

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/01 and 0486/04

Paper 1 (Open Books) and Paper 4 (Closed Books)

There were clear favourites in all three forms: *Macbeth* was the most popular of the drama texts, *Lord of the Flies* the most popular prose text, and in the poetry section *Songs of Ourselves* was overwhelmingly more popular than Coleridge's *Selected Poems*. Of the other texts on offer the most frequently encountered amongst the novels were *Things Fall Apart*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and the short story anthology, and amongst the plays *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The wording of the questions seemed to present few problems to candidates, and where that did occur it was the failure to read the question with attention that was usually the cause of the difficulty. There were a number of instances of candidates writing on two texts when the *either/or* injunction was clearly telling them to answer on just one. In such instances Examiners were instructed to mark the answer holistically, but inevitably the work on each text could not reach the standard which might have been attained if the candidate had written as instructed. Elsewhere, the main reason for any difficulties arose from limited knowledge of the detail of the text.

However, in the great majority of scripts, it was plain that candidates had managed to see precisely what the task required and had got on with it. There were riders to this which will be mentioned later, but this was pleasing indeed. Most Examiners commented that they detected a continuing improvement in standards. It is now very unusual to come across work which betrays failure to have engaged with the texts on any level or in the worst case apparently not to have even opened the book.

Rubric infringements were extremely rare.

This was the first November session in which candidates for Paper 1 were required to write on all three forms (drama, poetry, prose). Since some Centres in the past had not opted to take poetry in the written examination, and this form year-in-year-out has generally been the area of weakest response, it was expected that there might at least be a slight dip in performance this year, but it was pleasing that this proved not to be the case. Of course, of all the forms poetry continues to present the greatest of challenges to many candidates but the extent to which that is so seemed to be no more so than in previous years. Examiners continued to make comment upon the quality of quite a lot of the work they encountered which speaks highly of the teaching which is going on in this syllabus. They wrote of much work seen which showed deep engagement with the texts read, a directness in addressing the task, a confident independence of mind shown in argument, an ability to write in an involved and analytical manner about the wonders of literary language and, on top of it all, an enjoyment and enthusiasm for novels, short stories, plays and poetry. There was a significant amount of work at all levels which Examiners found rewarding to read: at *all* levels, it is stressed. Of course, it is highly pleasurable to give a candidate the highest of rewards, but an Examiner may also find pleasure in reading the work of a candidate of apparently limited ability in the subject who may be struggling to come to terms with a text but for whom the reading of it has obviously been worthwhile.

It is once again pleasing to note that in the main candidates continue to pay attention in detail to the extract instead of, as was once the case, using it as a peg on which to write a general essay about the text.

Answers to the 'empathic' questions are now more frequently encountered in many Centres and often with rewarding results.

The shortcomings noted by Examiners were for the most part familiar and often the obverse of the qualities noted above. Examiners read, as they do every year, answers which showed limited knowledge of the text, which did not fully answer the question, which did not engage with a text on the level of language when asked to do so, or which did not recognise the importance of engaging with the detail of the extract in a passage-based task. Further improvement remains possible, particularly in the area of poetry. This session there were a significant minority who simply ignored parts of the questions on the *Songs of Ourselves* questions. This may have something to do with the nature of the poems selected this year for the tasks. By and large they were a didactic group, which may have tempted some candidates to stray from due

consideration their poetic qualities. 'Caged Bird' was a particular victim of this tendency. Some candidates virtually ignored the *poem*, so eager were they to dilate at length on the injustices of the world. The task required an exploration of *the ways in which the words strikingly convey the injustices of the world*. Many candidates who merely asserted at length that the poet was conveying a message about slavery (for example) were not going to receive much reward for their efforts. Likewise, the task on 'Before the Sun' was deliberately trying to deflect the candidate away from conveying what they thought to be the 'message' of the poem and towards Mungoshi's descriptive qualities as a poet. Sadly, often that was to no avail. At times diverse and complex novels such as *Things Fall Apart* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* and equally complex plays such as *A Raisin in the Sun* were unfortunately reduced to one-dimensional sermons on colonialism and racism.

