

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Composition

Key Messages

A differentiated range of achievement was seen in this component. There were, as usual, some informed and occasionally outstanding pieces of work. At the top end of the range, candidates produced highly fluent and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section; in the discursive and argumentative writing section, there were some very tightly controlled answers, supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification. These compositions instilled not only feelings of engagement but appreciation of what learners could achieve within the time limit. Answers in the middle of the range were often secure and offered some focused and purposeful creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles, but were marked by inconsistency in terms of technical expression and accuracy. Lower down the range, responses tended to be lacking in development or drifted into rather derivative or naïve approaches; some were affected by inappropriate levels of fluency and accuracy. They needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative / descriptive control. Argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

General Comments

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses – though this issue seems to be better this session than the last. Spending some time checking through the compositions for inconsistent tenses (as well as other technical errors) goes a long way towards a better mark. While paragraphing has generally improved, candidates need to remember to paragraph when using dialogue. With regard to length, some of the responses to **Section B** were very short; these answers were self-penalising, as short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Sometimes, candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. While there is no need for full drafts, candidates who wrote a brief plan often succeeded in giving more structured responses. Still on the subject of length, it was obvious that some candidates had spent too much time on one section at the expense of the other: this was seen in some long, rambling responses for **Section A** and alarmingly short answers for **Section B**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

(All Alone)

This was a very popular question, though responses were of varied quality. There were a good number of well-constructed answers with a clear understanding of the need to balance narrative line with the creation of character and place. A wide range of approaches was taken, with many candidates making good use of their imagination to stay within the bounds of expectation. Ideas focused on times of isolation in childhood or beginning new experiences, such as starting school or moving to a new location. Less effective responses tended to drift into thought processes or into incidents of bullying supported by excessive use of dialogue. Weaker answers were not sharply focused on the theme; 'character' was usually more developed than 'place'. Some candidates ignored the 'novel' notation and wrote stories which had endings. Sometimes, the link to the question was often not revealed until the end, after a long and rambling plot.

Question 2

(Life on the Road)

There were very few answers on this question. Candidates who attempted this seemed to have some difficulty with it, apparently confused by the title, and struggling with the concept. Some wrote two disconnected pieces, or pieces by separate narrators. Scenarios were therefore unconvincing and, overall, expression lacked quality and conviction because of the limited understanding.

Question 3

(Landscape – Morning)

This was a popular choice and produced a good range of descriptive writing and convincing responses, most of which clearly understood the expectations of the title. There were some very engaging and enjoyable compositions, especially where candidates built up detailed and sustained descriptive ideas without drifting into narrative. Sometimes, however, language effects seemed forced, with loosely controlled punctuation. There was sometimes an over-use of sentence fragments – which ultimately limited their effect. Candidates should use sentence fragments only sparingly, for effect. There was also quite a degree of tense-shifting. Weaker answers drifted into narrative or simply wrote stories only loosely connected with either landscape or morning.

Question 4

(Valuable Painting)

This was not a popular question, but where attempted responses mostly showed a strong voice and a clear sense of contrast and motivation. The links between the two pieces were well-considered. Some were excellent pieces, often with stunningly vicious characterisation! The question produced some of the best answers the Examiners had come across, showing a genuine sense of character, creating contrasting motivations and personalities, and convincing situations. The best candidates demonstrated a strong voice and provided cohesive narrative links between the two parts, drawing out other tensions between the contestants, adding historical context and background in the process. At the lower end, responses were not very convincing and suffered from weak expression.

Section B

Question 5

(Live for Today)

This was a popular question with a wide range of approaches. Most answers were focused and balanced, with the better responses widening the topic beyond the individual. Some strong candidates argued well even if from only one point of view, taking a personal stance all the way through the composition. Weaker answers tended to ramble on and lose focus, lacking the expressive ability to handle this kind of conceptual question. Some of these responses became repetitive and unvaried, drawing on clichés and generalised observations.

Question 6

(Do not Get Me Started)

This was not a popular question but where attempted usually grasped the style and tone needed. The responses were of varying quality, but there were some interesting targets. The best responses offered a strong voice and relevant examples. There were a number of weak answers, where the breadth of the question seemed to make it more difficult for candidates to focus their ideas.

Question 7

(Media and Privacy)

This was a popular question with some Centres and one which brought out a wide range of opinion. Much depended on the culture of the candidate as to the direction they took. There were some detailed arguments supported by examples of contemporary incidents and personalities, ranging from media celebrities to politicians in the candidates' home countries. Most answers offered a focused argument but only a few were done with sophistication. Strong candidates saw the complexity of possible responses while weaker responses went for a simplistic yes / no answer. The better ones had clear examples and did not neglect to use persuasive devices to convince.

Question 8

(Hobbies)

This was quite a popular question and responses were relevant, offering appropriate examples. There was some strong personal engagement with the topic, underpinned by a reasoned and relevant sense of audience and the approach entailed in the format. Effective answers adopted a mood of logical enthusiasm and compared life without and with recreational pursuits in a constructive and focused manner. However, weaker answers were a little pedestrian. A number missed the focus of the question, not always grasping the magazine article style. These failed to speak directly to the teenage audience via an article, writing often in the third person or talking about teenagers as if they were not the readers. Some simply described their own hobbies.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Composition

Key Messages

A differentiated range of achievement was seen in this component. There were, as usual, some informed and occasionally outstanding pieces of work. At the top end of the range, candidates produced highly fluent and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section; in the discursive and argumentative writing section, there were some very tightly controlled answers, supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification. These compositions instilled not only feelings of engagement but appreciation of what learners could achieve within the time limit. Answers in the middle of the range were often secure and offered some focused and purposeful creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles, but were marked by inconsistency in terms of technical expression and accuracy. Lower down the range, responses tended to be lacking in development or drifted into rather derivative or naïve approaches; some were affected by inappropriate levels of fluency and accuracy. They needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative / descriptive control. Argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

General Comments

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses – though this issue seems to be better this session than the last. Spending some time checking through the compositions for inconsistent tenses (as well as other technical errors) goes a long way towards a better mark. While paragraphing has generally improved, candidates need to remember to paragraph when using dialogue. With regard to length, some of the responses to **Section B** were very short; these answers were self-penalising, as short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Sometimes, candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. While there is no need for full drafts, candidates who wrote a brief plan often succeeded in giving more structured responses. Still on the subject of length, it was obvious that some candidates had spent too much time on one section at the expense of the other: this was seen in some long, rambling responses for **Section A** and alarmingly short answers for **Section B**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

(Lost in the Crowd)

This was a very popular choice, but the quality of answers varied widely. There were many well-constructed answers with a clear understanding of the need to balance narrative line with the creation of character and place. A wide range of approaches was seen, with the vast number of candidates making good use of their imagination to stay within the bounds of expectation. Large numbers responded with tales of festivals or large scale music events and markets. A few saw the potential for a more imaginative interpretation of the title: writing as an outsider, having no sense of identity, and so produced quite moving stories; or of committing a crime and disappearing into the crowds afterwards, leaving some kind of tense cliffhanger at the end. However, there were quite a number of responses where the link to the theme was tenuous, and also a number of dull first-person accounts about becoming separated from parents at some crowded venue, which were most unconvincing as opening chapters for a novel and often lacked any clear narrative control. Weaker responses ignored the 'novel' notation and wrote stories which had endings.

