

# FRENCH LITERATURE

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Paper 8670/41

Texts

## Key Messages

Teachers should:

- think carefully about which texts to prepare as some present conceptual problems that are challenging for average and below average candidates.

Teachers should train their students to:

- manage their time in the examination room well and answer three questions;
- check carefully that they do not answer two questions on the same text;
- think carefully about what the question is asking of them before they start to write;
- refer to the question **during** the answer, not just at the start and the finish.

Candidates should:

- label questions with the number, and passage-based questions with **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)**. If questions have not been labelled, it can look as though **(ii)** and **(iii)** were not attempted at all, when all three of **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)** should be answered in the passage-based questions;
- remember that 'soit ... soit' means 'either ... or' and should not be copied before question numbers;
- choose carefully either **(a)** or **(b)** and invest in providing as complete and relevant an answer to that one question as possible;
- answer with reference to the appropriate text, even if other works by the same author have been read. Sometimes candidates wanted to write about Molière's 'Tartuffe', but 'L'Avare' was set this session;
- note key words in the questions, such as 'essentiel' (**Question 4 (b)**) and 'pour vous' (**Question 5 (a)**);
- answer the question precisely, stating in the introduction what will be said and coming to interim and final conclusions (see **Question 5 (a)**);
- explore both elements of questions asking, for example, 'Pourquoi (pas) ?', or **Question 1 (a) (iii)** 'pénible ou comique', rather than opting too hastily and exclusively for one or the other;
- finish with a concluding paragraph;
- start each new essay on a fresh page;
- be careful to attach continuation sheets in order.

## General Comments

This year, two authors in particular enjoyed much popularity: Molière and Joffo.

Candidates need to find a 'happy balance' between 'assuming that the examiner knows nothing' and 'remembering that the examiner has also read the text'. Although narration irrelevant to the question is not required, candidates should begin to answer the question at the beginning, but should not hold back from showing knowledge of the texts, not just retelling the story, but also making a point (see **Question 1 (b)**).

Candidates should **not** write an opening paragraph which addresses in rather general terms the author, his or her works or the audience that he or she was addressing. Candidates should just answer the question.

It was evident that Centres had used past questions when training their candidates, and detailed knowledge was shown in those areas. Candidates should select the question they choose to answer carefully, though, and ensure that their material is relevant. Sometimes the material was tailored efficiently and relevantly to this session's questions, but at other times, there were resounding echoes of previous years' questions, such as in **Question 8 (b)**.

The language used was on the whole appropriate but some essays contained colloquialisms. The best responses were those that were carefully planned (rough notes often shown on the answer paper, although it is helpful if these are crossed through to avoid any misunderstanding) and which led to a clear conclusion.

### Comments on Specific Questions

#### Question 1

Molière: *L'Avare*

- (a) This was a very popular question, and conscientious candidates with a good knowledge of the text could answer all three points successfully. Overall it was good to see more evidence of knowledge of the text beyond the extract this year.

In (i) Harpagon's character was justly assessed using such terms as, *avare / avarice, tyran(nique), dictateur, obstiné, têtu, autoritaire, abominable, incompréhensif, irresponsable, grossier, cruel* and *égoïste*. Some candidates were more perceptive and pointed out that the master of the house needed support to confirm his authority and accuracy of judgement, which led nicely to (ii).

Many candidates handled (ii) pertinently, showing fine knowledge of the context from which the extract was taken, although quality varied a great deal here. Harpagon's question - which should have introduced the response - was often ignored, consequently the *pourquoi ?* was often not directly answered, casting some doubt on whether or not the candidate had understood what was happening in the extract. It was quite rare to find a candidate who could identify Valère's initial instinctive response, then his attempts to backtrack upon learning what Harpagon was talking about, however, there were some good, and clearly carefully planned, responses. Some could detect the dramatic irony in which Molière placed his characters. Valère's tactics did not seem always to have been understood by candidates, nor Élise's reactions to what he said. In the text, Valère both agreed and disagreed with Harpagon. Many responses missed this point or expressed it in a simple way that made it unclear whether the candidates really understood what was going on. A good answer required fairly careful expression.

In (iii), some candidates commented on the dramatic irony (e.g. *Valère est l'amant d'Élise et c'est lui qu'Harpagon choisit pour être juge, qui provoque le rire chez les spectateurs*), as well as the comedy of repetition, exaggeration and contradiction in the extract. A fair number of scripts stated that the situation presented both comic and painful elements. There was plenty of illustration for the painful side, with candidates often recounting the same sympathy for Élise that they showed in (i). Fewer candidates identified the comic elements and fewer still were able to analyse the source of the comedy or say much about Molière's aims in writing the play. References to comedy were sometimes limited to 'comédie de mots' and 'comédie de situation' without illustration or example, although overall there seemed to be better understanding of the humour in this case than is often seen in candidates' work. Questions on 'comedy' frequently appear in this paper when Molière's plays are set texts, and teachers should bear this in mind when preparing their candidates. Most candidates knew that Molière criticised human faults through comedy, but while many candidates referred to seventeenth-century manners and customs and a desire to amuse the king and his court, very few addressed the universality of Molière. Stronger candidates referred to Valère's ambiguous position and embarrassment, having to support both contestants. A small proportion of candidates perceived the situation as more *comique* than *pénible* with good analysis of the situation and reference to Molière's intentions.

