

FRENCH

Paper 8670/04

Texts 04

General Comments

Overall, the candidates did well in this paper. All questions were attempted, the most popular texts being *Boule de Suif et autres contes de la guerre*, *Candide*, *Les Mains sales* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Many of the answers on *Caligula* and *Le Curé de Tours*, texts which are new to the list this session, as well as those on *Regain* which first appeared in October/November 2009, lacked detail and depth of knowledge, yet answers on *La Dentellière* and *Le Blé en herbe*, also newcomers to the list, proved the exceptions in this respect. *La Dentellière* makes its second appearance in fairly recent years, but there was a marked improvement in the quality and the number of answers on this text, compared with the introductory stage of its first appearance. *Le Blé en herbe* proved quite popular, candidates appearing to find the text very accessible, no doubt because they could identify closely with the two adolescent characters, Phil and Vinca. Consequently there were some pleasingly sensitive responses to both (a) and (b) questions.

Most candidates provided the required three answers, and scripts were, in the main, clear and quite well-presented. The main problem of those attempting the (b) alternatives in **Section 1** or any of the questions in **Section 2**, was the lack of careful planning of material to achieve good structure and effective argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Maupassant: *Boule de Suif et autres contes de la guerre*

- (a) There were a number of very reasonable and well-detailed answers, however some candidates failed to identify the cause of “*la crainte qui hantait les esprits*” in (i), i.e. those with no clear picture of the chronology of events, making premature assertions, assuming that it was as a result of the Prussian officer’s demands of *Boule de Suif* and the realisation that the gathered company were at the mercy of her decision. In some cases there was also a difficulty in identifying the correct reason for the “*indignation*” in (iii). Nevertheless in (i), the strongest candidates explored a variety of contributing factors to the characters’ fear, including the war, their riches and their uncertainty as to the nature of the Prussian officer’s proposition and to why they were not being allowed to leave. In (ii), many candidates were able to cite the example of Monsieur Loiseau selling poor quality wine at inflated prices, and some were able to provide quite perceptive insights about him. Madame Loiseau was frequently overlooked, despite the fact that the question specified “*le ménage Loiseau*”. The best answers to (iii) differentiated between the initial indignation, the corporate change of mind and the ensuing disdain of the characters for *Boule de Suif*.
- (b) On the whole, candidates found it fairly difficult to engage with this question and many had problems illustrating their assertions with evidence from a sufficient number of the stories to make their arguments convincing. Nevertheless, thoughtful reference was made to *St Antoine*, *Mademoiselle Fifi* and *Le Lit 29* in particular.

Question 2

Voltaire: *Candide*

- (a) Success here depended on the amount of relevance and detail provided. Many candidates correctly located Candide in Holland in (i), however some answers failed to summarise adequately the experiences of Candide prior to his arrival in Holland – obviously important detail with significant bearing on his continuation of the saga of misadventure. The incident with the Orator and his wife was generally understood and fairly commented upon in (ii). A small number of candidates did not realise that (iii) required general evaluation of Optimism and of Candide's inability to marry his experiences with the doctrine of Pangloss. Nevertheless, the question as a whole was well answered overall.
- (b) There were quite a few answers to this question, but not all achieved balance or could provide detailed and accurate evidence from the text. Many candidates did not acknowledge that Candide was still too naïve to doubt Pangloss' philosophy, that he was merely at the stage of wondering why his experiences to date were so at odds with Pangloss' teachings and had not yet reached the stages of development seen later in the book, as the revelation of Pangloss' extremism came gradually.

Question 3

Sartre: *Les Mains sales*

- (a) Detailed knowledge and in-depth understanding of the political scene and of the stances of both Hugo and Hoederer were vital to this answer but unfortunately a lot of answers were unsuccessful in providing all the facts with the necessary level of accuracy and economy. Candidates could have chosen much to write about in (i), but mention of the deal proposed by the Prince and Karsky was sufficient. Karsky was not named in the extract, but a number of insightful candidates made specific reference to him. Attention to Hugo's social background and his party involvement was required for (ii). Misunderstandings were often manifested in (iii), with some suggesting that Hugo or Jessica pulled the trigger, but conversely, many candidates were able to identify Olga, and Louis, and their involvement.
- (b) There were fewer answers to this alternative, which demanded an understanding of the need to compromise for political expediency. Although "*salir les mains*" was often quoted, few answers explained its meaning satisfactorily. Again, as in (a), the mark depended on the amount of accurate detail and relevance the answer provided.

