

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/21
Writing

Key messages

When reading the questions, candidates should concentrate on the proscribed instructions and focus within each question. For example, in **Question 1** the key instruction is to “write a story” and the key focus is “suspense and anticipation”. In **Question 4** the key instruction is to “write an article for your school magazine” and the key areas of focus are “the benefits that technology has given us” and “the difficulties that many people would face if they had to live without it”. To ensure that candidates do understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question.

Within the time limits of the exam, candidates should be prepared to spend a few minutes thinking about, and writing out, a short plan to ensure the sound and effective structure of an answer. For **Section B** responses, a paragraph plan is advised.

Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow easily in long, rambling sentences. Often weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long complex sentences.

In preparing for **Section A**: Imaginative writing, candidates should develop skills in sustaining narratives in the tense they start out with, and safeguard against confusion of tense forms. Candidates should differentiate between ‘showing’ versus ‘telling’, to improve descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must demonstrate their ability to make the reader feel as if they are in the world created in their narrative, and seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work.

When preparing for **Section B**: Writing for an audience, candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of newspaper and magazine articles, both print and online, as background preparation. Candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles and newspaper correspondence.

General comments

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

In **Section A**, **Question 1** was easily the most popular, followed by **Question 2**. There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required. Some who did write descriptive pieces loaded sentences and phrases with excessive and inappropriate adjectives. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to relate to the sense of suspense and anticipation in **Question 1**; explore the ironies of the different perspectives of participants of the school trip in **Question 2**; or appreciate the descriptions of sounds, light and movement in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 4** was the most popular, followed by **Question 6**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1

Jo looked through the window and saw the island in the distance

Candidates were asked to write a story beginning with the given sentence, *Jo looked through the window and saw the island in the distance*. They were asked to create a sense of suspense and anticipation.

Stronger candidates provided a seamless transition from the narrative opening supplied into subsequent paragraphs. They introduced a sense of suspense and anticipation, both in the language used, and in the sequencing of events in their narratives. Stronger responses included Jo interacting with a variety of other believable characters and documented the desire of explorers, scientists and adventurers to uncover the truth about suspicious activities on the island. Often the stronger answers incorporated a motivation involving escape from sinister forces, whether natural (storms most frequently), animal predators or human captors, thus increasing the ‘suspense’.

Weaker candidates often moved from the opening to a second paragraph which bore little or no link to “Jo (looking) through the window”. One common approach was teenagers taking their parents’ boats out to sea without permission and getting into some kind of difficulty, such as stormy weather or a shark attack. Pirate adventures were also a regular, if seldom accurate and believable, background.

A fair number of responses were not complete stories with too many ending on what the candidate felt was an acceptable ‘cliffhanger’; to the reader, meanwhile, it felt like a poor, unsatisfactory conclusion. In many stories, the third person narrative form became a first-person voice (as Jo), later returning to third person, thereby compromising structure and cohesion.

Question 2

Contrasting pieces about a school trip

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, about a school trip: the first from the perspective of a candidate and the second from the perspective of a teacher.

Some of the stronger candidates wrote very effectively about an excited teacher and a bored candidate on an educational site visit, or an excited candidate on an adventure holiday with the more restrained and world-weary reaction of the teacher with responsibilities for the candidates’ safety. Events sometimes converged and diverged to produce an entertaining read. In other responses, the difference in perspective was inverted or subverted in some way. The destination of the trip was less important in distinguishing the stronger candidates than the clear distinction between the contrasting voices and moods of the two perspectives.

Weaker candidates often concentrated exclusively on the bus journey to the destination without mentioning any details of the place itself; this did not provide any opportunity to describe ‘place’ other than perhaps the noisy inside of the bus. Sometimes the events of the day were described by each person in a very similar, listed way without much differentiation.

Question 3

Lights, Camera, Action

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece called *Lights, Camera, Action*, focusing on the sounds, light and movements in a TV studio just before a news broadcast is about to start.

The context of “just before a news broadcast” helped to focus candidates on a tight structure of the countdown to airtime. Stronger candidates concentrated on the immediacy of the situation, with staff members scurrying around, usually getting in each other’s way, and often providing exciting and/or humorous description. Personalities were sometimes described by their actions, rather than being involved as ‘characters’ in storylines. The behaviour of sound technicians, cameramen, directors and anchors were delineated with irony and subtle humour.

Weaker candidates often provided a mainly, or totally, narrative response or tended to list activities and attach language effects to them in a repetitive and uninteresting way. The 'countdown' structure, which was used to good effect when not too repetitive, became in the hands of some candidates an excuse to rouse some pseudo-excitement at the expense of genuine imagination or engagement.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4

Technology – could you live without it?

Candidates were asked to write an article for their school magazine called *Technology – could you live without it?* focusing on the benefits that technology has given us and the difficulties that many people would face if they had to live without it. The question required candidates to balance enthusiasm for technology with a necessarily cautious approach when describing a possible world without these benefits.

Stronger candidates looked at a range of technological advances and reached well-reasoned conclusions about how we would be adversely affected by their absence. The use of clear subheadings was an effective technique for giving more shape and control to their article. They not only engaged with their intended audience of school magazine readers but also balanced the euphoria of a totally-connected world with the 'awful' prospect of a lifestyle without cellphones. Often, they provided examples of previous generations' perfectly adequate lives, and the more subtle answers compared these descriptions of the 'olden days' with how a modern generation might cope with the same, or similar, lack of technology. They thus provided a rich vein of irony and possible wit and humour – sometimes using the naive friend attached to their phone as the butt of their sarcasm. Other effective answers took a more serious tone and attempted to describe the wider effects relating to health, crime, climate change and transport chaos.

Weaker candidates did not structure their answers successfully, and responses were merely an overview of technology through the ages or fell into the 'benefits vs. downsides' argument, often not mentioning a life without technology at all. Technology was generally confined to smartphones and the internet and discussion centred around the advantages/disadvantages of young people's attachment, rather than speculating about the difficulties we might experience in coping without technology in general.

Question 5

Response to plans to build flats in the centre of town

Candidates were asked to write two letters, of 300–450 words each, in response to an article in their local newspaper about plans to build flats on a piece of land in the centre of town. They were asked to write one letter supporting the plans and one opposing them.

Most candidates who attempted this question wrote two strongly contrasting pieces and were able to demonstrate a clear sense of voice. In many responses, the general trend in content was a straight trade-off between enriching the community's economic base and preserving a beloved green space in a predominantly urban environment.

Stronger candidates were able to integrate some wider issues, such as town versus country, wildlife conservation and homelessness into their letters, along with a positive or negative response to the specific plans. Many personae claimed an allegiance to the local area, either through family connections, or historical associations – leading to engaging emotional or intellectual objections (or support). Contrasting voices were most effective when tone, as well as argument, was given close consideration by candidates.

Weaker candidates often simply listed reasons for or against the project and tended to be rather repetitive in order to meet the minimum word requirement. Others overstated their case, verging on the rant or the sycophantic.

Question 6

Speech to thank volunteers at a festival

Candidates were asked to write a speech from a festival director, to thank the large groups of volunteers who helped to organise the festival. They were asked to create a sense of gratitude and the importance of the volunteers to the success of the festival.

