

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH) LEVEL 1/LEVEL 2

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**Paper 0476/01**  
**Paper 1: Set Texts**

## Key messages

The following are necessary for success on this component:

- Showing evidence of a detailed knowledge of the whole text.
- Ensuring that the answer is relevant to the question.
- Maintaining a focus on the extract in the passage-based questions, considering particularly the language of the extract.
- Using a well-structured and developed argument.
- Supporting in detail, by means of well-chosen quotation or close echoes of the text.

## General comments

Most candidates appeared to have been well prepared for the examination; knowledge of the texts was generally good, and most knew how to structure their answers and showed evidence of planning. Most candidates made appropriate question choices, though weaker candidates sometimes chose empathic questions that enabled them to show some knowledge and understanding, but not in a reasonably appropriate voice. When such candidates attempted a passage-based or essay question, they often fared better than in the empathic questions.

As in June, however, it was clear that some Centres had entered their candidates for the examination without any preparation and there were a significant number of blank scripts or scripts with answers of perhaps two or three lines, which showed no knowledge or understanding of the texts.

There were relatively few examples of rubric infringements and of the 'final answer syndrome', where it is obvious that time has run out and the final answer is much briefer and sketchier than the previous ones. In a few cases, candidates had written very lengthy plans, crossed them out and written almost identical final drafts. This is a waste of time in examination conditions and should be discouraged.

Overall there seemed to be a general understanding of meaning / ideas in the texts and a largely conscientious response to questions (even those responding in simple narrative); but only the most successful answers engaged with the language on a deeper level.

In general candidates used their knowledge of the texts judiciously, constructed convincing arguments, and illustrated them with apt quotations. The most successful went on to explore in detail the effects of language and imagery, and showed awareness of the authors' intentions. The best answers showed a close engagement with the texts and a real enjoyment of the books studied.

The point must be made that the words 'How' and 'In what ways' and 'explore' are specific indicators to candidates that more than narrative is required; that the main consideration is writer's method, and that the reinforcing words like 'memorably', 'vividly', 'strikingly' are also directed to consideration of the use of language. It is strongly recommended that teachers should make learners aware of the importance of these terms, and of the necessity to use them as the focus of their responses. Similarly the word 'significant' is one that candidates need to be familiar with, since it directs them to consideration of the function of a particular aspect of the text.

Lack of consideration of these words was particularly evident in some of the poetry answers. Whereas some candidates responded with enthusiasm and critical awareness to the poems selected, others seemed

somewhat at sea and had difficulty in articulating anything beyond rough 'translations' or paraphrases of the poems. Sometimes they showed an awareness that they needed to explore the effect of language, but they did this by means of general personal responses such as describing how watching a sunrise in the early morning made them feel, rather than by examining the way in which Wordsworth conveys his feelings through words and imagery in *on Westminster Bridge*. It was good to see that there was less 'feature spotting' and no particularly 'fashionable' critical term this session, but there was a continuing tendency for the words 'positive' and 'negative' to be used instead of words which identify effects precisely.

Similarly there was a lack of really close reading of the extracts in some weaker answers to the \* questions. Every session the Principal Examiner's Report comments on the necessity for candidates to give more than narrative run-throughs and to look analytically at the language used. Furthermore, the whole of the extract is important; it has been selected to offer candidates the optimum opportunity for the discussion. Though there is not usually a specific requirement to contextualise the passage, it is more often than not useful to give at least some indication of the circumstances surrounding it, and it is easy to detect a lack of knowledge of the whole text.

Empathic questions generated some of the higher-scoring responses, with several assuming a credible voice; that said, some responses in this category produced narrowly focused answers, often ignoring broader aspects of the character or their significance in the play / novel. Most candidates knew the importance of writing 'in character' and trying to capture particular mannerisms and turns of phrase. It was, of course, essential to identify precisely the moment specified in the question.

In the past, it has been commented that the sense of drama is underdeveloped in responses to the plays on the papers and this continues to be a concern. For example, the best answers to questions on *Julius Caesar* showed an understanding of the visual qualities of the scene, and of the dynamics between the characters, as well as responding to changes in tone and mood. Weaker answers merely gave run-throughs of the passages.

Though it is appreciated that not all candidates will be able to see plays in production, the acting of scenes in class is an important tool in developing this sense. Too often candidates refer to plays as 'books', revealing that they see them only as words on a page.

There was some poorly presented work this session, thankfully a minority, with handwriting that was very difficult to decipher. Candidates do themselves a disservice if they do not take pride in their work, and chaotic presentation often reflects a lack of coherence in the answer.

There follow notes on all the texts indicating some of the ideas that candidates might have used in their answers. They are not intended to be seen as templates for perfect answers; any relevant ideas that were supported from the text were credited. There are also indications of what candidates did particularly well and areas in which they were not quite so successful.

