

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/01

Paper 1

General comments

Most texts were offered in sufficient numbers to justify general comment meaningful, though as usual certain texts were clearly more popular than others. In the drama section, *Macbeth* and *Streetcar* were most frequently encountered. In the poetry section, responses to the new CIE poetry anthology *Songs of Ourselves* far outweighed those to the Coleridge selection, though the numbers for the latter were certainly not negligible. One of the most pleasing aspects of the Prose section was to find that not everyone had gravitated towards *Lord of the Flies* (as some had predicted), and with the exception of the Richardson, there was significant work on all the other texts. It was gratifying to find some good engaged work on contemporary fiction like *The Siege*, for instance.

Examiners found little self-evident misunderstanding of the questions. Failure to address the task satisfactorily usually came from palpable lack of knowledge of the book. With *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for instance, some candidates did not seem to know that in the extract Scout was in a costume which did not allow her to see. Likewise, some were unable to locate the spot in the novel to which the empathic question referred and hence wrote as the very different Aunt Alexandra from earlier on in the novel. With *Macbeth*, *Streetcar* and *Great Expectations* (to mention three other of the most popular texts) some candidates seemed unaware that Macbeth was on his way to murder Duncan or that Stella was pregnant or that Wemmick's house was a refuge from Jaggers and London. In other words, particularly in the extract question, a knowledge of context is essential for the production of a good response.

An area where the Paper was particularly successful this year was in the empathic questions (i.e. the third task for each of the drama and prose texts). Many Examiners wrote about how much they had enjoyed the assumptions of Malcolm, Mrs Dudgeon, Stella, Ger, Celia, Nwoye, Jane Turner, even sometimes Marina, and Aunt Alexandra. Rather disappointingly, Piggy's turn of phrase proved sometimes more elusive, as did Beneatha's feisty personality. Colonel Hakim and Herbert Pocket were rarely attempted.

As always, the candidates' work brought much pleasure to the Examiners. Most reports spoke of the liveliness of a lot of writing, the confidence that many candidates showed when asked to conduct an argument, the willingness of many to engage with literary language and the comparative scarcity of answers which did not address the question directly. We are indeed blessed with a culture of teaching and study which produces work which rarely gives the sense of being a prepared essay which the candidate is trying to fit to the question. What continues to please is a pervading sense that many, indeed most candidates, appear to have enjoyed their reading, across the range of ability.

Having said this, as always there were candidates who struggled to put together a coherent argument or who failed to support their ideas as instructed with detail from the text. It needs to be stressed to students that general assertions, no matter how viable, cannot receive high reward without evidence that the candidate has arrived at them from close reading of the text. As always, there were quite a few candidates whose knowledge of the text was clearly very partial and who were lost when asked to move out to matters not directly connected to one or two central characters or issues. For instance, with *Great Expectations* there were quite a few answers on Wemmick which showed only the haziest grasp of his role in the novel, as well as arguments on Magwitch's character which did not move beyond the opening chapters.

Whilst the general consensus seemed to be that the work on drama was often good, there were quite a few who still approached a play as if it was a novel, indeed sometimes actually referring to it as one. Of course, often this was just a slip, but for others it was an accurate reflection of their response. In all the sections many attempted to look at authorial means, at imagery in poetry, at dramatic techniques in drama and at the means novelists and short story writers use to impress their readers. However, particularly in poetry there are still many who note a literary effect and then fail to make any attempt to analyse why it is so effective in those particular words. A few continue to place an emphasis upon the power of the punctuation (above all exclamation marks) which in most cases the piece cannot sustain.

The great majority of candidates seemed to have enough time to complete the paper and that there were few Rubric Infringements. Several Examiners commented on the fact that in some Centres candidates wrote *each answer* in a different answer booklet; this is *not* a requirement and we would strongly recommend not doing this for this syllabus.

Comments on specific questions

A Raisin in the Sun.

Question 1

While answers usually were able to place the passage in the wider context of the play, Walter's demeanour was not often accurately explored. Some poorer answers were simply condemnatory of him. His sarcasm and bitterness at the end of the passage, for instance, was sometimes not grasped. The language was seldom probed, and features such as the repetition and short sentences were often overlooked.

