

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8695/21
Composition

Key Messages

On the whole, the questions seemed to differentiate a range of candidates successfully, with answers ranging from the very mature and thoughtful to those marred by significant lapses in technical accuracy. At the high end, there were some very creative and highly imaginative narrative/descriptive responses and some sophisticated and well exemplified argumentative/discursive compositions. These sophisticated and mature responses were highly enjoyable to read and very impressive, considering the time constraints they were produced in.

At the lower end of the range some answers tended to rely on often undirected and drifting plots while other responses tended to be undeveloped, with lapses in technical areas and expression. The usual areas of concern emerged: tenses commonly confused; the incorrect use of punctuation in dialogue, especially with speech marks; evidence of 'prepared' answers that did not quite fit the examination questions. On the whole, there were not many rubric infringements and time management seemed satisfactory.

The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. A number needed to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in **Section A**, e.g. prescribed instructions such as 'character and motivation', 'setting', 'mood', 'mystery' and/or 'suspense'; or a prescribed structure: novel or short story; or indeed simply an 'opening' to a short story.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in **Section B** was convincing on the whole: candidates were prepared well in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as discursive texts, letters, arguments and magazine articles. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in letters opposing each other, and not keep to the same sort of 'voice' for the two.

General Comments:

Problems with tenses can occur when candidates begin work in the present tense but then shift into past. The advice would be to have the time frame in a definite time in the past so past tenses can be used, rather than drifting into present. Often candidates attempt to replicate urgency and immediacy by using the present tense, but control is lost. Another issue is sequence of tenses. When one event follows another in the past they have to use past perfect, not simple past.

Revision of punctuation would be useful. Accurate punctuation is important: candidates can make their work more effective by apposite punctuation between and within sentences, noting especially the correct use of the apostrophe and the semicolon. Reading the work quietly to oneself helps in hearing the fall of cadence in the sentence. Semicolon/colon use is disappointing even in the higher band essays. Apostrophe in genitive singular and plural needs revision just before the exam takes place. Punctuating direct speech correctly is also important. All punctuation has to go INSIDE the speech marks. When speech is reported/indirect, candidates need to remember to 1) go back one tense 2) change the pronoun 3) change the time word. The most frequent error in punctuation is using the comma instead of a full stop. There were often many paragraphs which were one sentence long, and much absent punctuation pegged the mark to lower bands.

Candidates need to be aware of the importance of a varied vocabulary. Frequently, in weaker answers, a word is repeatedly employed. A teaching recommendation is that candidates should select the key words/phrases from the question and note alternatives. This would provide a vocabulary bank.

Paragraphing has seen some improvement. It is important that the paragraphing and discourse markers are used to help the reader navigate around the work. Topic sentences should be taught. Paragraphing, topic sentences and connectives are helpful structures are important props which add to the structure and coherent progression of ideas in a text. When conversation is used in stories, candidates should remember

to start a new paragraph for each change of speaker.

There was much more evidence of planning in this examination session. In some cases the plans were detailed and too long. It took time away from the writing of the actual essay. There has to be a balanced approach here. Plans are useful for sequencing ideas in a **Section A** narrative or a description, and in **Section B** responses where careful argumentation and explanation are often central to the tasks set. Candidates should be advised that 5-10 minutes worth of planning would be sound practice. Also, five minutes could be set aside for the checking of work for accuracy.

Comments on Specific Questions

Paper 21:

Question 1 (The Tower)

There were some very evocative and focused responses which created atmospheric suspense. Candidates employed a range of descriptive and narrative effects in a substantial number of answers. Stronger compositions involved subtle mixtures of place and mood, often highly subjective points-of-view from a single protagonist. Many compositions situated the tower in a forbidding forest, or on a lonely island, though there were a few that involved a tower as a part of an urban cityscape. Some candidates used the idea of the tower as a metaphor. Answers worked well when the prescribed instructions were followed- i.e. to create a sense of mystery and suspense; and to create the opening to a short story. Less successful answers wasted time by creating lengthy preambles, building up to the introduction of 'the tower', attempting to develop many characters - then failing to achieve the 'sense of mystery and suspense' that the narrative needed. Some less secure compositions drew on horror conventions alone at the expense of originality. The use of tenses was often precarious in the weaker answers.

Question 2 (The Comedian)

This question was often very well done. The element of contrast seemed to focus the candidates on a restricted number of key points and so led to some structured essays. The two sides of a comedian provided some interesting and imaginative answers usually with a good contrast between the public and private persona. The noise, laughter and liveliness of the performance sections were well described and contrasted starkly with a range of gloomy, lonely and tragic personal lives. The 'character and mood' aspect was done well, with candidates sensibly recycling those words to anchor the material to the question. Often, the jolly comedian was sketched as a grumpy manic depressive at home, which is a fairly obvious choice, but it was done well and subtly in some cases. Just a few had their comedian as a woman. The onstage section was often better than the at home character. The most successful answers used cohesive devices to structure the contrasting sides into an effective whole. The most successful writing adopted a first person narrative voice, which allowed for implicit meanings, rather than stating the obvious from an observer's point of view. With less successful compositions, a common weakness here was inconsistency with tenses.