## **SECTION A: DRAMA**

### ***Julius Caesar***

#### **Question 1**

The key words in the question were 'a dramatic and significant moment in the play', so more than a mere run-through of the extract was required. Good answers commented on the fickleness and potential violence of the plebeians, who are easily won over by Brutus, on Brutus's self-justification and the manner of it, and on the entry of Antony and the implications of leaving Antony alone with the plebeians. The best answers explored Brutus's oratory in detail, showing what it reveals of his character. Candidates often gave a narrative response, with considerable re-telling of events and explaining of meaning, and little awareness of context. Many candidates understood the skills of Brutus as an orator and explored his language with confidence. They also understood the political sensitivity of the situation and the fickleness of the crowd. Many also made the point that allowing Mark Anthony to speak was a mistake, and that that this made the extract even more significant since it was the beginning of Brutus's downfall. There was some confusion about whether or not Brutus had deliberately killed Caesar for his own ends or whether he had been tricked. Some candidates suggested that Brutus was deliberately lying to the crowd as he had killed Caesar in order to gain the crown himself.

## Question 2

'To what extent' was a key consideration in examining sympathy for Cassius, and candidates tended to begin by feeling contempt for him but came to feel more sympathy as the play progresses. Their perceptions of his character covered his jealousy of Caesar, his flattery of Brutus, without whom he is unable to raise support, and on the other hand his success as a soldier, generally respected except by Caesar and Antony. Issues under consideration were his part in the conspiracy, his treatment by Brutus before Philippi, and the manner of his death. Some candidates did not engage with Cassius on a human level and merely saw him as a pantomime villain. Many acknowledged that his character had changed and that there was more sympathy with him towards the end of the play, but they were unable to truly communicate how and why.

## Question 3

There were some very competent assumptions of the character of Brutus, showing his appreciation of the nobility and courage of his wife, and of the strength of their bond. They tended to focus on his sense of honour and his fear of the outcome of the conspiracy. Many smoothly integrated echoes of the text into their answers. Weaker answers tended to pour out plenty of emotion but did not refer in detail to what has happened in the meeting with the conspirators.

## *The Tempest*

## Question 4

The extract (Act III Scene ii) develops the blossoming attempt by Caliban to persuade his fellow-drinkers to plot against and overthrow Prospero, and is comic in the way in which the drunken Stephano and Trinculo attempt to be effective. Caliban's descriptions of Prospero and Miranda are compelling; he obviously has some understanding of the sources of Prospero's power. The 'isle is full of noises' speech reveals his character as more complex than it might have at first appeared. The way that the conspirators are led on by Ariel's music contributes to the dramatic power of the scene, as Ariel is going to tell Prospero of their plans. The key words were 'dramatic' and 'amusing', and successful answers focused sharply on them and developed arguments. Many candidates understood the humour in it; that there was comic relief after a previously tense scene, and that Caliban was comic and foolish. Unfortunately they did not engage with the language to any great extent, and there was little reference to the brutality of Caliban's threats.

## Question 5

Central points were Caliban's truculent and resentful reaction to Prospero's physical punishments, and the fact that he regards himself as having been robbed of his birthright by Prospero. Candidates might have referred to his attempts to involve others in his plots against Prospero's power. In fact there were some excellent answers which confidently debated the previously kind treatment of Prospero and his cruel treatment of Caliban. Many saw the injustice of what had happened and discussed how Shakespeare created this sense of injustice. Those who referred closely and in detail to Caliban's language achieved high marks, though some weaker candidate referred only to the extract for **Question 7** and thus limited their achievement significantly. A number of candidates wrote about *their feelings about Caliban*, rather than Caliban's feelings. Many simply described Caliban's feelings or responded to the character in a very basic way.

## Question 6

Miranda has come a long way emotionally in a very short time. She has met and fallen in love with the third man she has ever seen. She has learned a great deal about her background and early history in her conversation with her father. Her love for Ferdinand seems all consuming as she declares she would also happily be his servant. She is likely to be glad and relieved that her prospective father-in-law is as happy to bless the union as her own father, and she is likely to show some bewilderment at the pace of events. Many candidates embarked on this task enthusiastically but success was dependent on achieving the compassionate serenity of her voice, often through the integration of some of her actual words.

## SECTION B: POETRY

There are many ways of interpreting a poem, and any ideas that could be supported were credited. Answers which explored the imagery and show sensitivity to the music of the poetry were very successful, whereas those that merely explained or narrated the content of the poem rarely achieved a mark higher than Band 5.

### **ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON: *Selected Poems***

This text was only offered by a few Centres, but candidates seemed to enjoy the poems, probably because of their strong narrative elements and also because of their musical quality.

#### **Question 7**

The key word in the questions was 'admire', and so straightforward character sketches did not achieve high marks. Ulysses has prepared for the final journey; he has put his house in order with Telemachus, and seems to be content to hand over the reins of power to his son. This may be seen as courageous and sensible or as defeatist. He is encouraging his old friends and compatriots to make the most of their last days with him, and is courageous in refusing to succumb to old age. He insists on pressing onwards into the unknown, though he accepts the inevitability of death. Good answers responded well to the tone of the poem and explored the imagery in some detail. Weaker answers did not seem to fully understand the character or Tennyson's purpose.