- (b) This question took for granted that Harpagon's conduct towards Cléante was not very good and suggested that Cléante's towards Harpagon was hardly any better. Harpagon was described as a miserly father, an unscrupulous money-lender and a rival to his son whose conduct deteriorated as the play progressed. Candidates mentioned his disapproval of Cléante's attitudes and spending on fashionable items of clothing, wigs, etc., imposing a marriage to an older widow, the conflict of love interest in Mariane, and usury, but needed not just to retell the episode but also to make a point, such as that Harpagon would not give or lend as a father, but only at excessive interest.

Most candidates were able to describe Harpagon's poor behaviour towards his son, but fewer had much to say about Cléante's unacceptable behaviour towards his father. More able candidates separately detailed ways in which Cléante's conduct was hardly better than Harpagon's, such as taking advantage of the opportunity to give Mariane Harpagon's diamond. A surprising number omitted to mention Cléante's blackmail of his father over the theft of the *cassette*.

In some cases, candidates focussed their essays on describing Cléante's and Harpagon's personalities and behaviours, but not in relation to each other. The most successful attempts, however produced good essays which emphasised the relationships between the two characters, concluding with a judgement weighing up what both men did.

## Question 2

Maupassant: *Bel-Ami*

- (a) This text was not widely chosen but seemed to have been appreciated and well understood, despite its complexities, by candidates choosing it.

**Question (a)** was usually selected and was quite well handled. The majority of candidates understood how cautious M. Walter felt he ought to be when dealing with Du Roy and understood the reasons why.

The vast majority were able to identify Madeleine Forestier in **(ii)**, and most had a general understanding that Du Roy was in no position to be hypocritical and self-righteous. A number of candidates thought that Madeleine had deserved to be badly treated and that Du Roy was quite right to abuse her verbally. Better responses went into the background of the text and stressed Du Roy's ingratitude and 'vulgarity' in using abusive language towards a woman let alone a wife and one who had put him in the way of success.

A range of answers was provided in response to **(iii)**. Some thought that the minister worked for 'La Vie Française'; others paraphrased the text or repeated material from earlier in the answer. The best scripts showed Du Roy's vindictive nature and his jealousy. He had not been privy to the shares offer and had only heard about it indirectly through Mme Walter. He now took malignant delight in planning M. Laroche-Mathieu's downfall.

- (b) This question attracted fewer responses than **Question (a)**. *Vulgarité* was linked to amorality, ruthlessness, success, and love for women. One or two candidates approved of Du Roy's behaviour and thought that Bel-Ami was a great chap who made a success of his life. Rarely was it noted that Du Roy's behaviour was totally ungentlemanly, his methods crude, and his behaviour almost always verging on bad manners, despite a physical charm. Du Roy's rise from very obscure origins to the highest echelons of society was a vulgar course which involved ruthless exploitation of women and utter selfishness. There was plenty of available and relevant material as evidence of Du Roy's *vulgarité*, but few candidates came to grips with the adjective *inquiétante*.

## Question 3

Sartre: *Les Mouches*

- (a) Most candidates provided satisfactory responses on Électre's attitude towards Oreste in the extract, but it was more challenging to explain 'immense présent' and 'précieux fardeau'. Some candidates, however, were able to identify that Électre represented *la mauvaise foi* and that Oreste was the embodiment of Sartre's existentialist principles, choosing to take the 'précieux fardeau' on his shoulders.
- (b) Jupiter depicted humans as weak and cowardly in Act 1, sc. 1 when he exposed their lack of action in defence of Agamemnon, and in Act 3, sc. 2 he confronted Électre with allegations of weakness and cowardice. By contrast, Oreste could be said not to manifest 'la faiblesse et la lâcheté de la race humaine'.

## Question 4

Alain-Fournier: *Le Grand Meaulnes*

- (a) Candidates with sound knowledge of the text acquitted themselves well in answer to this fairly popular question and seemed to find **Question (a)** a very satisfying option. The majority knew that the aunt had been referring to the night on which she and her husband had crossed paths with Valentine Blondeau, disguised and in distress, not a ghost as aunt Moinel had suggested (hence, 'ce n'était pas une histoire de revenants', line 7), on their way back from what would have been the

young woman's wedding to Frantz de Galais – the 'fête étrange' at the 'domaine mystérieux' that Augustin Meaulnes had stumbled across and where he had met Yvonne. A little retelling of this much of the story was welcome and appropriate, although if candidates had not recognised the context, then the history of Meaulnes and Yvonne tended to figure too largely throughout the response. Some paraphrased the passage instead of explaining what the aunt had just said before it.

