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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8693/01
Passages for Comment

General comments

Candidates produced a wide range of responses and all three questions achieved a successful range of differentiation. At the top of the range candidates were able to analyse passages – in line with the questions – with maturity and considerable flair. Embedded quotations, comments on style – which were effortlessly linked to content, tone and authorial viewpoint – and personal, informed response were all in evidence. Answers in the middle of the range responded to content, tone and language in a fruitful way. Responses at the lower end of the range tended to offer paraphrase rather than analysis, relying primarily on feature spotting or making vague comments on simple versus complex sentences or identifying different types of punctuation used. One Examiner noted that the standard of the teaching of analysis seems to have improved and this is an encouraging sign for this particular paper. There was an overall sense that candidates enjoyed the passages and the variety they offered.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This was a very popular choice and many points were raised. Most perceived clearly the links between diet and conflicts about the writer's culture. Indeed, able candidates were able to pick up on the humour of the writer's desire to diet – with all its implicit struggles – as well as the cultural clashes which were at the heart of the passage and the link between the two. They explored the writer's relationship with food, Oxford, her West African roots and, most notably, her mother with real insight. Both the internal conflict of the writer – her desire to be thin yet being desperate for food – and the external conflict of the culture clash were acknowledged and explored. Her confidential tone, her wish to justify her 'binges' with scientific detail and her conversational relationship with the reader were commented on successfully. However, less secure responses did not always comment on the use of heightened language ('gulped', 'utter desperation', 'starve' and so on) with as much effect as possible. Such answers failed to draw on brief, relevant quotations. On the other hand, many commented effectively on the use of African words, the change of tone and the poetic and alliterative qualities of the language.
- (b) Better answers used a natural tone and conveyed the mother's concerns about her obvious love for her daughter; they sensed the angst of the mother and the multiple nuances of her relationship with her daughter. In addition, they addressed all sorts of relevant cultural details with verve and this lent the letter a genuine air of verisimilitude and poignancy. Often, this was done in an understated manner with real aplomb. Less successful answers tended to be rather too abrupt and angry in tone.

Question 2

- (a) This passage seemed, in general, to be enjoyed by the candidates and was also a popular one. Better answers saw the patterns and progression in the passage and the language; many saw the military imagery and traced its effects well. The humour of the extract was genuinely appreciated in such answers. They commented on the irony implicit in much of what the writer reported, the graphic nature of some of the diction, the repetitive nature of some of the phrases (in keeping with the repetitive nature of the driving lessons) and the terse direct speech. They also noted the contrast between the instructor and the examiner and the fact that, ironically, the latter seemed to give up in exasperation. The best answers realised why the examiner's hand was trembling at the end and found the writer's behaviour in the final paragraph the most amusing of all. Less successful answers tended to miss all of the above and focused on feature spotting, identifying matters such as a checklist of punctuation.
- (b) Effective answers brought out the personalities of the driver, instructor and examiner in a variety of extremely entertaining ways. They captured the idiosyncratic voices of the driver and examiner well. They picked up on the undercurrents implied by the passage, writing in a concise and precise style. Less successful responses tended to paraphrase the original material, offering rather bland, generic reports and missed the chance to establish some sense of characterisation.

Question 3

- (a) This was on the whole covered well. Rhetorical and emotive speeches seemed to have been studied and assimilated by the majority of those who tackled this question. A diverse range of subjects emerged as the chosen topic. A real range of rhetorical and linguistic techniques was picked up but they were not slavishly or exclusively followed from the passage. Less successful answers tended to write about a relevant issue but without any real sense of it being an impassioned speech. Candidates should be reminded that they are not encouraged to lift phrases from the original extract.
- (b) There were some outstanding commentaries on the original extract and some strong comparisons. All sorts of features were explored ranging from the emotive use of language to the delayed elucidation of the dream, from the inclusive nature of the voice to the hyperbolic diction. Successful answers saw the progression and structure of the passage, Major's questioning and use of repetition, his awareness of the present condition and his solution. Less effective answers offered no comparison, concentrating purely on the Orwell piece.

<p>Paper 8693/02 Composition</p>
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General comments

As usual, there were some effective and rewarding responses across a range of questions. There were imaginative answers of a mature nature and some discriminating argumentative pieces of writing. Candidates should be reminded that there is a rubric requirement to write between 600 and 900 words for each piece: work which fails to meet this requirement loses marks in an almost self-penalising way. There should be time left for proofreading answers: the number of technical errors seemed more evident this session, especially matters of tenses and agreement.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

This question elicited a range of different conversions, some of which were very ambitious and imaginative. Successful answers were well structured with a clear, significant conversion. Less successful responses tended to rely on narrative without fully exploring the character's thoughts and attitudes. Careful planning paid dividends here if carried out effectively.

Question 2

This proved to be a very popular choice, inducing some highly imaginative responses. Effective answers were characterised by very detailed observations of emotions and physical objects and used an extensive vocabulary. Stark contrasts were developed successfully. Some candidates were over ambitious: they tended to pile up descriptive effects to the extent that this produced rather flowery, forced work. Some overlooked the rubric and wrote two narrative rather than descriptive pieces, relating the activities of characters before and after a party.

Question 3

This also proved to be a popular choice and elicited some imaginative and thoughtful work. Answers at the top of the range clearly mentioned the home country. However, some candidates simply wrote about a series of events and some never even left the airport. Those who focused on thought, feelings and experiences fared well.

Question 4

This was not such a popular choice but those who attempted it offered some perceptive and stimulating work, underpinned by an imaginative and structured approach. Some allowed the mirror to watch its owner changing over time and combined a dispassionate initial tone with an increasing sense of frustration that the voice could not help or alter experiences and the passage of time.

Section B**Question 5**

Many candidates opted for this, showing a mature and sophisticated understanding of world affairs and reasoned, persuasive discursive writing. Attitudes varied widely. Such responses considered both sides and structured the essay accordingly before giving a conclusive opinion. Less effective answers tended to focus on one particular example and tended to get bogged down in commenting on it at the expense of considering a range of issues.

Question 6

On the whole, this produced some good responses, allowing candidates to draw fluently upon their own knowledge, although, at times, there was a tendency to describe a particular country's traditions without explaining what people could learn from them. Less secure answers seemed to have a rather random approach to selection of material – and, as always, effective planning would have helped.

Question 7

This question produced some inventive and humorous answers where candidates justified their choices in a persuasive and reasoned manner. Effective responses managed to offer comparative reasons for their selection of each object.

Question 8

There were some predictable responses here but the material was generally well handled, showing knowledge and persuasive skills. Answers at the top of the range were characterised by explicit discussions about why their chosen person was a true role model. Less successful answers tended to resort to biography or to rely on description and a list of achievements at the expense of considered and measured evaluation.