Question 3 (Rain)

This popular title has a descriptive pointer which encouraged candidates to deploy the full panoply of devices: adjectives, emphasising adverbs, compounds, adjective stacks, simile, metaphor, extended metaphor, personification, imagery etc. The colour and sounds were a helpful focus in that respect, but they were not adequately exploited. Many candidates simply narrated a piece with references to rain threaded through. The narrative ought to act as a spine to hold the descriptive elements together. There were many essays which narrated the beginning of a day, and only managed to get to the rain element towards the end. Several candidates used the rain as a parallel to the events/moods of the narratives. So rain fell as news of a death/illness/disaster became known. Rain was also used as a positive, life enhancing symbol, as the rain fell the long lost son/lover/soldier returned. However clever the use of pathetic fallacy, successful answers were ones that managed to sustain an appropriate level of depth in their description, using structure to cohere their ideas, instead of simply listing. The balance between narrative and descriptive elements had to be right - taking too long to 'set up' a story would mean less focus on the description itself. The Examiners' advice for a descriptive piece would be to begin 'in medias res' and aim for the lower end of the 600 to 900 word range.

Question 4 (Two Homes for Sale)

Although a popular question, with very varied submissions, it was disappointing when candidates forgot about writing to an audience and offered just a stream of attributes of the homes without expanding on their

merits and desirability. As these essays were intended to be advertising copy, a distinct tone and audience were essential but were often lacking. The biggest problem then became a lack of content and rambling descriptions. Simply deploying contrasting language to list the differences between the two was not enough for a complex 'argument'. Those with a distinct tone/attitude were often well done. These successful answers deployed persuasive devices and some appropriate specialist vocabulary to imitate real estate advertising copy - creating a real sense of voice, audience and purpose.

Question 5 (Stress)

This was a popular question that was done well. Candidates appeared more comfortable with the content of this question than the previous, and most responses had an appropriate audience, voice and form. There were a good number of very successful answers which offered practical advice and explanation in an appropriate register for the target audience. Candidates were able to develop a lively approach to this text due to the subject matter and the intended audience. However, some candidates needed to address the audience directly ('aimed at teenagers') rather than talk *about* teenagers. The question specifies that the candidate 'offers guidance' and this clear directive was not always followed. The crux of the essay is about the stress generated by teen life, not about the problems encountered in teen life. That is a definite split that has to be addressed to access the higher bands. The question also asks for practical advice: therefore prayer, thinking straight, being happy, being yourself are more 'theoretical' and do not qualify as practical advice. Sound, practical advice included asking for guidance and help, using planners to organise time better, making sure to factor in enough sleep/rest, play and work. A few candidates managed to develop their responses to a deeper level by considering the morality of competition and how far success was linked to personal happiness. This, of course, was only done after the initial stipulations of the questions were met.

Question 6 (The Joys of Reading)

The question states no specific audience so the range needs to be broad in appeal. It is a leaflet, and the format needs addressing. Because a lot of candidates read, there was much valuable material including references to specific books, authors and genres. Pleasures and benefits were well considered. Often candidates recycled the words, and so anchored themselves to the question. A very good idea. Candidates who appear to have been writing from their own experiences, wrote with excitement and passion and presented very convincing essays, combining theories with some book recommendations. Less successful answers tended to be repetitive, talking about the benefits of an increased vocabulary and being able to impress at an interview, spending a lot of time discussing how reading helps you learn more but often missed the point about the pleasure of reading.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Comments on Specific Questions

Paper 22:

Question 1 (The Unsolved Crime)

This was a very popular question, written with a wide range of levels of success. A good proportion of candidates developed inventive ideas and effectively created tension and suspense. Many answers included the idea of an unsolved crime right at the end of their writing. However, as this was only the beginning of a story, this was in many ways justifiable. With the less effective answers, a common pitfall was the tendency to overdo the build-up, leading to a marked lack of tension and suspense. The better essays had generally established an appropriate atmosphere by the end of page one. Weaker answers also tended to just relate the outline of the story rather than use any narrative techniques, speech etc. In these answers, there was often much confusion of tenses and little originality, with unnecessary concentration on blood and guts.

Question 2 (Tourist attraction - contrasting pieces)

This was a popular choice of question, which was generally well-handled and with a clear contrast evident in most answers. The best answers described a specific place, probably known to the candidate, while weaker answers seemed to be writing about general places, such as a beach scene. Many responses tried hard to use descriptive language which was often imaginative and appropriate. There were some fine examples of writing which created a sense of setting and mood. The better essays seemed to be authentic descriptions based on personal experiences. Weaker responses were often characterised by confusion with tenses and simply outlined what they saw. A number of these responses missed the point of the contrast of this piece and did not talk about the place becoming a busy tourist attraction. There were some very successful responses where candidates integrated the two and used a character in both to illustrate the changes.

Question 3 (Heatwave)

This was a fairly popular choice of question, with some effective description. There were some impressively written pieces which delighted with a developed description of intensely hot weather. In less successful answers, a lot of time was spent listing colours and sounds rather than creating a developed description. Unfortunately, a number of candidates wrote a story with hot weather as a backdrop, rather than focusing on a purely descriptive piece; or ones which succumbed to the pitfall of preambles which went on and on, leading to a lack of focus on describing the "colours and sounds" of unusual weather. Some candidates' writing became supernatural or sci-fi narrative, leading to irrelevance regarding the purpose and topic. Sometimes, while there was relevant form and content, there was a struggle to find appropriate structure.