The expression 'une entreprise mille fois impossible' referred to the thought of finding Frantz de Galais (line 14) in order to reunite him with Valentine, whose whereabouts Seurel had just learned from his great-aunt (line 13). Meaulnes had promised Frantz (recalled in lines 9-10) that he would help him find Valentine, but there had been no 'leads', as far as Seurel had known, until now. Reuniting Meaulnes with Yvonne de Galais had seemed *une entreprise impossible*, yet against the odds, Seurel was about to *porter ... la joie ... à Meaulnes* (line 11). By comparison, the Frantz/Valentine affair was *mille fois* as complicated. Candidates generally found it difficult to comment on this expression and sometimes combined (ii) and (iii), repeating material as a result.

(iii) was an opportunity to assess Seurel's sentiments in the final sentence of the extract against the backdrop of 'strokes of good luck' and 'bad omens' felt throughout the novel, but particularly at this point as his planned meeting with Meaulnes was approaching. The feeling was used for dramatic effect by the author. Seurel was soon to tell Meaulnes that he had found Yvonne and that she was not already married, a rumour which had originated with the aunt (lines 4-5). The consequences of this false information were to be very far-reaching. Although Meaulnes would be reunited with Yvonne, and Frantz with Valentine, it would not be straightforward. Some candidates went too far in (iii), giving Seurel the benefit of knowing things he could have not known at that stage of the story.

- (b) **Question (b)** was a little more popular than (a), but may possibly have been chosen by candidates as a supposed easy option. To most candidates, 'la perte de la jeunesse' meant, for example, sadness, depression and falling in love. They recognised that François Seurel had spent a lot of his time helping Meaulnes but sometimes omitted to acknowledge 2e Partie, Ch. 11 and the early part of 3e Partie – the interim time during which François qualified as a teacher, made friends again with Delouche and others, enjoying easy times. Yvonne featured amongst those who wasted their youth and rightly so, especially later on. However, a few candidates argued that the whole book was a glorification of youth: love at first sight, deep friendship, fidelity, and that only a truly young person could abandon recently acquired happiness for the sake of a school boy promise to a friend.

Good answers were seen from candidates who recognised immediately that 'youth is a time of insouciance, freedom, experimentation, following dreams, making errors of judgement – but learning from experiences and finally reaching maturity'. Such candidates fitted all five main characters into this framework. 'Attempts to analyse and compare' were seen in responses which distinguished between Frantz who could be said to have repeated childish behaviour, never grown up and not lost his youth, and those characters who lost their youth prematurely (Seurel, Valentine, Yvonne). Exactly which group Meaulnes belonged to varied in candidates' opinions.

At the other extreme, some discussed 'jeunesse' with no reference to 'perdue', or else considered only Meaulnes in detail, with the others mentioned merely 'en passant', or not at all. There was also a surprising general omission of the period in 1e Partie where childhood games with Meaulnes were described in warm terms, or later, the adventures with the bohemian. While deciding that other themes (usually love or friendship) were more important could provide a good counterbalance, the theme in the title also needed to be explored.

## Section 2

### Question 5

Mauriac: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*

- (a) Many candidates argued that Thérèse's problems were caused by the lack of a mother and an indifferent father, meaning that she was bound to misbehave. There was much storytelling with this type of response. Quite a few omitted to mention her desire to explain herself to Bernard, that came to nothing since it was too late and he would not listen. Some argued that her crime could be forgiven. Most dealt with understanding and forgiveness from Bernard, the family, Anne and

Thérèse's father – but not from the reader. The reader arrives at a point of some sympathy for Thérèse, but there were not many responses that looked at the question in that way.

The best candidates made a clear distinction between Bernard and Thérèse's relationship before the poisoning attempt and after the trial. A few looked at Thérèse's life and character but could not get past her being a 'monstre'. Sometimes candidates dealt with the question purely 'philosophically' with little if any illustration from the text, or just retold the story. There was a fine line between storytelling to recount events in the novel without reference to the question, and storytelling which showed that Thérèse could be understood and forgiven by the candidate. The more that candidates stated in the introduction what they were going to say and came to interim and final conclusions, the more successful their essays certainly were.

- (b) (b) was the more popular question on this text. Essays on hypocrisy were handled more effectively as long as the candidate knew what hypocrisy was and could distinguish it from selfishness, jealousy, nastiness and cynicism. Some relevantly confirmed the hypocrisy of certain characters, but failed to elucidate the ways in which their behaviour and attitudes were hypocritical. Too many associated hypocrisy with lack of communication, indifference and lack of understanding. Oddly enough, religious hypocrisy was not underlined as often as it might have been. There were some good and quite comprehensive responses, although occasionally essays focussed only on Thérèse and Bernard. A careful study was required of Bernard, who appeared to forgive his wife only to save appearances in society, and of M. Larroque who saved his daughter from the law only to protect his name and standing. Jean Azévédo seemed to get away quite lightly with candidates, although admittedly he did not break any promises. Some candidates vehemently denounced Thérèse – to read their scripts, one would have thought that she was the clearest instance of hypocrisy in the novel, but the *être / paraître* issue in provincial social attitudes was generally well picked up and analysed overall.

