

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 2010/01

General comments

The set texts varied widely in popularity. *The Crucible* was by far the most popular drama text and in the prose section *Lord of the Flies* and *Mockingbird* came by a long way top of the list. Very little work was presented on Desai, Keatley and Hardy. In the poetry section, caged birds proliferated to the virtual exclusion of anything else. Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the freshest responses seemed to come from work on texts for which there is not a surfeit of attendant 'study aids' on the market.

Some stellar work was seen, and there was also a freshness and directness in the work of many more average-achieving candidates. Examiners were pleased to see scripts with clearly shown detailed knowledge of the texts, with the precise wording of the question usually attended to. Rarely did Examiners find little attempt to answer the question.

A minority of candidates had clearly limited knowledge of the text, particularly when required by the question to range outside the one or two obvious central issues or main characters of that text. For some, close reading of the question was obviously a skill beyond them. Quite often a key adjective or adverb was not sufficiently noted. Candidates are required to pay attention to the presence of words like *moving*, *powerfully*, *vividly*, *amusing*, *memorable* in the question. These ask that they engage fully with the means by which the writer makes things live. This is one of the crucial elements which decide whether or not an answer is worthy of high reward.

Frequently Examiners came across mere assertions of the power or vividness of a word or group of words; for higher reward such answers need to explain *how* this power or vividness are created. Too many seemed, furthermore, content simply to offload, and sometimes parade, technical terminology (this year's favourite was 'anaphora') without engaging with the task in hand, and without explaining how language is being used by a writer and what its effects are.

Empathic answers on drama and prose were quite often encountered, sometimes revealing a remarkable imaginative contact with the writer's world. Samantha, Hale, Buckingham, Elizabeth and Reverend Sykes sometimes spoke with startling truth to the character, though other figures posed greater problems.

There is still the problem of some candidates assuming they need to write extensive introductions and conclusions. Most of these simply produce generalities and much repetition that contribute virtually nothing that is rewardable. While some candidates may have had no more to say than appeared in the body of their essays, it was more often the case that more detailed comment related to the task could have appeared had such candidates allowed themselves more time, with resultant extra reward.

Centres are asked if they could ensure the following: first, if there is a grid on the front page of the booklet, please see that all candidates use it to indicate what questions they have attempted; second, please ensure that each page has a margin in which the Examiner can write; third, please do not tie the sheets together so tightly that it is difficult to turn the sheets; fourth, please do not begin every answer in a new answer booklet.

Comments on specific questions

A Small Family Business

Question 1

This was the most popular task on the play, and was often done well. Most candidates saw the connection with the opening of the play and were able to make invidious comparisons, particularly in regard to Jack and his speech. Weaker ones spent a great deal of time on such things as Ken's state of mind or Yvonne's jewellery, often missing even here the significance of Poppy's change of personality from the beginning of

the play. It was also surprising how many did not take notice of the fade-out on Samantha and all that that contributed to the irony when contrasted with the fine sentiments and bonhomie of the final scene.

Question 2

There was much description of Hough's progress through the play, but his *menace* was rather too subtle for some. Others, though, really did do justice to his line in implied threats and the inferences of his creepy sexual nature.

Question 3

There were some convincing assumptions of Samantha's character. Clearly her adolescent mix of surliness, scepticism regarding her parents and uncertainty about her life struck a chord.

A Raisin in the Sun

Question 4

This was overwhelmingly the most popular question on this text. There was much good work seen in response to it. Many brought out rather well the sense of the family being reborn and supported that general idea with detail from the extract. At the other end of the scale, candidates used the task as an excuse to reveal the play as a whole with very little reference to the extract.

Question 5

The few who did this question often chose well and were able to show how the sparks flew, for instance between Beneatha and Mama and Walter and various family members. A minority simply asserted things without any detailed attention to language and action.

Question 6

This was attempted by very few. Some of the work showed very mature insight, but more usually candidates struggled at times to adopt appropriate thoughts and voice.

My Mother Said I Never Should

There was far too little work submitted on this text for for general comment to be appropriate.

The Crucible

Question 10

There were a great number of answers to this question and many of them showed an impressive ability to probe the inferences of the text. It was a very good differentiator, particularly when it came to weighing up Danforth's part in the passage. Quite a few totally misread the signs, thinking that Danforth was the major catalyst for change, sometimes even citing the twisted logic of his rejecting any evidence other than the 'victim's' in a witchcraft trial. Some solved the problem by ignoring Danforth totally.

