

LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/01
Set Texts

KEY MESSAGES:

- Detailed knowledge of the *whole* text is essential.
- Responses must answer the specific question set.
- Focus must be on the extract in passage-based questions.
- For higher marks there needs to be analysis of effective language used by the author, particularly in the passage-based and poetry questions.
- Detailed support from the text, either by quotations or by well-chosen references, is essential in all questions.
- Candidates need to present a developed and well-structured argument.

General comments:

By far the most popular texts were *A Raisin in the Sun*, Billy Collins, *Songs of Ourselves* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Passage-based questions were usually chosen wherever possible, presumably because the passages or poems are printed on the paper. There were a number of rubric infringements; usually this consisted of answering all three of the passage-based questions. Occasionally a candidate would offer two, usually brief, responses to the same text. Some good answers were therefore rendered ineligible; all candidates should be reminded of the need to stay within the requirements of the rubric - this is *never* overlooked.

Success in this paper depends, even at a basic level, on being able to demonstrate thorough knowledge of the texts. This means that texts should be read through several times; candidates should not be dependent on published notes or information gleaned from the Internet or a film. Even in the passage-based questions, there needs to be a sense of context, of how the passage and characters fit into the whole text. In the more general essay questions, candidates should be able to range widely through the text, selecting relevant material and creating a clear, developed and well-supported argument. Lack of knowledge of the text usually reveals itself very quickly. Empathic questions also require knowledge of the text as a whole and understanding of the character; it is not sufficient just to write in a convincing 'voice'. Answers which go beyond this basic level of knowledge to begin to explore writers' intentions and how literature deals with universal issues will achieve higher marks. Looking beneath surface meaning is a differentiator and is seen in higher level responses, as is the ability to provide a developed and detailed argument.

One of the weakest areas of many responses was in the analysis of the way language is used. This is particularly true of the answers to the prose and drama texts – usually candidates are more aware of the need for this in the poetry section, though few were able to manage sustained critical analysis with success. Candidates need to be reminded to look at specific choices of words and phrases in *all* questions, particularly the passage-based ones; the sense of the writer at work is essential to a good answer.

This paper also requires a 'sensitive and informed personal response'. Many of the candidates showed a genuine engagement with and apparent enjoyment of the texts which was a pleasure to read. This was often evident through a general emotional reaction or comment on behaviour of a character, for example, and, in the better answers, through a strong understanding and knowledge of the texts. It should be noted that personal response needs to be 'informed', meaning that it must be supported by evidence from the text. Some assertions made by weaker candidates, while clearly strongly felt, were not backed up by textual reference and were not always relevant to the question.

High marks are achieved by presenting a detailed and developed response which answers the question. Perhaps the most common weakness was brevity; many candidates made one or two relevant points with a little reference to the text in one or two paragraphs. All questions require this to be expanded to cover five or six points which are then developed with references, quotations and comment. It is much easier to do this if a brief plan is made before starting; each point can then be linked to the one following so that there is a sense of a developed argument. There is no need for general introductions and conclusions which often repeat points made in the body of the essay. Preparation for this essential skill of constructing a developed and convincing discussion is best achieved by using past papers in the classroom beforehand, and by working through 'model' answers.

Comments on specific questions:

DRAMA

A Raisin in the Sun

Quotation 1

This was a very popular choice and produced many responses which showed engagement with the play and with Mama's character. Most were able to comment on Mama's care for Travis, her desire to know what is going on in her family, the importance of religion to her, and consequently her dislike for the idea of being involved in a liquor store. Stronger responses developed the idea of her 'meddling', often with effective personal response (reactions being split about this), her care for Ruth as well as for Travis and her own children, and her strong feeling that they are 'plain working folks'. There was some misunderstanding about the meaning of 'busy-bodyish', which could have led to useful comment if correctly interpreted. Very few picked up on the prompt in the question asking for how this is an *effective* introduction to Mama; using the stage directions would have helped focus on this important aspect. Many responses were characterised by a lack of detailed reference to language.