Recognition of the importance of moving candidates towards an understanding that good literature does infinitely more than convey simple moral 'messages' (and in so doing providing an appropriate foundation for those planning to pursue further study of the subject at a higher level) is one of the reasons why IGCSE Literature places such emphasis on the language writers use. Once engaged with its power and beauty, the reader will no longer think that reading is a matter of decoding the 'message' of the text. One will not, for instance, think that Malcolm's speech at the end of *Macbeth* is Shakespeare's own final judgment on a man whose torment the dramatist has conveyed in the preceding drama with such power and pity. This approach to literature as a means towards uncovering human existence in all its wonderful complexity might be helped if the investigation of literature as an act of creation at times was made more central to study. It is still too often the case that drama is not approached as something created to be effective in the milieu of the theatre. Answers to **Question 17**, for instance, too often became a character sketch with no attention to the many places in which Stanley is designed to play a particularly dramatic role in the play. In the extract tasks on the novels, it soon became obvious which were the candidates able to engage with a novelist's craft of compelling the reader to enter her or his world.

Examiners also found it quite obvious which candidates had thought widely about a text's complexity and those who had not. There are still too many who know little of a text outside the 'central' characters. In **Question 29**, for example, candidates were given a choice of three 'minor', but at certain moments crucial, characters in *Great Expectations* and some seemed to have very little knowledge of these characters, never mind what their roles in the novel might be.

It needs emphasising again that empathic tasks are not an invitation to personal fantasy and invention. On the contrary, they are designed to test the intensity of the candidate's engagement with the text, both as to the character through the voice and the situation in which the character is placed. The task will have been carefully framed to ensure that there is the material in the play or novel which will make wilful invention unnecessary. While some sort of linguistic ability to adopt a way of speaking appropriate to the character cannot but be an advantage, this does not mean one has to write, for instance, in Shakespearian verse. Truth to Lady Macbeth's personality, for instance, can be transmitted in many ways. But knowledge of her character and her likely state of mind at the beginning of the play is hardly conveyed by giving her material more apt to romantic literature or by having her concerned about such things as her hair appointment and a luncheon date. Empathic tasks are not a means of escape from the rigour of more usual forms of examination answers.

Comments on specific questions

A Raisin in the Sun.

Question 1

The great majority of those who chose this text opted for this task and generally did it well. There were some answers which captured superbly the ironies and sarcasms as the scene develops. That was the main differentiator in reward. Most felt suitably outraged by Lindner but did not really engage with the way the scene develops dramatically. A few completely missed the point and felt that Lindner was really a rather nice man.

Question 2

This was not a popular choice and was seldom done very well. The majority of answers did little more than list some of the character's dreams without making any link to their dramatic effect.

Question 3

Again, this was not very popular. Perhaps candidates found Ruth a slightly shadowy figure. However, the extract captured nicely what would have been her stunned reaction and the bitterness ensuing. Some with more insight suggested amongst other things that she would have characteristically thought of others' disappointed hopes as well, even Walter's.

Cuba and Doghouse.

Question 4

Some candidates showed ability to handle the drama of this extract. Answers ranged from the very insightful to the poor. Some made very little of the adults' predicament.

Question 5

The answers on this were stronger on the father than the mother. However, surprisingly some candidates made little of the man's brutality.

Question 6

This was quite well done, a number capturing accurately Cairncross' bigoted priorities, though only the best captured his pompous, self regarding 'voice'.

As You Like It

This text was rarely offered and when it was virtually everyone did **Question 7**. The majority of answers offered formulaic descriptions of the differences between court and country without paying detailed attention to the extract.

Macbeth

This was a very popular text and the work on it occasionally impressed. However, only a minority managed to engage with the play in any real depth.