Question 11

A few really did balance most impressively the detail in the context of the developing drama, but a significant number of responses seemed incapable of addressing how Miller makes John Proctor such a vividly dramatic character. Descriptions of his character abounded but were quite often not linked to the dramatic moments in the play when the audience see him at his most striking. Tellingly, the play was often described as a novel. Usually one just accepts that this is a slip of the pen but here it happened so often that one began to wonder whether this play was being treated as a drama or as a prose tract. Quite often Examiners were told how powerful the audience would have found a stage direction, as if there would be surtitles for them to read in the theatre. Perhaps drama in this mould needs extra effort to ensure that it is approached as something for the stage. (It was interesting that another drama set text with few stage directions like

Richard III presented few such problems in a very similar task.) Those who did the best were usually those who had some organisational skill in managing material.

Question 12

There were some very impressive assumptions of Hale's character, exactly capturing his anguish in suitably apocalyptic language as he has watched his beliefs and certainties disintegrate. Conversely, a minority narrated the events of the play and/or showed him coolly ready to minister to the flock.

As You Like It

Question 13

The majority of candidates were able to identify some drama in the passage, while weaker answers tended merely to re-tell. Good answers made the points that emotions are high because of Rosalind's banishment in the scene immediately preceding, that the mood here is at first one of sorrow and fear but that it soon turns to one of optimism and energy, and that the audience is moved by the closeness of the bond between Celia and Rosalind. The best answers explored the ways in which new elements are introduced, such as the comparison between the Forest and the Court, and suspense as to whether Rosalind will find her father and Orlando. There was also some discussion of the role of women and the necessity for disguise.

Question 14

Even those who adopted a narrative approach were able to find relevant material relating to the 'happiness' of the play even if 'optimism' sometimes proved elusive. Successful answers were well argued and picked up some of the darker elements of the play, such as the sibling rivalry and the comments of Jaques.

Question 15

There were some very convincing Celias which captured her wit and intelligence as well as the fact that she has just fallen in love. Outpourings of love for Oliver alone did not score very highly, however; there had to be some reference to the text even if oblique.

Richard III

Question 16

Few who attempted this were unable to pick up on the dramatic ironies of the scene surrounding the hapless Hastings, egged on by Catesby's sly innuendoes. Some quite rightly caught the scene's cynical tone and scoffed at the man's naivety and complacency but others were rather too inclined to pity him as he walks to his death, missing his self-esteem which is proof even to Stanley's warnings.

Question 17

There was some splendid work on this task bringing out fully the things which make Richard so riveting. Many clearly saw his relation to the audience and the effect that he has as he wittily and gaily picks off whatever or whoever stands in his way. At the other end of the scale, there were some who did little more than recount his villainous deeds.

Question 18

The responses here were varied. There were some excellent assumptions of the role when candidates had thought themselves into the character. They exactly caught the man's outrage at being dumped and his fears for the future now that he is out of favour. There were a number, though, who did little more than retell events.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 19

The great majority of the poetry answers were on this question. There had clearly been much preparation of this poem and there was some very impressive work indeed which managed to chart its overall meaning and developing structure, as well as probing in detail the effect of various poetic features. Less penetrating answers tended either to wander through the poem, picking out poetic features without much reference to the poem's developing meanings or simply told the Examiners what they thought the birds 'stood for'. A great number of candidates focused on what they saw as the political implications of the poem without engaging with the words at all and it was disappointing that many did not see the importance of the contrast with the free bird.

Question 20

This was not a popular task but it was well done at times by most of those who attempted it. There was some real engagement with the way the poets' feelings were communicated.

Question 21

There were far fewer answers to this and most who embarked on it found it hard to deal with the parameters of the task. Nearly all chose *Plenty* and *Mid-term Break* but most simply attached the concept of surprise to a run through of the poems. It was surprising how many failed to see that one major element of surprise in Dixon's poem was the persona's nostalgia for her childhood.

Keats

Question 22

This was the most popular of the Keats questions. Although candidates generally understood the thrust of the extract there was a disappointing lack of ability to comment on the language. Most answers merely paraphrased or explained.

Question 23

Candidates who chose this question generally knew the poem well and were able to comment on at least some of the imagery. They generally responded to its sensuousness and to the mood created by the personification of Autumn. Some had clearly been exposed to an interpretation relating the seasons to the stages in man's life, but when they focused on this they tended to lose the sense of what made Autumn attractive.

Question 24

This was a minority choice, but candidates attempting it showed knowledge of the poem and there were some good responses to the mood and language which went beyond mere narrative.

Things Fall Apart

Question 25

The answers to this often struggled. It required a clear grasp of the context, of the difference between this man and his predecessor, exemplified by the way Enoch suddenly becomes a power in the land. There was a good deal of mis-reading. Some, for instance, thought that black and white referred to Smith's supposed racist attitudes.

Question 26

The success of answers here rested to some extent upon the choosing wisely and most candidates made sensible choices. What was rather too often missing was a really detailed connection with Achebe's writing. Many thought that simply describing the events was sufficient to answer to the question.