Stronger candidates had visualised the imagined event in some detail and created a suitable sense of voice. They offered some background to the festival's origins or perhaps included some personal reasons for holding the festival, such as touching backstories, often convincing anecdotal ones, to account for a personal sense of gratitude. A few speakers indulged in medal ceremonies or other gimmicks, to encourage further volunteering possibilities in the future.

Weaker candidates' responses often showed little sense of the purpose of the festival and became repetitive or list-like, with copious expressions of gratitude. One common weakness was a complete absence of any detail about the festival, apart from the names of the stands the volunteers manned, which seemed to be generic and thus overly generalised. Sometimes the amounts of money raised were tediously listed, and those amounts tended to be unrealistically large for a local festival. In some of these cases, the speaker seemed intent on giving it all away again, in massive handouts of money or in one case, cars, to each of the volunteers.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/22
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General comments

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

In **Section A**, **Question 1** was easily the most popular, followed by **Questions 2** and **3**. There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required. Some who did write descriptive pieces loaded sentences and phrases with excessive and inappropriate adjectives. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to relate to the sense of drama and atmosphere in **Question 1**; explore the ironies of the different perspectives of the tourist and local person in **Question 2**; or appreciate the descriptions of colours, sounds and movement in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 4** was the most popular, followed by **Question 5**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a

mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1

The Finishing Line

Candidates were asked to write the ending of a story called *The Finishing Line*. They were asked to create a sense of drama and atmosphere.

Many candidates coped well with this question, which offered a chance to write the 'ending' of a story, sometimes considered to be the more challenging option, when the 'backstory' has to become integrated with the current action. Usually the 'race' was interpreted as a physical contest of some sort (track event, marathon or triathlon) but occasionally of the automotive/motocross variety. Some responses, striving for originality, interpreted concepts of "a race" and "the finishing line" as stories about life struggles; while these were variably convincing, on other occasions both strands were skilfully intertwined.

Stronger candidates tended to focus on the protagonist's struggle against believable competitors while being encouraged by a recognisable 'coach' figure and/or atmospheric crowd conditions. A number of candidates were successful in creating a sense of drama, especially as races entered the final stages. Some good responses used a countdown structure to build tension. Sometimes a metaphorical approach was successfully offered, when the central figure battled against the odds in their struggle to succeed in business or relationships.

Weaker candidates often focused on pre-race preparations, with the actual race being dealt with briefly right at the end of the response, or had a single focus on a running race with the drama built up exclusively by a scarcely believable surge of energy near the tape. A great many responses ended with the main character just crossing/falling across the finish line, and there were lots of runners who stopped to help their rivals.

Question 2

Contrasting pieces about a famous building

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, about a famous building or monument: the first from the perspective of a tourist and the second from the perspective of a local person.

'Atmosphere and place' was a challenging direction for many candidates. Historical sites that the candidates were themselves familiar with tended to be the focus of their characters' deliberations, but convincing creation of a sense of 'place' was quite rare.

Some of the stronger candidates drew on personal experiences so writing was vivid in many cases with a lot of sensory language used. Some wrote very effectively about an excited, often naïve, tourist and a cynical local person, with stronger candidates presenting clearly distinct voices and moods through the two perspectives. Some stronger answers provided the additional frisson of a possible meeting of the two people. Locals were sometimes portrayed as taxi-drivers or tour guides in the better answers.

Weaker candidates found it difficult to create a sense of atmosphere and place, with a significant number concentrating on the different/contrasting moods of the two speakers, with minimal creation of the intended atmosphere. In such scenarios, typically, the tourist was described in naive, first-person terms and the local people were often stuck in traffic jams. Some perspectives lacked any clear contrast between the pieces, both going on to praise the beauty and historical value of the chosen monument.

Question 3

Campsite

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece about a campsite during an expedition, focusing on the colours, sounds and movements at the campsite.

This was a question designed to accentuate the descriptive rather than narrative, although some candidates wrote a purely narrative response, with a number of explorers climbing Mount Everest in an afternoon.

Stronger candidates used the campsite as a central space with the 'expedition' aspect as a framing device. Some responses drew on the excited chatter of campers who had a chance to tell tales of previous expeditions or on the description of the light camp fires threw into the darkness. Other strong candidates focused on the transition from daytime to night, with some vivid descriptions of the natural environment. The question catered well for candidates who were convincing in their descriptions of both a natural setting and the human activities involved in camping.

Weaker candidates concentrated on listing the preparatory narrative aspects, in this case of walking or climbing to the campsite, without much descriptive detail. Often, such responses lapsed into narrative, rather than descriptive, writing.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4

Shopping centre review

Candidates were asked to write a review of a recently opened shopping centre to be published in their local newspaper.

This question was generally answered quite effectively, although few candidates totally grasped the particular language and structure needed for a review, whether positive or critical. Many answers lacked development and felt too list-like. Most reviews focused on good points; a few offered slightly more balance by including negative comments too.

Stronger candidates structured their reviews clearly, with some effectively deploying subheadings. They gave clear recommendations or criticisms, and some of the writers posed as the naive reporter discovering the ironic counterpoints of shopping, design and accessibility issues. The rare critical reviews were the more dramatic and usually the more insightful.

Weaker candidates did little more than list and describe the shops and facilities floor by floor and, compounding this mistake, finished their 'review' by a listing of every food item in the food court. Other weaker candidates' work more resembled advertising copy than reviews. They often omitted to express a view, suggesting a lack of understanding about the nature of review writing.

Question 5

Letters to head teacher about work experience

Candidates were asked to write two letters, of 300–450 words each, to provide feedback to their head teacher. They were asked to write one letter from a candidate who gained from the experience and one from a candidate who did not consider it a good use of school time.

Candidates mostly achieved the necessary contrast of positive and negative experiences. Most who answered this question did so with reasonable success, citing sensible, detailed reasons for enjoying or not enjoying their work experience. The majority answered in an appropriate tone, and candidates were generally successful at striking the right balance between respect and criticism.

Stronger candidates were able to show the skills of writing a letter, adopting a suitable tone (formal yet clearly informative and opinionated) and conveying a sense of contrast to the other persona. They also described in some specific detail the tasks that provided the benefits (or otherwise) of their week's secondment.

Weaker candidates fell into the pitfalls of inappropriate tone (for example being overly familiar with the head teacher, especially in the negative letter) or omitting any specific details of their assigned workplace (some wrote generalised opinions about work experience per se).

Question 6

Voiceover for TV documentary about childhood games

Candidates were asked to write a voiceover for a TV documentary about popular childhood games and how they have changed. They were asked to create a sense of interest and enthusiasm.

Some candidates struggled with the 'voiceover' format, often simply writing an essay without indicating the visual element to which the voiceover must necessarily, and through various means, refer. Conversely, where directions or descriptions of the TV 'shots' are to be included, they should be in service of, rather than in place of, the voiceover itself.

Stronger candidates did just what the question asked: wrote a voiceover with obvious visual elements described and linked to the words, and included a variety of scenes showing a range of games from past times to the present day.

