

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.

For guidance on teaching and learning we provide resources for many of our syllabuses.

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
Teaching tools	Teaching Tools
Exemplar candidate responses	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Learner guide – A guide for students to help them understand what the course involves.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Community forums – Do you have a question or something to share? Our online forums are great way to keep up to date with your subject and the global Cambridge community.	Community forum on the school support hub
Access to scripts for this series.	Access to scripts service
Results analysis is available for some syllabuses.	Results analysis
Test maker is available for some subjects.	Test maker

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CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 9868/12
Reading

Key messages

Candidates performed well on **Questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 35** and **36**.

Candidates performed less well on **Questions 2, 5, 9, 11, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 28, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39** and **40**.

Candidates should pay close attention to every detail in each passage, especially when all the options appear to be supported by the text. They should also use their knowledge of grammar structures to eliminate distractors and select the most appropriate answer. Only options that are firmly rooted in the passage can be correct. Candidates should consider the surrounding context carefully, as it may either rule out or support a particular option.

Comments on specific questions

Question 2

- Option **D** was a common incorrect answer.
- Some candidates did not pay close enough attention to the structure 没有像……，而是……， which led them to choose **D**. Candidates will benefit from paying more attention to details, especially sentence structures such as this.

Question 5

- Option **D** was a common incorrect answer.
- Many candidates chose **D**, clearly overlooked the fact that **D** refers only to ‘不到一半的公司’以此为由，which cannot represent the main reason why most students were rejected. Once again, attention to detail is essential.

Question 9

- Option **D** was a common incorrect answer.
- Some candidates overlooked the fact that the 土屋 had not yet been built at the time. Therefore, it was premature to say that Mum kept it clean and tidy.

Question 11

- Options **D** and **E** were common incorrect answers.
- In the passage, the writer was comparing himself to Dad during childhood, so the option including 他忙乎的模样 is the only option that fits the context, whereas options **D** and **E** that introduce Mum or the rest of the family do not match the context. Candidates must make sure the option fits with the surrounding context.

Question 15

- Options **A**, **B**, and **C** are all common incorrect answers.
- Candidates are mistaking 低碳生活 for 再生能源, or perhaps they are not too sure what 再生能源 entails. A clearer understanding of the meaning of 再生能源 is necessary.



Question 18

- Option **A** was the most common incorrect answer.
- Candidates need to take notice of the difference between 环保理念 and 纷纷行动. Only after a change in mindset can actions follow. This distinction is subtle but crucial when choosing between **A** and **B**.

Question 19

- Option **B** was a common incorrect answer.
- The question asked for 谁目睹过 (who has seen). **B** 听到 (heard of) clearly is not the correct answer.

Question 20

- Options **B**, **C** and **D** were all common incorrect answers.
- Although 小事情 was mentioned in all options, only option **A** used the structure 不止于.....也是....., putting 小事情 side by side with other forms of environmental protection measures, emphasising equal importance.

Question 22

- Option **D** was a common incorrect answer.
- Although 不仅....也(亦)..... was a familiar structure to many candidates, some candidates overlooked this structure. Candidates must pay close attention to the use of grammar structures in this exercise.

Question 23

- Options **B**, **C** and **D** were all common incorrect answers.
- 伞 once opened, forms a round shape, and a round shape symbolises togetherness or re-union.

Question 28

- Options **B**, **C** and **D** were all common incorrect answers.
- The gap is after 的 which stipulates a noun is what we are looking for.
- 广泛 (widely) is an adverb, hence should be dismissed.
- 提高 (to improve/improvement) can also be dismissed as a verb or a noun because improvement can only be made with quality, level etc., not with 雨具 (rainwear).
- 传播 (to spread/spreading) can be dismissed as a verb or a noun because spreading usually follows a concept, a disease, culture etc., not a physical object such as 雨具 (rainwear).

Question 32

- Options **A**, **B** and **C** were all common incorrect answers.
- Option **A** 出路 suggests that the 油纸伞 is a lifeline for the business, which contradicts the previous idea in the text that business is not the most important factor; option **B** 花样 can imply tricks or gimmicks, it is not appropriate in this context. Option **C** 体裁 means 'genre' and is more often used to describe literary style, so once again, it is not appropriate here.

