

LITERATURE IN (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 9276/03
Poetry and Prose

Key Messages

- A few candidates explored the literary nature of their texts to some degree, though many dealt with the issues raised rather than the literary ways in which the texts raised them.
- For greater success, candidates need to focus on how writers communicate meaning through their choices of language, imagery and form.

General comments

As a new specification, it is to be expected that Centres and candidates will take a little time to become accustomed to its requirements. Candidates need to be more aware of ways in which literature is created for the reader. Answers on poetry were generally more successful in this regard, whereas discussion of characters in novels often dealt with them as real people rather than as artistically created figures within a text.

Candidates should focus carefully on the precise wording of questions, ensuring that they respond to their specific demands. They need to support points they make on the texts with quotations and precise references.

Many answers were very short, while some candidates submitted only one response or more than two.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There were very few responses, which showed appropriate selection of poems and an awareness of the pairings of poems between *Innocence* and *Experience*. The content of the poems was known, with some limited awareness of how the tone is different between the pairs.
- (b) There were few answers, which retold parts of the story of the Little Girl of the poem. The answers lacked, though, focus on the language and structure which Blake uses to narrate the events and create the mood of the poem, so they demonstrated limited literary appreciation.

Question 2

Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) There were very few responses, which usually referred to appropriate poems, 'Cut' being a particular favourite. Answers usually concentrated, though, on the emotional states and what led Plath to those states, rather than the ways in which she communicates them in poetry.
- (b) Answers on 'The Night Dances' were generally more successful, though there was wide variation between those candidates who saw the poem as a celebration of motherhood and those who saw it as deeply pessimistic. Candidates commented on the structure and language of the poem, but usually overlooked the last part of the question, asking how they 'develop its meaning.' This meant that images of comments on couplets were often taken out of context, without consideration of the poem's developing meaning. Candidates were also very selective in which images they chose, so stanzas 1, 5, 6 and 12 received much attention, while the rest of the poem was ignored.

Question 3

Songs of Ourselves

- (a) Very few responses, which were not able to focus successfully on 'ways in which... a woman's voice' is presented, though there was appreciation of a female point of view.
- (b) This question elicited the most successful responses on the paper. Most candidates showed a good understanding of the 'complexities of a relationship' and that the poem presents a view of an ever-changing, intriguing but fulfilling relationships between the man and the woman in the poem, usually taken to be a married couple. Though no answer fully developed the geographic and cartographic metaphors, many candidates showed appreciation of how references to 'territory', 'charted' and 'helpless journey' were used and ways in which phrases such as 'quarried hurt' and 'cool water' suggested the woman's different moods. It was clear that most candidates who answered this question had enjoyed the poem, and this benefited their responses.

Question 4

Henry James: *Washington Square*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) Very few responses, which gave a broad outline of Dr Sloper's attitudes to the two young people. While accurate, the essays were not supported with the close attention to the writing of the passage that such a question demands. Candidates should note the instruction to 'Comment closely' on the passage and examine the writing in detail.

Question 5

Maxine Hong Kingston: *The Woman Warrior*

- (a) One response, which did not answer the question set.
- (b) There were a few responses to this passage, which showed appreciation of the Mother's strength and bravery in her fight with the ghost. None, though, followed the instruction to 'Discuss in detail' – though there were one or two comments on the determination in Mother's lines of dialogue, but most gave a narrative account of the passage and none commented on the style of the extract, dealing with imaginative fantasy in a realistic way.

Question 6

Stories of Ourselves

- (a) There were a few responses to this question, which selected appropriate stories, usually with an eye to comparison, such as *The Destructors*, *Ming's Biggest Prey* and *The Taste of Watermelon*. The comparisons gave the essays shape and demonstrated candidates' knowledge of the stories, with some appreciation of different ways in which violence is used, but less of ways it is presented. There were some useful comparisons, though between premeditated violence in *The Destructors* and *Ming's Biggest Prey* and spontaneous violence in *The Taste of Watermelon*.
- (b) Most responses gave a narrative account of the passage, but a few showed knowledge of the attitudes to suicide which make the Shradh ceremony particularly awkward and some expressed great frustration with Mr Mitra's self-absorption, citing a number of useful examples from the passage. These responses would have been improved with a closer examination of the details of language in the passage.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (US)

Paper 9276/04

Drama

Key messages

- Candidates need to demonstrate sustained appreciation of the texts as works of art that can be explored in terms of language, structure, form and style.
- Some candidates engage with issues raised by the text (absent fathers, for example) and then focus on them rather than on literary appreciation. This is not what is meant by 'personal response' in the specification.

General comments

As this is a new specification, it is not surprising that candidates are taking time to work their way into what is required. The general impression given by the papers is that there is usually good knowledge of what happens in a play, but little consideration of how texts that are written to be performed create meaning. More detailed study of specific moments would help candidates support their discussions and provide material for developing more complex arguments.