### Question 6

Giraudoux: *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*

- (a) **Question 6 (a)** could lead to storytelling and repetition. *Le destin* was generally blamed for 'l'inutilité de toute action', an indomitable force impossible to oppose. Better essays gave some relevant information illustrating heroes like Hector who accepted the humiliation of a slap to avoid war, and lovers like Pâris who agreed to be considered as below par in order to placate the Greeks. The final irony did not escape the better candidates who underlined that the killing of Demokos by Hector was the ultimate cause for war.
- (b) The majority of responses to **Question (b)** showed fair relevance and knowledge. Appropriate references were made to the strong dialogue between Hector and Ulysse. Comparisons were established between the initial demand from the Greeks, that Héléne be returned untouched, and the final agreement between the two men, after concessions had been made and some casuistry agreed, so to speak.

### Question 7

Bazin: *Au nom du fils*

- (a) The question invited candidates to investigate the extent to which Daniel Astin succeeded in making himself understood, in light of the fact that he narrated his story in the first person, and most grasped this as the essential thread in their essays, considering some of his musings as well as issues arising from interaction with different members of his family, and his responses to various events.
- (b) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

### Question 8

Joffo: *Un sac de billes*

This was a very popular text, and the majority showed great enthusiasm for it.

- (a) **Question (a)** was chosen by relatively few candidates. The opportunity was offered to focus on the simple, universal values such as courage, endurance, love, kindness, unity and empathy, but many candidates dealt extensively with the obvious and timeless anti-racist, pro-tolerance message and the power of good Samaritans to make a difference.
- (b) This was possibly the most popular question of the paper. Candidates were often familiar with the quotation in the question, taken from the last page of Ch. 10, shortly after the boys' father had been arrested again. Up to this point, the boys had largely kept up morale despite violence and fear, but this was a more negative reflection on the result of their experiences. Echoes of last year's question (on differences between Maurice and Joseph) were seen in responses, but candidates wrote knowledgeably and well in many instances, and there were some very good pieces of work, although 'tué' was a 'strong' word, and 'Ils' were perpetrators, so answers along the lines of 'circumstances forced the boys to grow up quickly' did not seem to go far enough. Good answers were characterised by balance, organisation and an awareness that Joffo was somewhat hardened by the end of the novel, despite his young age.

Candidates seemed to find it difficult to convey how Joseph's innocence was destroyed. Justification for telling lies was mentioned frequently as well as hardships and the necessity to work in order to survive. Having to face injustice and evil and thus losing one's childhood illusions were not so often suggested. Most commented on how Joseph and Maurice had lost their childhood but not so many brought in the element of trauma and violence or identified and explained the full horror of, 'Ils ont tué en moi l'enfant que je pouvais être' – what was specifically lost, irrevocably changed or rendered impossible. Perhaps this was unsurprising given that Joffo himself tended to underplay the genuine fear that he and his brother must have faced.

By contrast, some candidates recounted the atrocities of the Nazis towards the Jews without relating their observations back to the novel. The best illustrations were probably the bullying incident early in the novel and the underlying horror and real threat at the Hôtel Excelsior later.

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In (iii), some candidates commented on the dramatic irony (e.g. *Valère est l'amant d'Élise et c'est lui qu'Harpagon choisit pour être juge, qui provoque le rire chez les spectateurs*), as well as the comedy of repetition, exaggeration and contradiction in the extract. A fair number of scripts stated that the situation presented both comic and painful elements. There was plenty of illustration for the painful side, with candidates often recounting the same sympathy for Élise that they showed in (i). Fewer candidates identified the comic elements and fewer still were able to analyse the source of the comedy or say much about Molière's aims in writing the play. References to comedy were sometimes limited to 'comédie de mots' and 'comédie de situation' without illustration or example, although overall there seemed to be better understanding of the humour in this case than is often seen in candidates' work. Questions on 'comedy' frequently appear in this paper when Molière's plays are set texts, and teachers should bear this in mind when preparing their candidates. Most candidates knew that Molière criticised human faults through comedy, but while many candidates referred to seventeenth-century manners and customs and a desire to amuse the king and his court, very few addressed the universality of Molière. Stronger candidates referred to Valère's ambiguous position and embarrassment, having to support both contestants. A small proportion of candidates perceived the situation as more *comique* than *pénible* with good analysis of the situation and reference to Molière's intentions.

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young woman's wedding to Frantz de Galais – the 'fête étrange' at the 'domaine mystérieux' that Augustin Meaulnes had stumbled across and where he had met Yvonne. A little retelling of this much of the story was welcome and appropriate, although if candidates had not recognised the context, then the history of Meaulnes and Yvonne tended to figure too largely throughout the response. Some paraphrased the passage instead of explaining what the aunt had just said before it.