Quotation 2

This was also a popular choice, though fewer attempted this question. Many chose two suitable moments, better choices being Walter losing the money; Walter's reaction to finding out about Ruth's possible abortion; George's attitude to Beneatha; Lindner's racist attitude; and Beneatha and Mama's argument ending in the slap. There was often excellent personal response, with some very heated comment about unacceptable attitudes, injustices, theft, and lack of understanding between characters. However there weakness was a tendency to narrate without very much comment or close reference to the text. Some very briefly identified the 'moments' with little development, and references to language were scarce. Quite a few candidates opted for two moments from the **Quotation 1** passage. This was possible, with comments on Mama's meddling, and Ruth or Mama's attitude to Walter's proposed investment, but there could never be sufficient development to gain many marks.

Quotation 3

There were a few responses to this empathic question and they were well done on the whole. Some answers captured Walter's voice with uncanny accuracy; better answers were able to reflect his anger, regret, guilt and the fear of facing the rest of his family. The best responses also demonstrated knowledge of the text – essential in even the empathic questions – bemoaning the effect on Beneatha's career and on Travis, and drawing comparisons with Walter's father who had worked so hard and so long to accumulate the money which had disappeared so rapidly. Some used the incident as a metaphor for the discrimination prevalent in this white-dominated society. Weaker answers lingered over-long on how he might find Willy and what he would like to do to him when they met up! Some did not quite grasp the style needed and wrote, 'If I were Walter I would feel.....'.

Macbeth

Quotation 4

There were few responses to this question and these tended to be rather superficial, stating that Duncan is 'nice and kind', for example, and 'treats his friends well'. Quotations were over-long and did not focus sufficiently on language. More was needed on Duncan's qualities as a king rather than just as a man.

Quotation 5

This was the only question on this text which was answered by a substantial number of candidates. Most were able to identify Lady Macbeth's psychological collapse and her subsequent sleepwalking as a sure sign of a guilty conscience. Strong answers drew the parallel between thinking that 'a little water' would wash away their sins, and her later comment that 'all the perfumes of Arabia' could not accomplish this. Lady Macbeth was always the principal focus; few candidates dealt in any depth with Macbeth and his catalogue of crimes following Duncan's murder. Some mentioned Banquo and his ghost with a few describing the slaughter of Macduff's family, but the fact that Macbeth went on to murder many more people was considered in only very general terms, if at all. Most responses were therefore in the 'begins to develop' band; very little was incorrect but there was simply a lack of development and, in particular, focus upon language. Too often the only language mentioned was the quote given in the question, and candidates should be reminded of the importance of supporting their points with quotations from the play.

Quotation 6

Too few responses to comment.

Our Town

Quotation 7

Very few responses. Most recognised the 'breaking of the fourth wall' convention, and were also able to comment upon the bareness of the stage and the requirement for the audience to use their imagination in picturing the location. Few were able to take this a step further and discuss its originality, or the implication for the play of this simplicity. Weaknesses were a lack of discussion of the role of the Stage Manager and failing to pick up the importance of the Webb and Gibbs families, who are introduced here. However, there were several creditable responses and a real attempt to develop a discussion.

Quotation 8

There were fewer responses than for **Quotation 7** and they were significantly weaker. Most narrated what 'happened' to George and Emily (though knowledge of the text was not secure) but few understood the meaning of 'dramatically significant'. There was little consideration, for example, of the characters as individuals with whom we could empathise, nor an evaluation of their lives before and after their marriage and what their doubts, successes and tragedy might say to us all. Surprisingly few even mentioned Emily's death and its significance to the play as a whole.

Quotation 9

Too few responses to comment.

POETRY

This was the weakest section by far. Some responses showed pleasing evidence of genuine engagement and personal response, even if a full understanding was insecure, but others sounded like pre-learned excerpts from commentaries which rarely addressed the specific question. In these cases, the lack of understanding was invariably revealed very quickly.