Question 2

(Twenty-four hours)

This was a moderately popular choice. It gave scope for a wide range of short stories. Some responses tended to be uneven in the wordage they gave to the respective episodes. Responses varied quite widely in quality. There were a few good answers but it was surprising how many candidates did not understand the concept of twenty-four hours. Many wrote two separate incidents or wrote the same incident but from different points of view. The effect was the two episodes did not hang together well or lacked any truly contrasting elements. Many limited the narrative effect by slow detailed description of a morning routine which had little relevance to the rest of the story. Others wrote in the third person. The best answers were those which contrasted location and pace, as well as personal emotion – drawing a clear sense of positive and negative scenes with some skill and imagination. Less effective answers tended to make the negative aspect too melodramatic – a sudden family tragedy, for example.

Question 3

(A Country Scene in the Evening)

Not as popular a choice as the first two questions. A number of candidates attempted appropriate linguistic features but sometimes this was overdone and the effect seemed forced, often at the expense of appropriate punctuation. There was also sometimes an over-use of sentence fragments – which ultimately limited their effect. Candidates should use sentence fragments only sparingly, for effect. Tense-switching was also a negative feature of some responses. Weaker answers drifted into narrative or simply wrote stories only loosely connected with either landscape or morning. There was still a good range of descriptive writing though, and most candidates clearly understood the expectations of the title. The top end answers were very well written indeed, with a sometimes impressive range of vocabulary and language effects, painting a visual landscape in great depth. Individual details and contrasts were evoked with aplomb.

Question 4

(Property Dispute)

This was a moderately popular choice. Some of the responses to this title were very good, showing a genuine sense of character, creating contrasting motivations and personalities, and convincing situations. The best candidates demonstrated a strong voice and provided cohesive narrative links between the two parts. Some excellent pieces came up with stunningly vicious characterisation. There were some very cantankerous relatives on display, unaware of any obligations or unable to evaluate a wider sense of responsibility. The question, though not the most popular, produced some of the best answers the Examiners had come across. Candidates from some Centres were particularly effective with this question, where issues of race were sensitively handled; often claimants were trying to restore ancestral homelands. The less successful answers allowed the narrators to resort to too much narrative or professions of outrage.

Section B

Question 5

(The Law)

The quality of responses to this question varied quite widely. The best answers offered balance, good examples and a developed argument. Weaker candidates were more diffuse in their responses with answers that tended to be generalised and lacking development. Other weak answers went on at some length about the importance to society of having laws in place without relating this directly to the question of people obeying legislation, nor of circumstances in which it might be permissible to bend the law, or corruption. One candidate used this question to write about School uniforms without any convincing relation to the question. The most successful responses were those which argued that there are situations when it is more moral to disobey the law – when the law restricts human or civil rights etc. The best answer took a historical perspective and cited the way in which American citizens threw tea into Boston harbour to rebel against the tax laws, moving through to Hitler and Stalin and how it is right to disobey totalitarian laws which persecute minorities.

Question 6

(Holiday Guide)

This was popular with candidates. This was generally answered with a suitably grumpy tone and most candidates appeared familiar with the kind of article that was being suggested. Most candidates managed to offer a humorous voice and appropriate content. The more able candidates found scope for lively articles, some of them quite amusing and using appropriate rhetorical language; less able answers struggled to find many points to make or to develop those points they had made. It was obvious when candidates were not really familiar with this kind of writing – they struggled with the concept of grumpiness. Of those who did focus on the title, many wrote about Christmas alone, on the assumption that ‘holiday’ equates to Christmas. However, strong candidates gave some splendidly vitriolic responses to horrendous family holidays.

Question 7

(Multi-national Companies)

Generally the strongest responses in **Section B** were to this question, as quite a few candidates in developing countries seemed to be quite knowledgeable about the subject. A good range of arguments, many of which were well developed: a question which gave a clear advantage to candidates of Economics, Geography or Business Studies. Candidates were often able to offer structured and coherent responses. Some candidates were let down by weak expression and/or technical errors but content was often well-focused. Many strongly argued with clear understanding of the double-edged sword which multi-national companies bring. Less successful answers neglected to use persuasive techniques to convince, relying only on the knowledge alone to formulate responses to the question.

Question 8

(Retirement)

This was a moderately popular choice and there were a number of well-focused responses which showed great insight into what one might do in retirement. Answers were usually well-structured and coherent. There were some very well balanced pieces and Examiners enjoyed a few non-condescending, lively responses to this question. But there were some highly patronising pieces which effectively patted the elderly on the head and told them to go away and play. Many wrote a straightforward guide, giving suitable suggestions for activities to pursue and ways to maintain health and fitness. Better candidates saw the value in older people, encouraging them to balance community involvement with personal enjoyment. Those who took notice of the fact that they were supposed to be writing a magazine article for older readers tackled this well.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23
Composition

Key Messages

A differentiated range of achievement was seen in this component. There were, as usual, some informed and occasionally outstanding pieces of work. At the top end of the range, candidates produced highly fluent and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section; in the discursive and argumentative writing section, there were some very tightly controlled answers, supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification. These compositions instilled not only feelings of engagement but appreciation of what learners could achieve within the time limit. Answers in the middle of the range were often secure and offered some focused and purposeful creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles, but were marked by inconsistency in terms of technical expression and accuracy. Lower down the range, responses tended to be lacking in development or drifted into rather derivative or naïve approaches; some were affected by inappropriate levels of fluency and accuracy. They needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative / descriptive control. Argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

General Comments

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses – though this issue seems to be better this session than the last. Spending some time checking through the compositions for inconsistent tenses (as well as other technical errors) goes a long way towards a better mark. While paragraphing has generally improved, candidates need to remember to paragraph when using dialogue.

With regard to length, some of the responses to **Section B** were very short; these answers were self-penalising, as short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Sometimes, candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. While there is no need for full drafts, candidates who wrote a brief plan often succeeded in giving more structured responses. Still on the subject of length, it was obvious that some candidates had spent too much time on one section at the expense of the other: this was seen in some long, rambling responses for **Section A** and alarmingly short answers for **Section B**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

(Starting Again)

This was a popular question, though responses were of varied quality. There were a fair number of well-constructed answers with a clear understanding of the need to balance narrative line with the creation of character and place. A wide range of approaches was taken, with many candidates making good use of their imagination to stay within the bounds of expectation. Responses focused on beginning life at a new School or possibly getting involved in a new relationship. Weaker answers were not sharply focused on the theme; 'character' was usually more developed than 'place'. Some candidates ignored the 'novel' notation and wrote stories which had endings. Sometimes, the link to the question was often not revealed until the end, after a long and rambling plot.

Question 2

(The Factory)

This was a moderately popular question. There were some very sound responses here, which implied that candidates had good knowledge of the realities of redundancy and sudden closures. There was some effective writing and characterisation even within the limits indicated – contrasts of before and after were nicely developed and opposed. Some pleasing answers brought out the changed personalities of those involved in the ownership of the factories in subtle ways. However, a number of answers tended to be rather unvaried, without much narrative interest or descriptive contrast: adopting the positive and then the mirror image approach ('there was a gleaming machine' / 'there was not a gleaming machine'). Some candidates offered two separate, two disconnected pieces, ignoring the specific wording of the question.