#### **Question 8**

Elements for consideration were the curse, the entrapment and loneliness of the Lady, her willingness to sacrifice herself for love, Sir Lancelot, and the fantasy background (the mediaeval castle, knights in armour). Good answers went beyond narrative, and considered the way the language and imagery and the form of the poem all contribute to the effect. Weak answers merely told the story.

#### **Question 9**

This is the final section of the poem and has a sense of completion about it. The mood has changed from grief and despair to one of hope and optimism, though there are still tinges of sadness. The imagery is full of light and colour, and there is a sense of new life in nature which is reflected in the poet ('in my breast Spring wakens too'). The strong rhymes give a sense of uplift. The discriminator was the strength of response to 'moving', and the details in which the language was explored, not merely explained.

### **SONGS OF OURSELVES: *from Part 4***

#### **Question 10**

This question was perhaps the most popular on the whole paper. Answers ranged across all levels, but almost all understood the poem and the poet's feelings about what bliss it was to be alive, and attempted to communicate this very positively. It was, however, an easy poem to 'parrot', and many answers were deceptive, in that they seemed good but actually consisted only of choosing a great many lines and paraphrasing what they said. There were innumerable blue skies and gentle clouds. 'Calm' and 'wonder' appeared over-frequently, without a clear understanding of *how* they had been created. Answers therefore tended to be descriptive rather than analytical. Candidates might have commented on the lack of activity in the poem and identified specific features of the diction of the poem which support this, e.g. 'silent', 'smokeless', 'calm', 'still'. They might have commented on the use of repetition, e.g. of 'Never', on the contrast between human inactivity and the ongoing processes of nature, and on the rhythm and form of the sonnet, and how it contributes to the creation of this sense of calm and wonder. However not many answers showed a secure understanding of what a sonnet is. There was a good deal of misreading of the line referring to 'valley, rock, or hill', which many seemed to think meant that these natural features existed in the middle of London. The main problem was a lack of analysis of the words. Many candidates took a line by line approach, offering a sort of paraphrase or explanation and even sometimes inventing a scenario, for example, "'Earth has not anything to show more fair" The world is full of beautiful gardens but Wordsworth does not find any of them as appealing as to his view which shows that he was in awe.' (sic.). There was, however, feature-spotting, e.g. 'there is personification', but without any development. There was some confusion about when the poem was written and suggestions that it was calm because there were no cars, and some candidates seemed not to realise that the poem is about London.

#### **Question 11**

Key words in this question were 'the power of nature'. In *Hunting Snake* candidates might have commented on the contrast between the language used to describe the humans out for a gentle walk and the more intense language to describe the appearance and activity of the snake, and on the effect of the snake on them. *Pike* apparently offered more explicit references to power because of the violence and malevolence of the creature, and it produced some extremely good answers. Candidates seemed to engage powerfully with

the power of nature in the two animals, with strong descriptions of movement and, of course, grins and jaws. Answers were focused and used language creatively to communicate feelings, candidates often writing at length. Weaker answers showed a working knowledge of the chosen poem but they did not relate it to the 'power' of nature, instead discussing in general terms what it told them about nature.

### Question 12

The sustained use of simile by Rossetti and the ways in which Hopkins uses compound words to create images of pied beauty were central here. It was a fairly open question, but answers required more than the mere listing of appropriate words and images. Analysis was the key to success and focus on the effects created on tone and mood. A number of otherwise competent candidates provided unnecessary biographical details for both poets and, while picking up one or two marks for knowledge, lost focus on the poems and the marks they might have gained by exploring the language more closely.

## SECTION C: PROSE

### *Wuthering Heights*

This text was offered by only a few Centres, so comments are by necessity limited.

### Question 13

A number of things might be thought to point to a changed relationship. Heathcliff and Cathy no longer seem to value and share the same things. Catherine wants civilised conversation which Heathcliff cannot provide. He is a farm labourer, she is a lady and therefore much drawn to Edgar Linton's world as is made clear through the passage. Almost all candidates understood Heathcliff's feelings and the changes in Catherine, but there were many intrusive paragraphs about what happened elsewhere in the novel.

### Question 14

The key word in this question is 'compelling'. Heathcliff is larger than life in everything. He is a man of huge energy, consuming passions, violent rages and the capacity for vengeance and at times titanic imagination. Although there were some valiant efforts to engage with 'compelling', engaging with two sides of Heathcliff's character, there were whole chunks of writing describing his childhood and early years.

### Question 15

Edgar Linton is besotted, as Nelly Dean observes. He will be thinking about the vibrant personality of this young woman who lives with an intensity which he finds overwhelming, disconcerting, but utterly beguiling. He might also be thinking with self-satisfaction about how he can offer Catherine the life of a lady, and how he is just the man to 'civilise' further this still rather wild creature. Most candidates knew the context of the question, but quite a few did not understand Edgar's state of mind, not quite capturing his mixed feelings about what had happened. The best answers picked this up and explored it well.