Weaker candidates failed to use a convincing voice, and wrote vague and/or generalised accounts of games (usually video games), sometimes not even describing any games from the past. The typical example was a listing of the reasons why video gaming was popular, written in essay format with little indication of a specific audience.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/23
Writing

Key messages

When reading the questions, candidates should concentrate on the proscribed instructions and focus within each question. For example, in **Question 1** the key instruction is to “write the opening of a story” and the key focus is “adventure and anticipation”. In **Question 5** the key instruction is to “write two contrasting reviews” of a new social networking website, one praising the new website and one criticising it. To ensure that candidates do understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question.

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General comments

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In **Section B**, **Question 5** was the most popular, followed by **Question 4**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1

All Change

Candidates were asked to write the opening of a story called *All Change*. They were asked to create a sense of adventure and anticipation.

Most responses were successful in achieving a believable opening to a story and the general impression was that candidates could successfully cater for 'adventure' but less so 'anticipation' (although 'apprehension' was sometimes conveyed quite well).

Stronger candidates provided an engaging opening to the story, leaving the reader wanting to find out what happened next by concluding with a suitable cliffhanger, or another interesting end point. They introduced a sense of adventure and anticipation, both in the language used, and in the sequencing of events in their narratives. The strongest responses came from candidates who were able to include an appropriate amount of detail on character and setting, while still ending with a believable reason for the 'change'.

Weaker candidates often failed to make it clear what change was going to take place in the story, with characters' intentions or motives not explained. They often provided minimal detail about the characters or the setting and often utilised a lot of dialogue, which was poorly punctuated. In many stories, the third person narrative form became a first-person voice, later returning to third person, thereby compromising structure and cohesion.

Question 2

Contrasting pieces about university

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, about a new student on the first day of university and the second about the same student a year later. They were asked to create a sense of outlook and mood.

Responses to this question were usually convincing in the creation of both 'outlook' (usually via the first-year student's perspective) and 'mood' (usually of the jaded variety from the student's perspective one year on).

Stronger candidates described very effectively the changes in the student's outlook and mood. They usually depicted fairly drastic changes, with the student often becoming more conscientious, or acknowledging the error of their formerly naive ways. Some candidates wrote about very similar events in both pieces, but focused on the vastly different thoughts of the student.

Weaker candidates managed to find something to say about the first day, but found it harder to show the change a year later. These candidates often produced repetitive work, merely outlining the events of a particular day, or they were unable to write the stipulated amount and produced short responses. Some weaker candidates did not realise they had to write about the same persona in both parts and some responses lacked any clear contrast. There were many candidates who omitted paragraphing altogether, a common feature of two-part answers for this paper: this weakness, by definition, restricted candidates' ability to organise narrative and descriptive changes, including the obvious one of new speeches.

Question 3

The Desert

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece called *The Desert*, focusing on colours, sounds and movements to create a sense of atmosphere.

This was a question designed to accentuate the descriptive rather than narrative, though some candidates wrote a purely narrative response, with a number of characters getting lost in the desert.

Many stronger candidates focused on the transition from daytime to night to provide them with an effective

structure and wrote some vivid descriptions of the natural environment and different kinds of life in the desert. Some successfully used the desert as a metaphor for a state of mind.

Weaker candidates concentrated on listing events, such as travelling to and arriving in the desert, without much descriptive detail. Often, such responses lapsed into totally narrative, rather than descriptive, writing.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4

Importance of qualifications and work experience

Candidates were asked to write an article for their school magazine on whether it is more important to gain qualifications or some experience of work in order to get a good job in the future.

This question gave candidates the opportunity to raise serious issues of lifestyle and employment choices, though many responses became merely pep-talks about moral choices without much specific detail of education/work situations. Candidates who included anecdotes in their articles often managed to engage the audience with some success.

Stronger candidates clearly addressed the audience that might be interested in reading this information in a school magazine, as opposed to other publications. They included a range of realistic anecdotal experience and reached well-reasoned conclusions about the relative merits of qualifications and work experience. Several of the best responses, after clearly presenting the pros and cons of both, advised taking a balanced approach. Others presented very strong views, with a strong sense of voice, about how one of the two was considerably more important.

Weaker candidates did not structure their answers successfully, and responses were merely an unconvincing and uninteresting overview of the pros and cons of gaining qualifications and work experience.

Question 5

Reviews of social networking website

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting reviews, of 300–450 words each, of a new social networking website. They were asked to write one review praising the new website and one criticising it.

This question was generally answered quite effectively, although relatively few candidates totally grasped the particular language and structure needed for these reviews, whether positive or critical. Many answers lacked development and felt too list-like.

Stronger candidates structured their reviews clearly, with some effectively deploying subheadings. They had a strong grasp of social networking and gave clear recommendations and criticisms, sometimes with real insight.

Weaker candidates did little more than list the functions of the website and merely contrasted the same features in a simple way, expressing enthusiasm or a lack of enthusiasm for the sites; for example, 'I found this function easy to use'; 'I found this function really difficult to use'. Some candidates did not seem to have a real understanding of the topic and tended just to deal with computer applications in general.

Question 6

Speech about the highs and lows of a career in business

Candidates were asked to write a speech for a business leader to give to candidates at their school who are interested in setting up their own businesses in the future. They were asked to create a sense of enthusiasm and motivation.

Many candidates found the voice of the question difficult to assume. The content often tended to drift into lengthy life histories rather than focus on the audience's stated interest in setting up a business.

Stronger candidates, however, did manage to create a suitably convincing sense of voice. In the speech, they focused on both the highs and lows of the business leader's career, often with relevant and convincing

anecdotes, including backstories. The best candidates managed to avoid the “I was a penniless urchin until I turned my life around” cliché, while managing to walk the fine line between a rousing pep-talk of the typical motivational speaker and the understanding such a person must have of their audience’s aspirations. They often provided sensible advice as part of the speech, sometimes emphasizing early failures and the need for resilience and hard work.

Weaker candidates’ responses often showed little sense of the purpose of the speech or the audience and merely recounted the life history of the business leader, sometimes without any hint of enthusiasm or motivation.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key Messages

- Successful responses focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects that these might have on a reader or audience.
- Responses which only show knowledge of what happens in texts, and what subjects they explore, are not successful.
- Detailed references and quotations are needed to support points in essays. This should be remembered particularly for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select a wide range of material to answer the question.
- Answers to **(b)** passage-based questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General Comments

Examiners read many vigorous and thoughtful essays on the texts set for study, often showing insight and appreciation. The most successful responses demonstrated not only a detailed knowledge of the texts and their concerns, but a developed understanding of ways in which the writers explore their ideas and present them to the reader. Explicit discussion of technique was most often evident in essays on poetry, frequently accompanied by the appropriate critical vocabulary, but this was only fully successful when matched by an appreciation of the effects of such poetic methods, considering how the writer's choices of language, imagery and structure shape meaning for the reader. Such discussion of method should not be solely reserved for poetry however, and some candidates demonstrated a strong awareness of narrative technique in novels and short stories with observant references to structure, point of view, chronology, dialogue, creation of setting and so on. Successful drama answers look carefully at the language of dialogue, the effects on an audience of entrances, exits, stage actions and stage directions for setting, lighting and sound among others. In literary study candidates should be conscious of writing about writing, not about events and characters.