Question 10

Most candidates managed to identify the context of this soliloquy and to describe reasonably efficiently what was going through Macbeth's mind. However, only a minority really probed the way the language reveals the turmoil in his mind and hence engaged with its full dramatic impact. Rather too many answers did little more than paraphrase and some struggled to do even that. Some weaker candidates thought that here he made up his mind to do the murder and others even thought that Lady Macbeth had already persuaded him to commit the deed.

Question 11

Again most who attempted this task had some grasp of Banquo's qualities. Most saw him simply as a good man, indeed really the hero of the play. Only a minority seemed prepared to take on the challenge of the question, which, of course, encouraged candidates to ponder the way the play makes plain his growing suspicions of Macbeth's intentions, his own ambitions and his complicit silence once the deed is done.

Question 12

There were some very impressive assumptions of Lady Macbeth's character, which not only captured the very likely feelings of apprehension she would have had about her loved one's fate on the battlefield but also the fierce pride she has in her husband's valour. Quite a few converted this pride very convincingly into her making odious comparisons with the king whom he serves and the ambitions she might have for him. Whether she has already fully formed ideas of his removing the king must be doubtful. Rather too many had so uncertain a knowledge of the chronology of the play that they thought she had already received the letter and some made her a hopelessly romantic and/or anachronistic figure.

The Devil's Disciple

This was quite a popular text with a full range of response on show. The great majority who opted for **Question 13**. Some candidates here showed a keen awareness of the way Shaw develops this scene to its climax, though there was generally a lack of awareness of the humour. Others just described events with greater or lesser accuracy. Some seemed to be quite unaware of any irony, a few even seeming to think that Richard was a true disciple of the Devil.

Question 14

The minority who did this usually had something pertinent to say. However, most had difficulty in ranging beyond a few selected features into a fully developed argument.

Question 15

This was not popular, perhaps because, as proved to be the case with most of those who chose the question, they thought Burgoyne's characteristic voice to be beyond them to adopt. However, usually the content was apt.

A Streetcar Named Desire

This play continues to produce much good work and clearly appeals to students of this age.

Question 16

Very few were unable to say something of value about this moment in the play. Most at least recognised its poignancy to some degree and some conveyed fully the shock of the brutality of Blanche's removal to an asylum, picking out the drama of Stanley's appalling treatment of her even when he is getting his way. Several pointed to how peculiarly terrible this was, given the fact that he had raped her. Quite a few explored the powerful effect of Stella's realisation of what she has allowed to happen. However, there was a disappointing minority who seemed to do no more than to describe a few moments in the extract, being quite unable to engage with its dramatic impact.

Question 17

Most who tackled this were able to say relevant things about Stanley's personality. Rather too many did not really make the next step, which was to look at the way Williams creates memorable drama out of this personality at specific moments in the play.

Question 18

This was one of the most successfully attempted of the empathic tasks on the paper. There were some responses which precisely created Blanche's way of speaking, and the content in the majority of answers was convincing in conveying her apprehension of what lies ahead, though sometimes she was given knowledge, for instance about Stanley, that she would not have had.

Coleridge

There was a relatively limited take-up of this poetry text. A reliance on basic narration characterised many responses to **Question 19** and **Question 20**. There was work on display which actually engaged with Coleridge's world but it was greatly in the minority. The choices made from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* seemed too often to have been made because they were remembered rather than because they were very suitable to the task.

Question 21

There was rather more response here to the scene Coleridge paints and to his thoughts. However, deep probing of the poetry was rare.

Songs of Ourselves: The University of Cambridge International Examinations Anthology of Poetry in English (Set poems in Section C)

This was by far the more popular of the poetry questions and there was much good, or very good, work seen. But many candidates are not scoring higher because of failing to engage more fully with the poetic language, even in work where there was clear realisation that it was important. Giving candidates a hatful of terminology like *lexical choices*, *internal vocalisation*, *positive and negative lexical fields* (as seen in some answers) does not of itself ensure engagement with the associations and music of words which are the essence of poetry.