Question 33

- Option **D** was a common incorrect answer.
- Although it seems plausible, it is not mentioned in the text. An answer must be supported by evidence from the passage.

Question 34

- Options **C** and **D** are common incorrect answers.
- 本来.....但..... structure is used to show a change took place. Candidates are advised to pay close attention to grammar structures such as this and respond accordingly.

Question 37

- Option **D** was a common incorrect answer.
- The subject in the question is 小兰, whereas the subject in option **D** is her best friend. Candidates should be careful not to confuse who is carrying out the action.

Question 38

- Options **A**, **B** and **C** are all common incorrect answers.
- Some candidates overlooked 不是所有的 (not all) which eliminates option **A**; 有的 (some) eliminates option **C**; option **B** is not referenced in the passage, hence should be dismissed. Once again candidates must pay close attention to all details in the passage.

Question 39

- Option **C** was a common incorrect answer.
- Candidates should take note that the travel drama's entertainment value was in response to viewers' demand, as stated in the text; it was not the creator's intention as suggested in option **C**.

Question 40

- Options **A** and **C** were common incorrect answers.
- The text states that travel dramas 提升了文化旅游宣传推广的效果 (improve the effectiveness of travel promotion), without directly promoting travel itself, as option **A** suggests; option **C** talks about immersive experiences from an angle that is different from what is in the text.

CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 9868/22 Writing
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Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates produced focused, well-organised responses that showed clear comprehension of the tasks.
- Responses for **Question 1** were logically developed, with arguments supported by relevant and well-chosen examples, such as the link between languages and the appreciation of literature and history, communication with locals, and technological advances.
- Candidates enriched their writing with sensory details and personal insight, creating a bustling and immersive atmosphere in **Question 2**.
- Responses for **Question 3** told smooth, engaging stories with touching, entertaining or moving plots that held readers' interest.
- Candidates demonstrated effective use of idioms and authentic expressions to enhance meaning.
- Candidates showed an overall sound grasp of grammatical accuracy, particularly in the use of characters and punctuation.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates needed to avoid repetition and ensure each point added new, relevant information.
- Examples in responses needed to be more thorough or better connected in order to strengthen the overall reasoning.
- Language quality could have been improved by using more stylistically appropriate vocabulary and structures.
- Candidates needed to work on the use of '的', '地' and '得'.
- Responses needed to be better organised with suitable paragraphing.
- Candidates showed a developing awareness of punctuation, and their writing would be strengthened by more accurate and varied use of commas, semicolons and ellipses to ensure smoother flow.
- Candidates sometimes used pinyin when they were unsure of certain characters, which sometimes led to unclear or incomplete sentences.
- Clearer presentation would have made responses easier to read and assess.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Comprehensive responses

- Responses presented varied arguments, demonstrated open-minded thinking and provided confident, detailed analysis, with clear conclusions.
- Responses showed a clear understanding of how to structure an argumentative essay, stating their view clearly and supporting it with relevant examples.
- Candidates gave a wide range of ways to understand a country's culture beyond language learning, such as exploring history, observing customs, using multimedia, reading and translations, using translation tools, or visiting the country.
- Candidates who offered an alternative viewpoint explained their ideas from different angles and justified their stance well using a variety of cohesive devices.
- Responses shifted into general cultural discussion or lengthy explanations of language evolution, or focused purely on the importance of the language.

Limited responses

- Responses shifted into general cultural discussion or lengthy explanations of language evolution or purely focus on the importance of the language.
- Candidates presented an inconsistent stance, stating agreement at the start and then emphasising the opposing viewpoint without refuting it.
- Responses could be strengthened through a wider range of cohesive devices and fuller use of examples to support key points.
- Responses contained correctly written characters that were used in the wrong context. Using the correct characters would help ensure that meaning is conveyed clearly.

