

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/01

Paper 1 (Open Books)

Paper 0486/04

Paper 4 (Closed Books)

## General comments

There was a significant rise in Centre entries this session, bringing with it some outstanding work which was a pleasure to read. As usual over the whole entry, Examiners continued to find much to praise, with no decline in standards.

As last year, a core of texts proved overwhelmingly popular. In the Drama section, these were *The Crucible*, *Macbeth* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In the Poetry section *Songs of Ourselves* featured much more often than the Keats selection. In the Prose many offered *Lord of the Flies* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, particularly in the Prose, other texts had significant take up and some Examiners noted fresh responses to texts which perhaps did not have a multitude of study aids to 'assist' the candidate. It is worth reiterating a point made in previous reports that central to the philosophy behind this syllabus is the desire that candidates be given the confidence to respond directly and personally to their reading. Of course, teaching guidance is always crucial, but the good teacher knows also how to encourage individual thought and judgement. Nurturing that also means that when such candidates become examination candidates, they read questions precisely, address them directly to the best of their abilities, and confidently argue their points, instead of offloading carelessly gleaned unassimilated secondary material which all too often does not directly impinge on the task set. The contrast can be quite startling in responses to some tasks. **Question 14** was a marked example of one such differentiator: Examiners read some splendid responses to the ways in which Shakespeare makes Macbeth's brutality as King so terrifying, while other answers did no more than regurgitate 'prepared' material charting Macbeth's journey towards tragic death.

That said, it is pleasing to note that the syllabus continues to attract teachers and candidates who do wish to make the reading of literature more than just another academic hoop through which young people are expected to jump. Examiners remarked on the freshness of the approach of so many of the candidates. In many Centres, there was clearly shown detailed knowledge of the texts and the precise wording of the question was attended to. Examiners were particularly pleased to find increased evidence of a concern with stagecraft in the Drama section, rather than plays being approached as novels with only dialogue. There was some impressive insight shown by 16-year olds who were able to maintain over pages sharply developed arguments. It is now commonplace to find candidates paying close attention to the detail of an extract in the passage-based questions.

There were no instances where any significant numbers of candidates struggled to understand what was required. Every year there are some candidates who, as in **Question 19**, take the word *moving* in its most literal meaning. Perhaps Centres might go out their way to convey the emotional meaning of this word. Otherwise, where any problems with tasks occurred it was almost always because of the cursory reading of the question wording.

A minority of candidates had clearly limited knowledge of the text, particularly when required by the question to range outside the one or two obvious central issues or main characters of that text. Close reading of the question was obviously for some a skill beyond them. Some candidates penalised themselves by answering on one short story or poem when they were required to answer on two, and others answered on two poems when they were asked to concentrate on one. Quite often a key adjective or adverb was not sufficiently noted. Hence, in **Question 8** *vivid* would be ignored as would *terrifying* in **Question 14** and *vividly* in **Question 20**. One could refer to others but the point is that these words are the ones which signal a demand for engagement with the linguistic detail of the text and the authorial achievement without which a high mark is unlikely to be secured. The candidate is being asked to do more than paraphrase and decode.

A failure to do more than that can be particularly damaging in addressing the poetry tasks and the reasons why candidates in a number of Centres might tend to perform less well in that section on answering on drama and prose. It is sometimes noticeable that, even where candidates have often been encouraged to think about the various forms of literary language, there can be a failure to engage with its effect. Every year it seems Examiners come across work from candidates who are able to identify figures of speech but cannot really show *how* these figures of speech communicate so powerfully to a reader.

Furthermore, it seemed to be rather more apparent this year that some candidates are being encouraged to learn a number of terms fairly esoteric for IGCSE level, the listing of which might be designed to impress the Examiner. Certainly knowledge of literary terminology can be useful – but it will not be rewarded for its own sake on this syllabus. Such knowledge *per se* does not encourage personal engagement and insight. For example, in **Question 13** Examiners were sometimes informed that the early terse, fractured dialogue of the extract was an example of *stichomythia*. But knowledge of the term which might be applied to this passage does not enable a candidate to penetrate to the way the dramatist wonderfully creates in a few swift strokes the atmosphere of the moment and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's states of mind. Indeed, at times the self-conscious parade of a term can discourage candidates from further exploration: they think they have said the important thing, when actually they have not begun to do so.

