

LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/01
Paper 1: Set Texts

There were very few scripts in this session and it is therefore possible only to make general comments. The responses seen did not differ substantially from those seen in the June session.

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:

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.

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. 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 the writers' intentions and how literature deals with universal issues of human interest and concern 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 very much 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 often rather doubtful in nature or irrelevant to the question.

High marks can only be 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 at least 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 simply 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 working through 'model' answers.