Question 4 (Media Representation of Young People)

This was a popular question though a good number of candidates struggled to write meaningfully to present "opposing viewpoints and attitudes" in their magazine articles. The question was misinterpreted by quite a few candidates, who discussed the benefits and disadvantages of teenagers using media, or about their views of the media in general, rather than how young people were being represented by the media. The best answers made good use of examples of positive and negative representations in the media (for example, Malala Yousafzai and Justin Bieber) and wrote two persuasive articles.

Question 5 (Radio Script - Young at Heart)

This was a popular question and was generally well-handled, with a number of very successful answers which offered practical information in a lively format. These were characterised by a strong sense of voice, employing rhetorical devices such as direct address, facts and anecdotes. Such scripts were often quite lively with a sense of audience.

Question 6. (Sports Centre Website)

This question was equally popular. Answers were always relevant in their form and content with answers almost professional in their approach, while weaker candidates did little more than list activities offer - with perhaps too many diverse suggestions lacking depth and argument/persuasion. Some essays missed the audience focus of "interested beginners", tending to address more accomplished or expert enthusiasts.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Comments on Specific Questions

Paper 23:

Question 1 (Moonlight)

This was hugely popular and enjoyed some degree of success. Stronger responses veered away from the mythical (werewolves, vampires etc) and clichéd writing with 'spooky' description. Less successful answers either referred to 'moonlight' too frequently throughout their piece, rather than working to actually create a sense of a threatening and fearful exposition, or else forgot to include any reference to moonlight at all in their story. Contrived responses – i.e. standard horror stories - did not achieve high marks. Successful answers managed to create a real sense of threat and fear.

Question 2 (Contrasting Views of the Same Location)

This was a successfully answered question although it was not popular among candidates. Successful responses used a character to convey the differences between the two views. Some answers were more successful at creating ground level descriptions, but struggled for ideas when dealing with the view from a high altitude.

Question 3 (Sense of Wonder at the Natural World)

This was not a particularly popular question. There were some impressively written pieces which contained a developed description of the natural world. In less successful answers, a lot of time was spent listing colours and textures rather than creating a developed description. Focus was lacking in these answers.

Question 4 (Contrasting Job Applications)

This was a relatively popular but rather problematic question for candidates. Almost all wrote in the appropriate form but the level of 'complex argument' was not always achieved. Candidates did try to create differing voices but they struggled to write appropriate content in both letters, often talking a lot about their friends or that their parents are forcing them to get a job etc. Candidates often forgot to create different voices for the two parts, so that the applicants tended to sound exactly the same, creating letters that were list-like, with only slightly different content. Some neglected to say what the job was, which made the two parts of the answer too general. Some answers went into hugely personal tales of their hard lives to show why they deserved the job, which seemed inappropriate.

Question 5 (Letter to a Newspaper about Making Retirement Compulsory)

This question was better answered. Candidates took the viewpoint seriously and argued well on either side with development. Less successful answers struggled with this, not understanding when people retire, often talking about 30/40 year olds stealing candidates' jobs. Some responses spent a lot of time 'stating that they feel strongly...the writer should be ashamed etc' but did not respond to the topic itself. Conversely, another problem was when candidates ignored the fact it said letter and wrote an essay about the subject instead. Successful answers remembered to use language techniques for persuasive writing.

Question 6 (Script for a TV Voiceover for a Charity Organisation)

This was very popular and resulted in some varied responses. Most candidates wrote in depth, using the appropriate form and created a strong sense of voice. More successful responses used specific examples of how their charity has helped others. Some were very short and did not develop well, others included some emotive and persuasive language. Some less successful candidates did not really understand what they were writing or how to structure it.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/91

Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding; answers which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary will not do well.
- Candidates should use secure detailed references and quotations to support points.
- The most successful answers clearly focus on the author's choices of language and literary methods.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the selected extract in great detail.

General comments

There were some excellent responses to questions in this examination series, with the most confident candidates constructing careful, structured arguments in response to the questions, supported by detailed analysis of the writing of the texts. The new poetry selection from *Songs of Ourselves* proved popular. Sometimes candidates showed themselves unaware of some of the literary conventions of Renaissance poetry, but others were able to comment thoughtfully on the sonnet form, for example. An understanding of sonnets also informed some of the discussion of Wilfred Owen's poetry, the other new text this examination series. In this case, historical context was usually used discriminately and purposefully, without obscuring attention to the poetry.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) Many candidates answering this question chose poems which feature specific objects, such as 'The Turnip Snedder', 'Helmet', 'The Harrow-Pin' and 'Wordsworth's Skates', exploring ways in which these items hold and provoke memories and take on symbolic value. Others looked at particular moments captured in verse, in poems such as 'The Nod', 'The Aerodrome' and 'Anahorish 1944', often leading to sympathetic readings which carefully explored the darker elements, the links and suggestions of strife, discord and warfare in the language and imagery. Less successful answers relied on paraphrase of poems, without demonstrating an awareness of the poetic means by which Heaney communicates and provokes the readers' responses.
- (b) A number of careful and detailed readings of 'Out of Shot' teased out the connections Heaney makes between historic violence enacted by Viking raiders, contemporary violence in the Middle East observed on television news and, implicitly, the violence of the Northern Ireland Troubles. Some candidates observed the irony of such a poem about violence being framed by references to sunshine and linked this with the poem's speaker being detached and safe, leaning on a gate on a 'bell-clear Sunday', but still surrounded historically and geographically by violence. Such answers often noted the use of the sonnet form, the use of the ubiquitous donkey as a symbol and the punning irony of the poem's title. It was, for many, though, a puzzling poem and some candidates struggled to give a coherent account of its meaning and methods.