The expression 'une entreprise mille fois impossible' referred to the thought of finding Frantz de Galais (line 14) in order to reunite him with Valentine, whose whereabouts Seurel had just learned from his great-aunt (line 13). Meaulnes had promised Frantz (recalled in lines 9-10) that he would help him find Valentine, but there had been no 'leads', as far as Seurel had known, until now. Reuniting Meaulnes with Yvonne de Galais had seemed *une entreprise impossible*, yet against the odds, Seurel was about to *porter ... la joie ... à Meaulnes* (line 11). By comparison, the Frantz/Valentine affair was *mille fois* as complicated. Candidates generally found it difficult to comment on this expression and sometimes combined (ii) and (iii), repeating material as a result.

(iii) was an opportunity to assess Seurel's sentiments in the final sentence of the extract against the backdrop of 'strokes of good luck' and 'bad omens' felt throughout the novel, but particularly at this point as his planned meeting with Meaulnes was approaching. The feeling was used for dramatic effect by the author. Seurel was soon to tell Meaulnes that he had found Yvonne and that she was not already married, a rumour which had originated with the aunt (lines 4-5). The consequences of this false information were to be very far-reaching. Although Meaulnes would be reunited with Yvonne, and Frantz with Valentine, it would not be straightforward. Some candidates went too far in (iii), giving Seurel the benefit of knowing things he could have not known at that stage of the story.

- (b) **Question (b)** was a little more popular than (a), but may possibly have been chosen by candidates as a supposed easy option. To most candidates, 'la perte de la jeunesse' meant, for example, sadness, depression and falling in love. They recognised that François Seurel had spent a lot of his time helping Meaulnes but sometimes omitted to acknowledge 2e Partie, Ch. 11 and the early part of 3e Partie – the interim time during which François qualified as a teacher, made friends again with Delouche and others, enjoying easy times. Yvonne featured amongst those who wasted their youth and rightly so, especially later on. However, a few candidates argued that the whole book was a glorification of youth: love at first sight, deep friendship, fidelity, and that only a truly young person could abandon recently acquired happiness for the sake of a school boy promise to a friend.

Good answers were seen from candidates who recognised immediately that 'youth is a time of insouciance, freedom, experimentation, following dreams, making errors of judgement – but learning from experiences and finally reaching maturity'. Such candidates fitted all five main characters into this framework. 'Attempts to analyse and compare' were seen in responses which distinguished between Frantz who could be said to have repeated childish behaviour, never grown up and not lost his youth, and those characters who lost their youth prematurely (Seurel, Valentine, Yvonne). Exactly which group Meaulnes belonged to varied in candidates' opinions.

At the other extreme, some discussed 'jeunesse' with no reference to 'perdue', or else considered only Meaulnes in detail, with the others mentioned merely 'en passant', or not at all. There was also a surprising general omission of the period in 1e Partie where childhood games with Meaulnes were described in warm terms, or later, the adventures with the bohemian. While deciding that other themes (usually love or friendship) were more important could provide a good counterbalance, the theme in the title also needed to be explored.

## Section 2

### Question 5

Mauriac: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*

- (a) Many candidates argued that Thérèse's problems were caused by the lack of a mother and an indifferent father, meaning that she was bound to misbehave. There was much storytelling with this type of response. Quite a few omitted to mention her desire to explain herself to Bernard, that came to nothing since it was too late and he would not listen. Some argued that her crime could be forgiven. Most dealt with understanding and forgiveness from Bernard, the family, Anne and

Thérèse's father – but not from the reader. The reader arrives at a point of some sympathy for Thérèse, but there were not many responses that looked at the question in that way.

The best candidates made a clear distinction between Bernard and Thérèse's relationship before the poisoning attempt and after the trial. A few looked at Thérèse's life and character but could not get past her being a 'monstre'. Sometimes candidates dealt with the question purely 'philosophically' with little if any illustration from the text, or just retold the story. There was a fine line between storytelling to recount events in the novel without reference to the question, and storytelling which showed that Thérèse could be understood and forgiven by the candidate. The more that candidates stated in the introduction what they were going to say and came to interim and final conclusions, the more successful their essays certainly were.

- (b) (b) was the more popular question on this text. Essays on hypocrisy were handled more effectively as long as the candidate knew what hypocrisy was and could distinguish it from selfishness, jealousy, nastiness and cynicism. Some relevantly confirmed the hypocrisy of certain characters, but failed to elucidate the ways in which their behaviour and attitudes were hypocritical. Too many associated hypocrisy with lack of communication, indifference and lack of understanding. Oddly enough, religious hypocrisy was not underlined as often as it might have been. There were some good and quite comprehensive responses, although occasionally essays focussed only on Thérèse and Bernard. A careful study was required of Bernard, who appeared to forgive his wife only to save appearances in society, and of M. Larroque who saved his daughter from the law only to protect his name and standing. Jean Azévédo seemed to get away quite lightly with candidates, although admittedly he did not break any promises. Some candidates vehemently denounced Thérèse – to read their scripts, one would have thought that she was the clearest instance of hypocrisy in the novel, but the *être / paraître* issue in provincial social attitudes was generally well picked up and analysed overall.