Question 27

There were a few responses that captured Obierika's mixture of sorrow and anger at his friend's situation. Some, however, made him far too warlike and not sufficiently resigned to the inevitable.

Pride and Prejudice

Question 28

There was much good work on this question with candidates relishing the way Austen dismembers the Bingley sisters and reveals their nastiness. Many had no difficulty in responding to the author's acid ironic tones in much of the extract. Certainly there were few answers which did not at least attempt to probe the detail of the extract, though there were not infrequent uncertainties of reading. Some, for instance, did not realise that Mrs Hurst was one of the sisters.

Question 29

This task brought out the best in many. Whilst a number took the usual line of disparagement, and argued well for it, quite a few saw that Mrs Bennet, for all her sillinesses, did have legitimate concerns and worries. This often entailed referring somewhat sourly to Mr Bennet.

Question 30

Though there were some rather inappropriately gushing responses here, there were many more which caught the character's qualities quite splendidly and gave great pleasure to Examiners.

The God Boy

Question 31

This was chosen by the great majority of candidates who answered on Cross, and often with a great deal of sensitivity. There was a tendency to skate over the amusing moments which one candidate suggested was worthy of slapstick comedy at its best. However, nearly everyone was able to detect at least something of Jimmy's underlying hurt, most notably at the end of the extract.

Question 32

There were relatively few answers on this, but these were largely successful and often profoundly responsive to her tragic situation.

Question 33

Again only a few answers were seen, but most captured well the man's spiteful venom.

Games at Twilight

Far too little work on this text was submitted to make general comment appropriate.

Lord of the Flies

Question 37

This was a very popular choice and elicited a full range of responses. There was much that looked profoundly into the way Golding's symbolism works in this passage in the various descriptions of the fire, the sea and the mountain. As importantly, many picked out how Ralph's actions and speech suggest this is a watershed in his view of Jack and the hunters. Conversely the task revealed those candidates who could only repeat learnt mantras and could not engage with the detail of the writing.

Question 38

There were some very interesting answers on these two characters. Clearly the vote went, one suspects quite rightly, to Roger. Many felt that his comparative shadowiness and lack of emotion made him truly scary. Some answers mined details to support this which were extremely impressive as evidence of detailed knowledge. Indeed there was very little work here which did not show at least some evidence of this.

Question 39

Though Simon says little in the novel, a few candidates made a good attempt at creating appropriate thoughts for him, conveying his concern for the boys, his sense of something evil within them, and his desire for thought and contemplation. Examiners felt, though, that the majority answering on this rather struggled to find an authentic voice.

Far from the Madding Crowd

Question 40

There was a good deal of paraphrase in response to this question but the best answers were able to relate Troy's appearance in the passage to his behaviour elsewhere in the novel.

Question 41

There were some good choices here, particularly Bathsheba's opening of Fanny's coffin, and, as ever, candidates were more or less successful in the extent to which they went beyond narrative to exploration of mood and atmosphere.

Question 42

Better answers managed Boldwood's growing excitement well here. There was some confusion in weaker answers over the sequence of events.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 43

This was a hugely popular task and was usually done at least competently. It was, after all, not very difficult to pick out some salient, not to say obvious, points of comparison. However, quite a few did not really range very widely over the extract, missing such things as Atticus's role as a father later on in the passage which makes a startling comparison to Ewell. Also, it was often a sign of the better answers that the significance of the confrontation being mediated through the voice of the town gossip was considered, as was the effect on the reader of Atticus's complacency in regard to Ewell's continuing threat.

Question 44

This was usually competently done but rarely impressively. The problem lay in the selection of a range of material which showed the development of Scout's character. Sometimes crucial moments were missed or the candidate lost the thread of the argument and just described isolated moments in her life. Not infrequently her dispersal of the lynch mob was used to illustrate her maturing, when the point is that it is her innocence which deflates the mob's brutal intentions.

Question 45

A few outstanding assumptions of the Reverend Sykes's character were read. Sometimes, though, the selection of material was not always particularly judicious. To ignore what the future holds for the Robinson family, for example, is hardly to be expected of this man and sometimes his tones were hardly those of a gentle cleric.

Into the Wind

Question 46

Most of the answers on this text were to this question. Most at least captured something of the man's profoundly unpleasant personality but not that many quite mined the depths of Dahl's contempt for this kind of authority figure. Indeed, some argued that he was really only doing his job when faced by a road hog.

Question 47

The few candidates who attempted this task seemed to be vague about what constituted the setting of their chosen story. They rarely had very much to say.

Question 48

Again there were few answers to this question, but those who attempted it captured the prisoner's voice very well. They conveyed his dignity and contempt for his captors whilst making his fear very apparent. The best answers also made detailed responses to the physical surroundings, such a striking part of the story.