Candidates need to be careful to look closely at the precise wording of the question and to ensure that they respond to its specific demands.

Scripts that moved beyond plot towards analysis were on the right track, particularly if reference was made to particular moments in a play, to stage directions, or to the language being used.

A number of answers were very short. Some candidates submitted only one response.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Arthur Miller: *All My Sons*

- (a) Candidates were usually able to muster a series of examples of people who feel guilty in the play. However, the question asked for the 'dramatic presentation,' and this needed to be considered in a structured way. It would have been useful to see candidates comment on particular moments where clashes of personality are seen in the play, each driven by a different motivating guilt.
- (b) Most candidates could give an account of the scene. Better candidates ventured into the detail and started to see how the tensions are created through Chris's gradual realisation of what has gone on, exemplified through his horrified questioning of his father, his repetitions to make sure he has understood, and his exclamations. Attention to the stage directions often helped candidates make something of the range of tones in the scene.

Question 2 William Shakespeare: *As You Like It*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) No responses.

Question 3 William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) No responses.

- (b) There were a small number of responses. The candidates understood the situation and were able to outline the basic antagonism between the two characters. Answers were not sufficiently focused on the detail printed. More could have been done to discuss how Shakespeare contrasts the two characters present.

Question 4 Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) A number of candidates responded to the question in terms of the characters being like real people who face the loss of a member of the family. Better candidates were able to see (and analyse) various ways (the ever present portrait of Mr Wingfield, for example) in which Williams dramatises the blight that the father's absence casts over Amanda, Laura and Tom. Some candidates rightly discussed the diversity of ways in which he continues to sour and corrupt the relationships within the family. Parallels between Mr Wingfield's achieved flight and Tom's longings were well made by some candidates.
- (b) Most candidates were able to give an account of the passage and its situation in the play. Better responses pointed towards the complexity of presentation and the way that Jim gradually realises that his approaches are open to misinterpretation. Clues given by the extensive stage directions were rarely commented upon.

Question 5 Athol Fugard: *Township Plays*

- (a) No responses
- (b) There was one response. The candidate showed some understanding of Willie, but had not really grasped the situation in which he finds himself.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (US)

Paper 9276/05

Shakespeare and Other Pre-20th Century Texts

Key messages

- Candidates need to develop the arguments and analysis presented to show knowledge and understanding of the wider text.
- Candidates need to demonstrate awareness that texts may be interpreted in different ways.

General comments

Candidates showed a sound knowledge of what happens in the texts studied, with some understanding of how the writers' choices create meaning. In nearly every case the response could have been developed effectively by exploring the wider text and the issues raised, with more detailed reference to specific moments in the text.

At this level of study candidates are expected to understand how texts may be interpreted in different ways by different audiences, substantiating these different views by apposite reference to contexts and detailed analysis of textual details.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Shakespeare: *Othello*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) Most candidates had a clear understanding of the passage and could explain what was happening accurately. In nearly every case a more precise context for the passage would have encouraged candidates to link this passage to the wider text. Candidates showed a clear understanding of Iago's characterisation and were able to analyse the different aspects of his role that are revealed by what others say: '*Othello and Cassio speak in a respectful tone toward Iago*' as one candidate put it, quoting from the passage to support the point made. Candidates who considered the different sides of Iago here, recognising the different tone and language of his soliloquy, were addressing the question directly, particularly when this was linked to a consideration of Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony. A clearer account of the relationships and why Iago is intent on getting Cassio drunk would have helped candidates to demonstrate an understanding of the wider concerns of the play.

Question 2 William Shakespeare: *Coriolanus*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) No responses.

Question 3 Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) No responses.

Question 4 Emily Dickinson: *Selected Poems*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) No responses.

Question 5 John Donne: *Selected Poems*

- (a) No responses
- (b) No responses

Question 6 Nathaniel Hawthorne: *The Scarlet Letter*

- (a) Candidates showed a sound knowledge of the text, referring in detail to three symbols: the letter, the rose bush and Pearl. Answers were clearly organised and the material successfully shaped to the task with candidates showing awareness of 'meaning and effects' of the novel. This was most successful when this was developed into an exploration of the way Hawthorne used the symbols to reveal his concerns in the wider text. For example, one candidate noted that '*the evolution of the letter's meaning conveys an important message*', going onto discuss what the novel reveals about the limitation of the Puritan attitudes to sin.
- (b) One candidate attempted this question, showing a sound knowledge of the meaning of the extract and some understanding of the literary methods used. A more precise context for the passage and an awareness of the wider text would have enabled the essay to develop its view of Dimmesdale in more detail.

Question 7 Mark Twain: *Huckleberry Finn*

- (a) No responses
- (b) No responses