With regard to the empathic tasks, two things are worth reiterating. Reward can be given to evident understanding of situation and the thoughts which would be going through the mind of the speaker. However, for high reward this may be a tricky task for those who are struggling with English since at this level, so much being dependent on the establishment of a tone of voice which shows how much the candidate's imagination has enabled entry into the being of the character. A further consequence of this is that long narrative answers are not the approach needed. Candidates should take their time to pick their words.

There was a clear increase in the number of very long scripts this session. Some of these were impressive indeed, but in others time spent on organising thoughts would probably have been time well spent. Of course, in examination conditions it is understandable that candidates might want to get as much down on paper as possible so as not to 'waste' a moment – but some moments pondering a task are rarely moments wasted. What is a waste is the way some candidates wrote a very general (and sometimes lengthy) introduction to each answer. These rarely contained material which demanded reward, and simply cut down the time candidates had to write to the point. That said, few seemed to run out of time at the end of the examination, which of itself underlines the way time is given to allow thought.

There were relatively few infringements of the rubric relating to section/question-type coverage. An occasional problem occurring in Paper 4 was that candidates missed the question prefacing the extract and used the extract to answer the second question on the text. This was most common in relation to *Macbeth* where the extract was relevant to **Question 14** to a limited degree. Examiners were sympathetic to the slip, given examination conditions, but candidates penalised themselves by only addressing a very restricted amount of material.

#### *A Small Family Business*

There was much invigorating work on this text. Gone seem to be the days when candidates could write on an Ayckbourn play without recognising that it was in any way comic. Pleasingly, in **Question 1** many entered into the hilarity of the public embarrassment of Jack and Poppy and showed a keen awareness of how the stage picture contributed to the audience's enjoyment. The empathic task drew from several candidates probably the best empathic assumptions on the whole Paper, though a number made Jack far too contrite, missing the way his forthright bluster consistently makes out black to be white. **Question 2** was the least popular and, though often competently done, did sometimes present problems. The word *decent* was not always understood, and some found difficulty in choosing appropriate subject matter. For instance, whilst Poppy and Samantha are in a way relevant to the task, to argue that they are high up the scale of criminality in the play is highly questionable.

#### *A Raisin in the Sun*

Some Examiners reported extremely positively on the work seen on this text, but others found the standard more variable. The key in **Question 4**, the most popular question on this text, resided in the phrase *powerfully dramatic*. Candidates at some Centres responded strongly to the way Hansberry orchestrates the drama of this moment, looking closely at the stage action and dialogue and the way it creates great tension. At the other end of the scale, other candidates looked only cursorily at the extract and spent much time setting out the context of the episode. There were some well argued answers to **Question 5** but Examiners

felt there were too many who tended to simplify the choice and ignored the question marks which Asagai. In **Question 6** most managed to create appropriate thoughts for Ruth, and some penetrated to the poignancy of character and situation. Some, though, found it difficult to find an apt her.

#### *The Crucible*

There was a quantity of good work on this popular text. The extract in **Question 7** was quite testing in the way Miller charts the currents that reveal the gap between the pair. Most saw some reason to sympathise with both, with the majority favouring Elizabeth. It was noticeable how many ignored the final telling line as a comment on the Puritan way of seeing the world. Also, there were quite a few who did not explore the extract in detail, preferring to expand on the context, and some who did not even understand that context, thinking that the main concern here was what was happening in Salem. A wide range of responses was seen in answers to **Question 8**. There were some splendid answers which recognised the requirement to make close contact with the play's power. Others did little more than describe relevant events in the play, leaving the drama to speak for itself. In the main, the assumptions of Abigail were at least credible and some caught her malice and vindictiveness very well indeed. Others, though, displayed a very hazy knowledge of the circumstances of the flight and even created a young woman eaten up with guilt and highly contrite about what she had done.

#### *As You Like It*

There was comparatively little work on this text. Examiners commented positively on what was seen. The extract task **Question 10** was by far the most popular and most answers looked at the detail of the passage at least adequately. A pleasing number commented on such things as the importance of the forms of address throughout and responded to its surprising dramatic power at the beginning of a comedy. Likewise the few who attempted **Question 11** avoided writing a character sketch of Rosalind and answered the question with refreshing directness. Duke Senior clearly did not much encourage candidates' imagination but there were some competent assumptions.