Billy Collins

Quotation 10

This was the most popular poetry question. Candidates seemed to enjoy writing about this poem, perhaps because the 'grim reaper' is still someone who does not seem too close and real to them as yet! The personification of Death was well-handled, and also the sheer ordinariness of parking his car and taking his scythe from the trunk. Many commented on the fact that the narrator had chosen to live in his 'hidden cottage' in the vain hope of avoiding death. Most grasped the notion that death can happen at any time, and were able to relate their points back to the question and how Collins conveys 'fear'; weaker responses just described where Death could be found. More could have been made of the fact that the poem consists largely of questions and the feeling that we cannot know the answers to them; the unknown is always a source of fear.

Quotation 11

This was less popular but there were some enjoyable and lively responses. However, 'love of life' is a more testing concept to grasp and more challenging to discern from the language of the poem. Most made a creditable attempt at showing how the narrator feels that he is placed in the middle with the world revolving around him, and his sheer joy at experiencing both the sun and the moon at the same time. Many made very thoughtful comments about his positive attitude to life and how it is expressed here.

Quotation 12

As the more straightforward poem, 'Forgetfulness' was handled slightly better than 'Schoolsville', but responses for both were superficial and struggling to grasp meaning. There was some appreciation of the difficulties caused by encroaching memory loss, but little understanding of the poet's sense of humour. In 'Schoolsville', no acknowledgement was given to the sheer imagination of the poet in creating this fictional town peopled with candidates he had taught; indeed many failed to understand that he was looking back at his past rather than describing a real town. Very little comment on language was apparent and so responses were limited to the lower band descriptors.

Songs of Ourselves

Quotation 13

Several candidates attempted this – presumably because it was the only one printed on the paper - but there was very little evidence of any understanding. Some candidates eagerly grasped 'it is as great to be a woman as to be a man' as a comment on gender equality but the rest of the poem was largely a mystery to all but a very few. Many candidates appeared to be reading it for the first time and were unable to make any secure, relevant comments.

Quotation 14

'The Bay' was more popular and there were some answers with merit; 'vivid images of nature' was accessible and most responses were able to pick out 'carved cliffs', 'amber water' and 'outcrying surf' at least, though 'vivid' was largely ignored. Most had a better understanding of the poem but did not focus on the demands of the question, providing instead an overall commentary on the poem as a whole. Again, comments on language were absent or superficial with little appreciation of poetic language and technique. As a result, most marks were in the lower bands.

Quotation 15

There were only very few responses but the central idea of the poem was understood and enabled candidates to make a coherent response, with an attempt at describing how the poet made the poem 'memorable'.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Quotation 16

This was the most answered question on the most popular text on the paper. It was evident that candidates had enjoyed the novel and there were many enthusiastic responses, keen to outline the ways in which Atticus was an excellent parent to Scout and Jem: common examples were how he explains complex issues to them in an adult way, how he will not allow his principles to be compromised by public opinion though they must also respect the opinions of other people, and that they must accept the consequences of their actions. Strong answers used the passage for material and were able to analyse the first part, where Atticus appeared to have no regard for Jem's safety, as being told through Scout's voice and therefore not to be taken at face value. Weaker responses made general comments, often correct, about Atticus' parenting but used the whole text as reference; they did not relate these closely enough to the passage and candidates should be reminded that a close focus on the language in a passage-based question is essential for higher marks. This question more than any other revealed the perils of not knowing the text well enough or even at all. Several candidates mixed up Mrs Dubose with Miss Maudie, for example, and some suggested that Atticus showed a reckless disregard for his children by allowing someone to shoot at Jem.

