

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (US)

Paper 9276/03
Poetry and Prose

Key Messages

- Candidates showed some ability to explore the literary nature of their texts, many showed a secure understanding of the content of texts but there needed to be further examination of the ways in which that content is communicated.
- In order to achieve top bands, candidates need to focus on how writers communicate meaning through their choices of language, imagery and form.

General comments

It was pleasing to see an improvement in the second session of this examination, as candidates demonstrated that they were more accustomed to its requirements. Candidates need to continue to develop their awareness of ways in which literature is created for the reader. There was some awareness of literary techniques in poetry answers, and this should be carried forward into the discussion of the prose texts.

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 specific references.

Many answers were too short, given the amount of time allowed during the exam and some candidates did not follow the rubric instructions to answer two questions, one from each section.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

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

Question 2 Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) One response, which showed insecure knowledge and understanding of the poem.

Question 3 *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) One response, which focused on appropriate poems, 'One Art' and 'Marrysong'. Some knowledge was shown of the subject matter of the poems, though appreciation and understanding of the poets' methods were limited.
- (b) Most candidates answered on Hughes' poem 'Full Moon and Little Frieda'. Responses were varied, but most showed knowledge of the poem's content and understood the narrative of the poem. Some went further and acknowledged the tone of reminiscence, while others commented on the special quality of the memory and interpreted the father/daughter relationship. Stronger answers considered some of the ways in which Hughes creates effects in the poem, looking particularly at the ways in which suspense and expectation are built through the sound effects and detailed

observations before the child cries out 'Moon!' Some candidates commented on the poem's description of the moon and the final link with the child. Opportunities to discuss the stanza lengths were missed and few candidates understood the reference to the 'dark river of blood'.

Question 4 Henry James: *Washington Square*

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

Question 5 Maxine Hong Kingston: *The Woman Warrior*

- (a) No responses.
- (b) One response, which gave a solid account of the selected passage and looked at some of the ways in which Hong Kingston communicates the narrator's impatience and violence, contrasted with the patient silent suffering of her victim. The essay used quotation appropriately and showed clear understanding of the language choice, both in describing the actions and in the dialogue.

Question 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) There was a handful of responses to this question, usually making appropriate choices of stories to illustrate different types of courage. The essays were limited by giving clear accounts of the plots of stories, demonstrating the courage displayed and sometimes identifying the nature of the courage, but not exploring ways in which the courage is portrayed by the writer and how the effects are created for the reader.
- (b) Most candidates wrote on the passage from 'How It Happened' and were able to give a clear account of the passage with some attention to ways in which the speed and danger of the drive is presented before the crash. A number of candidates noted Conan Doyle's early hints, such as the narrator's unfamiliarity with the car, the dark evening and the terrain over which he will drive the car. Stronger responses noted the effects of these and further considered ways in which the writing of the passage shows the car's increasing speed and creates tension with the men's restrained dialogue clearly indicating their awareness that the vehicle will crash. While weaker responses tended to rely on narration, stronger answers picked out these telling details, while the most successful responses discussed carefully how these details of the writing create the effects of the increasing drama of the crash.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (US)

Paper 9276/04

Drama

Key Messages

- It is important to give consideration to the texts within their genre — as plays to be performed.
- When a **(b)** question prints stage directions, they are there for a purpose and should be commented upon.
- A question that at first seems to invite simple character study is never that straightforward and requires candidates to explore a broad range of ideas about the text.

General Comments

This paper is done by a very small number of candidates, so what follows should be read in the knowledge that the remarks may be based on the work of ten or fewer candidates.

Better responses offered coherent and detailed argument that was supported and relevant to the question asked. Insights at this level were fresh and personal. At the other end of the spectrum, responses showed little more than an understanding of the narrative of the text, with little awareness of ways in which writers create meanings through language, structure and form. At this level, candidates need to be less concerned with the 'what' of a text and more concerned with the 'how' of a text. This is particularly important when dealing with plays, where a leap of imagination, from page to stage, needs to accompany close reading in order to analyse the significance of dramatic action.

The study of literature, of course, centres on a close reading of the texts chosen. However, in parallel to this must come work on how to communicate the insights gained, and there is a need for teachers to focus more explicitly on what it takes to write a good essay. Often, responses are let down by a failure to select judiciously and to integrate material into an overall argument. In **(b)** type questions, there is a tendency for responses to offer a general view of the passage, or to go through chronologically, when what is really required is a close analysis of detail within a clear, strategic framework. When the question gives a deliberate angle, this should be seen as signalling the central focus of the response.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

Arthur Miller: *All My Sons*

- (a) There were a small number of responses to this question. Candidates were able to show clear understanding of the idealism of the younger generation, set against the more pragmatic selfishness of Joe and Kate. More sophisticated responses also considered the Deever family in order to demonstrate that the conflicts are really those of one particular family. Discussions of the American dream and of the ideal American family sometimes gave clear contextual support to the question but at other times did not develop candidates' ideas.
- (b) Most candidates showed awareness of the tensions between Joe and Kate. Better responses were able to use the stage directions in order to substantiate points made. Kate's blind faith in her son's survival was often well illustrated, as was the foreboding of what is to come with Keller's 'What have I got to hide?' with the implication that there is much that this couple are busy not saying in this scene. Their mutual impatience with each other came across clearly in some responses. The significance of Bert in the scene was not explored.

Question 2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *As You Like It*

There were no responses on this text.

Question 3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) There were a small number of responses to this question. Candidates were aware of the central temptations in the play, but few moved beyond discussions of Angelo towards seeing how his being tempted fits into a larger pattern, with Isabella's demonstration that there is no need to 'fall.'
- (b) The small number of responses to this question showed awareness of the situation and of some of the subtleties and ironies of the scene. Weaker answers provided paraphrase and gave an account of events in the extract. Stronger answers responded particularly to words like 'justice' and to Isabella's faith in the system ('Worthy Duke') to redress wrongs.

Question 4 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) Candidates soon saw the ambiguity of having Tom as both narrator and participant. Better responses were also able to comment on how his retrospective narration is also slanted, because he knows from the beginning how things will turn out. The best responses were able to see that Tom perhaps presents himself in a more favourable light than the action would actually sustain as truth. Candidates who supported what they said with direct quotation of particular moments in the play were able to make the case effectively and economically.
- (b) Many answers were quickly able to discuss Amanda's deluded, rose-coloured dominance of the scene. A small number of responses also noted Tom and Laura's indulgent tolerance of their mother's nostalgia that verges on fantasy. Better responses were also able to point out contrasts between the past and the present ('the faded tapestry'), between young Amanda and the socially awkward Laura. Candidates who paid attention to the way that the scene is staged, particularly with the use of images, screen legends and the use of lighting soon got to the centre of 'dramatic presentation'.

Question 5 ATHOL FUGARD: *Township Plays*

There were no responses on this text.