Question 22

The question was not asking for a decoding of the poem; experience already suggests that it is a poem whose 'meaning' remains a matter for considerable conjecture. It should have been an exploration of Mungoshi's evocation of the early morning. Alas, for so many candidates this involved probing what the words precisely communicate and what makes those words peculiarly effective, and they were unprepared to engage with the poem on this level.

Question 23

There were some sensitive answers seen on both of these poems, but some showed the barest understanding of them. Some thought that *Farmhand* was a past love affair, and some thought that 'sandy' suggested how unkempt the farmhand was.

Question 24

Most wrote on 'Caged Bird'. Paraphrase and decoding ruled the day, with, as already has been suggested, this being unconvincing at times. Is the poem intended to have only relevance to black Americans and their situation? A few thought it was about cruelty to birds. Only a minority really related in detail to the way the words powerfully depicted the contrast between freedom and captivity, whether actual or in the mind. Some of these were very impressive in their response to the power of Angelou's poetic language. The Shelley poem for the most part received at least sensible responses as to its purpose, though again precise engagement with the words of the poem was often lacking.

Things Fall Apart

Question 25

This was done well by the majority who were able and willing to engage with Achebe's writing in detail. The weakest answers amounted to little more than a description of events in the extract.

Question 26

This was the most popular of the Achebe tasks. While it produced a number of answers which were just character sketches, the majority presented a case, in some instances conducting a sophisticated argument with telling detail in support and capturing the ambivalent manner of Achebe's presentation of the man.

Question 27

While very few attempted this, a handful of very good responses were seen.

Great Expectations

Question 28

Most of the answers on this task saw clearly what a dysfunctional family the Pockets were and there were accurate assessments of Mrs. Pocket's total lack of interest in the raising of her children. What was often disappointing was the lack of response to the humour in the passage; some answers read like the report of a horrified social worker, and it would have been good had more responded to the image of Mr. Pocket's desperation depicted by his pulling himself up by his hair.

Question 29

There were some impressive responses to Wemmick and Pumblechook, but Orlick might have existed.

Question 30

Far fewer did this, but those who did usually captured Bidy's mixed feelings well.

The Siege

Question 31

There was some quite delicately perceptive work on this extract, though for some it presented problems of striking a balance between setting the passage in context and attending to the undercurrents of the passage itself.

Question 32

This proved a testing task in that it was difficult for some to make a distinction between the effects of the siege and those for which the regime was responsible, even though the evidence of the latter is wide ranging in the novel.

Question 33

Far too few answers were seen to make general comment appropriate.

Lord of the Flies

This was a very popular text and the consensus amongst Examiners was that much of the work was excellent.

Question 34

There were a great many insightful responses to this extract. Few failed in some measure to see what a shocking moment this was and many were ready with copious detail to say why it was. Even better were those who in considerable numbers at least reacted to the novelist's art, latching onto the setting with relish. There were some who failed to make any connection between this and the dreadful deed about to be perpetrated and there were some who were surprisingly unsure who or what was the beast, failing to make anything of the last paragraph.

Question 35

There was much thoughtful argument to be found in this task, though some made no distinction between the irritation shown by figures in the novel and their own. Most found good reason in the end to sympathise strongly with Piggy.

Question 36

There were some very strong assumptions of Jack's character at this juncture. They captured his shrugging off of the death of Simon and his understanding of the opportunity this gave him to extend his hold over the boys. His gratuitous cruelty and his ego were well captured. Quite a few answers, however, gave him insights into his own motivation which he would not have had, and some even made him quite uncharacteristically remorseful.

Travels with My Aunt

Question 37

Nearly all the answers on this text were to this question and generally it was competently done, at least as to understanding Henry's state of mind. What was not always grasped was the significance of the passage in the novel, it being the moment when Henry sees his past and present life with some clarity. Some took things quite literally and thought that he decided here to go back to his old life.