#### *Macbeth*

In such a popular choice of text, one would expect a wide range of response, and so it proved. There was much truly outstanding work but also some which showed that there had been the most superficial of study, heavily dependent on study aids. The latter, of course, were often found out when close textual knowledge was required. The key to a successful answer to the most frequently attempted task, **Question 13**, was to note the requirement to show what makes this scene so memorably horrific. Quite a few did that very well indeed, engaging totally with the wonderful dramatic detail and language, picking out, for instance, the chilling contrast between husband and wife and the manifold dreadful ironies of the scene. There was a tendency, however, to spend too much time setting the context both prior and post, and a proportion simply described what was happening with the occasional assertion that it was truly horrific. Answers to **Question 14** sharply differentiated between candidates. There were those who read the question, saw that it involved mining material from the second half of the play and responding in detail to dramatic moments which conveyed tellingly the brutal world that Scotland had become, details which did not always directly involve Macbeth. Others wasted much time charting Macbeth's personality from the beginning, and often failed when they reached relevant moments in the play to do other than simply narrate events in the briefest of comments. For **Question 15** there were many confident assumptions of Lady Macbeth which captured her mix of emotions as she reflects on the disaster which was the Banquet. Here again, though, there was evidence that rather too many candidates did not know the play in sufficient detail. It was common to find her apparently with the certain knowledge that Banquo had been murdered, even down to the detail of it. (See comment earlier re misreading of questions.)

#### *A Streetcar Named Desire*

The majority of candidates choosing this text did the passage-based **Question 16**. There were many examples of insightful sympathy with Blanche's plight balanced by a number of fairly stern comments on her all too frequent self-delusion. Examiners noted how detailed and penetrating some candidates were in engaging with the extract. Conversely, there were clearly rather too many who declined to look at the extract in any real detail, falling back instead on prepared statements on Blanche's character. In such answers, Mitch's role at this point in the play in affecting our view of Blanche hardly figured at all. There were some subtle and thoughtful answers to **Question 17** which embraced the mix, even contradictions, of Stella's character, paying precise attention to the adjectives of the description and mostly expressing sympathy with the character. Some had difficulty with the meaning of *naïve*, though, and others again offered prepared

material which did not address the task directly. The empathic task **Question 18** was often a number relished assuming Stanley's individual voice, sometimes going over the top and making simply Blanche's 'animal'.

### *Songs of Ourselves*

There was some very good work on *Farmhand* which explored the detail of the poem's language and put together a deeply sympathetic portrait. Here it was noticeable how well some candidates managed to show precisely *how* the poet's words achieved such a sympathetic picture of this man. Weaker answers did little more than decode or paraphrase, just nodding in the direction of the words used, at times taking *moving* in its literal sense and signally misreading lines, making for example some odd claims for the role of the tractor in his life and thinking that sandy hair suggested that the fellow was dirty or worked in a desert. There were sharp variations in the answers to **Question 20**. The Morris poem was quite often tackled well, with candidates capturing the various perspectives which the poem offers on a child's reaction to punishment. However, sometimes those perspectives were not explored in the detail of the language and were confused. Confusion was rather more widespread in the Nicholson. Some understood the central point of how the child represents humanity's inability to relish the present and, for instance, made the link between the child and the vibrant images of Spring. However, others were reduced to commenting on isolated pieces of description without showing any real grasp of the developing argument of the poem through to the images of death. Some attempted to write on both poems. Conversely in **Question 21** there were some who only answered on one poem and there was considerable uncertainty in a number of answers how to approach a task which deliberately did not wish the candidate to have to explore in the time available two poems in detail. Some simply decoded each poem with the occasional general comment on a piece of description without any real probing of the words and their effect. At the other end of the scale, there were answers which looked at pieces of description without any sense of a context to give meaning to their observations of how the words were working. A few managed to achieve a balance, bringing out how lines and phrases made memorable the context in which they were found.

### *Keats*

Some Examiners wrote enthusiastically about responses seen to **Question 22** in particular, from candidates who showed a fine grasp of the paradoxes involved in Keats's depiction of the figures on the Urn. However, these poems presented a stiff challenge for other candidates. Many simply did not begin to grasp the teasing arguments of the poems and what made matters worse was the frequent failure even to begin to engage with the texture of the poet's words which hold the key to that meaning. Far too often the poems were merely given a loose explanation or paraphrase.