Section B

Question 2

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates described the charity fair in a lively and vivid way, successfully capturing the excitement and joyful atmosphere of the event.
- Responses included descriptions appealing to different senses, such as sight, sound and smell.
- Responses described each stall or area with clear structure and distinctive details.
- Responses showed confident command of language, including suitable four-character phrases, idioms and rhetorical devices.
- Responses created a strong sense of movement and visual imagery, allowing the event to unfold naturally for the reader.
- Candidates often ended with thoughtful reflections on the meaning of the charity fair, highlighting how it encourages generosity, community spirit and social responsibility.

Limited responses

- Responses were largely focused on narrative elements and personal feelings. A stronger focus on descriptive conventions would help refine the overall response.
- Candidates showed an emerging ability to describe the charity fair, and many could further enhance their work by allocating more space to the main scene rather than to events before or after the fair.
- Candidates demonstrated a basic awareness of sensory description, and their writing would become even more vivid with fuller development of these sensory details.
- Candidates provided initial accounts of the charity fair, and their responses would be strengthened by adding specific details such as stall appearance and interactions between sellers and buyers.
- Candidates showed a developing control of descriptive techniques, and greater use of precise and expressive vocabulary would further improve clarity and impact.

Question 3

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates wrote imaginative and exciting stories that kept readers interested, especially when they used suspense, tension or surprising twists to move the story forward.
- Candidates developed characters and settings in a steady, engaging way, helping readers understand the relationships and the importance of the events described.
- Candidates created meaningful climaxes by focusing on specific, well-chosen moments, which made the emotional impact feel natural and convincing.
- Responses covered a wide range of themes, such as family, friendship, regret or appreciation, and expressed these feelings clearly through relevant examples.
- Candidates showed effective paragraphing, following the sequence of time and events, and their varied vocabulary and sentence structures made the narratives fluent and engaging.

Limited responses

- Candidates showed enthusiasm for describing settings and objects, especially the gift. With more focus on the storyline, they would be able to balance description with an explanation of why the gift led the narrator to think about the past.
- Responses were more like diary-style accounts and did not build a clear sequence of events or a climax.

- Candidates explored ideas freely and tried different ways of organising their writing. With more attention to linking events and returning to the main idea of the 'gift,' their narratives would become clearer and more focused.
- Responses needed to begin with the quotation from the question.

CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 9868/32
Literature

Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates followed the rubric successfully. Most answered one question from **Section A** and one question from **Section B** and clearly labelled their responses.
- Candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of the prescribed Chinese literary texts, including key characters, major events, central themes and significant relationships.
- Many candidates responded appropriately to the demands of the questions and showed awareness that literary essays require analytical discussion rather than simple retelling of the narrative.
- Candidates used the stimulus passages effectively, identifying important ideas and concerns in the extracts and linking them to the wider meanings of the text.
- Candidates selected relevant textual material to support their arguments. Responses incorporated short, well-chosen quotations and explained their significance clearly.
- Candidates demonstrated an understanding of literary techniques, including imagery, symbolism, characterisation, narrative perspective, setting and descriptive language. They connected these features to the writer's purpose.
- A number of candidates moved beyond a literal reading of the texts and drew on relevant social, historical, political and cultural contexts to enrich their interpretations.
- Responses were generally well organised, with clear introductions, logically developed paragraphs and effective conclusions.
- Many responses maintained a clear line of argument and offered thoughtful personal interpretations supported by detailed textual knowledge.
- Candidates demonstrated sound examination technique by planning their responses, keeping their discussion focused and managing their time effectively.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates would benefit from reading questions carefully to ensure that all aspects of the task are addressed fully and that the focus of the response remains closely aligned with the wording of the question.
- In passage-based questions, responses could be strengthened by moving beyond the extract to explore how the issues raised contribute to the meaning and significance of the text as a whole.
- Candidates are encouraged to place greater emphasis on analysis and interpretation. Knowledge of the narrative is important, and candidates could use textual detail more effectively to explore themes, ideas and authorial intentions.
- Responses would be enhanced by selecting textual evidence with greater precision and integrating short quotations smoothly into analytical discussion.
- Opportunities remain for candidates to develop closer analysis of literary techniques. Focusing on the effects of particular words, images, symbols and structural choices can help demonstrate a deeper understanding of how meaning is created.
- Candidates could make even more effective use of contextual knowledge by linking social, historical, political and cultural factors directly to their interpretation of characters, themes and literary methods.
- Some responses would benefit from maintaining a sharper focus on the specific character, theme or issue identified in the question throughout the essay.
- Candidates should continue to develop confidence in their knowledge of the prescribed texts so that textual references remain accurate and support detailed discussion.
- Thoughtful evaluation and personal engagement can deepen literary discussion and support a more developed interpretation of the text.
- Careful planning before writing can help candidates organise their ideas more effectively, maintain a clear line of argument and achieve balanced coverage of the question.