Question 3

(Midnight)

This produced a good range of descriptive writing and convincing responses, most of which clearly understood the expectations of the title. The genre based possibilities of mystery and suspense were in evidence, and predictably, there were ghost/horror stories set in graveyards or creepy houses; or kidnappings in alleyways at night. However, other answers looked at the title from an unusual angle – such as the romantic tryst of a teenage couple in an isolated landscape. Generally, though, even the narratives managed descriptive effects. Some fine descriptive writing was seen at the top end, creating very evocative/imaginative descriptions which avoided merely listing imagery. At the lower end language effects seemed forced, with an over-use of sentence fragments – which ultimately limited their effect. Candidates should use sentence fragments only sparingly, for effect. Punctuation was loosely controlled and there was quite a degree of tense-shifting. Weaker answers drifted into narrative solely or simply wrote stories only loosely connected with a midnight scene.

Question 4

(Two soldiers)

Not many candidates attempted this question. However, some of the responses to this title were very good, showing a genuine sense of character, creating contrasting motivations and personalities, and convincing situations. The best candidates demonstrated a strong voice and provided cohesive narrative links between the two parts. Some excellent pieces came up with a strong structure and powerful characterisation.

Section B

Question 5

(Space Exploration)

This was a popular question, and in the main, the efforts seen were sound, with some strong opinions. There was an analysis of why space exploration is important generally, as well as the cost implications. Better candidates had a clear understanding of the limitations, particularly financial, of any national involvement. There was a lot of interesting speculation about the worthwhile nature (or not) of trying to locate either Earth-like planets to colonise, or trying to link up with alien civilisations. There were some very strong advocates of space research and their approach was to offer strong exemplification and a focus on the future of the world itself. Weaker answers tended to drift around in terms of rockets and interplanetary development. There were mix-ups about Neil Armstrong's place in culture (no other astronaut names were mentioned); use of definite article "the outer space"; basic misunderstandings about how much money is spent – and very repetitive answers generally.

Question 6

(Grumpy Guide to Sport)

This was a moderately popular choice and elicited a number of engaging and thoughtful answers. Responses showed a suitable sense of voice and audience. There were quite a few entertaining and lively offerings – written with a witty tone and interesting examples to illustrate their points. It was enjoyable to see those with non-sporting interests offer their view on the subject. There were occasional responses where the

angle seemed to be one of vehement outpouring at years of frustration: others adopted a measured and reasoned attitude and gave the reader humorous and ironic insights from their own perspective.

Question 7

(Governments – Fairness and Morality)

A popular question, this provoked some lively and thoughtful ideas. Most answers showed informed awareness of modern examples, drawing in events from the international and domestic stage to expound their ideas. But some candidates found this tricky, as there was a tendency to drift into cases of the moral and financial sins of individual politicians, rather than the actions of governments. Some candidates managed to see the difference, writing thoughtfully on governments' decisions to go to war, for example, and human rights abuses. The key phrase was 'we should not expect...' and this potentially opened up the question of what our expectations of governments should be, and why. A number argued governments were so corrupt that there was no point expecting fair treatment. Others took the view that fairness and morality were signs of weakness and that no sensible government would be fair as that would be bad for the country. Better answers produced well-structured and rounded responses and had concrete examples. Less secure compositions seemed to offer a number of examples which were not drawn into a cohesive line of thought and direction.

Question 8

(School Brochure)

This was a very popular question. There was a wide range of responses from some excellent and thoughtful, to some which simply threw in everything technical and whizzy and hoped that that would do. A surprising number spent ages talking about swimming pools and computers but failed to mention teachers. Most, though, adopted the requisite style and approach of such a brochure, employing the kinds of persuasive language that such institutions might use in the act of self-promotion. Effective answers also drew on structure and offered a range of reasons in a voice meant to charm and entice.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key Messages

- For high marks, candidates need to know their texts in great detail to make secure references and use quotations to support the points made in the essay.
- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding, which means that answers which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary will not do well.
- Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.
- Candidates should not begin essays with a general paragraph about the writers, their works, or biography. They should demonstrate that they are answering the question set.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must be very detailed, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. Poetry answers should focus primarily on the poem printed on the question paper.

General Comments

Examiners saw a range of answers on most of the texts. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is gaining in popularity, though was not answered on as frequently as in the June session. Nevertheless, it produced some excellent, thoughtful answers. *A Passage to India* has remained very popular. It was notable in this session that many candidates on this text tended to write about general issues when attempting the passage-based questions, rather than focusing specifically on the details of the writing of the passages, as is required. As previously, responses to questions on Thomas Hardy's poetry were often hampered by biographical discussion; some candidates hardly discussed the poetry and therefore could not receive credit according to the mark scheme. Of the drama texts on the Language and Literature papers, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was the most popular text, eliciting sensitive, personal answers. There were very few responses this session on either of the other two plays.

While most candidates seemed appropriately prepared for the examination, there was sometimes evidence that answers were offered on passages from texts which had not been studied. In some cases there were significant errors of understanding, or a lack of any knowledge of relevant and informative context. These severely weaken such answers, which seldom gain significant marks. There was also quite a significant number of essays which declined into bullet points. Under pressure of time, bullet points may give some indication of where an essay was heading and are indeed better than writing nothing at all, but candidates should see this as a last resort; it is much better to plan time carefully so that two coherent answers can be written.

On the whole, the approach to passage-based questions has improved this session, with closer attention to the writers' use of language, imagery, form and structure. In some cases, however, candidates pick examples out of context, identifying a technique and sometimes suggesting some implications. It is a much more successful strategy to observe these details within the context of the passage or poem, showing how they contribute to the reader's understanding of the developing meaning.

Question Specific Comments

1. Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*

- (a) While there were not many answers to this question, candidates might have considered grief, change and loss as 'difficulties of life' explored in Hardy's poetry. This would have created opportunities to discuss a wide range of poems. As with all questions on Hardy, candidates are

most successful when they do not concentrate on Hardy's biography – it is a much more successful strategy to answer the question directly by looking closely at the poems and Hardy's poetic methods.

- (b) There were some successful responses to the question on 'At Castle Boterel', candidates usually appreciating the poem's negotiation between past and present and ways in which a specific memory associated with a particular place is evoked in the poem. There was some discussion of the way the stanzas are tightly structured, with comment on the effects of the short final line of each. Candidates also commented on the caesura and rhetorical question in stanza 4, which serve to exalt the memory, and there was sensitive writing on the final stanza, its acceptance of the past clear in the repetition of 'shrinking' and the emphatic quality of the final line. Weaker answers summarised the poem, while others discussed only Hardy and Emma Gifford, using the content of the poem merely as a springboard into biographical discussion. Such answers could not be credited according to the mark scheme descriptors.

2. Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were few answers on this question. Its cue quotation gave candidates a lead into ways in which Heaney explores the crafting process of various tools and the use which people make of them. The poem from which the quotation is taken, 'Midnight Anvil', as well as 'Poet to Blacksmith', makes explicit Heaney's drawing of a parallel between these crafts and the craft of poetry, which is implicit in a number of other poems.
- (b) While there were not many responses on Heaney, this question received more attention than the (a) question. Surprisingly few candidates acknowledged that the stanza selected is taken from a longer sequence of stanzas, and only a small number were aware of Heaney's earlier 'Tollund Man' poem and its archaeological source. There was, though, thoughtful response to Heaney's creation of the voice of the Tollund Man, inhabiting the character as he contemplates his first discovery. Attention was paid to the effects of the short phrases at the poem's opening and in l.10, while candidates also discussed the sense of patience apparent in 'lay in wait/ Still waited.' Few were able to comment on Heaney's use of sonnet form.