### *Nervous Conditions*

This was a very popular text and candidates had clearly derived a good deal of enjoyment from it.

### Question 16

Lucia has just overheard herself accused of witchcraft by Takesure at the *dare*, and her impulsive and passionate personality mean that she cannot hold back from action. The monolith of male dominance is subverted by Lucia's directness. The men are having to take notice of her. She offers a role model to Tambu and the other women. Good answers commented on the slapstick elements of her assault, and explored the manner in which her treatment of Takesure and his helpless submission to her physical force are described. Some noticed that even the patriarchy smiles at these events. Candidates understood the politics of gender equality and used the term patriarch / patriarchal confidently. The more able were also capable of seeing that Lucia's behaviour was the beginning of emancipation for some of the other female characters. However, there was little engagement with the language or understanding of the humour in the passage. Candidates struggled to show how Babamukuru's power was thwarted and to comment on his reaction. Candidates did not address the strength of personality that Lucia would have to exhibit in order to break into this patriarchal conference. Nor did they comment on her adopting masculine attitudes and resorting to violence.

### Question 17

The relationship between Babamukuru and his wife is quite complex. Both have experience of other cultures, and Maiguru on her return from England seems to have made a conscious decision to submit to Babamukuru's patriarchal status. For much of the novel, she only infrequently attempts to make him change his mind and uses a good deal of baby talk in trying to keep him sweet. He clearly requires to have the last word, and seems unwilling or unable to change. Maiguru is clearly frustrated that her educational qualifications count for nothing beside his, and that he takes all her salary. Maiguru's five day visit to her brother seems to mark a change in the balance of power. The relationship is presented through the narrator's description of it, together with their daughter Nyasha's comments. Some candidates misunderstood the relationship between Maiguru and Babamukuru and suggested that it was one of love, and that Maiguru was happy to look after Babamukuru and content not to work.

### Question 18

Mr Matimba appears to have recognised some potential in Tambu and has given her a chance to realise it by the attempt to sell mealies. He receives ten pounds from Doris, having had to convince her that he was not exploiting Tambu as child labour. In order to do this, he has had to play a role as a subservient and ingratiating black man to this old white woman, which, given his behaviour elsewhere, is unlikely to have been a pleasure for him. He may well be thinking now that this trip was worthwhile. He has clearly given thought to how to dispose of the money. He may well be anticipating some resistance to his plans from Tambu's parents, but will be determined that the money made will be put to good use towards Tambu's education. This was well answered on the whole, with good understanding and good knowledge of the text, including suitable condemnation of Tambu's parents and brother. It was interesting that little was made of the encounter with Doris. Tambu's ambitions and calibre were given due attention.

### *Fasting, Feasting*

### Question 19

Arun is suffering physical discomfort and has almost had an accident. He is also suffering mental discomfort, as he does not understand the family dynamics. 'Arun knows when to leave a family scene'. He does not fit in with the American way of life, he is revolted by the meat-eating, and he is bemused by Melanie and Rod. Good answers commented on the violence of 'the seeping blood of whatever carcass Mr Patton has chosen...', and the irony of 'one can not tell what is more dangerous in this country, the pursuit of health or of sickness'. There was clearly a sense of engagement with Arun and his feelings of isolation. Candidates explored both his physical and his emotional discomfort, and commented closely on how Desai had crafted this.

### Question 20

Melanie is truculent, bad mannered, and uncommunicative. She lacks a meaningful relationship with her parents and they are apparently unconcerned - particularly her father. She is bulimic. This question was answered less well than the others on this text. Little sympathy or understanding was felt for Melanie; most candidates considered her to be rude and aggressive, but had little understanding of bulimia or Desai's critique of some American values.

### Question 21

Dr Dutt would be reviewing the visit and its purpose and thinking about Uma and her potential, her impressions of MamaPapa, and her thoughts about the position of women in this society. The voice would be educated and westernised. Not many examples were seen of responses to this question and few displayed a secure grasp of the moment specified.

### *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

### Question 22

The morning activities might be thought to show Mr. Chawla as a ridiculous man of great self-importance and self-satisfaction, of busy, busy energy, who expects to be waited on hand and foot by the women of the family and to be listened to whenever he opens his mouth to spout an opinion. Many candidates wrote on the extract but struggled to understand how personality was revealed. There was quite a narrative approach

by some of the candidates, and many seemed not to be able to view Mr Chawla's early morning routine as a facet of his organised and rather rigid personality. Few candidates were sensitive to any of the humour in the passage.