- Candidates should continue to manage their time carefully so that both responses are developed fully and supported by sufficient textual evidence.
- More developed responses often provide greater opportunities to demonstrate detailed textual knowledge, analytical insight and literary understanding.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Comprehensive responses

- Comprehensive responses focused on analysing how natural imagery conveys the poet's emotions rather than describing the poem's content.
- Candidates selected relevant examples of natural imagery and explained how these images create mood and reflect feelings of longing, love or nostalgia.
- Responses demonstrated a secure understanding of the relationship between scenery and emotion. Some responses explored how the image of the red lotus as 'red flames' contrasts with the cool, rainy setting and intensifies the speaker's feelings.
- Candidates supported their discussion with well-chosen quotations and close analysis of imagery, sound and atmosphere, including the effects of the falling cicada song and rising frog croak.
- Responses that drew connections with other poems by Yu Guang Zhong explored how natural imagery is used to express personal emotion across his work.
- Responses made effective use of literary terminology, including imagery, metaphor, contrast, mood and the fusion of emotion and scenery.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by maintaining a clearer focus on the role of natural imagery throughout the discussion.
- Candidates would benefit from moving beyond description of scenery and exploring how natural images contribute to the poet's emotional expression.
- Some responses identified relevant examples of imagery, and further development of the connection between imagery and feeling would have supported more detailed analysis.
- Opportunities remained for candidates to examine the effects of specific images and literary techniques more closely rather than relying on paraphrase.
- Responses would be enhanced by more precise textual references to support interpretation.
- Candidates could explore the poem's emotional tone in more detail and consider how the poet combines landscape and emotion to create meaning.

Question 2

Comprehensive responses

- Responses analysed the social changes presented before and after Liberation and explored how these changes are reflected through characters, events and attitudes in the play.
- Candidates supported their discussion with relevant and accurate textual references. They used concise examples to illustrate social and ideological change, including dissatisfaction with old customs, recognition that times had changed, increasing social equality and the idea of the poor gaining a new status in society.
- Responses addressed both the extract and the play as a whole, demonstrating secure knowledge of characters and events from across *Longxugou*.
- Candidates explored changing attitudes towards women's roles, marriage, class equality, education, government and a sense of social responsibility, linking these developments to characters such as Er Chun, Ding Si, Cheng Feng Zi and Gouzi.
- Some responses recognised that the dialogue between Wang Da Ma and Er Chun reveals generational change, while the repair of the ditch symbolises wider social renewal and changing values.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by drawing on a wider range of examples from across the play rather than relying mainly on material from the extract.

- Opportunities remained to move beyond plot summary and examine how changes in attitudes and values are presented through characters and events.
- Some responses focused primarily on changes in lifestyle or behaviour. Further exploration of changes in ideas and beliefs would have supported a deeper discussion of the question.
- Candidates could develop a broader consideration of the play by including a wider range of characters and events alongside discussion of Wang Da Ma and Wang Er Chun.
- Responses would be enhanced by exploring the wider significance of key events, such as the repair of the ditch, and considering how these moments reflect social reform and changing values.