### Question 6

Giraudoux: *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*

- (a) **Question 6 (a)** could lead to storytelling and repetition. *Le destin* was generally blamed for 'l'inutilité de toute action', an indomitable force impossible to oppose. Better essays gave some relevant information illustrating heroes like Hector who accepted the humiliation of a slap to avoid war, and lovers like Pâris who agreed to be considered as below par in order to placate the Greeks. The final irony did not escape the better candidates who underlined that the killing of Demokos by Hector was the ultimate cause for war.
- (b) The majority of responses to **Question (b)** showed fair relevance and knowledge. Appropriate references were made to the strong dialogue between Hector and Ulysse. Comparisons were established between the initial demand from the Greeks, that Héléne be returned untouched, and the final agreement between the two men, after concessions had been made and some casuistry agreed, so to speak.

### Question 7

Bazin: *Au nom du fils*

- (a) The question invited candidates to investigate the extent to which Daniel Astin succeeded in making himself understood, in light of the fact that he narrated his story in the first person, and most grasped this as the essential thread in their essays, considering some of his musings as well as issues arising from interaction with different members of his family, and his responses to various events.
- (b) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

### Question 8

Joffo: *Un sac de billes*

This was a very popular text, and the majority showed great enthusiasm for it.

- (a) **Question (a)** was chosen by relatively few candidates. The opportunity was offered to focus on the simple, universal values such as courage, endurance, love, kindness, unity and empathy, but many candidates dealt extensively with the obvious and timeless anti-racist, pro-tolerance message and the power of good Samaritans to make a difference.
- (b) This was possibly the most popular question of the paper. Candidates were often familiar with the quotation in the question, taken from the last page of Ch. 10, shortly after the boys' father had been arrested again. Up to this point, the boys had largely kept up morale despite violence and fear, but this was a more negative reflection on the result of their experiences. Echoes of last year's question (on differences between Maurice and Joseph) were seen in responses, but candidates wrote knowledgeably and well in many instances, and there were some very good pieces of work, although 'tué' was a 'strong' word, and 'Ils' were perpetrators, so answers along the lines of 'circumstances forced the boys to grow up quickly' did not seem to go far enough. Good answers were characterised by balance, organisation and an awareness that Joffo was somewhat hardened by the end of the novel, despite his young age.

Candidates seemed to find it difficult to convey how Joseph's innocence was destroyed. Justification for telling lies was mentioned frequently as well as hardships and the necessity to work in order to survive. Having to face injustice and evil and thus losing one's childhood illusions were not so often suggested. Most commented on how Joseph and Maurice had lost their childhood but not so many brought in the element of trauma and violence or identified and explained the full horror of, 'Ils ont tué en moi l'enfant que je pouvais être' – what was specifically lost, irrevocably changed or rendered impossible. Perhaps this was unsurprising given that Joffo himself tended to underplay the genuine fear that he and his brother must have faced.

By contrast, some candidates recounted the atrocities of the Nazis towards the Jews without relating their observations back to the novel. The best illustrations were probably the bullying incident early in the novel and the underlying horror and real threat at the Hôtel Excelsior later.

# FRENCH LITERATURE

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Paper 8670/43

Texts

## Key Messages

Teachers should:

- think carefully about which texts to prepare as some present conceptual problems that are challenging for average and below average candidates.

Teachers should train their students to:

- manage their time in the examination room well and answer three questions;
- check carefully that they do not answer two questions on the same text;
- think carefully about what the question is asking of them before they start to write;
- refer to the question **during** the answer, not just at the start and the finish.

Candidates should:

- label questions with the number, and passage-based questions with **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)**. If questions have not been labelled, it can look as though **(ii)** and **(iii)** were not attempted at all, when all three of **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)** should be answered in the passage-based questions;
- remember that 'soit ... soit' means 'either ... or' and should not be copied before question numbers;
- choose carefully either **(a)** or **(b)** and invest in providing as complete and relevant an answer to that one question as possible;
- answer with reference to the appropriate text, even if other works by the same author have been read. Sometimes candidates wanted to write about Molière's 'Tartuffe', but 'L'Avare' was set this session;
- note key words in the questions;
- answer the question precisely, stating in the introduction what will be said and coming to interim and final conclusions;
- explore both elements of questions asking, for example, 'Pourquoi (pas) ?', rather than opting too hastily and exclusively for one or the other;
- finish with a concluding paragraph;
- start each new essay on a fresh page.
- be careful to attach continuation sheets in order.

## General Comments

This year, two authors in particular enjoyed much popularity: Molière and Joffo.