### Question 23

Two approaches might be adopted. Sampath clearly likes a life of leisure. His ideal is to be waited upon, and he relishes being the centre of interest on his own terms. He is also capable of radiating apparent wisdom. Alternatively it might be argued that he is a genuine dreamer, and does have some natural and rather mysterious affinity with the natural world. Candidates tended to answer this question well. Many were able to link the events before Sampath's birth with his personality as he grew up, and his behaviour in the guava orchard.

### Question 24

Sweet Miss Jyotsna who worships Sampath is likely to be thinking that this is the most dreadful moment of her life. She will have no idea what has happened or where he has gone, just that what has become her mission to support him has suddenly evaporated. Now there just remains her boring life at the post office. Voices for Miss Jyotsna ranged from grief to pleasure to anger to heartbreak. Some candidates were uncertain about what her voice should be. A few more successful candidates wrote knowledgeably about life in the Post Office, the flirting, and Sampath's knowledge of secrets.

### *The Great Gatsby*

This was the most popular of the prose texts and it was clear that candidates had derived a great deal of enjoyment from it.

### Question 25

The arid and unpleasant quality of the landscape, Wilson's run-down premises, and the general air of poverty provide a suitably unpleasant – and symbolic – backdrop. Both George and Myrtle are described in unattractive terms; George is weak and colourless, Myrtle overweight and overdone and contemptuous of George. Tom is able to control both of them. This was a very popular question that produced a range of responses. The best covered both parts of the question and focused on 'unpleasant', whereas some only looked at one aspect of the task. Most were able to comment on Wilson (with some condemning him because he looked 'anaemic') and most picked up on Myrtle's attitude towards her husband, especially her 'walking through her husband as if he were a ghost'. The best answers made critical comment on the effect of the language used by Fitzgerald and the impact of the adjectives.

### Question 26

Candidates might well have commented on the parties and those who attend them, the conspicuous consumption and greed, the class consciousness (new and old money), and the lack of depth in the relationships. Gatsby himself thinks that money is the answer to everything. Though candidates had clearly been taught about 'the Jazz Age', some had difficulty in producing cohesive arguments here and limited themselves to Daisy's reaction to Gatsby's shirts, and to Tom's philandering. The best answers were very condemnatory of the way in which Gatsby is sued by the party-goers, and that none turn up at his funeral.

### Question 27

Gatsby will be thinking about Tom's reaction when he was told that Daisy did not love him, Daisy's behaviour, and the effect on her of the accusation of bootlegging. He will also be thinking about the journey home. Responses showed an accurate knowledge of textual detail; many failed to capture Gatsby's 'shock' and 'despair', a few completely misunderstood his reaction (e.g. optimistic about future). Some foretold the fact Daisy was in a state and that if she drove she might kill someone. The best answers had the right mix of Gatsby's turmoil, mulling over what had happened; especially what Daisy had said and why.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

**Question 28**

It would be virtually impossible to write about the ending without making reference to earlier parts of the story, and to Leila's excitement and enjoyment of the dancing, which are deflated by the fat man's cynicism. The effect of his words and her recovery are conveyed very strikingly in the extract, and the discriminator was the extent to which answers went beyond narrative / description and focused on 'memorable', seeing the implications of the fat man's words and Mansfield's intentions. This was a fairly popular text and question, with lots of reference to detail overall in responses. There was, however, a popular misconception that the question was what made the ball memorable for Leila, rather than what made the writing memorable for the reader.

**Question 29**

In both cases the humour is what makes the story entertaining – in the Wodehouse it comes from the strong authorial voice, in *My Greatest Ambition* from the self-deprecating first person narrative. Answers needed to focus on significant detail: in *the Custody of the Pumpkin* on the way they the characters – 'fluffy' Lord Emsworth, his idiot son, the dour McAllister and the millionaire Mr Donaldson - are described and the interactions between them; in *My Greatest Ambition* on the contrast between the expectations of the boy of 13 and the reflections upon them of his older self. Most candidates were able to describe some things that were entertaining about the stories named, and some addressed the ways in which the writer made them so. Wodehouse was better understood than Lurie, though there were good answers on both. The most successful candidates were the ones who had the best grasp of the background and social setting of the former.

**Question 30**

The American will be thinking about his impressions of India, in particular this remote part, the meeting with Muni, the negotiations for the horse, his wife's possible reactions and his intentions for the horse. The American makes great play of the fact that he is not rich. He has been completely baffled by most of the conversations with Muni, and there may well be a rather patronising tone to his observations. This was a popular question; content was reasonable and knowledge of detail sound. There were a few convincing Americans, but generally there was not a great deal of success in capturing the voice and the character was not clearly understood. Often responses could have done with including much more textual evidence.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH) LEVEL 1/LEVEL 2

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Paper 0476/02

Paper 2: Unseen Texts

## Key Messages

- Centres must use the correct *stationery* provided by Cambridge, and candidates should do all they can to achieve legibility and to write their answers in the correct space.
- Relevant responses address the stem *question*, not just the bullet points.
- Good responses move beyond narrative, and explore the *writer's techniques*.
- *Quotation* should be used to comment on the writer's use of language and its effect.
- The techniques of both poetry and prose need *analysis*, not just identification.
- The best answers evaluate the *deeper implications* of the text, interpreting the writer's purpose and the impact of the writing on the reader.