Question 3

Comprehensive responses

- Responses presented a clear argument and developed it through well-structured paragraphs, maintaining a consistent focus on the causes and significance of Sha Fei's loneliness.
- Candidates analysed loneliness from multiple perspectives, including personal temperament, illness, friendships, romantic relationships and intellectual aspirations, demonstrating a secure understanding of the character and the text as a whole.
- Responses used carefully selected textual references, such as 'to die silently on the mountain' and 'never shed tears for me' and integrated them effectively into discussion of character and emotion.
- Candidates explored Sha Fei's emotional isolation beyond her relationships, considering her desire for understanding, her disillusionment with love and the tensions between personal ideals and reality.
- Some responses linked Sha Fei's experiences to the wider historical context and examined how her loneliness reflects the challenges faced by educated women influenced by the May Fourth Movement.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by exploring a wider range of factors contributing to Sha Fei's loneliness rather than focusing mainly on individual romantic relationships.
- Candidates would benefit from considering how friendships, illness, intellectual aspirations and personal values contribute to the character's sense of isolation.
- Opportunities remained to connect discussion of Sha Fei's experiences more closely to the wider historical and social context of the text.
- Some responses included relevant textual references and further analysis of these quotations would have supported a deeper exploration of character and theme.
- Responses would be enhanced by moving beyond narrative summary and examining how the text presents loneliness through character development, relationships and context.

Section B

Question 4

Comprehensive responses

- Responses explored how the city provides young people with a sense of belonging and supported their ideas with relevant examples from across the text.
- Candidates considered a range of reasons for this sense of belonging, including connections to home, family, work, education and opportunities for the future.
- Responses examined how participation in community life and urban development allows young people to form a shared identity and stronger connection with the city.
- Candidates demonstrated an understanding of the city's significance as a place where young people live, work, contribute and develop aspirations for the future.
- Some responses explored the emotional attachment of the younger generation to the city and considered how this attachment reflects broader social and historical changes.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by maintaining a closer focus on the sense of belonging experienced by young people throughout the discussion.
- Candidates would benefit from drawing on a wider range of characters, events and episodes from across the text to support their interpretation.
- Opportunities remained to move beyond description of urban development and explore how these developments influence identity, attachment and community.
- Responses would be enhanced by considering the wider historical and thematic context, including changing views of identity and belonging across different generations.

Question 5

Comprehensive responses

- Responses discussed the educational issues presented in the text and supported their ideas with relevant examples from across the novel.
- Candidates explored educational issues from a range of perspectives, including the limitations of rote learning, the pressure created by the examination system and the gap between classroom learning and real-life experience.
- Responses used A Fa's experiences effectively to illustrate how heavy workloads, limited free time and academic pressures affect students' daily lives and wellbeing.
- Candidates examined the physical and emotional impact of educational expectations and considered how these experiences reflect broader concerns about the education system.
- Some responses developed a balanced discussion by linking individual experiences to wider social issues and demonstrating a secure understanding of the text.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by moving beyond individual examples and exploring the wider educational issues raised by the text.
- Candidates would benefit from developing discussion of A Fa's experiences in greater depth and considering what these experiences reveal about the education system as a whole.
- Opportunities remained to analyse the significance of textual examples rather than using them primarily as evidence of events.
- Some responses drew on relevant personal observations, and closer engagement with the details of the text would have supported more focused textual analysis.

Question 6

Comprehensive responses

- Responses presented a balanced discussion of the causes of conflict between the two generations and supported ideas with relevant examples from across the text.
- Candidates explored differences in values, expectations and ways of thinking, recognising that the conflict reflects broader generational tensions rather than individual disagreements alone.
- Responses examined how the parents' attitudes are shaped by their social and historical experiences, while An Ran and An Jing represent a younger generation with different perspectives and aspirations.
- Candidates analysed issues such as family responsibilities, personal freedom, relationships and self-expression, linking these to wider themes in the novel.
- Some responses explored how An Ran's idealism contrasts with the more pragmatic outlook of the older generation and connected this contrast to broader social change.
- Responses used well-selected examples to support discussion and demonstrated a secure understanding of the novel's themes and characters.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by exploring the underlying causes of conflict rather than focusing primarily on arguments and disagreements.
- Candidates would benefit from examining differences in values and beliefs between the two generations in greater depth.
- Opportunities remained to connect family tensions more closely to the wider social and thematic concerns of the novel.
- Some responses included relevant examples from the text, and further analysis of their significance would have supported a more developed interpretation.
- Responses would be enhanced by maintaining a clearer focus on intergenerational conflict rather than discussing other relationships in the novel.

Question 7

Comprehensive responses

- Responses demonstrated a secure understanding of An Ran's character and supported discussion with relevant examples from across the novella.
- Candidates explored both sincerity and courage, examining An Ran's willingness to express her true views, reflect on her own behaviour, value friendships and appreciate the qualities of others.