Question 38

Far too few answers were seen on this question to make general comment appropriate.

Question 39

Some answers did justice to the Aunt, at least in establishing her pleasure at the prospect of her son marrying. A few caught her wry voice. Conversely some made her quite uncharacteristically maudlin and sentimental.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 40

This was a popular task in a popular novel and it was usually done solidly at the very least, with pleasingly few resorting simply to describing what was going on. Most attempted to convey the atmosphere at least to some degree. However, in a significant number of scripts there was a repetitive nature to much of the comment. Where this happened it was usually because candidates were not probing the tone of the detail sufficiently; answers often did not detect humour, for example, in the writing.

Question 41

There were many answers to this question and in a majority of them there really was some attempt to make judgement rather than just to tabulate some instances of Atticus's methods of bringing up children. All seemed to approve, as no doubt the author intended them to!

Question 42

This task was the least often chosen on this text, and in general the results were less accomplished than those of the passage and essay question. Perhaps Jem's elder brother personality proved rather elusive for some and certainly a number of character assumptions were way over the top for this son of Atticus.

The Getting of Wisdom

There were far too few answers seen on this novel to make general comment appropriate.

Into the Wind: Contemporary Stories in English

Question 46

This task was frequently attempted and the great majority saw the true nature of the relationship quite clearly. The strongest answers were those which really looked hard at the inferences to be drawn from the detail of the extract. Some lost focus by in effect writing their essay on the story as a whole. Only a few really conveyed the full detestability of the husband and, extraordinarily, a few seemed disposed to berate Molly for cowardice and other such failings.

Question 47

This task required a close attention to the way the writing develops the tension and suspense. Most candidates were quite good at pointing to moments in their chosen story which were full of suspense but were less good at tracing the build up of detail.

Question 48

This proved one of the best answered of the empathic tasks on the paper. Perhaps it was the case that Alice's contradictory feelings associated with leaving the nest struck a chord with a number of young people. Whatever the reason, Examiners commented on how touching were some of the assumptions of the character, and how well understood was the symbolism of this short story by the year's Nobel Prize winner.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/02

Coursework

All Centres receive an individual report on the sample submitted for the component.

In general internal moderation was conducted very well.

This was the first November session of the new portfolio format (i.e. two pieces). This seemed in nearly all cases to present few problems, and most Centres made the transition to the new format smoothly. However, there was very occasionally a little uncertainty in two areas as to limits set out in the syllabus document.

The first concerned the length of assignments. Once or twice the external Moderator felt that candidates might have written more had they not been constrained by what they saw as a word limit of 800 words. Please be clear that this is not a fixed word limit. It is simply guidance aimed at stopping candidates confusing length with quality and it may well be that some assignments will be self-penalising if, in covering a lot of paper, all they do is narrate or repeat ideas. However, most assignments of greater length are so because the candidate has much to say on a topic and those need most certainly not be self-penalising. Indeed, they are likely to deserve high reward. What Centres should not do is to encourage candidates to trim essays artificially simply in order to keep within the guidance. This was most definitely not its intention.

There was in at least one instance misunderstanding as to what latitude there was in the choice of texts. The texts selected in nearly all cases seemed fitting for the syllabus. However, it may be remembered that in the old format there was no overlap allowed between the texts offered in the folder and in the examination. In the new format, candidates are allowed to offer work on *one* text in both components. That means that there must be no overlap elsewhere. It has to be said that offering in the folder two texts which are on the current set texts list for Paper 1, even if supposedly the second text is not amongst the three or four texts which have been studied for the examination, still allows the possibility of the candidate writing on both coursework texts in the examination and hence being in contravention of the syllabus requirements. The obvious way to avoid this possibility is to make sure that at least one text present in the folder is not on the current syllabus. As the syllabus document makes clear, the purpose of coursework is to encourage the candidate to read more widely, not more narrowly.