3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) Success in the (a) questions is often based on an appropriate choice of poems, and here candidates wrote very well on 'You Cannot Do This', 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', 'Cambodia', 'The Reservist' and 'Attack' in particular. Many candidates showed intelligent understanding of language (particularly in 'Anthem' and 'The Reservist') and structure (particularly in 'Cambodia'). Some candidates made valiant efforts to link less suitable poems to the question, but not all succeeded.
- (b) There were many answers to this question with most candidates responding well to Bishop's poem. Even less confident candidates were able to note its progressive structure, the humorous, self-mocking tone and the fact that the repetition of the key phrase was an attempt by the narrator to convince both herself and the reader of its truth. More confident candidates picked up on aspects such as half-rhyme, the second person imperatives ('like a manual', noted one candidate), and the hyperbole of the fifth stanza. Many showed perceptive understanding of the subtleties of the last stanza, including the disruption of regular structure; the fact that the person addressed is now an individual rather than the reader; the use of the dash and parenthesis to reflect the loss of the poet's previous certainty; and what one candidate called 'the subtle modification' of the repeated phrase by the introduction of the word 'too'. Many candidates showed an implicit or explicit understanding of irony.

4. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

- (a) In answers to this question, most candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the presentation of Richard's character without always achieving a clear focus on his role or significance – although stronger candidates tended to do this almost automatically. Candidates who wrote explicitly about Richard's role and significance referred to him as a bridge between Europe and Biafra; as a suitable spokesperson, in that he is someone who is not bound to the country by nationality; as an inspiration for Ugwu to write the story and as a catalyst for the emotional entanglements of other characters. The most successful answers examined specific episodes from the novel which

illustrated these aspects, looking at, for example, his relationship with Kainene, his appointment by the Biafran government, his speaking of Igbo and his meeting with the American journalists.

- (b) The passage proved to be a popular question. Weaker answers struggled to rise above the level of paraphrase, but stronger responses focused on details such as the 'bloodied hands' and how 'Success hauled him above the ground' to show the effects of war on Ugwu. Comments were also made on the sense of liberation from normal discipline ('Rules relaxed') and from normal civilised behaviour, noting the aggressive nature of 'Get out! Bloody civilians'. Some candidates pointed out that Ugwu's statement 'It is enough' showed that he had retained some moral sense. Some answers noted how war had created hostile divisions between people supposedly on the same side. A few candidates wrote less successful answers as they overlooked the key requirement of the (b) question to 'Comment closely' on the extract: some made only very brief passing references, while others, while writing perfectly good general answers about the effects of the war on the various characters, made no reference to the selected passage at all.

5. EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) This question stimulated some thoughtful responses exploring the inter-racial relationships in the novel. A successful strategy was to compare the general English view, as encapsulated in the cue quotation, with the relationship between Aziz and Fielding. However, most candidates noted that despite its earlier warmth, the relationship is strained by the end of the novel. Some candidates astutely questioned whether the English ever show 'mutual respect and esteem', citing a number of examples, from the unsuccessful Bridge Party to attitudes shown at Aziz's trial. A few candidates unsuccessfully narrowed the question, taking the word 'Intimacy' out of its context in the quotation, and only discussing Aziz and Adela's experience in the Marabar caves.
- (b) Not many candidates chose the passage question on this text. Those who did attempt it wrote about the colour and activity of the festival and looked at Aziz's isolation from events, noting that he 'could not understand this' and that he 'did not pay attention to these sanctities, for they had no connection with his own'. There were also some interesting comments on the Hindu festival's inclusiveness, with the moment for the band of the 'unclean sweepers' before 'The doors were thrown open'. Successful responses looked closely at the language and imagery of the descriptions in the passage, while less successful answers summarised its content.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) 'Real Time', 'The Bath', 'The Hollow of the Three Hills' and 'Sredni Vashtar' were the most popular stories chosen in responses to this question. Candidates often found it a successful strategy to compare the stories, looking at the fearful resignation to oncoming death in 'The Bath', for example, and comparing it with death brought about by revenge in 'Sredni Vashtar'. The strongest answers looked in some detail at structure, the creation of mood and atmosphere, and at characterisation – this was much more successful than relying on a recall of plot only, a feature of weaker answers.
- (b) This passage stimulated a number of responses, many of which showed candidates' sensitive sympathy with the position of the narrator. Such answers commented on the sequence of demands made in the first section of the passage, and that the 'waited' in l.15 shows that there is no real hope that the 'checks in the mail' will be the last ones. Many candidates wrote well about the two dreams, recognising their significance. The first is a glimpse of past happiness and security and the source of the central 'elephant' metaphor, while the second shows decline and disillusion. Candidates usually recognised that these dreams hold the key to the psychology of the narrator and are therefore crucial in exploring his state of mind, sandwiched as they are in the passage between accounts of the narrator's daily life.

7. Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- (a) In the relatively few answers seen on this question, candidates were often able to illustrate the brutality of the play's dialogue and action, but had much greater difficulty in recognising its humour. This meant in turn that they struggled to deal with the ambiguity of responses to the play toward which the question gestures. Some candidates dealt with examples of brutality and examples of humour, without recognising the possibility of ambiguity and the coexistence of these reactions.
- (b) A number of candidates gave an account of the argument in the passage, showing a lively personal response. Stronger answers were able to go further and comment specifically on how the stage

directions and dialogue demonstrate Albee's dramatic methods in creating shock, tension and climax. The guides to actors were noted (*'distinctly'*, *'laughter'*, *'awe'*, *'contempt'*, *'fake-spits'*), as well as the use of italics, ellipses and capitals to show intonation and emphasis. Candidates also commented on the ferocity and shocking bluntness of some of the insults used before the passage ends with the promise of 'Total war'.

8. William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

- (a) There were few answers on *Richard III*. Answers to this question usually relied on plot summary and an account of deaths and betrayals, which did not sufficiently address the question about the 'ways in which Shakespeare presents a nation in political turmoil'. Candidates might have looked at scenes of planning and deceit juxtaposed with scenes of apparent reconciliation, speeches of lament, scenes with the citizens expressing their concern, or Richard's and Buckingham's manipulation of the Mayor of London, for example.
- (b) Some candidates showed sensitivity to how Shakespeare creates sympathy for Clarence across the two scenes represented in the extract. There was discussion of Richard's 'naked villainy' in plotting against his brother as well as against 'Rivers. Dorset, Grey', noting his coldness as he warns the murderers against 'pity'. Strong answers noted that the Scene 4 is informed by dramatic irony, the audience keenly aware of the plot while hearing Clarence recount his dream. The details of the dream, in particular its references to 'Gloucester', then became very fruitful for discussion, while the imagery of Clarence's speech consistently evokes death and despair.

9. Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- (a) There were some lively responses to this question, as candidates explored Blanche's mythologising of her past, her high status and sophistication. Candidates recognised the fantasies as Blanche's survival mechanism and the strongest responses looked at ways in which they are established in the play, not only through Blanche's speeches, but through her shading of the lamps, her baths and costume. Good answers too also looked at the realities which lie behind the fantasies, realities which require the mythical presence of Shep Huntleigh and which are brought into the play by Stanley.
- (b) Candidates often respond well to Williams' plays and his dramatic methods, and write in detail and with understanding as much about the stage directions as about the dialogue. This extract was no exception, as candidates started with the lighting creating '*Lurid reflections*' and ended with the threat of violence as Blanche clutches '*the broken top*' of the bottle. Strong answers noted the desperation in Blanche's phone call, signalled by the exclamation marks and dashes, and the foreshadowing effect of the action in the street between the prostitute and the drunkard. The violence of the bathroom door being '*thrown*' open was noted and candidates did not miss the significance of Stanley's '*brilliant silk pyjamas*', nor the dangerous threat of his '*grin*'. The aftermath of this extract was well known and this contextual knowledge crucially informed many of the responses.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/92

Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key Messages

- For high marks, candidates need to know their texts in great detail to make secure references and use quotations to support the points made in the essay.
- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding, which means that answers which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary will not do well.
- Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.
- Candidates should not begin essays with a general paragraph about the writers, their works, or biography. They should demonstrate that they are answering the question set.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must be very detailed, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. Poetry answers should focus primarily on the poem printed on the question paper.

General Comments

Examiners saw a range of answers on most of the texts. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is gaining in popularity, though was not answered on as frequently as in the June session. Nevertheless, it produced some excellent, thoughtful answers. *A Passage to India* has remained very popular. It was notable in this session that many candidates on this text tended to write about general issues when attempting the passage-based questions, rather than focusing specifically on the details of the writing of the passages, as is required. As previously, responses to questions on Thomas Hardy's poetry were often hampered by biographical discussion; some candidates hardly discussed the poetry and so could not receive credit according to the mark scheme. Of the drama texts on the Language and Literature papers, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was much the most popular text, eliciting sensitive, personal answers. There were very few responses this session on either of the other two plays.

While most candidates seemed appropriately prepared for the examination, there was sometimes evidence that answers were offered on passages from texts which had not been studied. In some cases there were significant errors of understanding, or a lack of any knowledge of relevant and informative context. These severely weaken such answers, which seldom gain significant marks. There was also quite a significant number of essays which declined into bullet points. Under pressure of time, bullet points may give some indication of where an essay was heading and are indeed better than writing nothing at all, but candidates should see this as a last resort; it is much better to plan time carefully so that two coherent answers can be written.

On the whole, the approach to passage-based questions has improved, with closer attention to the writers' use of language, imagery, form and structure. In some cases, however, candidates pick examples out of context, identifying a technique and sometimes suggesting some implications. It is a much more successful strategy to see these details within the context of the passage or poem, showing how they contribute to the reader's understanding of the developing meaning.

Question Specific Comments

1. Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*
 - (a) Candidates who focused clearly on specific moments, such as the evocation of memories in 'Beeny Cliff', the singing of the bird in 'The Darkling Thrush', hearing a voice in 'The Voice', seeing the shadow in 'The Shadow on the Stone', tended to be successful, especially when they considered in detail how Hardy uses language, imagery and structure to present these moments in the poems.

Essays which used poems as a launching pad for discussion of Hardy's biography were inevitably unsuccessful. Examiners found that many essays concentrated on biography to such an extent that they contained very little reference to the poetry beyond a brief indication of content. Such answers struggled to show any understanding of the writer's methods or effects.

- (b) As with (a), the most successful responses made sparing, if any use of biography, instead noting a detached observation of the man and his vision, while suggesting the poem is describing the narrator himself in the third person. This constructed detachment allows the judgement of him as 'Queer' and in 'a careworn craze'. Candidates noted that the vision presents a contrast: while 'He withers daily', she 'rides gaily' and 'Time touches her not'. Most answers recognised this as a dream vision from memory, but one deliberately constructed and held – 'A phantom of his own figuring.' Strong answers looked at ways in which alliteration, rhyme and rhythm combine to create a dreamlike tone in the poem.

2. Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) Some candidates knew their chosen poems in pleasing detail, which produced some strong answers to this question. They made effective use of their knowledge of poems such as 'The Aerodrome', 'Anahorish 1944', 'District and Circle' and 'The Nod'. Vivid details such as the 'Red beef, white string' of 'The Nod', the squealing pigs of 'Anahorish 1944', the various sights and sounds of the underground railway, from the 'tin whistle' to the 'white tiles' and the 'crowd-swept, strap-hanging' journey of 'District and Circle', and were able to convey why such details were so powerful, contributed to some developed and thoughtful responses.
- (b) Few candidates answered this question and only a small number of those who attempted it acknowledged that the stanza selected is taken from a longer sequence of stanzas, and very few were aware of Heaney's earlier 'Tollund Man' poem and its archaeological source. Some of the more confident answers were able to show how contemporary 'scans, screens, hidden eyes' contrasted with the rural references such as 'trickles of kesh water' and 'panicked snipe offshooting into twilight'. Candidates usually recognised that the Tollund Man is thus characterised as a rural figure, at home in 'bog-pooled rain' and unfamiliar with the security and electronics of a present day 'virtual city'. Some suggested a ghostliness or spirituality in the fact that he is 'Unregistered' by surveillance methods. Useful comments were made on how the rural background is reflected in Heaney's language choices, but few commented on the sonnet form of the stanza.

3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) There were some interesting choices of poems for this question. Some used poems such as 'Anthem For Doomed Youth' as an example of a poem with little hope for the future, compared with a poem which did demonstrate some hope. As long as this was clearly and explicitly argued, the strategy was successful – in many cases, though, it was not clearly argued through. Essays successfully featured such poems as 'A Man I Am', 'Friend', 'Trees' and 'Praise Song For My Mother'. 'Friend' elicited some particularly thoughtful writing, as candidates noted the progression from sad nostalgia to a tentatively optimistic ending: 'Perhaps the tree will strike fresh roots again.' The question asked for a discussion of 'ways in which poets express hope', which meant that candidates who looked closely at the progression of ideas in their chosen poems, with analysis of language and structure, were very successful, while those who were restricted to a summary of content were limited in their success.
- (b) Examiners saw an enormous number of responses to 'You Cannot Do This', a poem which does not define who or what 'you' and 'this' are. The strongest answers tackled that problem directly, making intelligent suggestions from a careful reading of the poem. Such answers were more successful than those which imposed a meaning, such as warfare or denial of women's rights. Most answers noted the authoritative voice of the speaker, the protective nature and concern for 'my people' and the sense of anger against those to whom the words are addressed, while stronger essays drew these points from close attention to details of the poem. Others appreciated the speaker's determination to record the evil committed, with references to 'the tomb' and 'I will record it also'. Answers which focused clearly on the tone and language, as required by the question, commented that the tone is variously Biblical, confrontational, threatening, accusatory and serious but also protective and defensive and the language features harsh imagery, passionate refrains and possessive pronouns, with connotations of injustice, inhumanity and ownership. Confident candidates commented on the lack of certainty conveyed through the vagueness of 'something to do with' and expressed quite perceptive and convincing interpretations of the references to School

trophies ('signs of innocent glory, valued by families') and pride of the loins ('a pride in successive generations, handing down the genes'.)

4. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

- (a) This is an increasingly popular text, and as the central character, Ugwu was a popular choice. Straightforward answers discussed Ugwu's characterisation by concentrating on his personal journey of growth and maturity from an uneducated, inexperienced village boy to a loyal, reliable servant, an ambitious, scholarly candidate ('I learn fast') a confident educator, a brave but guilt-ridden soldier ('Target Destroyer') and an accomplished author. More perceptive answers assessed Adichie's multi-faceted presentation of Ugwu's character more critically, noting that he is indulged and enriched by Olanna, inspired and transformed by Odenigbo, damaged and desensitised by the war, but that he emerges as a survivor. His significance was noted as the pivotal role in the lives of other characters and his narrative voice as a tool for Adichie to highlight the central concerns of the text – social divisions, the Biafran war and political change in Nigeria as well as sexual love, relationships and education. Such responses showed detailed knowledge of carefully selected episodes from the novel, with understanding of how they contribute to Ugwu's role and the reader's developing appreciation.
- (b) Candidates often demonstrated good and perceptive engagement with this option. Most answers discussed and illustrated successfully the effects of the horrors of war and the trauma experienced by ordinary citizens, as created through Adichie's use of brutal imagery. Some candidates noted the tense dialogue at the passage's opening and the disbelief that Port Harcourt is being attacked. There were also observant comments on the description of the aircraft and the parallel presentation of Ikejide's body movements while running and after being struck. Some candidates noted the role reversal in Richard's and Kainene's actions and reactions at the beginning and end of the passage, Harrison's calm presence of mind and the practicalities of a quick burial. The passage invited close attention to Adichie's language and candidates who accepted this invitation wrote very successfully.

5. EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) Many candidates who answer on *A Passage to India* have a very good, sometimes highly detailed, knowledge of the text and most were able to use it with some relevance to the question. However, a frequent problem, which restricted many answers, was a failure to read the question carefully, which led to essays discussing British treatment of the Indians or the British attitude to Indians. Such answers missed the entire purpose of the question. More alert candidates recognised an essentially politically-directed question. Stronger answers used the debate between Aziz, Hamidullah and Mahmoud Ali in Chapter 2, the bridge party and events at the Marabar caves as key episodes, while successful candidates acknowledged the Indians' dual perspectives of their rulers, reflected in the more respectful and compliant attitudes of the older passive generation, such as Godbole and Nawab Bahadur, contrasted with the younger generation, who display frustration and confrontation. There was also useful discussion of transient friendships and understanding between Aziz, Fielding, Mrs Moore and Adela, though noting that they do not ultimately last. Overall, responses to this question demonstrated the key necessity for candidates to read carefully the precise wording of the questions set.
- (b) The wording of the question is very important and the wording stated the constant requirement of passage-based questions: 'Comment closely'. A very high number of answers did not acknowledge that this was a (b) question, and instead contained general discussion of the Marabar caves. They often showed detailed knowledge of the novel and understanding of the caves' role in it, with thoughtful comments on the events that happen there. This contextual information was sometimes a part of strong answers, as long as it was used to develop the discussion of 'ways in which Forster presents the Marabar caves' in the passage. Without that close focus on the writing of the passage, such discussion, however well-founded in the text as a whole, did not answer the question set. More successfully focused answers noted the provocative opening sentences of each of the paragraphs, which combine to create a paradoxical impression of the caves. On the one hand, they 'are like nothing else in the world', while on the other they 'are readily described.' The suggestion that the caves are 'extraordinary' is balanced by a dull list of measurements. The possibility that the experience of the caves might be a 'dull one' is in turn balanced by the lyrical description of 'marvellously polished' walls and 'delicate stars of pink and gray'. Observant candidates noted the implications of diction such as 'insanely', 'dark', 'thrust' and the repetition of

'nothing'. The passage provides rich material for discussion of language, imagery and tone, so it was disappointing that so many answers did not respond to the question in the appropriate way.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) This was a popular question, with 'The Hollow of the Three Hills', 'The Moving Finger', 'Sredni Vashtar' and 'The Lady in the Looking-Glass' providing particularly fruitful material for candidates. Essays often showed good knowledge of the stories with understanding of how the writers created a sense of mystery. In 'The Hollow of the Three Hills', candidates tended to have a clear image in their minds of the setting and the characterisation of the old woman, while good use was made of the painting in 'The Moving Finger'. Candidates noted the build-up to the climax of 'Sredni Vashtar', making the point that the aunt's death is not seen, while discussion of 'The Lady in the Looking-Glass' often noted the metaphor of reflection, with the sense of mystery about the woman eventually extinguished by the mundane at the end of the story.
- (b) Among answers to this question, more successful essays commented on Ballard's creation of a claustrophobic atmosphere in the ever-diminishing space. Some answers noted the use of precise details, particularly with regard to measurements, in a story where space is so vital. Some commented on the depiction of character, for example the generosity of Ward, the fact that Helen is 'overjoyed' with a tiny amount of space and the ingratitude of the old man. Many commented on the symbolic significance of the wardrobe, linking it with its first appearance in the story. Many answers, however, lost sight of the question in terms of the effectiveness of the passage as the conclusion of the story, but one or two noted the pessimistic tone of the penultimate paragraph ('pang of regret', 'he would never see it again') and the fact that readers can appreciate the irony of the final sentence.

7. Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- (a) There were very few answers on this text, but nearly all candidates who had studied it chose to respond to this question. Answers concentrated on Martha and George's imaginary son and Honey's phantom pregnancy, with stronger responses looking carefully at how these issues contribute to the dramatic tension of the play. Strong essays considered the gradual stripping down to the painful truths which the characters try to hide and the way in which children and the absence of children are used as psychological and verbal weapons, particularly by George and Martha.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question. Strong answers would have noted the challenges and shouting in the dialogue, represented by exclamation marks and capital letters, along with the repetition of 'Lies!' and 'Liar!' The use of ellipses and interruption are other key devices here, while the overlapping dialogue at the end of the scene, where George tries to drown out Martha's speech with the Latin requiem is particularly notable.

8. William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

- (a) A number of the few answers to this question merely listed the murders which are carried out in Richard's name, which did not fully answer the question set. Stronger responses looked not only at the various assassinations, but also the deceit, manipulation and mistrust which informs the play. Clarence, Anne, Queen Elizabeth, Hastings, Buckingham, Tyrrel and the Citizens were as much a part of good answers as Richard himself.
- (b) Again there were not many responses to this question, but candidates who attempted it responded readily to Catesby's careful manipulation of Hastings and ways he encourages Hastings to reveal his beliefs and allegiances. Stronger answers showed acute awareness of the dramatic irony at play, with the audience's knowledge of Catesby's task, ordained by Richard, and therefore a growing certainty of Hastings' death, which follows shortly afterwards. There were thoughtful comments on how this is accentuated by Hastings' confidence, as he is certain that he 'shall laugh at this a twelve month hence'.

9. Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- (a) Many candidates wrote successfully on this question, looking at the ways in which Blanche constructs both history and future for herself in order to hide the reality of both. Strong answers paid detailed attention to some of her speeches, particularly to Mitch, who is taken in by her make-

believe until disabused by Stanley. Some answers demonstrated considerable sympathy for Blanche, suggesting her dreams cover her vulnerability, while others were highly critical of ways her imagination creates self-deceit and deceives others.