Question 2 Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This question drew a large number of responses, with the best clearly addressing the question. Essays which discussed the presentation of war did not attract high marks. Successful answers clearly selected poems and areas of poems which specifically presented soldiers at war. The strongest candidates shaped their answer by identifying contrasting ways in which Owen presents soldiers at war; though comparison was not a requirement of the question, it helped many

candidates structure their argument. There was a number of informed and detailed responses, using poems such as 'Dulce et Decorum Est', 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', 'The Dying Gaul', 'Inspection' and 'Exposure', which explored the experience of war for the soldiers as being destructive and reductive. Owen's realistic and brutal presentation of the soldiers' plight in terms of their physical, emotional and mental suffering was explored effectively. The strongest responses closely examined ways in which Owen uses language, imagery and form to present the horrors and their results.

- (b) Answers on '1914' were often usefully informed by pertinent references to the historical context of the First World War and the significance of the date in the poem's title, but many did not understand the references within the poem to Greece and Rome. Most answers noted the starkness of the two-word opening and the metaphor of the tornado. Beyond that, less confident responses tended to paraphrase the poem, unsuccessfully where Owen's references were not sufficiently understood. More successful answers examined the detached mood and lofty tone of the poem, considering its philosophical reflection of the transitions between despair and hope. Several answers showed perceptive awareness of the structure and tone of the poem, avoiding the over-simplistic view that the sestet is optimistic, and noting how the final couplet with its horrifying image of 'blood for seed', recaptures the dark mood of the octet.

Question 3 *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) Successful answers used the word 'different' in the title as a prompt to look at contrasting aspects of humanity, with appropriate poems. Such answers also considered the poetic means – voice, language, form, imagery – by which the aspects were communicated, leading to thoughtful consideration of such poems as 'Written the Night Before His Execution', 'The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself', Wroth's 'Sonnet 19', 'What is our Life?', Spencer's 'Sonnet 75' and 'A Mind Content'. Weaker answers to this question paraphrased each poem in turn and identified which aspect of human nature was being presented.
- (b) This was an overwhelmingly popular choice, though it was not always done well. Many answers featured simple paraphrase, biographical assertion and very literal understanding of 'breast' in the final stanza. There was little sense of the wider, non-biographical 16th century context and the conventions of such poetry. Stronger answers noted the retrospective nature of the poem indicated by its opening phrase and noted the tone of self-awareness in such language as 'scorn' and 'prouder', while there seems to be relish in the repetition of 'How many'. Such close attention to the language and structure of the poem was a feature of stronger answers, which noted not only the repetition of the refrain, but its changing use as the poem progresses, the big shift occurring when it is voiced by Cupid in the third stanza.

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

- (a) There were many well-rehearsed, engaged responses to this question. Most candidates acknowledged Olanna's central role in serving Adichie's dual purpose of narrating the political history of the horrors of the Biafran war with the human story of love, survival and identity. Most candidates noted the war as a turning point in the development of Olanna's character, exploring her growth from the earlier beautiful, intelligent, wealthy, woman whose role is mainly to complement Odenigbo, to her multifaceted roles of wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, lover and inspirational educator and leader during the war. There were perceptive observations on how she is shaped and changed by war and infidelity, commenting thoughtfully on Olanna as a foil to Odenigbo, how her growth in power and confidence mirrors his decline into alcoholism and despair. Weaker answers featured descriptions of who Olanna is and what she does with little understanding of the literary term 'role'. Candidates always need to think about how an author presents a character, which means too that quotations are essential to support ideas.
- (b) This prompted some very good responses, where candidates commented thoughtfully on small details within the overall passage – the effect of the word 'cradling', for example, in line 30, the position in which Odenigbo reads, and the repeated use of 'sah'. Most candidates commented on Ugwu's sense of wonder at the sheer size of Odenigbo's house; his sense of inadequacy and doubt as to whether he would be able to satisfy his employer; and his fascination with Odenigbo's speech (one candidate commenting that the use of the word 'feathery' suggested his words were 'soft – like a string of words floating'.) Analytical answers considered the implications of the 'piercingly' white ceiling, the overwhelming brightness of the room and the use of the word 'alien' to describe the furniture. There was some intelligent discussion of ways in which Adichie controls

point of view in the novel and how it influences the reader's experience. This was often achieved by putting this episode into the context of the whole novel, recognising the frequent references to books as a foreshadowing of how books and education will become so important to Ugwu, and the master/servant relationship evident here develops into something much more balanced later in the narrative.