Question 2

The best answers here usually managed to see something of the two possible approaches to Mama, though few were really inclined to see her as a villain. Most explored how in the end she was the one who held the family together and pointing out how at the end she adapted to the new situation. Most appreciated Mama's hard work and loving nature, and accepted her – at times – overbearing manner in controlling the family as a clear demonstration of her desire to help them in life.

Question 3

In general this was not very well done, although some highly personal responses were seen. Some had problems in deciding what Beneatha would think and could not easily relate her response to the previous conversation with Asagai. Sometimes the content was appropriate but the voice was not. In many answers Beneatha tended to sound more like some character out of a romantic novel than the vivacious and independent woman of the play; few captured her feistiness, and sometimes her complex state of mind was rather simplified.

Cuba and Doghouse.

Question 4

Most commented on the contrast between Val and Pats and the tension created by Pats's lack of response and the flying dog. The question differentiated quite sharply between those who could explore all the features the dramatist utilises here to make the moment memorable, including the humour of the last part, and those who could do little more than describe the events. There were rather more in the first group than the second.

Question 5

The relatively few answers that were seen on this question usually could well how class-ridden were their attitudes with, of course, the exception of Miss Arthur who is herself a victim of these attitudes. Some seemed to respond enthusiastically to the challenge of writing about teachers!

Question 6

There were some good and lively answers on this, charting very well the developing feelings of Ger through this episode, going from amazement at Pats stealing food to the horror and compassion Ger feels when she begins to piece together the reasons for this action. The best were able to capture Ger's lively way of speaking, but others found capturing her voice difficult.

As You Like It

Question 7

There were some good answers which had some sense of Rosalind's sense of fun, but the general standard was moderate. There was almost no awareness of gleeful audience interaction: candidates found it difficult to show what was entertaining about the passage and quite frequently answers hardly got beyond narrative. A few clearly had little grasp of the context, and 'significant' was rarely addressed in any meaningful way.

Question 8

Again there was some good work seen, but the general standard was not very high. Too many candidates had few ideas beyond thinking the Court bad and the Forest good, completely ignoring the tribulations of life in Arden. Better answers appreciated that Shakespeare gives us a more complex situation than the Forest being some unblemished utopia.

Question 9

The very few that did take up the task found it hard to convey Celia's personality, her humour and her sense here of being alone.

Macbeth

Question 10

This was a very popular question and it was often done very well. Many candidates charted in detail how the atmosphere was built up both in setting and dialogue. It helped if the candidate knew that Macbeth was on his way to murder the king. A few tried to make this scene into part of the process that decided Macbeth on his action and, of course, as a result misinterpreted much. It was noticeable that a number did not grasp the coded message which Macbeth is passing to Banquo just before the latter's exit. It was also interesting how very few probed Banquo's guilt in not bringing his suspicions to the surface either here or later.

Question 11

As was to be expected, this was another immensely popular task. What was really pleasing was the fact that there were relatively few answers which could be classified as straight character sketches. Nearly all tried to argue a case and nearly all looked at the proposition from a number of angles. Most were not willing to advance the thesis that Macbeth was simply destroyed by others. In this task a candidate needed to use the text in some detail and a number of answers advanced coherent arguments without that detailed textual support and as a result failed to achieve as well as they might. The scope of some answers was very thin indeed, barely producing more than an outline of an answer and rather too many stopped at the point where Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to murder the King.

Question 12

There were some really impressive assumptions of Malcolm as he reveals the suspicious man he has had to become after his father's murder. Of course, it was crucial to know the context and the scene that is to follow this moment. Those that did not were, of course, immediately in the gravest difficulties but more often Examiners read work which created splendidly Malcolm's conflict of emotions as he wrestles with the dilemma posed by Macduff's arrival.

Twelfth Night

Question 13

This was much the most popular of the three questions on *Twelfth Night* and there were some very pleasing answers which showed a clear understanding of the situation and the way in which Shakespeare is playing with elements of disguise and misunderstanding. Generally answers were informed by a sound understanding of the context and saw the ironies and the significance of the moment in terms of plot and character. The best answers showed real sensitivity towards Viola's plight and commented very well on the beauty of the 'willow-cabin' speech.