Comments on specific questions

1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** This question challenged candidates to go beyond the familiar tropes on Hughes and explore some of the many poems where he presents different kinds of human relationships. Some responses tried to sidestep this by asserting metaphorical interpretations of poems about animals, but more successful answers looked closely at poems like *'Her Husband'*, *'You Hated Spain'*, *'Full Moon and Little Frieda'*, *'Six Young Men'* and *'The Tender Place'* among others. Some of the best essays took contrasting views of relationships, examining, for example, the pessimistic presentation of a stale and mutually grating marriage in *'Her Husband'* with the expression of the patient tenderness of a parental view of a young child in *'Full Moon and Little Frieda'*. Essays looking at autobiographically based poems about Plath, such as *'You Hated Spain'* and *'The Tender Place'* were successful as long as they avoided excessive use of biographical material. Such answers depended on careful examination of the ways in which the poems explore the relationships through their language, imagery and form, rather than an extensive narration of the actual relationship between the two poets.

- (b) *'Football at Slack'* was a popular choice, with a number of candidates commenting that its moments of cheerfulness and even comedy set it apart from conventional views of much of Hughes' poetry, while its focus on strength and resilience is a familiar concern. Most candidates confidently discussed the effect of the imagery in relation to the movement of the football players in the first three stanzas and the penultimate stanza, with some enthusiastic analysis of the 'b' alliteration in relation to the players and ball sharing the same movement and delight in the game. They noted how Hughes used visual imagery of the players, such as 'spouted like water' and 'the goalie flew horizontal', to emphasise the shapes the players' bodies make in their enthusiastic game, and there were comments on the 'bunting colours' and the 'merry-coloured men', indicating the colours of the football strips. The natural imagery of the poem was not always discussed as successfully, though many appreciated the heavyweight industrial image of the 'steel press'. There were sometimes problems with 'the humped world', the 'Atlantic depression' and the 'golden holocaust', though some candidates interpreted this successfully as the sudden burst of sun clearing the rain and also recognised the personification of the sun desiring to watch the football players.

2. Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were not many responses to this question on creativity, though it is one of Jennings' central concerns. Though poems like *'Remembering Fireworks'*, *'Chinese Art'* and *'Samuel Palmer and Chagall'* were used, discussion was often general, offering broad ideas about Jennings' view on art without careful analysis of the chosen poems. A few candidates considered the crafting of Jennings' own poems as examples of her interest in creativity, which worked successfully when carefully argued.
- (b) The question on *'Absence'* was much more popular, though some answers suffered from assuming a biographical interpretation, asserting that the poem deals with an abandoned relationship or the death of a lover, rather than looking at ways in which the poem itself explores the notion of absence and the way it is felt by the poem's speaker. Some sophisticated candidates noted the 'in media res' of the opening line and the poem's deliberate ambiguity of who is absent and why. Candidates commented on Jennings' use of the natural imagery as a vehicle for her expression of loss, contrasting the unchanging steadiness of the garden with inner turmoil and change, picking up phrases like the 'usual steady jet' of the fountain. Candidates generally noticed the separation between the narrator and the birds, which feel 'ecstasy'. Successful responses noted the shift in metre and imagery in the final stanza, which contrasts the 'steady', 'level' unchanged garden with indications of the violence of emotion with the 'savage force' and 'earthquake tremor' - the absence is felt as a physical, unsteady force. Alert candidates commented successfully on this shift in argument traced through the three stanza structure, while some thoughtfully suggested that the rhyme scheme is indicative of a controlled response to absence, though undercut by the half-rhyme in the final stanza.

3. *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) A small number of candidates wrote about poems expressing religious faith, choosing to look at poems such as *'Last Lines'*, *'On My First Daughter'*, *'Death'* and *'Requiem'*. While the essays often showed a sound knowledge of the chosen poems, with some discussion of the attitudes to religious faith expressed in them; most needed more focus on how the religious faith was expressed poetically.

- (b) Most candidates responded to the question on *The Forsaken Wife*; indeed this was the most popular question on the paper. There were many interesting and personal responses, though many essays were hampered by being responses to the woman's situation rather than the poem. However sympathetic candidates were to the woman's position, essays which only dealt with the speaker's situation, rather than recognising the poem as a literary construct, did not attract high marks. There were also widely-ranging, confused suggestions about the context, the poem being dated by candidates at any point from the Middle Ages to 1970. Better responses were able to identify the social context and poetic conventions of the early eighteenth century and effective answers were differentiated by the quality of the analysis of diction, verse structure, the use of caesura and the effects of the use of rhyme. Less successful answers tended to revert to paraphrase and assertion. Whereas more successful essays explored the significance of the first person narrator as the wife's viewpoint, noting the social values expressed in the third stanza, where the speaker bitterly regrets that women have to suffer silently and love without being loved, whilst men expect to be loved and honoured within marriage and find fame in the world. Thomas, on the other hand, portrays women as suffering society's disdain if their husbands are unfaithful, as shown by 'my ruin'. Many candidates noted the balancing of opposites, such as 'methinks' – 'you'; 'Your infidelity', 'Your want of love' – 'My broken heart, your broken vows'. Most candidates commented successfully on the effect of the question in line 4, the accusation and use of exclamation mark in line 5 and some noted the use of the command in line 13. Candidates commented with various degrees of success on the tone of defiance of the third stanza, often making a wider general point about the faithlessness of men, and often noted the self-confident dismissal expressed in the poem's final couplet. Stronger candidates commented on the use of rhyming couplets as evidence of self-confident propounding of the speaker's argument by the poet.