## General Comments

This session produced many strong responses across the different time zones and variant papers; more candidates are writing with the sensitivity, detail and engagement with the task to achieve marks in Band 2 and above, and weak answers in Band 7 and below are becoming increasingly rare. Most candidates make extensive reference to the words of the text. Many at least begin to explore and engage with the writers' use of language and specific effects, and to respond to the impact these make on the reader. There are fewer examples of 'fair copies', over-lengthy or illegible scripts: most candidates shape and structure their responses well. There is plenty of evidence that teachers use these reports, act on the advice given and pass this on to candidates; planning, effective use of quotation and a concluding evaluation are all more evident than in the past, and more candidates are now choosing to write about the prose passages and using appropriate analytical tools to do so.

It is essential that the new marking booklets are used correctly (continuation sheets should only be used for that purpose), that candidates do all they can to make their answers legible, and that they do not write in any of the margins. Centres should now be used to the new Cambridge stationery and changes to the way in which we require answers to be presented.

It might be especially useful for Centres to review the general qualities which distinguish good scripts from average ones. The first requirement of scripts at Band 5 and above is relevance: the stem question should guide the response and be answered. Although the bullet points can help candidates to shape an answer to the question, they are not themselves the question, and the best candidates often ignore them and answer the question more holistically. The question itself must not be ignored, and attention paid to each aspect of a two-part question e.g. 'serious and amusing' or 'horror and dark humour'. The question is designed to draw attention to the writing and to its effect on the reader. It thus helps candidates to address AO3 (language, structure and form) and AO4 (an informed personal response). 'Personal response' should, for strong candidates, be personal response to the writing and not to the imagined situation.

It follows that a good answer always moves beyond a paraphrase of the narrative of the text. A well-supported narrative account of the poem or passage, illustrated by quotation, can achieve a good Band 6 mark; but to move beyond this level there must be engagement with the writer's purpose, and how this is communicated to the reader.

In responses to poetry, there was a tendency for weaker candidates simply to identify various poetic devices such as simile, alliteration or metaphor without comment on their purpose or effect. In responses to prose,

candidates should beware of concentrating exclusively on the narrative and how it unfolds: good responses also address the writer's use of description, the drama of dialogue and its effect, and the creation of a narrative voice or point-of-view. These are the prose writer's tools, and without an analytical approach to them, it is difficult for responses to prose to match the complexity of what candidates can achieve when writing about poetry.

Attention to the writer's language, style and purpose immediately takes a candidate's response further than the surface literal meaning of the text, allowing interpretation of possible figurative meaning. This is also a key strand in the Assessment Objectives for English Literature, involving exploration 'beyond surface meaning' (AO2). Answers at Band 4 and above are expected to address the text's 'deeper implications', so it is essential to delve further than the surface narrative and comment on the effect on the reader. Good candidates analyse the effects of language choices and the best candidates evaluate the overall impact of texts, both through sensitive response to detail and critical appreciation of their overall and cumulative effect. Responses awarded Band 2 and above therefore need to address the writer's purpose critically, and understand genre; showing sustained engagement with how the text works and with why it achieves an interesting and memorable effect.

It was good to note a high number of responses showing thoroughness of response to language, and an increasing number demonstrated the kind of independent critical engagement with both the writing and the power of its impact on the individual reader which makes this component so satisfying to study, teach and indeed examine. The variety and individuality of responses is a pleasure, and it is equally rewarding to see how key skills for success as critical readers of Literature are becoming so firmly embedded among the candidature for this paper.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Question 1**

This passage was taken from Simon Armitage's modern version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Although we do not set or study texts in translation in this syllabus, we have used modern poetic versions of older texts: Ted Hughes's *Tales from Ovid* has been set in the past, for instance. This famous passage of the narrative poem was certainly dramatic enough to engage the candidates' interest, and no prior knowledge of the text, legend or even the idea of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table was expected or assumed. The focus of the question, as always, was on the qualities of the writing and their immediate impact on the reader. Most were able to understand the surface narrative, however mysterious they found the words and identity of the Green Knight. Several intelligently suggested his colour linked him to nature, many believed him supernatural, and some thought he was a ghost. The writer never fully clarifies these matters, so all answers, if supported, are valid. Some struggled with the later parts of the narrative, and thought it was Sir Gawain who mounted the horse and paraded the head of the Green Man; those who did not realise that the Green Knight had been beheaded and yet continued to walk and ride, while remaining silent and defiant, found it hard to demonstrate clear overall understanding. Some candidates showed appreciation of the creation of humour, while many gave voice to the expression of horror. Good answers considered the ironic tone of both the narrator and the Green Knight, drawing inferences from this.