Question 14

There were fewer attempts at this question but most candidates seemed to be able to see both elements in Sir Toby and generally came to the view that there is a great deal about him that is unpleasant, but somehow he remains loveable.

Question 15

Malvolio always elicits strong responses and in the scripts this session there were some admirable recreations of his pompous and overbearing nature, also of his aspirations to be Olivia's husband.

The Devil's Disciple

Question 16

Most managed to convey something of the dramatic situation of Richard's imminent trial and apparently certain death, coupled with Judith's anguish. What few fathomed, however, were the scene's ironies and the consequent humorous tone which they produce. Sometimes, alas, this was because the candidate knew the play so little as to think that Richard reciprocated Judith's immature romantic feelings.

Question 14

Candidates often saw Dick's wit and sardonic humour and appreciated the irony of his being a better man than his relatives. The key here was the phrase 'dramatically compelling'. A number of candidates conveyed his charisma by exploring in detail some moments where he has a real dramatic impact. Other not so impressive efforts tended to simply describe his qualities.

Question 15

This empathic task gave some candidates a great opportunity to catch the vituperative Mrs Dudgeon's bitterness and bile to good effect. In some scripts it was noticeable how candidates had internalised her particular obsessions. The voice was often quintessentially hers, much to the pleasure of Examiners.

A Streetcar Named Desire

Question 16

This was a very popular question and was usually answered at least at a level of competence, sometimes significantly better. However, some Examiners found a lack of detailed probing of the extract, in which, for instance, there was some general understanding of the more obviously aggressive side of Stanley, but not as here of the man who cares for his wife. Some answers clearly did not have a grasp of basic details such as Stella's pregnancy being somewhat pertinent to the end of the passage.

Question 17

As so often in tasks like this, the best were those who at least attempted to see that there were different perspectives. Most were inclined to sympathise with Blanche, sometimes rather too much. Many paid no attention to the fact that Williams makes the audience understand if not approve of Stanley's attitude towards her and also perceive just how destructive, superior and disdainful she can be towards other people.

Question 18

There were some very good assumptions of Stella, capturing her apprehension at the imminent arrival of her sister, her equivocal feelings towards her elder sister, and her pretensions and what she thinks will be the likely response of Blanche to her home and to Stanley. Some, though, found her simplicity and voice difficult to capture, giving her also too much knowledge as to why her sister was suddenly descending upon her.

Coleridge, Selected Poems

Question 19

There were some good answers here that explored with evident engagement the ways in which Coleridge conveys his feeling towards his child. There were some very good responses to the natural imagery in the extract's second section; unfortunately, many others overlooked this part. A minority produced a run-through of the poem without much reference to the question and some did little more than paraphrase and quote without attempting to look at the language in any way. Most, however, at least commented upon the poet's tenderness. A few brought in detailed contextual biographical detail - which is not required by the syllabus – at the expense of focusing on the writing's expression of feelings.

Question 20

The problem here was the limited range of many of the answers. Most answers referred to the early part of the poem, and could comment on Christabel's beauty, but some never progressed beyond that. It was surprising how many ignored the father's actions at the end of the poem. Some candidates spent most of their answer delineating Geraldine.

Question 21

Generally, the impression was that candidates had really enjoyed and engaged with *The Rime*. Most answers made a sensible choice of an episode and many attempted to explore what made it frightening. Once again there was sharp differentiation between the many who analysed language to show why the words conveyed fear and fright and those who just described the situation or simply paraphrased the poetry. The most popular choice was the spectre-bark. There were some splendid answers from candidates who were able to look at the language in detail while still conveying an imaginative and personal response. In other answers points of detail were often misinterpreted (the light shining through the ribs of the ghost ship) or ignored (the skin as white as leprosy).

Songs of Ourselves

Question 22

There were many good answers on *Storyteller* which conveyed vividly the way the poetry evokes the woman's power. There was some particularly good work on some of the central images of the poem; the way the story was spun, for instance, evinced some very insightful comment. There was also some significant misunderstanding at times which almost suggested that some candidates were writing in effect on an unseen poem in the examination. Some, for instance, thought that the audience was exclusively made up of children. Some were content to give a general account without becoming engaged in anyway with the detail of the poetry.