Candidates need to find a 'happy balance' between 'assuming that the examiner knows nothing' and 'remembering that the examiner has also read the text'. Although narration irrelevant to the question is not required, candidates should begin to answer the question at the beginning, but should not hold back from showing knowledge of the texts, not just retelling the story, but also making a point.

Candidates should **not** write an opening paragraph which addresses in rather general terms the author, his or her works or the audience that he or she was addressing. Candidates should just answer the question.

It was evident that Centres had used past questions when training their candidates, and detailed knowledge was shown in those areas. Candidates should select the question they choose to answer carefully, though, and ensure that their material is relevant. Sometimes the material was tailored efficiently and relevantly to this session's questions, but at other times, there were resounding echoes of previous years' questions.

The language used was on the whole appropriate but some essays contained colloquialisms. The best responses were those that were carefully planned (rough notes often shown on the answer paper, although it is helpful if these are crossed through to avoid any misunderstanding) and which led to a clear conclusion.

### Comments on Specific Questions

#### Question 1

Molière: *L'Avare*

- (a) (i) It was anticipated that candidates might make three points in answer to (i), and most made two of the three. Firstly, Maître Jacques was Harpagon's coachman (and cook), so it was not surprising that he would talk about horses. Secondly, in Act 2 scene 5, Harpagon had talked with Frosine about arrangements for Mariane's visit to the house and outing to the fair with his daughter, Élise, by Harpagon's horses and carriage, later that day. Shortly before the extract, Harpagon had said, 'Maintenant, maître Jacques, il faut nettoyer mon carrosse ... et tenir mes chevaux tous prêts pour conduire à la foire.' Finally, the state of the horses' health and their supposed inability to pull the carriage reflected Harpagon's avarice. As Maître Jacques had told him, 'vous leur faites observer des jeûnes si austères, que ce ne sont plus rien que des fantômes ... je m'ôte tous les jours pour eux les choses de la bouche'.
- (ii) was particularly well answered by candidates, who took advantage of opportunities to compare Maître Jacques' attitudes to Harpagon and Valère, as well as to contrast his and others' attitudes to Harpagon. (iii) was answered in varying degrees of detail, but candidates made clear reference to Harpagon's reaction as he beat Maître Jacques, 'Vous êtes un sot, un maraud, un coquin, et un impudent.'
- (b) Fewer candidates chose **Question (b)**, and overall, responses were less convincing, with some forgetting to address the second part, about whether Frosine was 'aussi douée qu'elle le prétend'. Nevertheless, some good points were made, and it was pleasing to see essays structured well.

#### Question 2

Maupassant: *Bel-Ami*

- (a) This was not one of the most frequently studied texts, however, candidates appeared to have coped well with this long novel, although some confusion between Du Roy's different girlfriends was occasionally seen. Responses to (i) sometimes implied that Du Roy was still in a relationship with Mme Walter. More finely honed answers were careful to discuss different stages in this woman's interaction with the protagonist to explain the strength of feeling evident in her reaction at the beginning of the extract.

Most candidates could explain in (ii) that the bishop's words did not ring true of what the reader knows of Du Roy, but that the man's self-image created as the novel progresses, has successfully achieved the desired effect.

When commenting on the circumstances which had made possible Du Roy's gifts to his parents, a surprising number did not appear to have been reminded by lines 20-21 that, 'Il leur avait envoyé cinq mille francs en héritant du comte de Vaudrec' in that significant event in his marriage to Madeleine.

Candidates easily fell back on reciting general comments about how Du Roy had started out poor, but 'got rich', with varying amounts of narrative offered, but lacking detail about the large sums of money that Du Roy had cleverly appropriated to himself.

- (b) This question was not frequently undertaken, but candidates tackled it well and expressed some good ideas about 'une société sur le déclin'.

Stronger cases were made by contrasting the ascent of Du Roy the social climber and some of the leisure activities and newly discovered aspects of an easy life that he began to enjoy, as well as discussing the increased financial comfort of other characters, with a decline in values in a social setting where people like Du Roy are moving from positions in stable native rural communities to

more individualised industrialised locations as the rise of industrialism gave a financial break to some. Claims were made about moral decline, but candidates found it more difficult to put these into a relevant social context.

### Question 3

Sartre: *Les Mouches*

- (a) (i) This question was not chosen as often as (b), but it was usually handled competently, particularly parts (i) and (iii). In (i), candidates could explain how Clytemnestre had treated Électre's father, and what Électre had been subjected to at the hands of Égisthe, and how this had fuelled the hatred seen in the passage. (iii) invited candidates to look at the impression that Clytemnestre gave of Égisthe in the extract, but some fell back on general comments about him throughout the play. Better answers began with the powerful, destructive image depicted in lines 13-15 and chose examples from elsewhere in the text to examine the extent to which that impression corresponded with reality.
- (ii) was found more difficult, partly as candidates tried to juggle their knowledge of the 'stranger's' true identity, particularly as it related to Clytemnestre (even though she said, 'Je ne sais qui tu es' in line 6). A key detail was, 'ta présence est néfaste' (line 7). Stronger answers pointed out that the stranger, Philèbe/Oreste, was not limited by remorse and fear like all the others and would go on to murder Clytemnestre.
- (b) Many candidates showed knowledge of the fact that the Flies of the play's title were Erinyes, which in Greek mythology were goddesses of vengeance. It was rare to see any mention of vengeance in essays, though, even if answers recognised the significance of the event fifteen years before, when the king was murdered and the people had done nothing about it. The candidates who came closest wrote of the Flies punishing the people.