Quotation 17

This was also a popular choice and, on the whole, answered well where there was sufficient detail and development. Comments about how Miss Maudie was so likeable (no-one disagreed) were often supported by well-chosen references from the text. Many drew on some of her more notable comments with apt quotations about her garden and flowers and about her house after it had burnt down. Advice given to the Finch children on several occasions and her support for Scout in particular was also helpful and relevant. Candidates genuinely seemed to respond to her kind nature without exception. Perhaps her real strength comes out at the Missionary Circle but, sadly, this was usually overlooked.

Quotation 18

This was a good question for those who attempted it as they were largely able to capture Dill's voice successfully and to show some knowledge of the text. Many remembered his distinctive exclamations ('Shoot!') and were able to convey his loneliness at home, and his desire to be reunited with Scout and Jem in Maycomb in order to resume their adventures and be shown genuine affection and interest. Candidates were less secure on the reasons for his leaving Meridian, and some spent far too much time speculating on how he would get on and off the train and to the Finch house.

The Member of the Wedding

Quotation 19, 20 and 21: Too few responses for comment.

The Joy Luck Club

Quotation 22, 23 and 24: Too few responses for comment.

The Color Purple

Quotation 25

There were few responses seen, but those that did answer this question were able to focus on the contrast between Mr _____ (Albert) in the passage – his politeness, his interest in other people and the knowledge that he now works hard - and his previous behaviour as Celie's husband. Weaker responses muddled the time frame – how he acted in his more distant past when Celie was still with him, his later behaviour immediately after she left him (as described in the passage) and his present reformed character. Stronger answers clearly distinguished these differences, but lacked focus on the language of the passage. Quotations showed understanding but were too long and did not consider individual words and phrases.

Quotation 26

Fewer candidates attempted this question and, on the whole, this was not answered as well as the passage question. All understood the main points of Nettie's character, but tended to couch these in very general terms – she is pretty, clever and kind – without close reference to the text and to language. It would have enhanced responses if there had been some consideration, for example, of the contrast in style between Nettie's letters and those of Celie to illustrate the point that she is 'clever'. Many lapsed into narrative with descriptions of Nettie's life without taking this a step further to comment on what the writing shows us about Nettie herself.

Quotation 27

Too few responses for comment.

Stories of Ourselves

Quotation 28

Although not many answered this question, those who did showed a good understanding of Ravi's situation and were able to explain how his despair was portrayed. Perhaps more than any other question, candidates here showed an ability to focus on the passage and on the language. Most understood the symbolism of the game the other children were playing. The best responses were also able to see that the success of the story lies in Desai's ability to get inside the mind of a small boy so convincingly.

Quotation 29

Too few responses to comment.

Quotation 30

Too few responses to comment.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/02
Coursework

Key messages

Tasks for critical essays must direct candidates to consider the ways in which writers achieve their effects, if candidates are to meet the assessment criteria for the higher bands.

Teacher annotation of candidates' work enables Centres to justify the award of a particular mark and is an important part of the dialogue between a Centre and the Moderator.

All relevant paperwork, including mark sheets and candidates' individual record cards, must be checked for accuracy before submission.

General comments

Moderators saw much work that revealed enjoyment of the texts that candidate studied and engagement with the tasks set. The majority of Centres complied with the syllabus requirements. It should be remembered that candidates must write about a minimum of two poems or two short stories in poetry and short story assignments.

Task-setting and the assessment objectives

It is important that tasks are worded in such a way that enables candidates to meet the assessment criteria. The assessment objectives are as follows:

AO1: show detailed knowledge of the content of literary texts in the three main forms (Drama, Poetry, and Prose).

AO2: understand the meanings of literary texts and their contexts, and explore texts beyond surface meanings to show deeper awareness of ideas and attitudes.

AO3: recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure, and form to create and shape meanings and effects.

AO4: communicate a sensitive and informed personal response to literary texts.

The following tasks - one in the form of a question, and the other in the form of an instruction – direct candidates to examine the ways in which a writer achieves her/his effects, which is a requirement of Band 2:

- How does Steinbeck vividly convey the loneliness of two characters in *Of Mice and Men*?
- Explore the ways in which Steinbeck powerfully portrays the dreams of George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*.