Question 23

Here *Plenty* was done better than *The Old Familiar Faces*. Candidates found no difficulty in grasping the essence of the former but then found it difficult to pick up the subtle shifts in language and structure which constitute its development. There was much more evidence of engagement with Dixon's poem. Here there were some delicate responses to the sad regret at the centre of the poem as well as often insightful exploration of the way the words and images evoke the poverty of the family's life and the lack of understanding of the mother's plight. Some missed the importance of the drought both as an actuality and as a symbol and not too many explored the wonderful description of the mother's smile and the way it metamorphosed in later times. Also, some failed utterly to grasp the bittersweet quality of the poet's memories, thinking that she was simply pleased now to have escaped poverty.

Question 24

This question proved rather difficult for a number of candidates. Answers were often very badly balanced. It was common for Examiners to find Angelou's *Caged Bird* (by far the most popular choice) dealt with in detail (and enthusiastically) and the second poem chosen dismissed in one paragraph. Instead of looking at some images, some candidates felt that they had to deal with everything in the poem, particularly its message, and hence were rushed for time. Conversely, others did not place the images they were probing in any sort of context so that the poet's point never emerged. This was very evident in responses to *Rising Five*. In *Before the Sun*, examiners were occasionally surprised by some of the symbolic meanings with

which the poem had been invested by some candidates, who sometimes tried to impose a straitjacket of metaphors on the poem which lacked conviction because they were not supported by compelling or plausible textual references.

Things Fall Apart

Question 25

This was by far the most popular question on the text, and Examiners found that it was very frequently done well. Candidates used the detail of the extract to chart Okonkwo's character very accurately indeed. The most effective answers were usually those that set his personality against his own background and the customs of his clan. Possibly because the extract was so central to study of the novel, there were few really weak responses.

Question 26

There was very little work on this, perhaps because the other tasks were more obviously central and hence more appealing to candidates. Some deployed impressive knowledge of the whole novel to inform their responses.

Question 27

This was one of the most successful empathetic tasks on the Paper. Candidates had clearly identified strongly with Nwoye's predicament and the courage of his decision to walk away from his father and hence Examiners found much of work which movingly conveyed the young man's gentle personality, and answers which revealed pleasing knowledge of the text with content really in keeping with the novel's style. A few answers entirely missed the point by making him a vindictive young man.

Great Expectations

Question 28

Most candidates were able to make sensible comments about the nature of Wemmick's home and what it showed about the delightfully eccentric side to his personality but quite a lot did not grasp the significance of it being a miniature fortress and refuge and hence missed an important aspect of Dickens' vision.

Question 29

Most were inclined to be highly sympathetic and see Magwitch as a victim, though as usual in this kind of task, the most impressive work was that which did recognise that Dickens makes the violent side of the man very real. There was a tendency to focus too much and sometimes entirely on the early part of the novel and relations with Compeyson. Few saw that Dickens does allow us to understand the adult Pip's fear of the man, at least during the early days of his return.

Question 30

There were few answers on this task and, whilst some were successful, candidates generally found it difficult to get beyond narrative and to find a convincing voice for this loveable man.

The Siege

Question 31

This passage was full of undercurrents and therefore quite demanding. Hence, it was encouraging how many candidates handled it well, conveying in some detail the way the two are cautiously feeling their way to conveying their growing attraction towards one another. Conversely, it was a passage which demanded close reading and an understanding of context. One or two candidates, for instance, thought that Alexei had been to the dacha. Some clearly did not understand what Anna had been doing prior to her meeting him.

Question 32

Given the range of choice, the answers to this task were variable. Most made relevant choices and there was some highly evocative work, but others thought that too few probed the detail of Dunmore's writing to convey the vividness with which these aspects of the siege were conveyed.

Question 33

The few who attempted this in the main caught something of Marina's mixture of desperation at the state of the man she loves and almost anger at his lack of the will to live.