That is not to say that the result of the punishment and vengeance was neglected. Most responses focused on guilt, remorse, tyranny, oppression, moral judgement, misery, and even order and 'peace', but for candidates to fly to those more obvious themes in the play, bypassing vengeance and punishment, left an impression of a 'missing link'.

### Question 4

Alain-Fournier: *Le Grand Meaulnes*

- (a) Candidates could recall many details of the day on which Meaulnes set out to meet Seurel's grandparents at Vierzon station, even though Mouchebœuf had been selected for the task and recounted how he became lost and injured in varying degrees of detail in (i). They could also, almost without exception, identify the 'domaine mystérieux' in (ii) expanding on their answers in different ways with regard to the 'fête étrange' which took place there, the children who were guests and especially Yvonne de Galais, Meaulnes' first love. It was (iii) which differentiated responses the most. At one extreme, candidates appeared to misread the question and not to notice its future tense, simply discussing how the final sentence exemplified optimism. At the other end, stronger candidates drew together a sophisticated analysis of optimism and foreboding in the remainder of the novel.
- (b) Candidates were anxious not to forget that it was not only the narrator's, but also the author's personality which imposed itself 'souvent sur l'atmosphère de son récit'. More nuanced essays also pointed out that Seurel had merely second-hand knowledge of Meaulnes' adventures, which he narrated, making him even more susceptible than he might have been to Meaulnes' personality and cheerful or gloomy feelings about things. Overall, it was pleasing to see that candidates avoided the pitfalls of agreeing too readily with the question.

## Section 2

### Question 5

Mauriac: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*

- (a) The question was not often chosen, and those who did write on it did not always focus on the suggestion that, 'Thérèse présente une image de folie', falling back, instead, on other ideas of what 'Thérèse présente'. It would have been nice to see evidence from the text in favour of the judgement, arguments against and a conclusion to bring the discussion together, but this was rarely seen.
- (b) This was a much more popular question than (a). On the whole, candidates found it much easier to discuss 'le rôle de la femme' than 'celui de l'homme', but some were successfully able to contrast Thérèse and Anne, with some mentioning other women, too. More minor characters were sometimes covered, but not always very effectively, such as 'le fils Deguilhem', who was loosely combined with the other men in the novel, without investigating how similar his role was to Anne's as their respective families discussed their proposed marriage. It was good to read occasional references to Thérèse's aspiration to freedom and departure for Paris in the end, however it was surprising to see little about Jean Azévêdo, whose role might have been contrasted with other men's.

### Question 6

Giraudoux: *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*

- (a) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

### Question 7

Bazin: *Au nom du fils*

- (a) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

### Question 8

Joffo: *Un sac de billes*

This text was very popular among centres.

- (a) It was clear that some candidates had swiftly begun to write about the two Joffo brothers, Joseph and Maurice, whereas others remembered Henri and Albert, who do not feature as frequently in the story, but who were already based in the 'zone libre' when the two younger brothers set out to join them, so who were still important in the novel, assuming some of the care of their younger brothers in the absence of their parents. This question was quite open-ended, and candidates dealt with it in different ways, often successfully discussing the brothers' relationship characterised by co-operation for survival, and sensitively pointing out their similarities and differences. There was a slight tendency to deal with the brothers separately, emphasising their characters and roles, rather than acknowledging the key word in the question: 'relations'. Nevertheless, overall, some good responses were seen to this question.
- (b) Significantly fewer candidates opted for this question, fewer than one for every three choosing to answer (a). On the whole, the responses were equally pleasing, however, and in some cases more impressive.

The frequent examples of hatred in the novel included the young Joffos' persecution at school, although there was a tendency to think that hatred had not triumphed in that situation because Zérati his marbles for Joseph's 'étoile jaune', without mentioning that that day marked M. Joffo's decision to take his sons away from the school, beat them to teach them to lie about their heritage



and send them, young though they were, across the country to escape the danger. Similarly, the example was cited of the priest's kindness in the train to tell the soldiers that the boys were with him. Yet together they watched others being taken away to likely death, but this was not considered as the claim that hate did not triumph was repeated. Of course, happily, there was not an ultimate triumph of hatred, but it was good to see more thoughtful candidates referring to Jo's stolen childhood, or more strongly, his comment 'ils ont tué en moi l'enfant que je pouvais être' (Ch. 10), reflecting permanent loss even though there was relief in the final outcome.