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) Most candidates responding to this question seemed well-prepared on clashes of culture within the novel, though the strongest responses selected references carefully to construct an argument, while less successful work was often marked by narrative paraphrase of a few relevant sections of the plot. More confident candidates were able to identify various ways in which the clashes of culture were evidenced and discussed Lahiri's use of language, structure and form. For example, some compared the characterisation of Ashoke and Ashima, looking at ways Lahiri presents their responses to their early life in America, noting the narration of Ashoke's rapid ease with life at the university whereas Ashima is at first presented as isolated within their home. Others compared the parents with the presentation of Gogol and Sonia, children born and educated in America though steeped in Bengali heritage. Quite a large number of essays also had interesting things to say about Moushumi's multi-cultural position. Success here depended on not only the selection of relevant key reference points in the novel, but also knowing them well enough to be able to quote. The most successful answers were supported by key details of dialogue and description, and in this way to focus on ways in which Lahiri presents these clashes, as the question demanded.
- (b) While a number of less successful responses relied on paraphrase of the passage, relating Ashima's experiences in their own words, occasionally interspersed with quotations, the passage repaid careful reading and comment as there is much of interest in the ways Lahiri presents those experiences and Ashima's gradual gaining of independence. It is an important passage; as one candidate neatly put it: '*For Ashima, Gogol's birth [leads to] a coincidental rebirth of her own.*' Capable candidates recognised that Lahiri contrasts the alienation of Ashima as the new immigrant with Ashima the competent new mother who creates a role for herself and many commented on the range of routine tasks Ashima purposefully undertakes. Stronger essays commented on Lahiri's use of third person narrative and present continuous tense to portray the minutiae of repetitive ongoing tasks which are equated with Ashoke's wage-earning study and teaching. Lahiri's use of details to show the parents' pride was noted, 'admiring the tiny person they've produced' and pasting photographs into an album. Candidates noted the listing of aspects of the new baby which Ashima notes, from his 'glossy eyes' to his 'ten fingers and toes', and many appreciated the comic unpleasantness of 'the quick stream of undigested milk' which Ashima involuntarily receives into her own mouth. Some answers also showed a wider knowledge of the novel, noting the paragraph on letters from India and commenting on the one from the grandmother which never arrives.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) While this novel is not widely studied, it attracts some thoughtful responses and many candidates appreciated the paradox of this question and the novel's ending, suggesting that Lily finds happiness in death. The openness of 'the final stages of Lily's life' allowed candidates to draw their own limits and they usually did so effectively, concentrating on the key events which lead to the final chapter. Confident responses offered a careful analysis of Lily's progressive social deterioration, her internal conflicts and resulting isolation, but often saw Wharton suggesting a nobility in the decisions Lily makes. Candidates were often confident enough to define Lily's crisis, considering Wharton's depiction of her state of mind and her conscience in the few days before her death. Some embraced the ambiguity of whether Lily is indeed happy in her expectations of what was to come after paying off her debts and whether she intended to die. Strong, well-argued responses analysed how Wharton portrays Lily's attraction to the life of ease in the corrupt society she frequents and traced the events which precipitated her decline from favour, but acknowledged her rise in morality.
- (b) A number of candidates answered this question very well, offering views that showed understanding of Rosedale's cunning and the drive of a social climber, as well as Lily's resilience and show of conscience. Often even weaker responses which presented narrative summary still picked out some of the key examples of Wharton's language, such as 'monstrous glare', 'held her spellbound' and 'tranced subservience' as indicative of the power Rosedale has over Lily. Stronger essays recognised that the episode presents an important crux in the novel. Wharton not only shows the arrogance of Rosedale in his assumption that Lily will fall in with his plan but that Lily is herself attracted to a plan which answers her 'inmost cravings' for the restoration of her status and would assure for her a leisured and indulged life as Rosedale's wife. There was some skilful discussion of Wharton's use of the language of a political or business negotiation, with candidates taking note of language such as 'big backing', 'business', 'spoils', 'accomplice' and 'transaction'. Successful candidates analysed Rosedale's coarse, self-congratulatory monologue with its over-familiar slang expressions and veiled threats as indicative of the power shift between the two characters and related this to earlier parts of the story where Lily had thought herself superior to Rosedale. Much was made of the shifts in perspective in this extract. Starting with Wharton's use of third person omniscient narration and free indirect discourse in the first paragraph, to Rosedale's monologue, then back to the third person narrative of paragraph three, where the reader is made aware of Lily's 'groping consciousness' and is told of her recognition of 'the essential baseness of the act', leading to the hauteur of the 'old' Lily's pride and her rejection of temptation in paragraph four.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) '*The Yellow Wallpaper*', '*Games at Twilight*', '*The Stoat*', '*Secrets*', '*Journey*' (by Shirley Geok-Lin Lim) and '*The Village Saint*' were among stories successfully used to discuss the presentation of relationships between families. Occasionally candidates tried an inventive approach, attempting to use a story such as '*The Lemon Orchard*', for example, but these were not successful. It is very important to select material which is appropriate to the question set. Focus depended on the stories chosen, but the relationships between parents and children appeared most frequently, often showing ways in which the writers present the increasing distance between them, using description, dialogue and structure. '*The Stoat*' and '*The Village Saint*' were effectively used here. Other kinds of uneasiness of relationships were explored in '*The Yellow Wallpaper*', '*Secrets*' and '*Journey*', whereas candidates often wrote effectively about the portrayal of a child's view of siblings in '*Games at Twilight*'.
- (b) The passage from Dickens' '*The Signalman*' proved very popular and candidates who showed the ability to analyse the writing rather than describe the scene were much more successful. While some were unaware of the definition of a railway 'cutting', there were strong responses to the language of the excerpt and the way it creates the mysterious atmosphere for the story and its ghostly denouement. Comments were made on the 'oozier and wetter' conditions at the start and considered the initial presentation of the signalman as being in a 'solitary and dismal' place. Good answers picked up on the implications of the 'jagged stone' and the image of a 'great dungeon', often with references to gothic literature and even occasionally to Dante. There were, though, a worrying number of candidates who did not acknowledge why Dickens begins the story by creating this atmosphere – some thought the narrator was the signalman, failing to recognise the railway setting. They thought the action takes place in a ravine or a river valley, or on a rock-climbing adventure, with no clear idea what was going to happen later in the story. This limited responses

and showed that it is not a good idea to approach selected passage questions as unseen exercises.

7. Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

8. William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) There were a very few responses to this question, the most interesting of which went beyond the familiar loyalties to Egypt or to Rome and explored different kinds of loyalties for different characters. There was good work seen on the character of Enobarbus and the portrayal of his despair after abandoning Antony, as well as on Dolabella's vacillation between Caesar and Cleopatra in Act V. While Antony and Cleopatra themselves were the more frequent focus, it was good to see candidates considering wider aspects of the play.
- (b) Several responses relied on paraphrase, but most showed a generally sound understanding of Cleopatra's changes of mood and staged performance in this extract. The immediate context was used appropriately to inform understanding of the scene, particularly Antony's death, Caesar's plans and Cleopatra's subsequent suicide. Cleopatra's speech about actors who 'will stage us' received much appropriate attention. Stronger answers noted that even in her last stages she has a strong effect on Dolabella, and noted the contributions of Iras and Charmian to the stateliness and dignity of Cleopatra's final preparations.

9. Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Candidates often found it difficult to write about the comedy of the play, beyond asserting that an audience might find parts of it funny. Stronger answers looked at ways in which Private's dialogue often robustly undercuts both Public and other characters, particularly Gar's father, with references to 'Screwballs' as central to some comedic effects. Others looked at the presentation of the game between S.B. and the Canon, while the scene with Gar's friends also drew attention. Candidates also referred to Private's frequent performances, taking on different characterisations and accents.
- (b) Most responses showed a sound understanding of the Public/Private roles at this point in the play. Gar's character was understood clearly, as were his ambitions and the dilemma he faces. Stronger responses looked carefully at the debate between Gar's inner and outer representations and Private's use of different accents which represent Gar's dreams, but also serve to suggest their fragility.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/92
Poetry, Prose, and Drama

Key Messages

- Successful responses focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects that these might have on a reader or audience.
- Responses which only show knowledge of what happens in texts, and what subjects they explore, are not successful.
- Detailed references and quotations are needed to support points in essays. This should be remembered particularly for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select a wide range of material to answer the question.
- Answers to **(b)** passage-based questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General Comments

Examiners read many vigorous and thoughtful essays on the texts set for study, often showing insight and appreciation. The most successful responses demonstrated not only a detailed knowledge of the texts and their concerns, but a developed understanding of ways in which the writers explore their ideas and present them to the reader. Explicit discussion of technique was most often evident in essays on poetry, frequently accompanied by the appropriate critical vocabulary, but this was only fully successful when matched by an appreciation of the effects of such poetic methods, considering how the writer's choices of language, imagery and structure shape meaning for the reader. Such discussion of method should not be solely reserved for poetry however, and some candidates demonstrated a strong awareness of narrative technique in novels and short stories with observant references to structure, point of view, chronology, dialogue, creation of setting and so on. Successful drama answers look carefully at the language of dialogue, the effects on an audience of entrances, exits, stage actions and stage directions for setting, lighting and sound among others. In literary study candidates should be conscious of writing about writing, not about events and characters.