Question 5 E. M. Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) Fielding was a popular choice of character and most essays demonstrated a sympathetic response to him, but many of these essays discussed him as if they were discussing a particular friend, rather than a literary character in a novel. More successful responses noted specific situations in which Fielding is placed by Forster, such as the bridge party, his own tea party, the Club, his visit to the sick Aziz, Aziz's trial and befriending Adela afterwards. Candidates generally saw him presented as a man of tolerance, open-mindedness, intelligence and honesty. Essays noted his growing separation from his own compatriots and the loss of his friendship with Aziz, leaving him isolated, failing fully to connect with either race. Some candidates commented on the parallels with Forster's own life and values; his cynical view of the British in India, shared by Forster, was also noted by many candidates.
- (b) The passage proved a popular option and strong responses recognised the subtlety of Forster's characterisation in this extract; neither character is presented as the 'villain' but both engage the reader's sympathies at different points. Some less assured answers missed the nuances of tone, drawing a less subtle, critical picture of the characters. Successful candidates commented precisely on the stiff formality of the characters' dialogue and some noted telling details beyond the dialogue, such as the metaphoric implications of the 'declining' sun and the 'premonition of night'. Others saw the 'colourless grass' and the 'little green bird' as symbolic. Some sophisticated responses noted Forster's use of free indirect thought to reveal what Ronny and Adela cannot say to each other in lines 3-4, 19-21 and 24-26 for example, while the third person narrative provides gentle humour in lines 26-27 and 48-49.

Question 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) This question was answered quite successfully by those candidates who attempted it. 'The Bath' was the most popular story for this question, with 'The Hollow of the Three Hills', 'The Lady in the Looking Glass' and 'Sredni Vashtar' also featuring. Answers often included useful quotations to support discussion of 'ways in which' the characters are presented, with intelligent comments on, for example, the symbolic significance of descriptions of the bath and the letters in the Woolf story. Many candidates were successful in structuring their essays through comparison, looking at a sympathetic portrayal of the difficulties of age in 'The Bath' and a stereotypical evil witch in 'The Hollow of the Three Hills' or an embittered aunt in 'Sredni Vashtar'.
- (b) On the whole, this passage prompted candidates to consider the writing in detail, and so tended to produce sound answers. Strong responses explored not just the characterisation of the old woman but also Hawthorne's use of sounds and setting. Few exploited all the opportunities of the passage but candidates appreciated Hawthorne's archaic lexis and his use of auditory as well as visual imagery. Successful responses responded to what the sounds signify in terms of what the reader knows or imagines of the lady and her history, thus demonstrating the power of the 'hag' to summon up these sounds. Several answers commented on the final sentence, noting how 'a sweet hour's sport' and 'chuckling' convey the old woman's sinister delight in the macabre events that have taken place.

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

- (a) There were very few answers to this question, which provided ample opportunities for comparing the presentation of the two female characters in the play. Candidates could have looked at age, position in the university and confidence as issues where the women are widely different, but issues of parenthood could have been used to link Honey and Martha.
- (b) Few candidates responded to this question. Candidates who did so were able to see this episode as one of the play's many challenges and confrontations between George and Nick, this one based on their different academic disciplines and their ages. It was noted that the confrontation takes place through apparently polite exchanges with significant stage directions, making it a subtle exchange in this early part of the play.

Question 8 William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question. Candidates might have discussed the nature of kingship by looking at the three kings in the play – Edward, Richard and Richmond. The play provides clear contrast between them and candidates might also have considered other characters. Comments on kingship – from Clarence and Hastings to the citizens.
- (b) Few candidates responded to this question. It offered plentiful opportunities, being an extract from a long scene focusing on a key comparison between the two rivals before the final battle. There was plenty of opportunity for candidates to discuss ways in which Shakespeare presents Richard's unease but unexpected gentleness as well as Richmond's confidence and placing himself in the hands of God.

Question 9 Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) This new drama text was more popular than the others and produced some interesting responses. Most candidates concentrated on the presentation of More's wife and daughter, considering ways in which they challenge or support his stance and the nature of the relationships between them. The responses showed good knowledge of the events and characters of the play, but would have been improved by demonstration of a greater degree of dramatic understanding.
- (b) Responses to this question noted Bolt's creation of a cold, calculating Cromwell apparent through both his dialogue and the associated stage directions. Whereas other characters are '*brutal*', '*Triumphant*', '*winded*' or '*uncertain*', Cromwell is '*nodding judicially*', speaking '*politely*' and '*scrutinises... dispassionately*'. Candidates also noted the formal polite language used in his 'threat' to Norfolk and his refusal to accede to Rich's attempt at intimacy with his disparaging comment about Norfolk. His metaphorically described plans to 'net' More, explained at the end of the scene, were also noted.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/92
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding; answers which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary will not do well.
- Candidates should use secure detailed references and quotations to support points.
- The most successful answers clearly focus on the author's choices of language and literary methods.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions should examine the selected extract in great detail.