- (b) There were noticeably fewer answers to this passage-based question. Good responses, though, noted the use of costume, Stanley's retrieval of his significant 'silk pyjamas' contrasted to Blanche's 'worn-out Mardi Gras outfit'. Stanley's short, puncturing lines and questions, compared with Blanche's longer deceptive speeches were noted, until Stanley's sequence of aggressive lines from l.58 reduce Blanche to a sequence of 'Oh's. The underlying sexual tension, begun by the pyjamas and developed with questions about 'interfer(ing) with (Blanche's) privacy' before Stanley's exit '*into the bedroom*' was linked successfully with the rape of Blanche which occurs shortly afterwards.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/93

Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key Messages

- For high marks, candidates need to know their texts in great detail to make secure references and use quotations to support the points made in the essay.
- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding, which means that answers which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary will not do well.
- Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.
- Candidates should not begin essays with a general paragraph about the writers, their works, or biography. They should demonstrate that they are answering the question set.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must be very detailed, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. Poetry answers should focus primarily on the poem printed on the question paper.

General Comments

Examiners saw a range of answers on most of the texts. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is gaining in popularity, though was not answered on as frequently as in the June session. Nevertheless, it produced some excellent, thoughtful answers. *A Passage to India* has remained very popular. It was notable in this session that many candidates on this text tended to write about general issues when attempting the passage-based questions, rather than focusing specifically on the details of the writing of the passages, as is required. Again, responses to questions on Thomas Hardy's poetry were often hampered by biographical discussion; some candidates hardly discussed the poetry and so could not receive credit according to the mark scheme. Of the drama texts on the Language and Literature papers, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was much the most popular text, eliciting sensitive, personal answers. There were very few responses this session on either of the other two plays.

While most candidates seemed appropriately prepared for the examination, there was sometimes evidence that answers were offered on passages from texts which had not been studied. In some cases there were significant errors of understanding, or a lack of any knowledge of relevant and informative context. These severely weaken such answers, which seldom gain significant marks. There was also quite a significant number of essays which declined into bullet points. Under pressure of time, bullet points may give some indication of where an essay was heading and are indeed better than writing nothing at all, but candidates should see this as a last resort; it is much better to plan time carefully so that two coherent answers can be written.

On the whole, the approach to passage-based questions has improved, with closer attention to the writers' use of language, imagery, form and structure. In some cases, however, candidates pick examples out of context, identifying a technique and sometimes suggesting some implications. It is a much more successful strategy to see these details within the context of the passage or poem, showing how they contribute to the reader's understanding of the developing meaning.

Question Specific Comments

1. Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*
 - (a) 'A Church Romance', 'The Self Unseeing', 'Beeny Cliff' and 'Thunderstorm in Town' were popular choices for this question, with candidates enjoying most success when they made only fleeting references to Hardy's biography. Those who concentrated on biography tended to overlook the

poetic qualities of the selected material and thus missed discussion of Hardy's methods and language. This may have accounted for the success of those essays which chose poems with little recourse to biography, such as 'The Man He Killed' and 'Convergence of the Twain', which were frequently explored thoughtfully.

- (b) 'The Shadow on the Stone' elicited some sensitive responses. Literary answers dealt with the ways in which the rhyme and rhythm of the poem reflect the nostalgic mood; essays cited the alliterative effect of repeated use of 's', the use of enjambment to create a conversational, almost confessional tone and the effect in context of diction such as 'broods', 'lone' and 'apparition'. Few candidates, interestingly, commented on Hardy's neologism 'unvision'. On the other hand, there was some perceptive discussion of the role of the creative imagination which produces the vision, reflected in 'I thought', 'my belief' and 'My head unturned lest my dream should fade.' Such answers, carefully examining the language and structure of the poem, were much more successful than those which adhered closely to Hardy and Emma Gifford.

2. Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were not many responses to this question, but candidates who attempted it made good use of such poems as 'The Lift', 'A Clip', 'District and Circle', 'Out of Shot', 'The Aerodrome' and 'Anahorish 1944'. Successful answers discussed ways in which Heaney describes the various settings, establishing mood and atmosphere, and went on to acknowledge the significance of each setting to its particular poem.

- (b) Surprisingly few candidates acknowledged that the stanza selected is taken from a longer sequence of stanzas, and only a small number were aware of Heaney's earlier 'Tollund Man' poem and its archaeological source. There were some successful answers, however. Stronger answers showed an appreciation of the shift in tone of the poem, marked by a change from the diction of decay ('bog-damp', 'musty', 'withered' and 'dust' (twice) to the more optimistic connotations of 'straightened', 'benefit' and 'spirited'. Some noted how alliteration contributes to the more dynamic mood of the final lines. A few candidates appreciated the wider significance of the images, noting that the poem is about 'the inability of old methods and lifestyles to cope with the modern world'. Few commented on Heaney's use of sonnet form.

3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) 'Dissatisfaction with the world' was interpreted in a wide variety of ways, which gave candidates access to many poems in the selection. The war poems were frequently chosen, along with 'Because I Liked You Better', 'My Parents', 'Tears, Idle Tears' and 'Cold in the Earth'. The most successful answers were characterised by detailed knowledge of the chosen poems and strong awareness of the poet's language and methods – 'Cambodia' in particular often served candidates well here, with intelligent comments on structure. Less confident answers were limited by a lack of detailed knowledge of the poems to draw on. Most candidates maintained their focus on the specific question, but there were some responses that featured general commentary on the poems, with dissatisfaction mentioned only in passing, usually in the introduction and conclusion of the essay.

- (b) Allingham's poem was a popular choice and candidates who knew the poem well wrote successfully on aspects of technique, which proved accessible in this poem. Many essays featured sharp and intelligent comments on the effects of setting, structure, diction, and rhyme. Some candidates used context in a relevant way, mentioning Allingham's Irish roots and the Gaelic tradition of Samhain. Answers commented on the gothic opening, and the mood changes with the march of the dead, noting that 'Townsfellows' and 'Schoolmates' are terms of companionship. Candidates observed the effects of repetition, creating the sense of a never-ending stream of people before the sudden sight of the 'fair pale face' of 'Mother dear'. Candidates who were less well prepared tended to make assumptions based on the opening that the whole poem describes a frightening nightmare. Zombies were mentioned more than once and even some good answers tended to skip over the last stanza and add little after dealing with the narrator's mother.

4. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

- (a) There were some observant answers about Odenigbo, with candidates recognising the change in his character through the time period of the novel, beginning as an active, energetic intellectual, providing a role model to Ugwu, and ending disillusioned, weakened and inactive, with Ugwu taking

the dominant role. This disillusionment during the war was central to good answers. As one candidate commented, 'Odenigbo's ideas are theoretical and far less convincing when he has to apply them in practice.' Other good responses explored Odenigbo as a character positioned between the two worlds of traditional village life, susceptible to palm wine and Amala, and aspiring to a westernised life of tennis and debating. Some argued that his intellectual life is a post-colonial betrayal of his African roots, which leads to his decay during the action of the novel. Some essays also thoughtfully discussed how Adichie balances his political life with his private concerns, considering the 'revolutionary's relationship with Olanna, the birth of Baby and his patronage of Ugwu.