Comments on specific questions

1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** The relationship between humankind and the natural world was interpreted in different ways by candidates looking at, for example, human entrapment of animals in '*Jaguar*', attempted capture and control in '*Pike*', animals reduced to meat in '*View of a Pig*' and human survival in '*Wind*'. Other poems used included '*Crow Hill*', '*Meeting*', '*Thrushes*', '*Thistles*' and '*The Thought-Fox*', all used in interesting ways. Candidates tended to know their chosen poems quite well and succeeded best if they were able to quote accurately from them; in this way they were able to discuss Hughes' treatment of the relationship, rather than describe it. Candidates were most successful when there was careful engagement with Hughes' presentation of the relationship between humankind and the natural world; often there was a tendency to simplify the relationship rather than explore its rich potential for complexity.
- (b)** '*Bayonet Charge*' was a popular choice and many candidates were able to comment closely on the images of war presented by Hughes. Though most identified the First World War, there was some confusion over Hughes himself fighting in the war. Successful answers noted the suddenness of the action and ways in which Hughes presents the physicality of the soldier's experience, picking up the repetition of 'raw', the use of 'hot' and 'sweat-heavy', 'Stumbling', 'smacking', 'lugged' and 'sweating like molten iron'. The mental side of his experience in the second stanza proved more

challenging with some stepping over lines 9–11. More successful responses considered Hughes' suggestion that the soldier is caught in a mechanism of fate, circumstance and time, which have led him to this moment of uncertainty and momentary timelessness. Some were able to link these circumstances to the empty ideals of the third stanza in: 'King, honour, human dignity' and the dismissive 'etcetera' to suggest their worthlessness. Essays were most successful when they had a coherent plan, linking their points to the exploration of the soldier's experience. Those which picked out individual words and images and stripped them of their context within the poem were much less successful.

2. Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few responses to Jennings' poetry on this paper and the bulk of those studying the text answered the question on '*A Requiem*'. Candidates on the whole understood the poem's suggestion that funeral ceremonies prompt a greater sense of grief than death itself with some suggesting that this makes Jennings, or the poem's speaker, cold and unemotional. Stronger responses belied this, noting the contrast between knowing the deceased man 'Only a little' and the feelings of 'love I thought I lacked' prompted by his funeral. Such answers also commented on the contrast between the 'calm' and 'solemn' 'ritual' and the speaker's 'stirrings underneath' which inevitably connect the living, the dead and the mourners – 'I cannot claim/ To stand aside.' Successful answers pondered the ambiguity of the poem's final question and particularly the source of the 'shame' – a shame to be prompted only by 'ritual' to 'tears', or a shame to continue living?

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) Prompted by the quotation, '*The White House*' was a popular choice for this question. Other poems chosen included '*The Forsaken Wife*', '*The Border Builder*', '*These Are the Times We Live In*' and '*Requiem*'. Anger and discontent were emotions that candidates found accessible and so they were able to write clearly about feelings in the poems and how the writers' methods expressed those emotions. Sometimes candidates used contextual knowledge to good effect, highlighting the political concerns of Dharker's, Rumens' and McKay's poems, for example. Candidates who knew their chosen poems well were able to discuss effectively ways in which the poets' choices of language and structure powerfully communicated a sense of grievance and justified those feelings.
- (b) Most candidates studying the anthology opted for this question on Ben Jonson's '*On My First Daughter*' and there was a strong commonality in the discussions of the poem as an epitaph and the grieving father's various 'coping mechanisms'. This did at times, lead to highly sympathetic responses to the father's position rather than an analytical examination of the poem. A crucial starting point in a poem like this is to separate poet from speaker and to see the poem as a crafted artistic expression, not an outpouring of autobiographical grief. Sometimes too, candidates were hampered by limitations to their knowledge, incorrectly assuming 'ruth' to be a girl's name and 'virgin-train' to be a locomotive. Stronger essays successfully identified the contrasting tones of grief and consolation in religious belief. Some candidates were confident in identifying the religious imagery and the nature of the beliefs it represented. Other candidates discussed the use of the third person voice and the careful couplets as indicating a control of emotions, with some commenting on how the control breaks down with the use of 'severed' at line 10 to indicate the separation of body from soul. Many noted the poignant plea in the final line for the earth to be gentle in covering the body of the baby.

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) *The Namesake* is a popular choice and candidates usually have a thorough knowledge of the events of the novel. However, candidates need to select references carefully and consider how they are presented, rather than relying on summary and paraphrase of key sections. A number of answers here focused on the changing circumstances Ashoke and Ashima face on coming to America, which worked well when supported by details from the writing. Areas of the novel that were chosen to exemplify characters' reactions to changes circumstances included Gogol's birth, his starting school and his relationships with his parents and women. Some of the strongest responses examined the role of the train crash and Ashoke's injury, which is a catalyst for his decision to follow Ghosh's advice and shapes events; acting as an undercurrent throughout the novel. Ashoke's death and the family's response to it, including Gogol's break-up

with Maxine was also used very effectively, as was the divorce from Moushumi. In most cases, candidates argued that Lahiri shows that characters ultimately are strengthened by the difficult circumstances they encounter, often looking at Ashima's independence as the final illustration of this idea.