Question 4

Giono: *Regain*

- (a) A number of candidates showed appreciation of the poetic quality of the language and were able to make valid and detailed comments on the abundance of metaphor and simile, amply illustrated with appropriate quotation from the text.
- (b) This was not one of the most frequently studied texts, and many of the answers seen lacked detailed knowledge of the text and were thus unable fully to meet the demands of the question.

Section 2

Question 5

Rostand: *Cyrano de Bergerac*

- (a) In many answers to this question there was a tendency for random narrative to dominate the essay, or for candidates to present an essay of their "own agenda". The question demanded understanding of the word "*sentimentale*", which posed a problem to some candidates. In the main, the story line was universally appreciated, and the temptation to relate all or part of it seemed to have been too great to resist for a lot of candidates.

- (b) Successful answers to (b) relied on the correct interpretation of the word “*pathétique*”. A number of answers betraying having resorted to the false friend “pathetic”. Answers to (b) were probably equal in number, but (b) met with greater success overall.

Question 6

Balzac: *Le Curé de Tours*

- (a) A lot of the answers to this question were short and displayed insufficient knowledge to provide a satisfactory narrative.
- (b) In a number of cases the text did not appear to have been studied very thoroughly and answers to (b) seemed quite vague and uncertain.

Question 7

Lainé: *La Dentellière*

- (a) The level of understanding of this text was pleasing. Although there were relatively few answers to this question, most were quite competent, tracking the importance of Marylène in her impact on Pomme, being the only friend that Pomme took home before Aimery. Better answers contained material about the holidays that the two women took together. Stronger candidates wrote about Marylène’s character and values, and her beauty, in contrast to Pomme, as well as the contribution that Marylène made to Pomme’s feeling of rejection and gradual decline, when Marylène suddenly deserted Pomme in Cabourg for a man, as abruptly as Pomme’s father had deserted her years before and as she and Aimery would part company later.
- (b) The general level of quality was high here, and there were a number of very comprehensive and intelligent answers. Among the variety of good points made by candidates were those of the difference of social class, with Aimery’s *bourgeois* background in contrast to that of Pomme. Their respective occupations and level of education did not give them much common ground, given that Pomme was employed in a hairdresser’s salon, whereas Aimery was a candidate and intellectual with aspirations for his own progress as well as Pomme’s, but to which she did not rise. The couple’s monotonous routine and Pomme’s total acquiescence were key factors, as was their lack of communication, particularly as time went on, when Pomme busied herself with the housework and Aimery began no longer to be able to tolerate her.

Question 8

Camus: *Caligula*

- (a) The phrase from Act IV scene xiv was correctly located by many candidates. Some knowledge of the philosophy of Camus was essential to a competent answer to this question. Candidates who did not have that as a basis found some difficulty in arriving at a general understanding of the text and were less able to explain Caligula’s comment in precise terms. Conversely, of course, there were the obvious dangers of dwelling too heavily on the philosophy and failing to relate routinely to the text; several otherwise very good answers fell into this trap and were limited to a maximum mark of 17 for essays which are too long. Candidates are asked to write 500-600 words per essay.
- (b) A number of reasonable answers were given to this question. However, some candidates equated drama with violent action on the stage and failed to mention other dramatic features of the play.

Question 9

Colette: *Le Blé en herbe*

- (a) There were some very pleasing answers to this question, and there was generally a good level of understanding of the text. Some answers failed to comment in terms of “positive” and “negative” as required by the question, but the general drift of these answers was usually satisfactory. Even the essays containing excessive narrative did more than merely relate events, which bodes well for future sessions. A number of candidates became preoccupied with the transition from childhood to adolescence rather than focusing on the passage from adolescence to adulthood as specified in the title.



(b)

Some of the answers were not adequately balanced in that they stood firmly pro or con the statement, but there were a few which showed more sensitivity by demonstrating that attitudes changed in different circumstances or at different stages. The best answers seen challenged the whole premise and knowledgeably concluded that Colette's intention was not to show the superiority or inferiority of either male or female, but to highlight and celebrate the universal differences between the sexes.