- (b) This passage stimulated many very good answers, closely focused on the writing of the passage and commenting on aspects such as the creation of a calm ordinary mood through the natural, friendly dialogue between Richard and Nnaemeka, which is then destroyed when the side entrance 'burst(s) open'. Many noted the description of the soldiers' eyes as 'red and wildly glassy' and the frantic, hostile tone of the questions. Perceptive answers noted the contrasting effect of dramatic short sentences ('The lounge was silent') and the long listing sentence ('more soldiers, more shots, more shouts') together with powerful diction such as 'writhing', 'gurgle' and 'guttural', which, for a number of candidates, painted a particularly graphic and horrific picture. The sympathy the reader has with Nnaemeka, established through the earlier conversation, was cited as an added device in heightening the shock of his death. There were neat comments about the sentence structure at the end of the passage, where Richard's extreme physical reaction of vomiting is stated almost as an add-on to the more prosaic 'he almost missed his flight'. From this came a good structural point that the violence which erupts so quickly is framed by the initial announcement of Richard's boarding instruction and his walk to the plane. Others noted how Adichie subtly introduces the importance of ethnicity and accent with the note early in the passage of the 'elegant Hausa accent' of the boarding announcement and Richard's line of Igbo to Nnaemeka.

5. EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) A few responses based the argument on the cue quotation in the question, and wrote well on the almost sanctifying characterisation of Adela and Ronny as 'victim' and 'martyr', noting the elevation of Ronny despite Adela apparently having suffered the actual assault. This led to some interesting discussions of English attitudes after the Marabar incident. Answers covered Turton's comments at Aziz's arrest and McBryde going through his papers. Candidates noted the isolation of Fielding at the gathering at the club and the elevation of Mrs Blakiston as a symbol of English womanhood. Many candidates wrote well about the behaviour of the women and their sudden devotion to Adela, the subject of previous sneers, which dissolves rapidly when she reveals the truth at the trial. Characters like Mrs Moore and Fielding were used to provide contrast and there was also some sympathy for the English as a people very far from home, bewildered by their alien environment and feeling a sense of threat from everything they cannot understand. Less successful answers dealt with English attitudes to the Indians in a general way, missing the more specific focus of the question.
- (b) Many candidates showed an intelligent understanding of the passage in relation to the wider novel. Some commented on how the confusion at the beginning reflects the English experience of India as portrayed in the novel as a whole, while others noted how features such as the thumping engine, the concealed inscriptions and the draughtsman's slip reflected the influence of the British on Indian life. More literary answers commented on the shift in focus which occurs when Godbole is introduced and the reader begins to see things from his perspective. From the initial chaos, there develops a more genuine sense of spirituality, conveyed through the description of the singers' expressions as 'fatuous and languid'. Finally, several noted how the pace of the writing increases to describe what one candidate described as the 'sensory overload' of the ceremony. Examiners were pleased to see that several candidates appreciated the humour in the passage, with the image of the girl's leg 'like an eel' as well as the visual images of the two men singing into each other's moustaches and the people lifted up still in squatting position to make way for the Rajah. Many candidates were also able to link Godbole's memories of Mrs Moore with quick references to other parts of the novel in order to comment on the novel's exploration of spirituality.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) Candidates attempting this question made effective use of stories such as 'The Prison', 'Elephant', 'The Enemy' and 'Sredni Vashtar'. Less successful answers described the relationships in question, relying on narrative summary, pointing out that they were 'difficult'. More successful

responses explored how the reader is told about the relationships, how the difficulties are communicated, and how those difficulties inform the reader's understanding of the story. In this way the contrast in the relationships between the boy and his mother and father was a useful source of exploration in 'The Enemy', with particular reference to the terrifying night with his father and his argument with his mother about his homework. The aunt's mean-spirited treatment of Conradin in 'Sredni Vashtar' was explored by many, who had some sympathy with his subtle but deadly means of revenge. Several candidates wrote well on both content and style concerning the laconic disillusionment with every relationship the narrator of 'Elephant' has had.

- (b) Less confident candidates answering this question relied on a loose narrative summary of its content. As the narrative drive is quite diffuse in the passage, this was not a rewarding approach. There were, though, some strong and subtle answers which noted the centrality of the 'looking-glass' and discussed literal and metaphoric reflection in the passage, considering how fully a 'reflection' portrays or reveals the reflected reality. This proved very fruitful, encouraging a detailed consideration of the passage and the use of some knowledge of the rest of the story. Perceptive answers showed that the passage is visualised from the point of view of the mirror – thus Isabella Tyson 'had vanished, sliced off by the gilt rim'. This makes the rest of the description of her the object of guesswork, seen in such diction as 'presumably' and 'suggested', questioning the reality of the romantic imagery of flowers, reflective 'comparisons' which are 'worse than idle and superficial'. Candidates commented well on the disillusionment of the final paragraph, when 'Suddenly these reflections were ended violently'.

7. Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- (a) There were very few responses to questions on this play. Candidates choosing this question might have considered ways in which the play deals with masculinity, using the contrast between George and Nick as an important factor – George older and tired, while Nick represents youth and vigour, clearly a man, as Martha notes, who works out. Masculinity could therefore be considered in terms of sexual vitality, but also through experience, intellect and aspiration, which would have brought consideration of the expectations of Martha's father. The issue of paternity would also have been important for this question.
- (b) Most of the few candidates who answered on Albee's play chose this question. Successful responses looked at the fluctuations in the passage with its oppositions and disagreements. Candidates commented on the effects of interruptions, ellipses and capital letters to indicate raised voices, some noting the humour in '(braying) I DON'T BRAY!' and others picking up Martha's interest in the 'good-looking' guest, with George's comment 'It figures.' Good answers noted Martha's various challenges to George, George's weary resignation, the references to 'Daddy' and alcohol, while most showed their awareness of what ensues once the guests arrive.

8. William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

- (a) There were few answers to this question. Some candidates suggested that Shakespeare shows Richmond establishing a new order in England, but most suggested that the play had shown so much deceit, distrust and murder on all sides that it was impossible to accept Richmond's confidence at the end of the play. Stronger answers supported this argument with close reference to key episodes from the text.
- (b) Again, there were few answers, but some candidates commented effectively on the importance of this scene's focus on ordinary citizens, rather than the nobles and royalty. They commented on the range of views expressed by the citizens and noted the wisdom and foresight of Citizen 3 in particular, some candidates suggesting that he had more political insight than many of the play's main characters. This was supported in strong answers by close attention to his arguments, particularly as expressed in his longer speeches.

9. Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- (a) Most drama answers were written on this play, which proved very popular and often elicited both sensitive and vigorous responses. Responses to this question concentrated on Blanche, exploring the illusions about herself and her past which she sustains to draw a veil over the reality of her past. While more straightforward answers enumerated her various deceits and her actual history, more successful and thoughtful essays explored the psychological reasons for her need for illusion

and focused on ways in which Williams dramatises the idea of illusion through repeated motifs in the dialogue (like Shep Huntleigh), costume, lighting and music.

- (b) This passage drew some very sensitive writing from a number of candidates, who responded to the poignancy of the scene. Strong answers noted the staging division between the men and the women and in particular the atmosphere created by the lighting: *'the same raw, lurid one of the disastrous poker night.'* Comments were made about Stanley's arrogant bravado and Mitch's incoherent fury, compared with Blanche's tentativeness and concern with her 'yellow silk'. Eunice's pragmatic advice, 'Don't ever believe it', drew much comment, while the context of the rape and Blanche's departure to the asylum was understood by nearly every candidate.