of form, structure and language as integral to arguments and relevant to genre, rather than as an 'add on'.
- They should demonstrate deeper and more relevant engagement with elements of context – literary, social, historical and cultural.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: Pride and Prejudice

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) **Comprehensive responses**
- These answers placed the passage confidently within the context of the whole Prologue and Tale.
 - They offered detailed analysis of features such as the rhyming of 'wyf/lyf' and 'fair/repair', the ironic use of 'chese', and the perplexing conclusion that the wife 'obeyed him in every thyng', which appears to contradict much of what the Wife has preached.
 - They explored the genre of medieval romance and Chaucer's creation of an uncharacteristic knight who lacks chivalry and gentillesse.
 - They used critical views purposefully, including Shead's argument that the tale reflects the Wife's desires and fantasies, while candidates often argued that the final lines emphasise her sexual appetite and wish for men who resist female governance to be punished.

Limited responses

- These answers often had some difficulty controlling and organising material.
- They offered promising introductions, mentioning power, feminism, control and religion but subsequent discussions became confused about whether the knight or the old woman holds

power. Such responses tended to interweave this with the Wife's multiple marriages and her use of biblical authority without shaping a coherent argument.

- They made assertions that were sometimes overconfident or speculative, including readings of 'herte bathed in a bath of blisse' that were not securely supported by analysis.

Question 3

GEORGE ELIOT: *Middlemarch*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

Question 4

THOMAS HARDY: *Jude the Obscure*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

Question 5

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: selected sonnets

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) **Comprehensive responses**
 - They understood and commented on the sonnet's structure, including the use of quatrains.
 - They offered some analysis of paradox, such as 'enjoyed/despised', to show how emotions shift when desire is acted upon.
 - These answers discussed 'bait' as a comparison between desire and a trap, and 'past reason' as suggesting a lack of control.**Limited responses**
 - These answers mainly paraphrased the poem and misunderstood the final couplet, interpreting 'heaven' as a reference to God blaming the speaker for lust.
 - They offered basic analysis, broad reference to the wider text, unspecific contextual awareness and critical engagement.

Question 6

from WALT WHITMAN: *Leaves of Grass*

- (a) **Comprehensive responses**
 - These answers often established a clear argument from the introduction, sometimes drawing on Rossetti's view that Whitman is both 'an optimist and a realist', and used this to explore the effect of nature on humanity.
 - Candidates selected appropriate poems, including 'O Me! O Life!', 'A Noiseless Patient Spider' and 'I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing'.
 - They argued that 'trains of the faithless' acts as a metaphor for a complacent society rejecting the natural world, while 'vainly crave the light' was analysed through the elongated assonance of the 'a' sound to suggest a search for hope. These ideas were linked to the spider's persistence in seeking connection despite the loss of nature in 'trains and cities', and to the oak tree as a means through which Whitman reflects on solitude, desire and self-understanding.
 - These answers concluded that Whitman presents nature as a grounding force that helps develop meaning and purpose.**Limited responses**
 - These answers did not always complete consideration of three poems.

- Some candidates selected appropriate material and sometimes began with promising introductions, but these were not fulfilled in the body of the answer.
- They tended to focus on content or interpretation with little analysis or engagement with alternative readings.
- They included context, often in relation to Whitman's sexuality, but did not always integrate it effectively.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Focused on the presentation of men and women and considered Whitman's broader message or aim.
- Linked the poem to works such as 'I Hear America Singing' and sometimes discussed context intelligently, including gender roles of the period and the influence of Whitman's transcendentalist beliefs.
- Showed understanding of the poem, used quotations and paraphrase, and referred generally to the wider text, especially Whitman's opposition to slavery and belief in human equality.

Limited responses

- Offered simple ideas about the presentation of men and women, sometimes with generalised contextual comments such as 'women did the housework'.
- Used technical terms, such as assonance, without examples.
- Repeated broad claims about Whitman's use of 'positive traits' or discussed contrast and caesura without developing analysis.
- Wider reference was sometimes present, including to 'I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing', but was not always effectively linked to the question.