An area which continues to raise occasional problems is that of the wording of tasks. As has been said in previous years, Centres are becoming better at giving appropriate tasks to candidates but there are still instances in which candidates can seem shackled by the lack of focus and stimulus in the way a task is phrased. There are still some assignments with effectively no other injunction than to write an essay on a text. Others were completely locked into a thematic approach which only by implication encouraged the candidate to engage with authorial methods, with the power of literary language. The assessment criteria make clear how central is evidence of close engagement with the latter for the awarding of the top grades.

In addition, the setting of empathic tasks in at least one instance created profound problems. It cannot be stressed too strongly that an empathic task must enable the candidate to show close engagement with the text and its detail. There must be no encouragement or requirement for the candidate to embark on personal flights of fancy and invention. This also means that some texts are more appropriate for this kind of task than others. For instance, in one text being studied by a group of candidates, the author deliberately gave the reader very little on which to make any suppositions about a man's character, voice or circumstances and therefore anything else had to be built upon pure supposition without any basis in the story – such a man (and text) was inappropriate as basis for an empathetic task.

Further guidance on task setting may be found in CIE's new Coursework Training Handbook for this component, available from CIE Publications. (This supersedes the 0486 Distance Training Pack. Teachers who have already received accreditation to conduct 0486 coursework are not required to complete the new Coursework Training Handbook, but they may still find it useful to order a departmental copy for future guidance in a number of areas.)

It remains to comment upon the presentation of the folders. This was mostly very good. The Moderator's comments were often helped by the description of the qualities of the folder on the Candidate Record Card and quite often by the teacher annotation on the essays themselves. These can be both a validation of the essay itself and a good support for the mark awarded. When, on the other hand, it is absent, that contact between internal Moderator and external Moderator is broken and occasionally the latter may come close to questioning the basis of the assessment in the Centre. For instance, this year a fair copy of an essay whose central argument was that Jack was the real hero of *Lord of the Flies* only in the mark gave the external Moderator any clue that the Centre shared his profound questioning of this interpretation. Also, there were still some occasions where on the Candidate Record Card the Moderator would have liked fuller comment related to the assessment criteria. Finally, perhaps the Moderator might be thought old-fashioned but do comments scrawled in pencil on the Candidate Record Card satisfactorily suggest to outside readers that due professional care and consideration has been taken over the moderation ?

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/03

Alternative to Coursework (Unseen)

General comments

This was the first November for the new two question format of the paper, and as in June the changes proved an unqualified success.

Clearly, many candidates had read very widely and had benefited from wise and careful preparation for the examination. It was sometimes a surprise to think that the candidates were writing on *unseen* work, such as the perceptiveness and thoroughness of so many responses.

As in June, there was a broad parity of standards between those who chose the poetry option and those who chose the prose option, though in some Centres there seemed to be a pattern of stronger candidates choosing to write about the poem. It was good to see that very few Centres had prepared candidates for only one of the two. Candidates, therefore, were able to enjoy the advantage of unrestricted choice on the day of the examination.

The better candidates also took full advantage of the extra 20 minutes reading and preparation time now available to them. However, several Examiners commented on the ways that some candidates wasted their time. Some Centres seem to encourage their candidates to write out a complete first draft and then copy up a neat, and usually unchanged, final version; in such cases they typically count up the words and append the total. The timing of the examination is not designed to allow candidates such a luxury (and it certainly does not require it). The Examiners, however, do approve of the greater attention most candidates are giving to the reading of the poem and prose passage prior to writing and the more considered planning of the answers in the recommended 20 minutes allocated for the purpose. Answers now tended to be rather longer because of the increased length of the paper. Generally, this has been considered an improvement, though Examiners are at pains to stress that length is not a virtue in itself, but only so far as it is a result of fuller development of the candidate's argument.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The poem clearly affected the great majority of the candidates who chose to write about it. There were many heartfelt responses which engaged with the hopeless longing, the repression of feelings, the speechlessness, the desperate need for attention and acceptance and the pain of rejection that Echo suffers. Candidates sometimes related it to their own recent experiences.