By contrast, the following titles do not meet syllabus requirements as they do **not** invite an explicit focus on the ways in which writers achieves their effects:

- Loneliness in *Of Mice and Men*.
- Dreams in *Of Mice and Men*.
- The Sexist Struggle.

- Why was the family murdered?

These titles are not appropriate, since they do not explicitly require candidates to explore aspects of the writing.

When setting poetry assignments, it should be noted that candidates are not required to compare poems. Sometimes titles were simply along the lines of 'A comparison of Poem A and Poem B'. This is not helpful to candidates as they are not given a specific focus to consider in their analysis. A better approach would be:

- Explore the ways in which the poets strikingly convey [e.g. feelings about relationships] in Poem A and Poem B.

In poetry assignments, it is sufficient to write sustained analysis of the first poem and then the second poem. Too often a requirement to compare poems led to somewhat contrived essays that dealt with each poem in alternate paragraphs, in a way that prevented the candidate from constructing coherent and cohesive responses to poetry. The comparison too often got in the way of sustained critical analysis.

Centres with more than one teaching group are advised to discuss the choice of texts and the wording of tasks at the start of the course, in order to ensure that the tasks enable their candidates to meet the relevant assessment criteria. This will allow any problems to be resolved long before the Centre's internal moderation of coursework marks. At Band 2, candidates should 'respond *sensitively* and *in detail* to the way the writer achieves her/his effects'. For this reason, tasks need to be framed in such a way that candidates are directed to explore the writing. The Set Texts examination paper provides many examples of tasks that enable candidates to meet the relevant criteria (which are the same as for coursework).

When considering the appropriateness of tasks, teachers should refer to the guidance and examples of good (and bad) tasks found in the *0486 Coursework Training Handbook for English Literature*. This can be found on the Teacher Support Site. The coursework requirements and principles are the same for both Syllabus 0427 and Syllabus 0486.

Candidates should include the task in full (not an abbreviation of the task) at the top of each assignment. This is essential information for the external Moderator. As they read the assignment, they can gauge how successfully a candidate has engaged with the task that has been set.

Teacher annotation and internal moderation

Careful teacher annotation of candidate work leads to effective moderation within Centres. Comments on the assignments themselves and on the individual record cards provide evidence of the debates about standards that take place within the Centre. Where the original teacher's marks are moderated, it is helpful to have a concise comment giving the reason.

It should be noted that focused ticking, marginal comments and summative comments (the latter at the end of assignments or on the record card) are an **essential** part of the dialogue between the Centre and the Moderator. Such comments also form an important part of the dialogue between teachers *within* Centres before the coursework is submitted. It is not acceptable to submit assignments lacking teacher annotation.

Ticks should indicate valid, thoughtful, sensitive points made by the candidate. Brief comments in the margin should note strengths and weaknesses, drawing at least in part on the wording of the band descriptors. In this way a meaningful dialogue can take place about the award of any particular mark, with all interested parties focusing on the detail of the assessment criteria. By contrast, assignments bearing no teacher annotation or comments unrelated to the assessment criteria (e.g. 'lovely', 'nice', 'good') are not helpful to the moderation process.

Summary

The following list provides a summary of good practice found in Centres which manage coursework most effectively:

- texts and tasks are in keeping with syllabus requirements
- tasks are worded carefully in order to allow candidates to meet the relevant assessment criteria
- assignments include the full wording of tasks for Moderators to see before they start reading the assignment
- all teachers tick and annotate assignments appropriately, making reference to the wording of the assessment criteria
- concise comments are provided to justify any marks changed by the internal Moderator
- the sample is prepared according to Cambridge requirements
- all paperwork is checked for completeness and accuracy before dispatch to Cambridge
- assignments and record cards are securely fastened (e.g. by a treasury tag), and not placed in cardboard files or plastic covers.