Section B

Question 7

J M COETZEE: Waiting for the Barbarians

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These answers placed the extract securely within the novel, for example before the Magistrate begins his journey of enlightenment by returning the barbarian girl to her people.
- They summarised the passage effectively as presenting the significance of desire through the Magistrate's nostalgia and search for identity and recognised its importance in highlighting his growing confusion about selfhood after the arrival and torture of the barbarian people.
- Candidates used phrases from the passage as links to the wider text and as insight into the Magistrate's character and situation. They also engaged with critical perspectives, such as Bonhoeffer's view that silence in the face of evil is itself evil, sometimes challenging this view.
- They drew conclusions about significance, including connections between the carnal desires of men and the mechanical desires of the Empire.

Limited responses

- Answers showed less secure knowledge of the whole text and sometimes confused the girl at the inn with the barbarian girl. This led to readings of the Magistrate's sexual desire as being directly concerned with the barbarian girl throughout.
- They made assertions that were not always supported by analysis about unreliable narration or the Magistrate being 'unaware of most things in the novel'.
- They attempted alternative interpretations which were basic, such as the suggestion that a feminist reading might see the Magistrate's help for the barbarian girl as motivated by sexual attraction.

Question 8

from LOUISE GLÜCK: The Wild Iris

(a) Comprehensive responses

- They focused on the relationship between the creator figure and humans.

- These answers explored human frustration at the creator's absence or apparent lack of care, as well as the creator figure's frustration with humanity. Poems discussed included 'Early Darkness', 'The Wild Iris' and the 'Vespers' poems.

Limited responses

- They had some difficulty identifying the creator figure in poems such as 'Early Darkness'.
- These answers sometimes showed uncertainty about Glück's use of narrators.

Question 9

from KATHERINE MANSFIELD: Selected Stories

(a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- Candidates offered precise analysis of the extract, including Herr Brechenmacher's dismissal of his wife.
- They linked the extract to other stories, including 'Marriage à la Mode', and explored Mansfield's presentation of gender roles.
- Particularly effective responses discussed the image of the bride as 'an iced cake all ready to be cut and served in neat little pieces to the bridegroom beside her', using it to analyse gender expectations and to foreshadow the nature of marriage.
- Candidates also made purposeful links to elsewhere in the story, such as Frau Brechenmacher's reactions to her husband later the same night.

Limited responses

- No limited responses were seen.

Question 10

TONI MORRISON: Beloved

(a) Comprehensive responses

- These responses avoided narrative retelling and focused on different forms of healing, including healing through acknowledging and remembering the past, through individuals, and through community.
- They discussed Sethe's scar as a permanent reminder of slavery and as symbolic of her rooted connection to the past. Some linked this to context through Davidson's advocacy of historical conscience.
- Candidates recognised that, although remembrance is important, Sethe's guilt, feeding on her parasitically in the form of Beloved, has to be exorcised. Similarly, Paul D's healing was explored through the unlocking of the traumas held in his 'tobacco tin'.
- Candidates also discussed Baby Suggs's advocacy of self-love and the community's role in helping to exorcise Sethe's guilt.

Limited responses

- They tended to focus on one aspect only, such as the importance of community, with little attention to symbolism.
- Some candidates appeared to treat Beloved simply as an actual ghost, while others concentrated on more hopeful episodes, such as Paul D, Sethe and Denver's visit to the carnival or Denver seeking help from the community.
- These responses showed some awareness of the context of slavery but did not develop it fully.

(b) Comprehensive responses

- These responses focused on Morrison's narrative method, especially Stamp Paid's monologue-like internal narration and his mishandling of the truth when conveying it to Paul D through the newspaper report rather than his own words.
- These responses noted the animal imagery in Stamp Paid's thoughts, such as the comparison of Sethe to a hawk with claws and a beak, and linked Paul D's disbelief to his later condemnation of Sethe's love as 'too thick' and as having 'two feet, not four'.

- They also connected the passage to Stamp Paid's loyalty and shared guilt in 'looking the other way', as well as to Paul D's 'tobacco tin' heart, where traumatic experiences are locked away to avoid being faced.

Limited responses

- Answers tended to rely on broad and repeated phrases such as 'inter-generational trauma' and 'the lasting legacy of slavery'.
- They did not always take opportunities for close analysis of the passage and sometimes described the account inaccurately as detached third-person narration.
- These responses usually summarised the extract with limited analysis or wider textual reference.

Question 11

from GABRIEL OKARA: Collected Poems

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.

Question 12

NATASHA TRETHEWEY: Native Guard

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment on performance.