The best answers, in this case, tended to give equal weight to the bullet points. The extended similes in the first section allowed candidates an early opportunity to concentrate on the creation of sympathy. It might be helpful here to distinguish between the different levels of commentary on imagery that Examiners have come to expect in almost every unseen examination. At a very basic level, the candidates merely identify the figure of speech and quote it. This, even if accurate, receives minimal reward. At a slightly higher level, candidates produce a 'text-book' explanation of how similes work, mostly saying that they help readers to relate to something more within their own experience and they apply this roughly to the image they are considering. However, more able candidates explore the associations of images. In this case, there were some beautiful discourses. The better candidates explored both the way the wolf was described *and* the depiction of the stag; some explored the possible ambiguity in the use of the verb 'burn', in the cat simile. The best connected the similes with the hurt lynx image in the last stanza and saw a foreshadowing of impending tragedy.

The responses to the dialogue were rather more disappointing. Most answers did not look closely at the shades of meaning in the different statements that Echo repeated and the ebb and flow of emotion they represented. Surprisingly few candidates saw clearly that up to the moment Echo emerged from the undergrowth, Narcissus believed her words were those of his companions. The best answers perceived the tragic ironies in the way Echo invested Narcissus' words with a poignant meaning often different from the prosaic meaning that he intended. They particularly responded to the pathos of the way the fevered repetition of the words, "touch me", expressed the yearning that Echo felt and the pain of her rejection by Narcissus.

Some candidates had an impressively profound understanding of Echo's physical metamorphosis in the last stanza, and of the irony of her remaining only as a disembodied voice without volition, unseen in the loneliest caves and forests. The image of the barbed arrow was often well understood. Stronger candidates saw that the arrow could not be pulled out as the victim would 'bleed to death'. They connected it with the word 'festering' and understood how Echo's inability to forget Narcissus was killing her slowly and painfully.

A minority of candidates did not balance out their time very effectively and their treatment of the last part of the poem was sketchy in comparison with the first part. This was also true of the second question.

Question 2

It was impressive how few candidates failed to appreciate the perversity of the authorial voice in the extract in the second question. Most showed great interest in the personality of the narrator and did not take him at face value throughout. They appreciated the absurdity of his professed motivation but a few were so carried along by his manic state that they agreed with him about the cleverness of his plan, instead of demonstrating how ridiculous his behaviour was. Some answers, unfortunately, remained rather stuck with the first bullet point advice and did not use the material to advance an answer to the question itself. In other words, they explored closely the narrator's character and state of mind, but did not relate their material to the sense of danger and uncertainty in the narrative. Good answers cited the narrator's state of mind as a major cause of the suspense as the reader did not know what he was capable of nor how and when he was going to murder the old man. One or two commented on how uncomfortable it was to be drawn so closely into the deranged thoughts and actions of a madman.

There was a lot of excellent work on the syntax and rhetorical devices used by the narrator to capture and sustain the interest of the reader. Many candidates were able to explore, at a basic level, the use of exclamations and questions, the varying length of sentences, the unusual syntax, the repetitions and the use of metaphor and simile. The better candidates were able to relate these to the character of the narrator and expose the fallacy of his instruction to 'observe how healthily – calmly I can tell you the whole story'.

Very good candidates responded to the ironies or the black humour of the passage. They saw the irony of his saying that he was 'never kinder to the old man', the old man closing his shutters fast 'through fear of robbers', the narrator's self congratulation at his absurd plan which demanded seven nights' preparation, and the ultimate irony of his having to make an error before he had a chance of achieving his objective.

The best answers tended to concentrate ultimately on the narrator/reader relationship. They noticed how the narrator engaged the reader, by using the second person, asking demanding questions many of which cried out for a contrary response, compelling the reader to relive with him the actions of those nights by his obsessive evocation of detail, challenging sentence patterns and hypnotic rhythms.