### *Things Fall Apart*

This was quite a popular text and many answers were written with sympathy and insight. Most attempted the passage-based task and responded with understanding to the influence the spirit world had and were often deeply engaged with Okonkwo's fate. The part of the question which required the candidate to explore Achebe's writing, though, was less well attended to. **Question 26** attracted few answers. Again, though, Examiners found considerable grasp of the customs of this society, even if some ignored the required focus on the family. In the empathic task – **Question 27** – there were some impressive assumptions of Okonkwo, capturing his fear of being seen to be weak, despite his evident affection for the slain boy. How much he would admit that affection is a matter for conjecture, of course, and the work was marked accordingly. What was not open to conjecture was the inappropriateness of a few assumptions which made him a figure of guilt and remorse.

### *Pride and Prejudice*

Though only offered by a minority of Centres, those Examiners fortunate to come across work on this text reacted with enthusiasm. They noted the wide ranging knowledge displayed by candidates in answers to **Question 29**, coupled in general with the avoidance of a character sketch. Candidates really did engage with the effect which Austen's creation had upon them. Likewise in the empathic task – **Question 30** – time and again Lydia came flightily to life. There was also much insightful probing of the detail of the extract in **Question 28**. Here, though, occasionally there was a sense of character sketches being mined rather than the material in this extract. Also judgment on Elizabeth was not always as sharp as on Darcy. Not too many saw that she is actually very much pleased with herself to have received a proposal from Darcy and that in Austen's writing her convincing herself that she is even more pleased to have rejected him simply does not ring true.

*The God Boy*

There was limited take up of this text, but the response to it showed just how this novel can engage readers. There was evident identification from candidates with Jimmy's predicament as illustrated in the extract. This was very much the most frequently attempted task but it was encouraging to read positive Examiner comment on those who did **Question 32**. Clearly the laughter in the novel had made as large an impact as the pervading tragedy. There were very few answers to **Question 33**, the empathic task. Perhaps the level of speculation demanded tended to deter. However, again, Examiners were very positive in their verdict on the responses seen.

*The Siege*

This was another minority choice but Examiners thought that Centres who chose it did well in the main, showing considerable engagement with the novel. Answers to **Question 34**, the passage-based task, usually showed at the very least knowledge of the uneasiness and trepidation felt by both women and the underlying reason for that. A number probed the many currents of the passage well. However, quite a few did not quite manage to balance the various constituents of the passage, either skating over the journey to the *dacha* with its prescient descriptions of setting and Anna's state of mind, or spending most of the answer on this and failing to consider the meeting itself. One Centre relished the chance to write on Evgenia, often showing vividly why they found her such a striking character. There were, however, only a few attempts at **Question 36**. Anna's voice proved somewhat elusive.

*Lord of the Flies*

This extremely popular text produced a wide variety of performance, especially in the responses to the end of the novel in **Question 37**. Many candidates showed just how well they were able to engage with Golding's writing. Such candidates saw the dramatic change of perspectives brought by the sudden arrival of the officer, they relished the ironies of his failure to understand what had happened on the island, and they communicated powerfully the full poignancy of Ralph's tears. Conversely there was work which failed to look at the passage in any detail and responded little to its drama; some candidates totally misread its implications. Quite a few amazingly seemed to find this ending optimistic, suggesting that the arrival of the officer put all things right. They appeared to make nothing of the significance of the burning island, the presence of the warship and Ralph's weeping for the loss of innocence. A similar contrast of achievement was found in responses to **Question 38**. This should have been a very straightforward task and in terms of choice of passage so it proved. Except for a few who meandered through a number of moments in the novel, the choice of incident was not a problem. The difficulties lay in the degree to which a candidate was prepared to probe the detail of the language to bring out why the chosen incident proves so frightening to the reader. Rather too many answers did little more than simply describe in general terms what went on. There was greater consistency of achievement in **Question 39**. Most managed to find some convincing material to put into Jack's mouth and quite a few captured very well in his voice his arrogance and disdain for most of those around him. Some, however, gave him a totally unlikely inner uncertainty about his capacity to cope with the Beast and the other problems of the island.