General comments

There were some excellent responses to questions in this examination series, with the most confident candidates constructing careful, structured arguments in response to the questions, supported by detailed analysis of the writing of the texts. The new poetry selection from *Songs of Ourselves* proved popular. Sometimes candidates showed themselves unaware of some of the literary conventions of Renaissance poetry, but others were able to comment thoughtfully on the sonnet form, for example. An understanding of sonnets also informed some of the discussion of Wilfred Owen's poetry, the other new text this examination series. In this case, historical context was usually used discriminately and purposefully, without obscuring attention to the poetry.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question. Among those who did attempt it, there was little consideration of the quoted words in the question, leading to a rather general consideration of the 'detached observer', often comprising little more than paraphrase of what is observed.
- (b) Candidates answering on Heaney overwhelmingly chose this question, though a surprising number were unaware that the poem is a version of a poem by Rilke, assuming that the Rilke of the title was the identity of the man in the poem. A knowledge of Rilke was not necessary to write well on the poem, however, and many answers contained thoughtful comments on the structure of the quatrains and the development of the speaker's train of thought through them. The strongest responses understood the significance of the moment – the arrival of the son at the scene of the fire, observed by others, as his recognition of the disaster robs him of his security, past and identity. These ideas were carefully linked to Heaney's use of sentences, enjambment, alliteration and the contrast between the tones of the different stanzas. Less successful answers offered uncertain paraphrase, missing the son's loss and resultant displacement, the role of the children's ignorance, nature's bemused witnessing of the scene, and the overall sense of alienation by one who is touched by difference.

Question 2 Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Candidates found the topic of physical suffering very accessible, with a number of relevant poems to choose from. Candidates who dealt with their chosen poems narratively were less successful than those who pursued an analytical angle, picking up on the key word 'explores'. Success also depended on detailed knowledge of the poems and their poetic methods. Favoured poems were 'Dulce et Decorum Est', 'The Sentry', 'The Last Laugh' and 'Disabled'. The first of these in particular seemed to have impressed candidates with its vivid imagery. Several were able to support their argument with quotations such as 'Bent double', 'blood-shod' and 'froth-corrupted

lungs', while those who used 'Disabled' were able to note the bitter irony in the presence of a young man, who used to be proud of injury sustained playing football, now having no legs.

- (b) Fewer candidates attempted the question on the 'Sonnet' and some struggled with the poem's imagery. More successful responses noted that the poem is addressed to the gun, the tone intimate, implying its power and greatness. The strongest essays addressed the moral ambiguity of the celebration of the weapon's power in the sonnet's octet and the revaluation of the sestet. Candidates who noted the force of the final couplet, driven by 'God curse thee', tended to write well about the poem.

Question 3 *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) A wide range of poems was used by candidates in answers to this question, though surprisingly poems such as 'The Flowers That on the Banks...' and 'Spring, the Sweet Spring' were seldom seen. Candidates usually showed sound knowledge but did not always look closely at the demands of the question. A number of candidates listed the natural imagery, often with much careful detail, but did not consider how the imagery is used to develop the poems' ideas. It can be useful for candidates to highlight the key words of a question to ensure that they direct their answer towards it.
- (b) A number of candidates provided much biographical information about Mary Wroth, which seldom contributed usefully to their answers. Others relied on paraphrase, but these often struggled, as a number of candidates did not recognise that the speaker of the poem addresses 'torments' themselves, rather than a lover, and therefore misinterpreted aspects of the poem. Successful responses looked carefully at the language of the poem and were able to pick out the diction of distress; fewer were able to comment usefully on the poem's form.

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

- (a) There were some perceptive discussions about the characterisation of Kainene; most essays juxtaposed her with her sister, contrasting their different characters and roles. Strong answers drew on comprehensive, detailed knowledge of the text and were able to discuss the axis between prudence and passion in terms of romantic and political choices in the novel. Kainene's detachment and independence was noted and several candidates explored the implications of her relationship with Richard very fruitfully. There was a suggestion that, as the novel's most independent woman, she represents Biafra, and therefore her disappearance at the end of the novel is crucial.
- (b) A greater number of candidates responded to the passage question. Less ambitious and successful answers described Ugwu's meeting with Olanna rather than commenting on the way it is presented. The most confident candidates recognised that the third person narrative is directed through Ugwu's perspective, giving the reader a strong understanding of his responses to Olanna. His changing views of her were often carefully charted, considering the dispelling of his preconceptions prior to meeting her and his admiration, demonstrating his own emerging adolescent sexuality. The comments on her shapeliness and the use of food imagery were noted. Some successful answers linked the passage to developments later in the text, explaining how the relationship between Ugwu and Olanna develops into one of mutual value and trust.

