

FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/01

Reading

General comments

Generally speaking, performance was good this year. Most candidates responded with interest to the situation presented in the reading passage. All the questions were understood clearly by the majority of candidates and nearly all candidates attempted all questions on the paper.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) The question asked the name of main character. Nearly all candidates answered correctly, some gave three names: Петруша, Петр, Петр Андреевич. There were some, however, who failed to score the mark because they confused the names of the father and the son.
- (b) Here candidates were asked for Petrusha's origin. This question proved difficult for candidates. Many candidates correctly answered that he is from a provincial noble family of modest means, but there were several who answered wrongly or did not give any answer.
- (c) The question asked what career was chosen for Petrusha by his parents. Candidates of all abilities performed well, answering that his parents chose a military career for him. This was the best-answered question of the paper.
- (d) Here candidates were asked what happened when the boy was sixteen years old. Nearly all candidates correctly answered that his father decided he should go to serve in the Army.
- (e) This question asked how Petrusha related to this change in his life. The overwhelming majority of candidates correctly answered that he was very happy.
- (f) For this question, candidates needed to explain if Savelyitch had given the boy a good education. The answer was worth three marks, and it was important for candidates not only to answer 'no' but also to explain why. Most candidates scored one or two marks, but only a small number produced a clear explanation and gained the maximum of three marks. (For six years he was under Savelyitch's supervision and he had learned only to read and write Russian, and about thoroughbred hunting dogs.)
- (g) This question asked which pedagogical characteristics Beaupre possessed. This caused problems because some candidates did not recognize the person the question referred to. A large number started correctly by saying that he was not a pedagogue. The more successful candidates gave a good explanation with more detail, saying that he had been first a hairdresser, then a soldier, then he came to Russia to be a teacher, without clearly understanding what it meant. Furthermore, he was a drunkard and had run after women.
- (h) This question asked what Beaupre had taught his student. There were two marks available, which indicated that two points of explanation were required. A pleasing number of candidates explained that Beaupre had taught nothing, although he was supposed to teach languages and all subjects. He had picked up some Russian from Petrusha and after that had left him to his own devices. But some candidates described the personality of the teacher and his biography, which was not appropriate in response to this question.

- (i) For this question, candidates were required to explain in their own words how Beaupre had seduced the laundress and the dairymaid. Nearly all candidates correctly wrote that the laundress and the dairymaid had come to Beaupre's room and that Beaupre had seduced them. Petrusha's father went to the boy's room and found Beaupre sitting on the floor. He was drunk. Petrusha was making a kite. The father sent Beaupre away that same day. There were some, however, who failed to score the available marks because they copied the passage from the text.
- (j) For this question, candidates were required to find words and phrases in the text pertaining to Beaupre's character, and explain what effect was obtained by using them. Selecting appropriate words and phrases did not cause many difficulties, nor did reaching the conclusion that the author gives the image of an inoffensive, mild person, who is at the same time a drunkard and profligate. The best candidates noticed that the ironic tone of the author had created a humorous effect.

Question 2

The task was to compare the systems of upbringing portrayed in the two passages.

Fifteen points were required for full content marks and there were many examples of excellent scripts. The candidates who scored less well on this exercise would have done better if they had not exhibited one or more of the following:

- Frequent copying from the texts.
- Writing extended introductions and conclusions. One answer had an introduction and conclusion as long as the maximum for the whole answer (about 250 words).
- Writing a commentary, an opinion or expressing personal reflection on the issue, for example, why it is so important to be educated, how to be happy and rich etc. The answer should have consisted only of relevant facts.
- Writing long explanations. Some candidates wrote a story describing the situation in Army in the 19th century and now, while it was only necessary to say that both boys had to be in the military.

No penalty was applied to overlong answers. But the result of writing overlong answers was that candidates did not give themselves time to read carefully. A good answer could easily have been written within the limit of 250 words, not 500 or more, as some candidates thought.

A significant number of candidates were able to produce clear and focused answers, containing comparisons based on careful examination of both passages. However, some candidates did not always read both passages thoroughly enough to find a sufficient number of relevant points. They could also have reordered the facts and grouped points together for clarity.