*Far From the Madding Crowd*

This was not a popular text and in contrast with the others on the set texts list generally the work Examiners saw on it was rather moderate. Some clearly had difficulty in responding to Hardy's prose in the extract and, whilst most grasped the tension in the episode, not very many were good at charting the way it is intensified as we approach the moment of confirmation. A number of candidates showed a hazy grasp of the context, missing the crucial point here that the reader knows what Bathsheba will find when she opens the coffin. There were some nicely balanced and thoughtful responses to **Question 41** showing a good grasp of the contradictions which lie at the Centre of Boldwood's character. Some struggled, though, with the positive perspectives, one or two thinking it was quite decent of him to shoot Troy. Not many attempted the empathic task **Question 42**, and those that did sometimes struggled to capture Troy's self-centred personality, making remorse too central to his response.

*To Kill a Mockingbird*

This was a very popular text and the majority of Examiners reported good work on it. Most candidates, though by no means all, recognised that Miss Maude is a character the reader is expected to approve of. It was surprising how some candidates thought she was being created as a malicious old gossip, particularly given Scout's view of her. All the same, many probed the detail of the extract at least satisfactorily and sometimes with considerable insight. Weaker candidates at times struggled with detail in the passage,

particularly in regard to such things as foot-washing Baptists. **Question 44** was a relatively simple task and there were few weak answers to it. The great majority had a clear understanding of the maternal role in Atticus's household and referred to pertinent detail to show that. However, the role of the children plays in all this was not always sufficiently delineated. There were some simple character sketches but they did not raise the key moments in the novel such as when Atticus firmly resists Aunt Alexandra's attempt to get rid of her. Most of the answers to **Question 45** had Atticus having highly relevant thoughts about the trial with some linking those thoughts back to the incidents of the previous evening and the vulnerability of his children. An encouraging number also captured his dry low-key delivery. However, a common failing was to give him hopes of success in the trial he simply does not have.

*Into the Wind: Contemporary Stories in English*

There were wide variations of performance to this collection of stories. Some Examiners noted with approval how delicately candidates of some Centres responded to the situation in the Lessing extract in **Question 46**, no doubt identifying strongly with the tensions between the generations depicted here. They also picked up the way the daughter humours her father almost like a child. However, there was also work which showed a very uncertain grasp of the detail and tone of the extract. Some candidates thought that Lucy was the granddaughter's name, and there was much simplistic reading, with some reducing the relationship between Alice and her grandfather to one of hatred and loathing. **Question 47** in some instances was dealt with well, candidates bringing out the humour of the episodes they had picked. Some did little more than declare their chosen moments to be funny. Others occasionally made bizarre choices; one really has to scratch around to find humour in *The Sniper*. In addition a few offered only one short story. The empathic task, **Question 48**, was far less popular, but those who chose it often captured man's strong laconic nature. However, a few completely missed his character, so misreading the story as to have him hastening home to Boston to tell everyone about his amazing experiences.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

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Paper 0486/02  
Coursework

## General comments

This year saw a considerable increase in the number of Centres taking the coursework component, making it all the more pleasing that there were slightly fewer administrative problems than last year. The vast majority of the Centres are to be congratulated on the care and attention they give to presenting this work properly.

As usual each Centre receives an individual report on its assessment and administration. The present report is essentially an attempt to paint the overall picture and to highlight some of the recurrent features of these.

There occurred a few instances where it would appear that the Syllabus has not been read with sufficient attention. How else to explain candidates only offering one poem or one short story in their folders? More widespread was the continuing practice of allowing candidates to present fair copies of their essays for the folders with no Teacher annotation. As was said last year, Teacher annotation is important for two key reasons (amongst others). Firstly, it is immensely helpful to external Moderators in gauging whether there is a meeting of minds regarding the quality of work and allows Centres the chance of persuading external Moderators to see things from their point of view. Secondly, it effectively means that the Teacher is validating the work as the candidate's own.