Most candidates had little difficulty in locating horror, exploring the brutal nature of the beheading and the apparently callous and cruel atmosphere of the court in this extract. The descriptions of physical violence and the hints of the supernatural and macabre were carefully explored. It was also pleasing to see that the majority had no difficulty in locating dark humour and irony, whether in the Green Knight's sardonic tone or the ironic turn of events. Many quickly noticed how irrational the Knight's request to be beheaded was, and how confident he appeared to be that he would survive, and rightly concluded that he was not entirely human. However, a little more comment on the text as a poem, with a closer look at alliteration, rhythm and diction would have been welcome. Only a small number of candidates looked at the effect of the shorter 'bob-and-wheel' lines at the end of each stanza, and the ways in which they provided a close-up of the action and a more intense description of the atmosphere. The creation of anticipation is an important element of narrative poetry, and is especially masterly in this extract.

Using the bullet points, many candidates divided their responses into the preparation for the decapitation, the event itself, and its aftermath. This chronological sequence worked well, as long as they addressed both horrific and humorous elements. The Knight's confidence is both provocative and ominous, and many noticed the irony of his promise to divulge his identity after Gawain had beheaded him. Many commented on how phrases such as 'smite me smartly' and 'show your striking style' suggested that he is mocking Gawain rather than reflecting the horror of the moment, and that his bravery and attitude in the face of 'that gruesome

axe' seemed super-human. More might have been made of his deliberate provocations and accusations of cowardice: 'loafing and lounging', 'But / you stall!' and the way in which he seeks to undermine the chivalry of Gawain and his comrades.

Most analysed the realism and horror of the beheading itself with intelligent skill and attention to detail. They contrasted the vulnerability of 'the nape of his neck now naked and ready' with the way he prepares for the blow 'in the standing position', and heaps his hair to prepare the way. Some speculated about the 'flash of green flesh' which is revealed: is he dead and rotting? Supernatural? A force of nature? All of these are possibilities the original writer hints at here, and addresses further later on in the poem (without ever entirely answering them). There was strong commentary on the violence of the blow itself: how Gawain 'heaves' the heavy axe, needs to plant his 'left foot firmly', and then 'swings it swiftly'. Several found it ironic that he is described as swinging the axe 'heavenwards' in what seems such a brutal and hellish scene. Most noted the coldness of the clinical detail which describes the surgical severing of the Knight's spine as Gawain 'parted the fat and the flesh' like a skilled butcher, and again the word 'cleanness' was explored as an ironic counterpoint to a bloody scene. A discriminator among stronger scripts was the ability to comment in some detail on how the 'blade took a bite from the floor', not only spotting the personification but also explaining why it is so disconcerting for the reader.

The aftermath of the beheading received detailed attention, even from those less certain about what was actually happening. Many contrasted the horror of 'blood gutters brightly' with the use of the word 'tumbles' to describe the journey of the disturbingly 'handsome' head. Plenty commented on the dark humour of the moment when the relieved 'king's men' play football with the severed head. This moment certainly elicited a range of interesting personal responses. The power of the Knight was understood by those who commented on diction such as 'tree-trunk legs', 'trudges' and 'rummages': they reveal that he is a huge force of nature, and unstoppable. The sinister ease of the sibilance as he 'strides', 'snatches', 'steps' and 'swings', all without the aid of a head, was noted by the strongest candidates. Some felt, appropriately, that his ability to regenerate was a quality of his closeness to nature, which they contrasted with the effete and callous decadence of the King's court 'deadened now with dread'. Many strong responses commented on the irony of this final line, as it is the courtiers who seem dead, not the Knight. As one candidate amusingly put it: 'the Knight keeps his head in every sense'.

Some candidates struggled a little with the use of slang, even though they are helped with this in the footnote. Phrases such as 'cops hold of his head' and 'never mind minus his head' were not always understood as humorous. Armitage successfully reproduces and updates the distinctively Northern element of the Gawain poet's Englishness; it was pleasing to see the ways in which a text over 500 years-old came alive for the candidates, and stimulated them to engage with both the story itself and the way it was told, exploring language and the deeper implications of this disturbing yet entertaining scene.

## Question 2

The passage from Alan Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child* was a far more contemporary piece of writing, presenting a teenage girl's experience and point of view while nevertheless having a period feel. Set in England just before the First World War, this part of Hollinghurst's novel concerns an upper middle class milieu familiar to readers of E. M. Forster, and his style parodies Forster's, as well as the aesthetic crush experienced by an impressionable young woman. As young Daphne herself only partly understands what she sees and feels (and is slightly intoxicated by alcohol as well as the presence of the romantic young poet Cecil), it was not expected that candidates would have a completely clear impression of the relationships portrayed. The intention of the question was that candidates should concentrate on Daphne's viewpoint and feelings, and the impact of this moment on her: discovering the boys in the hammock, hearing the romantic music and wanting to experience a moment of transgression, but feeling disappointment and regret afterwards.