Lord of the Flies

Question 34

Most of the many who did this question realised that this was the seminal moment when fear in the shape of the beast came to the island. There were some very good responses which accurately charted in the greatest detail the way the meeting gradually turns against Ralph. The best answers picked out crucial moments in Golding's writing such as the decline in the laughter and the description of the gradual darkening and cooling of the setting. At the other end of the scale, some candidates had little grasp of the context, whilst a few concentrated totally on the devices of the passage without making any link to the content.

Question 35

Most candidates attempted to conduct an argument and some were strikingly successful in exploring the issues of leadership which the novel raises, recognising Ralph's qualities in trying to do something that was always going to be profoundly difficult in the circumstances. Rather too often, though, it has to be said that the quality of argument was a very simplistic interpretation of the author's intentions. Some argued that Jack was a better leader apparently on the basis that he successfully led the children down the path to becoming savages, completely missing such things as, for instance, the author's final biting irony that Jack's setting fire to the whole island unintentionally achieves one of Ralph's main aims of rescue. A number of answers were stuck in simple character sketch mode, until a belatedly focused last paragraph along the lines of "Thus we can see that Jack is the better leader" – an approach which does not lead to a mark in the higher bands.

Question 36

Most answers showed a clear knowledge of the circumstances and hence achieved at least reasonable reward but some struggled to capture Piggy's way of speaking and at times even of thinking. Piggy may be intelligent but he does not think or speak like the adult intellectual some made him into. Also blindness and his fear were also often absent.

Travels with My Aunt

Question 37

Few attempted this. Those that probed the passage conveyed rather well the negative first impressions, though still managing to bring out that even here all was not lost. The weaker candidates made little response to the detail of the passage, writing generally about what he would find in South America.

Question 38

This produced a good deal of lively argument and most were of the opinion that at last Henry was beginning to live. It is a tribute to Greene's powers of persuasion that a number seemed to leave all moral scruples behind and not even consider that there might be another side to the proposition.

Question 39

Not many found to their liking the prospect of assuming the personality of this suave but ruthless policeman. Those that did certainly captured for the most part his shrewdness.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 40

This was often done very well. There were some startlingly good answers which placed the passage firmly in context and then charted the way Lee makes the reader as bewildered as the protagonists and builds the tension through some dramatic writing in which the qualities of sound and touch become paramount. Other answers made little of the reader's momentary lack of understanding, simply recounting what was happening from a later perspective. Others seemed to have very little knowledge at all, not knowing, for instance, that Boo Radley was involved in the extract.

Question 41

Quite a few candidates found it difficult to maintain focus in the task. There were some who managed to centre their answer in the trial and to link it to the wider issues of the novel very well indeed. However, others wrote general essays on racism in the Southern States and virtually ignored the trial. Conversely, there were those who did little more than narrate certain features of the trial with very sparse conclusions.

Question 42

As has already been said, some failed to grasp the precise moment in the novel at which they must write and hence portrayed an Aunt who was much more hostile to Scout than she would have been after the tea party. However, there were some very good assumptions of this formidable and ultimately worthy woman expressed in her usual downright tone of voice.

The Getting of Wisdom

Questions 43, 44, 45

Far too few answers were seen on this novel to make general comment appropriate.

Into the Wind

Question 46

On a basic level this task was done well. Nearly all grasped the substance of the extract and accurately charted the child's misunderstandings and rising resentment. The main differentiator was the degree to which the candidate responded to the humour, showing how O'Connor's adoption of adult phraseology for childish perception was at the centre of the amusement. Those that missed this struggled to show what was amusing about it all.

Question 47

This was not a very popular question and in certain cases it could be seen why in that some candidates were distinctly uncertain of the precise situation and relationships in *A Stranger from Lagos*. The responses to Samphire were usually more successful, though some did not really bring out what a truly dreadful overbearing bully of a man the woman had married or see the depth of her desperation.

Question 48

There were some splendid assumptions of Jane Turner, who really brought alive the bitter sweetness of her moment of revenge and something of her characteristic sense of irony. Others clearly had not quite grasped the essence of her situation and had her bemoaning her loss of any hope of engaging Collier's attentions. Most gave some sense of Jane's revenge; fewer appreciated her accompanying misery.