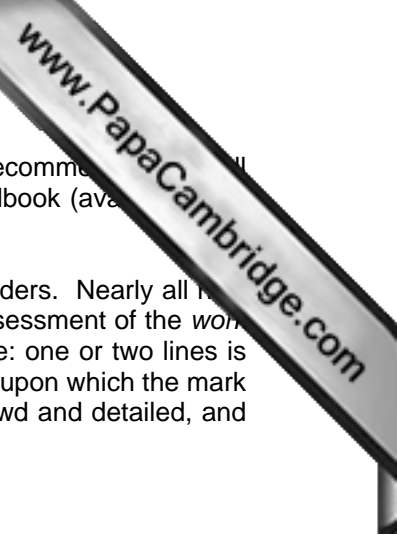
Some Centres are clearly instructing candidates to place a word count on assignments, still seeming to think that penalties will be imposed on work above this supposed limit. It was thought there was some possibility that, as a consequence, candidates were being disadvantaged by not being allowed to develop ideas in the depth which very often is necessary to bring high reward. Once again, it can only be pointed out that there is no mandatory limit. The suggestion is purely there to encourage candidates not to think that length of itself is commensurate with quality. To repeat a point made previously, no piece of work will be penalised for its length and candidates whose enthusiasm and insight leads them to have much to say should be encouraged to write at the length which their material demands.

As regards to the work submitted, the Moderators were often full of praise. The vast majority of texts chosen were highly appropriate for the syllabus, but encouraging candidates to write on films is not appropriate for this course; this is not a film studies syllabus. It was rare to come across a folder which showed little or no evidence of work and thought. In many the results were encouragingly impressive. So was the majority of assessment. In no instance did a Moderator have serious reservations about the order of merit within a Centre. Occasionally Moderators felt that a Centre had been on the cautious side, apparently not wishing to commit themselves to giving full marks; but it was rather more common to find slight leniency. Moderator reports sometimes spoke of work simply not having the range to justify the top grade, in particular not engaging sufficiently with the ways in which the writer has created a literary experience for the audience or the reader.

An encouragement to keep essays relatively brief has already been alluded to above as a possible cause of assignments not seeming developed enough for high reward. However, a more common reason concerned the quality of assignment setting. At the moment the setting of inappropriate tasks is the single greatest obstacle to candidates showing their full potential in their folders. Moderators sometimes pointed out that tasks did not encourage – nor sometimes even allow – candidates to fulfil all the assessment criteria. They came across some tasks which made no requirement that the candidate engage with the way the writer makes the text effective *literature*. The simplistic decoding of themes and the interpretation of character in too many instances seemed to be considered to be at the centre of a literature course in a few Centres. Occasionally the task set seemed to demand little more than narrative recall. Most Moderators found at times a direct link between the quality of performance and the stimulus, or not, of the task set. There also were some questionable empathic tasks set, in which candidates were encouraged to exercise their imaginations almost entirely divorced from any material in the text. Such tasks must be rooted in an established character in an established situation in the text.

It is not enough simply to get the candidate to write; the direction is crucial. It is recommended that all Centres who feel they have problems in this area study the Coursework Training Handbook (available from CIE publications) which gives examples of good and bad practice.

The great majority of Centres demonstrated pleasing care in the presentation of the folders. Nearly all are using the Teacher Comment Section of the Student Record Card to record their assessment of the work rather than of the candidate. In a few Centres there is still room for improvement here: one or two lines is surely not enough for summarising the qualities of a folder and making clear the criteria upon which the mark is based. However, there were a greater number of summaries which were both shrewd and detailed, and thanks are due to their writers for their dedication to their candidates.





# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/03

Alternative to Coursework

## General comments

The prose and poetry option format of the paper that has been running for two sessions now seems to be well-established. Candidates clearly took time over their choice of passage, read the questions carefully and used the bullet points to assist the structure and detail of their answers. A number of new and large Centres joined the entry 3. Examiners noted some very able responses from candidates who enjoyed the challenge of these verbally rich and demanding texts.

In this session, more candidates chose the prose than the poetry. However, among the stronger achieving candidates responses were more evenly divided between them. Weaker candidates found that the questions helped them to 'scaffold' their responses and produce well-organised writing. The prose offered a more straightforward narrative and so they were probably right to prefer it over the poem. However, the poetic qualities of Lee's descriptive prose ensured that this passage still offered many opportunities for the best candidates to comment on subtle features of language and tone, so differentiation and fairness were both successfully maintained. There were few very weak or very short answers.