- (b) The passage dealing with Gogol's visit to Maxine's house was very popular and stimulated some lively, detailed responses. Strong answers recognised that Lahiri is presenting the fascination Gogol has for the whole experience of white, middle class wealthy and cultured American life which encompasses: Maxine, her parents, the house, its decor, artworks, books, food and wine and even the dog as part of the package. Successful responses noted that Lahiri describes Gogol as being like a tourist in his admiration and uses his architectural understanding to legitimise his admiration for the neo-classical house which is so far removed from his parents' suburban home. Candidates who were alert to details of Lahiri's narrative technique noted that Maxine and her mother are described in great detail using reported thought. Lahiri's description of the house was recognised as being very detailed because it records the lifestyle which comes to absorb Gogol and leads him away from his parents' lifestyle. Some very sharp candidates suggested that the extract is Lahiri's parody of an aspirational American life: the 'large farmhouse kitchen table', artful prints on the kitchen walls, 'copper skillets', 'ceramic plates', 'hundreds of cookbooks', the 'butcher-block island' all seem taken from an article on how to live the American Dream. Even the colours on the walls – 'hibiscus pink, lilac, pistachio' – seem taken from a paint chart of fashionable colours. Most candidates recognised that this lifestyle, with its casual welcoming of guests, free-flowing wine and food prepared in view of the guests, is described in this evocative way by Lahiri to underline its contrast with the Gangulis' traditions. Careful answers also noted the caveats almost as form of foreshadowing as Gogol checks his image in front of the mirror, indicating his uncertainty that he can belong in this world. Maxine's suite is luxurious and she is indulged in her parents' wealth, but it is 'a mess', which some candidates took to be a warning of the future of the relationship between her and Gogol.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) There were few responses to this question on Lily's search for happiness and while most candidates were able to select appropriate moments from the novel, many found it challenging to move beyond events and comment effectively on how Wharton uses language and narrative methods to draw attention to Lily's search. Some candidates commented on the dilemmas Lily is shown to face between a wealthy lifestyle with a less than satisfactory husband and freedom with personal happiness and contentment. In choosing key episodes with Selden, Rosedale and Gryce, they noted that this choice is a feature of Lily's progress through the novel. More complex answers noted Wharton's focus on the difficulties Lily faces in making these complex choices. Many noted that Lily is characterised as unwilling to make up her own mind at crucial moments in the novel which also leads to ambivalent reader responses.
- (b) The passage with Gus Trenor was much more popular, with many candidates apparently relishing the opportunity to express their own personal distaste for Trenor, focusing on Wharton's descriptions of his repugnant nature and physical attributes. There were thus some thoughtful analyses of Wharton's presentation of Trenor but subtle answers were responsive to how Wharton writes the passage from Lily's viewpoint, using free indirect thought to show her calculations and responses. There were also some good commentaries which analysed Trenor's speeches which expound his values and his preoccupation with his wealth. They noted how his dialogue shows him to be a character who uses other people to make money and views Rosedale in terms of someone to be exploited. He also assumes that Lily shares his views. Lily's circumspect treatment of Trenor in her replies to his attempts to elicit pity for his neglected married state are indicative of Wharton's presentation of Lily's awareness of Trenor's power; foreshadowing later events in the novel.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) Parents and children was a relatively popular topic, and the stories were generally well chosen: ‘*Games at Twilight*’, ‘*The Stoat*’, ‘*Journey*’ and ‘*The Village Saint*’ all made several appearances. In some answers, candidates focused on the impact of mothers on their children, given that the fathers stood back from the business of upbringing for all kinds of reasons, including immaturity and self-engrossment. Others looked at children’s separation from their parents as they grow up, often becoming critical evaluators of them – here ‘*The Stoat*’ and ‘*The Village Saint*’ were useful selections. Those writing about Lim’s ‘*Journey*’ noted the reversal of roles, where the daughter tends the mother while the father irresponsibly ignores them both.
- (b) The passage from ‘*Secrets*’ was very popular and drew a wide range of often very thoughtful and detailed responses. The question about the exploration of the past prompted close examination of the ways the stamps, cards, letters and photographs prompt memories and strong candidates who were aware of the context noted that the whole passage is the narrator’s exploration of his own past, recalled in flashback. Some suggested that the steam unpeeling of the stamps was mimetic of the slow unpeeling of memories and candidates commented sensitively on how the photographs represent a capturing of past moments, held for the present. This is represented by the image of the formerly ‘beautiful’ aunt, the 1930s clothes and the young man ‘in the uniform’. Essays featured detailed analysis of the dialogue, which shows the innocent curiosity of the boy versus the willingness of the great aunt to give away some information but withhold the rest, with careful judgement of tone and language. The passage repaid very careful analysis which many candidates appreciated, there being fewer narrative-led responses to this question.

7. *Ama Ata Aidoo: The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

8. *William Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) The question on Cleopatra prompted well-rehearsed studies of the character. More successful responses took their prompt directly from the cue quotation, examining her ‘cunning’ and how ‘man’s thought’ responds to it in the play. This tended to lead to a more successful and focused consideration of how Shakespeare presents Cleopatra, rather than a discussion of what she says and does. A high number of answers showed a tendency to discuss her as a real person rather than a dramatic construct in the play.
- (b) In discussion of the passage, there was some deft commentary on the tension between Caesar and Antony, apparent first in the falsely polite jockeying for position as each invites the other to ‘Sit.’ Candidates often also noted that it is Antony’s direct questions which force matters into the open and brief questions which prompt longer complaints from Caesar. Some answers perceptively suggested that the pattern of dialogue presents a shift in power in the scene – at first Antony is sharp and direct while Caesar is forced to moan and complain at greater length, whereas from line 25 Antony takes over with expansive speeches which feature both humour and logic, wrong-footing Caesar so that his last complaint at lines 54–57 seems petty and petulant.

9. *Brian Friel: Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The few candidates who responded to this passage noted its pivotal nature in the play, the source of Gar’s disappointed love. They noted the genuine mutual affection between Kate and Gar, which is circumscribed by Kate’s pragmatism – ‘Be sensible’, ‘This is serious’ and ‘And how much do you make?’ Sometimes Private’s comparatively small role in this episode was noted, giving prime attention to the exchange between Kate and Public, and therefore revealing the small, parochial nature of Gar’s ‘source of income’ and ‘handsome profit’, where such language outstrips the reality of his egg scheme. Others noted too the sexual tension in the passage, where Public ‘*Grabs*’ Kate and she ‘*kisses him passionately*’ as neither feels they can ‘wait till Christmas’ to get married.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/93
Poetry, Prose, and Drama

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Comments on specific questions

1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a) The most popular choices selected by the candidates who chose to respond to the question were '*Hawk Roosting*', '*Snowdrop*', '*Pike*', '*Wind*' and '*Thistles*'. The strongest responses were very clearly focused on the use of structure, form and language with very detailed, sustained analysis and lively individual interpretations of the chosen poems. The characterisation of the hawk and his despotic view of the world was often explored effectively, and the resilience of the warrior-like thistles was discussed well. Details from '*Pike*' showed the awesome power of the fish's jaws, even potentially threatening the unwary fisherman, while the presentation of the power of wind, threatening 'gull', 'house' and 'skyline' was sometimes discussed perceptively. Some candidates picked up on the ways in which the power of the snowdrop is presented quite differently, the contrast often making for an effective essay structure.
- (b) While more candidates opted for the question on '*November*', a number seemed to find it a challenging poem. Those which looked at some of the ways the bleakness and hardness of the month and season are portrayed did well; effectively focusing on 'the gulleyed leaves', 'wind-chilled', 'wind-hardened', 'glassy verticals', 'weight of winter' and 'worst days'. In some essays there was careful discussion of the tramp and his endurance of nature's threat and the discomfort of the

'drilling rain'. Candidates who paid close attention to Hughes' language and imagery, and its cumulative effect in the poem wrote successful essays.

2. Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) '*Two Deaths*' is a poem which has to be read carefully, following the sentences rather than splitting meaning into lines. In this way, the careful development of thought as well as Jennings' use of free verse can both be appreciated; considering her use of enjambment and caesurae. Some candidates were not able to do this which lead to confused readings of the poem. Better prepared candidates considered the first two stanzas' depiction of deaths witnessed through the distance of film, strikingly described, but not actual death. These answers commented on the shift in the final stanza to self-reflection – 'I am ashamed/Not to have seen anyone dead'. Though the death described in the final stanza is that of a cat rather than a 'shot boy', the immediacy of it is powerful and candidates often noted the final line's repetition of the idea at the beginning of the stanza. Successful essays needed precise reading, carefully expounding Jennings' meaning and the methods she uses to communicate it.

3. *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) Candidates responding to this question on the presentation of dealing with difficult circumstances tended to approach it in a narrative way, outlining the content of the two poems selected, but missing opportunities to analyse style or literary methods. '*The Migrant*', '*The White House*', '*The Border Builder*' and '*These Are the Times We Live In*' were the most popular poems. Successful answers often considered the tone of the poem, which was the central clue to how the difficult circumstances were dealt with. In this way candidates were able to write about the sense of injustice and anger communicated in McKay's poem, compared with the empathetic observation of Hendriks, for example. Rumens' repeated questions were noted in '*The Border Builder*', and Dharker's satirical flights of fancy in '*These Are the Times We Live In*' were also usefully discussed.
- (b) Candidates wrote about '*The Uncles*' with sympathy and there were a number of touching personal responses to this question. The poem was understood as showing the uncles' pride in their work and how they predicated their identities on their working lives. Candidates also noted the progression of the speaker's pride in their family connections and in the uncles' solid working-class background, some picking up references to 'Red Square' and 'commun-ism' which is built up by the speaker with links to 'émigré intellectuals' who have 'dignity of their calling'; lifting them to the status of 'kings' and the 'immortal'. The poem contains a great deal of detail with which candidates could get to grips, and although the overall meaning is quite straightforward, there are some complex nuances to tease out. Many candidates tended to focus on the broad brushstroke response of the speaker's view of the uncles and neglected to pick up the little details that would have informed the details of their answers. There were a few responses which focused on the semantic field of mechanical and engineering language, almost unintelligible to the uninitiated, suggesting that the Uncles' work, though manual, is highly specialised, before becoming more general in later years, with language to match – 'doorhandles, grub-screws and the brass bits/that hold the front of the motor case'. Some answers expounded very well this paean to heroes of manual labour, in a continually running, unformed pair of stanzas, ending with that final note of pride: 'My Uncles.'

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) The question on different values gave candidates plenty of material to choose from and most tended to form their responses around Ashima, looking in particular at Gogol's birth and her discomfort with the medical gown she is required to wear, her shock at the public intimacy of American couples and the requirement to name her baby before she leaves hospital. Some candidates also wrote about the challenges she faces as her children grow up and her gradual willingness to adapt their diets to the North American norm. Some candidates considered the affluent American world Gogol enters with Maxine and his ready acceptance of that way of life, while some interesting answers turned that round and considered Lahiri's presentation of Maxine's inability to adapt to Bengali family grief following Ashoke's death.
- (b) There were some perceptive and assured responses to the passage, considering ways in which Lahiri portrays Gogol distancing himself from family life, a process which they noted, had started

before he left for college. The phrase 'obediently but unwillingly' received a lot of appropriate attention, capturing Gogol's sense of reluctant family duty. Candidates noted that Gogol falls back into childhood patterns, going out with his parents, watching the television with the children and expecting that his laundry will be done, while missing the new experiences of college. The image of Gogol's desk being too small was dealt with well, suggesting that the smallness is in contrast to his expanding world where he learns 'how to tell the classical composers apart' and smokes 'Brandon's cigarettes'. Very good responses were alert to Lahiri's contrast between Gogol's subtle distancing himself from his parents and Sonia's more overt and conventional teenage rebellion, where she becomes the all-American teenager, contravening Bengali standards of female dress and decorum.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The very few responses on this text were concentrated on the passage question, where candidates were able to comment on Trenor's attempted entrapment of Lily. His aggression and physicality was sometimes noted, with the phrases 'pushed a chair', 'laughed', 'squaring his shoulders aggressively', caught her up with a sneer' and 'darkened with rage', all of which convey a real sense of threat to Lily who has been brought to the house by trickery. The forcefulness of Trenor's dialogue was examined, with his use of transactional vocabulary, like 'you've got to pay up' and expressing his own sense of anger at having been made 'an ass' of. Good answers also looked at Wharton's portrayal of Lily in the episode, as ways in which the writing shows the effects Trenor has on her. Thus she 'flamed with anger' at the beginning, but later language is less secure as 'she faltered', feels 'the sea of humiliation' and finally 'She stood silent, frozen to her place.' Candidates often expressed shock at what Trenor's earlier flirting and bluster turns into in this scene, the novel at this point taking a distinctly nasty turn.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. The handful of candidates who attempted it wrote about such stories as '*The Stoa*', '*Journey*' and '*The Village Saint*'. The son's critical detachment from his father in '*The Stoa*' was exemplified in the narrative and dialogue; while Mompoti's complete change in attitude towards his mother was explained by her greedy behaviour. The young girl in '*Journey*' was seen herself in the parental position, doing what she can to assist her mother while as some candidates saw it, implicitly criticising the irresponsibility of her father.
- (b) Far more candidates answered the question on '*The Lemon Orchard*' and most understood the apartheid context well. They often successfully discussed the power imbalance between the anonymous victim and the Afrikaner farmers. They distinguished between the attitude of the leader with the gun, the lantern bearer and Andries, looking closely at their dialogue. The fear, resilience and pride of the victim was also discussed, noting that the third person narrator has access to his thoughts, but relies on dialogue from the assailants, creating sympathy and a closeness between the victim and the reader. Candidates dealt fully with the racist Afrikaner slang and there was frequent thoughtful analysis of the setting, with the dark path difficult to distinguish; surrounded by the magical heavily scented lemons. The ambiguity of the ending was also noted.

7. Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

8. William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

9. Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Friel's central idea of separating the Public and Private sides of Gar was understood well; what was less clear was candidates' understanding of its dramatic effects. Candidates selected some

appropriate episodes from the play, and described ways in which Private offers a commentary on Public's hopes and interactions with other characters. More careful examination was often needed of Private's commentaries, considering ways in which they present Gar's dreams of advancement in America, his attitude to his father, his friends and the limitations of Ballybeg, but also ways in which his disappointment in the failure of his relationship with Kate is communicated. The comedy of Private's many assumed characters and accents was also worthy of comment.

- (b) Fewer candidates wrote about the passage with Lizzy and Con. Those candidates who chose it recognised the significance of these characters as the ones who have given Gar his chance in America, and this episode's flashback recalls the time when the offer was made. Private introduces it as a key memory and the stage directions establish the scene as one of sociability and ease, while characterising Lizzy as the source of energy. Candidates would have done well to have examined the stage directions in more detail, considering how they introduce the characters and make an impact on stage. Lizzy's dialogue confirms her as the energetic force, dominating the other characters not only by speech but action, as Con 'spreads his hands in resignation' and she '*puts her arm around (Ben) and kisses the crown of his head.*' The vibrancy of the scene represents not only the characters, but also the opportunities which Gar sees that America might provide and candidates could have done more to establish that link to show the scene's dramatic significance.