- Responses analysed how An Ran demonstrates courage by challenging authority, resisting pressure to conform and remaining true to her beliefs in situations such as the red shirt incident and the poetry competition.
- Candidates considered how the writer presents these qualities through relationships with family members, teachers, classmates and An Jing, revealing different aspects of An Ran's character.
- Some responses recognised that An Ran's courage is moral and emotional as well as practical and linked her character to wider themes of individuality, integrity and personal growth.
- Responses demonstrated detailed knowledge of the text and showed how sincerity and courage are presented as positive qualities within the social environment of the novella.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by drawing on a wider range of examples from across the text rather than focusing mainly on one or two incidents.
- Candidates would benefit from giving balanced attention to both sincerity and courage throughout the discussion.
- Opportunities remained to explore how the writer presents these qualities through character relationships, contrasts and key events.
- Some responses included relevant examples and further analysis of their significance would have supported a more developed interpretation.
- Responses would be enhanced by examining the ideas and values behind An Ran's actions rather than focusing primarily on moments of disagreement or conflict.
- Candidates could develop a fuller understanding of the character by considering how sincerity and courage contribute to the novella's wider themes and messages.

Question 8

Comprehensive responses

- Responses demonstrated a secure understanding of the journey to Sanlū University and used it as a starting point for exploring wider social issues presented in the novel.
- Candidates examined how the difficulties encountered during the journey reflect the effects of war, shortages of resources, social disorder and the breakdown of everyday life.
- Responses explored examples of selfishness, opportunism and moral decline among different groups of people, linking individual behaviour to broader conditions in wartime society.
- Candidates recognised that the journey reveals not only material hardship but also the weaknesses and limitations of the intellectuals themselves, including their lack of idealism, responsibility or moral strength.
- Some responses analysed how the author uses satire to expose social problems and demonstrated an understanding of how individual experiences are connected to wider criticism of society.
- Responses supported discussion with relevant textual examples and maintained a clear focus on the social significance of the journey.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by moving beyond description of the journey and exploring more fully what the events reveal about society.
- Candidates would benefit from linking examples of hardship more directly to wider issues such as war, social instability, resource shortages and changing moral values.
- Opportunities remained to consider how individual characters and incidents represent broader social concerns rather than discussing them in isolation.
- Some responses included relevant examples of difficult travel conditions, and further analysis of their significance would have supported a more developed discussion of the question.
- Responses would be enhanced by maintaining a closer focus on the social issues reflected through the journey rather than treating it primarily as a sequence of events.

Question 9

Comprehensive responses

- Responses demonstrated a secure understanding of the relationship between Zhao Xin Mei and Fang Hong Jian and traced its development across the novel.
- Candidates explored how the relationship develops from romantic rivalry over Su Wen Wan into friendship, mutual understanding and support through shared experiences.

- Responses examined the reasons behind this change, considering the influence of common experiences, personal growth and the challenges faced by the two men in an unsettled society.
- Candidates analysed the different personalities of Zhao Xin Mei and Fang Hong Jian, showing how their contrasting qualities help to reveal each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- Some responses explored how their relationship reflects wider themes in the novel, including disillusionment, compromise, social pressure and the experiences of intellectuals.
- Responses supported discussion with relevant examples from different stages of the novel and maintained a clear focus on the changing nature of the relationship.

Limited responses

- Responses could be strengthened by considering the relationship across the whole novel rather than focusing mainly on the early rivalry involving Su Wen Wan.
- Candidates would benefit from analysing the reasons for changes in the relationship rather than describing events or stages in its development.
- Opportunities remained to explore how the contrasting personalities of Zhao Xin Mei and Fang Hong Jian contribute to their friendship and shape their interactions.
- Some responses included relevant examples, and further analysis of their significance would have supported a more developed discussion of the question.
- Responses would be enhanced by maintaining a closer focus on the relationship itself rather than discussing the two characters separately or using one primarily as a contrast to the other.
- Candidates could develop a fuller interpretation by considering both moments of tension and moments of friendship, trust and shared experience throughout the novel.