Candidates are usually using their time well, many of the best making sensible use of planning time and the opportunity to annotate scripts. However, there are some who labour to produce 'fair copies' almost identical to their first drafts. Drafting should be discouraged, as it reduces the time available for a detailed final response.

Some candidates and even whole Centres need a reminder to address the Assessment Objectives of the Literature syllabus more carefully, particularly to 'recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure, and form to create and shape meanings and effects'. The learning outcomes on pages 7 and 8 of the syllabus give further guidance about the requirements for performance at Grade C and Grade A. These make it clear that a response has to move beyond paraphrase or narrative summary towards analysis based around well-integrated use of the text as support for reading and interpretation. That must include a critical understanding of the writer's craft for the highest grades, based on engagement with the detail of the writing, rather than a more speculative recreation or allegorical reading of the text.

The best responses, and there were plenty of them, not only showed judicious selection of quotation and produced comment on the writer's techniques which was incisive and insightful, but were also very well-written. While the quality of written communication is not part of this assessment, Examiners appreciate well-structured answers which progress from initial personal response through analysis towards a synthesis of the candidate's observation. Original or alternative interpretations are welcome, but they do need to be based on an evaluation of the writing and of the surface and technicalities of the text. This paper does not contain 'trick questions' or riddles with 'hidden meanings'; the texts mean what they say, although there may be many different layers to meaning, which different readers might wish to explore.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

The search for 'hidden meaning' was sometimes a problem for candidates who chose the Auden poem. Stronger answers made careful use of both questions and of all three bullet points, which directed them towards the sensory aspects of this poem. Auden's writing here (and elsewhere) is both highly musical – this lyrical poem was soon set to music by Benjamin Britten – and extremely visual – indeed it seems, like 'Night Train', to have been originally composed to accompany a Post Office film, although the text was not used in the eventual documentary. It is quite a delicate and elusive text, which requires a little 'negative capability': candidates needed to ensure that they did not over-interpret or search for a clearer narrative than was there. Some were keen to read it as a Robinsonade, about someone marooned on an island and longing for

rescue, perhaps detached from his 'tribe'. The influence of *Lord of the Flies* on some candidates was obvious at times. However, this paper cannot reflect the choice of set texts, and candidates' responses when they heard the voice of the poem, noting its dramatic engagement with the reader through imagery and emphatic inversion of syntax, the mimetic qualities of the verse and the pictorial clarity of the cliff-edge.

Candidates who worked their way into the poem through its sounds soon picked up marks, noting the arresting way of being addressed 'as if by a tour guide' and how the strong sibilant patterns in the first two stanzas recreate the sound of the sea. There were many readings of 'the channels of the ear', some, picking up an analogy to 'radio waves', a little more fanciful than others. The best responses picked up the synaesthesia of Auden's imagery and appreciated the ways in which sight and sound blend to create the visionary moment at the extreme verge of the 'chalk wall' in the second stanza. Some found the imagery here difficult, reading 'wall' literally or over-interpreting the meaning of the gull which 'lodges/A moment' at the end of the stanza. The best answers were able to see the connection and contrast between this moment of vision and the 'full view' and sauntering memory in the third stanza.

It was pleasing to see how candidates responded to the ebb and flow of the verse and appreciate the way Auden's musical verse recreates the seascape. They also saw the immediacy of the way the present moment is captured through tense as well as tone. Candidates showed an impressive knowledge of literary terminology, commenting on Auden's use of assonance and the ways in which the sea is given anthropomorphic qualities. More subtle analyses explored the onomatopoeic effects of the last few lines of the second stanza, some with great effect. They sometimes needed to remember that knowledge only becomes understanding when 'device-spotting' drives an interpretation of the effect which language has on our appreciation of the poem's mood. To achieve this, it was essential to appreciate the change in tone in the final stanza, which candidates were explicitly directed to by the third bullet point. Here Auden's subject appears to be less the seascape itself and more the nature of reflection and memory. The poem is far less topographical at this point; many thought that the last line refers to the movement of the ships, but it is clear that it is 'the full view' which is compared to the clouds, moving in memory, passing the 'harbour mirror' and sauntering 'all summer'. This idea is not only very elusive, but perhaps subtly allusive too, so a wide range of interpretations is possible, and a 'perfect' response is not possible. However, plenty of candidates did attract full marks, by making their reading progress with logic and clarity from their observations about the rest of the text. They noticed the more panoramic view, the quieter sounds, the change in rhyme and the disappearance of sibilance, to appreciate its more peaceful tones, although some noted (perhaps quite correctly) more ominous notes in the 'urgent voluntary errands' which push the ships into this interwar seascape. However, the meaning here does not have to be 'deep': it comes from reflection on what the surfaces present. Good answers noted that an interpretation of the 'different feelings' of the first question had to arise from 'observing the scene' with the precision the second question demanded.