Question 5 E. M. Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) Responses varied between those which used the quotations in the question as keys to a structured essay, and those who wrote more generally about Ronny. The latter group tended to describe the character rather judgmentally, seeing Ronny as representing the worst faults of the Anglo-Indians. More considered responses recognised a more complex character and developed an argument which related Ronny to the pressures of Anglo-Indian society, exploring his character within the wider historical and social context. Using the question's quoted suggestions, such answers considered the qualities described and considered them in the light of Ronny's behaviour. Some saw him as a more understanding and sympathetic character in the final stages of the novel.
- (b) Almost all candidates were able to place the passage accurately within the novel and identify its narrative importance. There was plenty of careful analysis of Forster's presentation of Adela's thought processes and the way these were linked to the dialogue. While some essays drifted towards general essays on Adela, most were able to select telling details from the passage, often

arguing that her inappropriate questions to Aziz stem from her sublimated attraction to him. Some noted that she struggles with doubt about her relationship with Ronny. Strong responses noted how the third person narrative reveals Adela's thoughts, showing her innocence as she moves towards a more direct and offensive question. Candidates often noted that Forster is shifting the reader's perspective on Adela: a woman who has seen marriage as a commonsense arrangement but suddenly realises that she has not considered love. Some noted that Forster used the symbol of the rock over which Adela 'toiled' as the turning point in her realisation. Further interesting observations were made on the way in which the listing of events indicates Adela's need for order, the way in which apparent certainty is undermined by the introduction of rhetorical questions in lines 13-14, and the powerful effect of the sudden realisation of the hollowness of her relationship with Ronny, conveyed through the dramatic exclamations of lines 19-20.

Question 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) This was not a popular question, but stories effectively chosen included 'Elephant', 'The Bath', 'The Enemy', 'Real Time', 'Report on the Threatened City' and 'The Lady in the Looking-Glass'. The strongest responses showed a developed awareness of how the narrative voice shapes the way readers respond to the story, making the 'alien' point of view of 'Report on the Threatened City' a particularly useful choice. Some discussed the voice in 'The Bath' very well, with careful exploration of the development of the story and the sense of desperation and loneliness captured by the free indirect discourse within the third person narrative. Some candidates viewed the narrative voice as that of the main character, which is sometimes importantly not the case, making these answers unsuccessful.
- (b) A number of candidates merely retold the entire story, ignoring the extract as a specific focus. Others paraphrased the extract itself, but neither of these approaches was successful. Stronger answers considered ways in which the third person narrator reveals Tommy's innermost thoughts as well as describes his actions, in this way communicating his desires and hopes in dealing with the girl who steals the sweets. Many candidates explored the passage very well, focusing effectively on the ending, the importance of Tommy's past and his relationship with Rosa.

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

- (a) The few candidates who responded to this question showed knowledge of Honey's actions in the play, referring to her relationship with Nick, her phantom pregnancy and her drinking, but few were able to develop this knowledge into a clear understanding of her dramatic significance.
- (b) There were not many answers to this question, but most candidates recognised its position towards the end of the play and were able to comment on how it reveals the nature of Martha and George's relationship, the argument about the moon being particularly revealing here. Others picked up how Nick is excluded for most of the extract and most commented on the reference to the 'son'. A number commented on the snapdragons and George's 'flores para los muertos' as a foreshadowing of their son's 'death'. Few commented in detail on the multiple changes of tone in the dialogue of the selected passage and missed opportunities to demonstrate developed analytical skills.

Question 8 *William Shakespeare: Richard III*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, which invited candidates to consider the ambiguity in Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard. The challenge in the question lay in being able to demonstrate ways in which Shakespeare presents Richard as 'engaging' and 'oddly sympathetic'.
- (b) There were slightly more responses to the passage question. Although some candidates identified the reversal of fortune between Margaret and Elizabeth, they found it challenging to analyse Margaret's character and sometimes had difficulty placing the episode and her character within the larger context of the play.

Question 9 Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) Answers to this question tended to focus on Cromwell and Richard Rich and often show knowledge of these characters and how Cromwell's machinations trap More. Candidates found it more challenging to consider the '*dramatic presentation* of political ambition as a source of moral corruption', which includes all facets, including the character of More himself as a foil to Cromwell and Rich.
- (b) This important scene gave candidates plenty of opportunity to explore the relationship between More and Norfolk as friendship and patience are tested by events. Norfolk's frequent questions, with notes of frustration, are important, and the exasperation is confirmed by the final line of the extract. More's teasing out points of faith and logic, which Norfolk cannot quite follow, also repaid careful attention. Candidates also found useful material in More's 'lawyer's tricks', as he stages a 'trap' for Norfolk with his '*whispering*' confidentially to make a point about obedience.

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) This question did not attract many responses, but poems like 'The Clip', 'The Lift' and 'The Nod' were favoured choices. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the content of the poems, describing the subjects being observed. More successful answers looked closely at the language and poetic methods employed by Heaney to present the observation and considered the implications – the suggestions of distrust and violence in 'The Nod' or the intrusive surveillance helicopter in 'The Lift'.
- (b) There were far more answers on 'Anahorish 1944'. Candidates generally recognised the significance of the date and the reason for the presence of American soldiers en route to Normandy. A number looked at the violence of the slaughter of the pigs, noting diction such as 'killing', 'gutter-blood', 'slaughterhouse' and 'squealing', though surprisingly few made the connection between this slaughter and that to which the soldiers are heading. More alert responses noted the innocence and anonymity of the 'Sunburnt' soldiers handing out sweets, compared with their implied fate as they head towards the war.