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Paper 0516/02

Writing

General Comments

All questions were attempted, and all were equally popular.

The overall standard of response was satisfactory. There were some outstanding performances, and many candidates were able to produce two coherent pieces of writing displaying a competent grasp of idiom and grammar.

Section 1: Discussion and Argument.

The best responses contained relevant, clear, well-developed, appropriately illustrated and sophisticated argument. Candidates were able to structure their arguments, and each stage was linked to and followed on from the previous one. The weaker answers shared the following characteristics:

- **Failure to address the title adequately:** Lack of clarity: making statements without elaborating on them or giving an illustration (for example, in Question (b), reflecting on the importance of principles without an explanation); failure to address the complexities of the question (for example, reducing man's relationship with nature to the problem of leaving rubbish outdoors, or building the argument around the statement that "in the past man lived in perfect harmony with nature and now does not understand it at all"); lack of logic: implying one thing and then later another; writing something only vaguely related to the question.
- **Inadequate structure:** Lack of introduction and/or conclusion; poor use of paragraphs; unfocused ideas and argument seemingly put together at random, without considering the relative significance of facts and ideas; repetitive ideas.
- **Style:** Limited range of vocabulary; reliance on simple syntactic structures, overlong complex and compound sentences; lack of sensitivity to register (e.g. inappropriate use of informal idiom or slang); awkward syntax and foreign-sounding forms of expression.

Section 2: Description and Narrative

The best descriptive essays presented relevant ideas and images, generating imaginative and evocative descriptions with a range of vivid details. The best responses to the story writing tasks were distinguished by skilful development of narrative, effective use of descriptive devices, and stylistic flair. The weaker answers displayed the following characteristics:

- **Failure to address the title adequately:** Content only loosely related to the question (for example, writing about a day in the country when asked to describe a hunt for mushrooms); failure to follow the instructions to write a beginning of a story and instead **either** writing a narrative with a beginning, middle and end **or** a continuation of a story (in Question (c) several answers contained an unconvincing plot lacking in build-up of setting and character or in any descriptive detail); failure to follow instructions to write a посказание, i.e. a fictional story (Question (d) where many candidates merely presented a sequence of mundane events with few details of character and setting).
- **Inadequate structure:** In descriptive tasks, some candidates focussed on events rather than images and atmosphere; there was a lack of balance between different sections; repetitive use of images; a lack of effective descriptive detail. In story-writing, some showed a poor development of narrative, with sections too long or too short; a climax was not effectively described or led up to (or missing altogether); poor use of descriptive devices (for example, failure to describe or comment on different qualities of fictional characters or to invite readers to infer qualities from characters' speech or

appearance). The general impression is that some candidates do not have a clear understanding of the purpose of this exercise and of what a description or a fictional story should be like.

- **Style:** Limited range of vocabulary; reliance on simple syntactic structures; poor use of epithets and figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole and other tropes designed to create certain moods; awkward syntax and foreign-sounding forms of expression.

Grammatical accuracy, punctuation and spelling were satisfactory overall, and often presented less of a problem than command of complex syntactic structures and idiom or quality of ideas. Where there were problems, they fell within the following areas:

- **Morphology and syntax:** Basic errors, including wrong prepositions and cases; incorrect use of indefinite pronouns with particles **-то** and **-нибудь**; incorrect use of the gerund; incorrect use of verbal tenses; incorrect use of verbal aspects; incorrectly constructed complex and compound sentences.
- **Punctuation:** Absence of commas in complex and compound sentences, in sentences with gerund and participle constructions and in sentences with parenthetical words; use of comma instead of full stop; lack of familiarity with usage of question mark, colon, semicolon and hyphen.
- **Spelling:** A variety of spelling errors, some of which were careless slips that could have been eliminated by a careful final checking of the script. It is important that candidates leave time for this.

A small number of candidates did not pay attention to the specific questions or context, producing memorised answers to past questions. Candidates should be advised that this will inevitably lead to a lower mark as the answer is highly unlikely to meet the demands of the question.