## Question 2

The prose passage demanded a similar attention to the writer's observations and perspective, and also to the sensory qualities of his writing. Laurie Lee's prose is as poetic as his verse, and here too candidates found it easy to show their appreciation of imagery, syntax and descriptive writing. The narrative is much clearer here, which doubtless accounted for the question's much greater popularity. However, the language is far more complex than a simple portrayal of a three-year-old child's viewpoint. Stronger candidates appreciated this and were able to see ways in which a memory is being recreated for us, using analogies and images. We are almost reading the construction of a personal myth rather than a piece of realism, however vivid its visual qualities.

Narrative voice was a problem for some candidates who either forced the descriptive language to be childish or felt the child had extraordinary cognitive ability. The imagery of the jungle was understood by most and those in tune with the narrative voice suggested that Lee chose to have the child make comparisons which would scare an adult. Some structured the first part of their answers with reference to the allusions to the five senses. This was quite an effective approach, especially when it was related to the suffocating effect of the outside world on the boy's senses. The best candidates selected individual words such as 'frenzied' or 'fumes' for special consideration. There were some particularly perceptive responses to the apocalyptic imagery of the 'sky tearing apart', some candidates actually using the word.

The first two bullet points helped to focus attention on the descriptive response to nature and to the fears of the child, and most candidates were able to produce some effective paraphrase, or, in stronger answers, analysis of the first half of the passage, with its intense invocation of fear of the unfamiliar. The best brought out how the writer highlights the child's feelings of alienation and abandonment. Some found it harder to picture the scene, and were misled into reading the jungle and its denizens literally, or reading 'this daylight nightmare' as if the whole sequence were actually a dream.

While the responses of candidates showed that they had enjoyed the passage, few either explicitly or implicitly, in the way they wrote, revealed that they had sensed the humour or light-heartedness in the style of writing. Some, of course, did, but there was often a solemnity about their censorious comments on the greed and absorption of the young boy or in frequently expressed concern for his welfare, or even his mental state. The final simile was only partially understood and the lively self-mockery only partially appreciated.

The third bullet point proved a discriminator, alongside the writer's manipulation of language and perspective. Candidates found it less easy to write well about the second half of the passage: another argument for careful planning and selection of detail before beginning an answer. There were some most intriguing responses to the sisters. Several thought them 'like the witches in *Macbeth*'. Some particularly thoughtful candidates showed that the prose painted a picture of them as being grotesque and witch-like, with their mouths smeared with red currants and their white broken teeth, but that the way of writing brought out the comforting aspects of their presence. A few related this paradox to the contradiction in the way the familiar, natural life-giving features of the first part, the grass and the sun, for example, are presented as overwhelmingly hostile. This was analysis of the first order. Some found such complexities too confusing, but most picked up on the presentation of the sisters as 'saviours' or guardian angels, commenting on the comparisons with 'shields' and 'genii'. The best were conscious of the young child's manipulation of his good fortune, and how the writer presents his younger self critically as well as sympathetically.

Examiners were impressed with the thoroughness and detail of candidates' writing, although sometimes a little more selectivity of analysis might have aided the synthesis of observations into a lucid and coherent interpretation. Comment on details of language can lead to misinterpretation if it not clearly understood within the whole context of the passage. There are enough hints, in the first paragraph and in the repetition of 'For the first time...' noted by so many candidates at the beginning of the fourth paragraph, that this passage represents response to a new beginning, and that this accounts for the freshness of experience and expression throughout.

It is pleasing to add that a similar freshness and individuality of response remains a characteristic of so many answers to these question papers. While candidates' answers would often benefit from clearer structure, it would be wrong to prescribe a particular formula for analysis of unseen texts, and our questions will continue to be determined by the nature of the texts themselves, deterring predictability as well as uniformity of response.