Question 2 Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This was a popular question, with a wide range of poems cited, such as 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', 'Exposure', 'The Letter' and 'The Sentry' among others. Successful candidates showed an appreciation of different kinds of hardships suffered by soldiers, including physical, mental, separation from loved ones and a lack of care from superiors. Strong responses showed an understanding not just of these differences, but also of different poetic means of communication, discussing, for example, the diction of a descriptive poem and the creation of the voice of a soldier-speaker.

- (b) Few candidates wrote about 'The End', a poem with which some struggled. A number of responses noted the sonnet form, broken into separate stanzas, but few were able to comment on ways in which the poem was exploited. More successful responses noted the possible interpretations of the poem's title, the use of archaic diction and rather bombastic style, which is associated with Owen's earlier verse.

Question 3 *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) There was a small number of responses to this question. Candidates choosing it tended to opt for poems which explore change in relationships, such as 'When I Was Fair and Young', 'They Flee From Me' or Spenser's 'Sonnet 75'. Weaker answers described the changes, lapsing into paraphrase of the poems, paying little attention to 'ways' in which the change is explored in the poetry. Successful responses considered how the language of the poems creates mood and tone, while candidates who chose one or more sonnets were often able to comment on the poets' use of the form.
- (b) More candidates chose to answer on 'Weep You No More Sad Fountains', often interpreting the poem as a response to the death of a child, arguing that 'sleep' is a frequently used metaphor for death. It was seen as an optimistic poem, moving towards resolution and acceptance. Candidates usually looked at the language of the poem in some detail in order to support their interpretation, but very few considered the poem's distinctive form.

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

- (a) Very few candidates attempted this question. Eberechi is the early key to Ugwu's developing sexuality, the girl for whom he longs but who remains unattainable. Her calm admission of her pragmatic relationship with an army officer is also important in Ugwu's loss of hope, the presentation of the results of war and another sexual relationship among the range in the novel. It is significant that Ugwu's last action in the novel is to send a letter to Eberechi, but Richard holds from him the news of her death in the war.
- (b) There were few answers on this text. The passage presents the developing unrest framed by domestic activities as Ugwu attempts to retain normality with setting the table and bathing Baby. Candidates could have commented on the retrospective references to Miss Adebayo's frantic visit and Odenigbo's reactions to the news announcements before the arrival of 'the hollow-eyed men' at the end of the passage. Alert candidates might have picked out that the unease also affects Baby and particularly Ugwu, whose lack of complete control is indicated by such as small detail of his lack of certainty over Baby's nightclothes.

Question 5 E. M. Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) There were few responses to this question. The Collector, Mr Turton, is the central administrator of Chandrapore and thus comes to represent the English and English values in the novel. Candidates could have cited a number of important episodes where his character is revealed, such as his early conversation with Adela and the bridge party which he organises. His response to the alleged assault on Adela perhaps comes to define his character, and with it, English views of India and Indians. He could have been viewed as a role model for Ronny and contrasted with Fielding.
- (b) Few candidates responded to this question. It offered many opportunities, as a central episode in the novel, where Adela admits her error in the court case. The passage began with 'A new and unknown sensation protected her' and ended with her retraction of the accusation, so offered much material on the presentation of her state of mind. The narrative first explores her mental state before the dialogue breaks in. Adela's dialogue is punctuated by dashes and ellipses as she hesitates, interspersed with narrative comments which show her memory's working and her growing doubt.

Question 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) There were few responses to this question. 'The Enemy', 'Sredni Vashtar' and 'The Prison' were very suitable stories, though 'Elephant' and 'Report on the Threatened City' could also have been used effectively. The children in the stories are very different, as some feature in the stories as characters while others are only referred to, so there was ample opportunity for the comparison which the question demanded.

- (b) Most candidates answering on the short stories chose to respond to this question. Confident candidates relied on summary or paraphrase of the passage, there was sensitive writing which showed appreciation of the old woman's predicament and the way it is communicated. Successful answers noted the way the third person narrative slips in and out of the character's mind and thoughts and commented on the careful preparation for the bath, 'step by step', suggesting the way she is intimidated by such a simple domestic activity. Her bathing and enjoyment of the water, then her delaying getting out, were all noted. Alert answers noted the language of physical difficulty and fear in the second half of the extract, culminating in the 'wild drum-beat' as she strikes the sides of the bath in panic. The dark undertones of death and burial in the metaphorical presentation of the bath were noted in a number of perceptive answers.

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

- (a) Very few candidates responded to this question. Those who did showed knowledge of the range of games played by the characters in the play and were able to link these to the central concerns of relationships, rivalry, career and children. Success depended on the details with which the play was known and the level of understanding shown in linking the games to the 'serious issues'.
- (b) There were very few answers to this question, but most candidates recognised its importance in developing the tension in the relationship between George and Nick. Better answers looked in detail at the challenges between the two men, some of them trivial in nature, but taking on a greater significance in context. Successful responses looked very closely at how these challenges are worded in the dialogue, noting vocabulary, questions and pauses, while the strongest would have also taken the stage directions into consideration.

Question 8 William Shakespeare: *Richard III*

There were no responses on *Richard III*.

Question 9 Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

There were no responses on *A Man For All Seasons*.