This passage proved to be less popular than the poem, but it attracted many strong and detailed responses. Many used the bullet points to shape their responses and paid careful attention to different parts of the narrative, but this should always be done with the stem question clearly borne in mind. Daphne's attitudes and observations needed to be at the heart of the answer. Most noticed that her interest is clearly in Cecil: she asks for him 'artfully', used his name 'fondly' and wants to be included by the boys, agreeing to smoke the cigar in order to impress them. Many commented on her befuddled senses 'startled and amused by her own tipsiness', although some were distracted into articulating their own dislike of drunkenness or smoking, rather than exploring the significance of these details as an element of the writing. In the passage, the drink contributes to the sense of confusion and heightened sensory awareness, and the cigar is clearly signalled as a source of 'faint devilish' temptation. Good candidates were able to make such deductions by exploring language and implication throughout the passage.

The play of lightness and dark in the hammock is important in establishing the nature of Daphne's interest in Cecil. Good candidates noticed the 'shadowed gleam' of his face, momentarily lit up by the cigar, and that this is tantalisingly attractive yet elusive for Daphne. The sinister cigar, a 'dimly luminous bug', was amusingly contrasted by good candidates with Daphne's more childish memories of the hammock, and her desire to 'tip them out' or 'climb in with them', while at the same time feeling this was some 'new game' from which she was excluded. Most candidates could empathise with her infatuation, desire to be grown up, mixed feelings, and later regret and sense of disappointment.

Most engaged with the sibling rivalry between Daphne and George, although some commented very disapprovingly on his failure to protect her from temptation, or mischievous desire to let her make a fool of herself. Some confused George's lines with Cecil's, though Hollinghurst makes it very clear who is speaking, and candidates preparing for this paper should certainly be familiar with the conventions of dialogue from their work on Set Prose Texts. Stronger scripts contrasted George's 'paradoxical tone' and chortling with Daphne's 'pained and tantalized' feelings.

Attention to the second bullet point, and the symbolic element in the descriptions of the music, distinguished the more accomplished responses. 'Wild and intense', it was rightly seen in these answers as representing the more adult feelings which Daphne yearns to express; 'full of yearning and defiance' and with 'the heightened effect of beauty encountered in an unexpected setting'. This desire to be taken seriously or to defy expectations extends to her interest in the cigar, and the desire to join the boys' game instead of 'missing a chance at it'. Some very strong scripts were able to connect Daphne's yearnings with the 'mad girl in love with a man' in the song, who is 'under a curse and can only be redeemed by a woman's love'. By tracking the connections between the song and Daphne's behaviour, these candidates were better able to understand her disappointment later in the passage.

The best responses had a sense of the overall shape of the narrative, and that Daphne's smoking of the cigar was both the climax and anti-climax of the scene. They were able to see how her romantic yearnings and fantasies contrast with the reality, both her own immaturity (which peeps out when she sees the boys reminding her of 'her parents sitting up in bed') and the disappointment of her moment of rebellion. The cigar symbolises this contrast. Many appreciated the attraction of 'something none of her friends had done', and stronger responses commented feelingly on how repetition emphasises 'shame and duty and regret' to show how unwilling her submission really is. The cigar is described as 'the thing', from her point of view, and it makes her do something 'unladylike' which even George appears to feel some remorse about. Strong scripts saw that perhaps it was not just the cigar which Daphne 'wanted out of her system', and a pleasing number of candidates appreciated the significance of the final line, linking and contrasting the cigar and the music, by juxtaposing the singer's 'noble ignorance' and 'Daphne's behaviour'. Those candidates who kept a strong focus on Daphne and her emotions produced the strongest answers. Some realised that Cecil's comments on the song are as cynical as the way he offers her the cigar, and suggest he is not really the man for her.

Whilst weaker responses tended to focus largely on description, they showed reasonable understanding of the surface narrative and began to explore what might be implied by the young girl's yearnings and disappointments. Stronger scripts showed the ability to tackle symbolism in the narrative, made careful selection and comparison of details from the writing, and addressed the writer's style and development of ironic contrasts between fantasy and more bitter reality. When writing about prose passages it is impossible to make a close reading entirely exhaustive, so good answers are distinguished by the ability to make judicious selections and to communicate a sense of the style and shape of the whole extract, and the journey the principal character makes. The best responses in this session offered sustained engagement with the writing, and make very clear how the writer sympathetically presented Daphne's longings and rebellious inclinations whilst simultaneously mocking them; several noted the subtle sexual nuances hinted at in both her feelings of desire and regret. Most candidates certainly understood that Daphne's magnetic attraction to Cecil was not reciprocated, and were able to identify with her adolescent wish to be taken more seriously. Many were able to explore hints of disenchantment and loss of innocence. Some justifiably felt that Daphne's sense of guilt or disapproval was itself a sign of her immaturity. It was certainly pleasing to read such a variety of personal responses strongly grounded in engagement with the writer's language, and its range of possible implications.