

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 2010/12**  
**Poetry and Prose**

## Key Messages

In order to do well in this subject, candidates should be discouraged from:

- writing long introductions explaining what they are going to do, or summarising the whole of their answer in advance
- writing long conclusions repeating what has already been said
- giving a great deal of unneeded biographical information
- commenting on how the use of commas and colons adds to the mood and tone of a poem
- commenting on rhyme schemes and verse forms without relating them to the question
- using the passage from the passage-based question to answer the discursive question on a text.

And most significantly:

- treating a poem or passage as an Unseen exercise.

Success will come from:

- a relevant and carefully argued response to the question
- detailed knowledge supporting the points made
- careful commentary on the writer's choice of words and on the effects created
- an individual and perceptive personal response.

## General Comments

This was the first November session for the new specification with the two question format. There was no change to the style of the questions but all the poems were printed on the paper, which candidates obviously found of benefit, though in some cases they appeared to be relying on this rather than on their previously acquired knowledge since there was insufficient focus on exploration of the language effects.

For a long time the passage-based questions have been significantly more popular than the discursive ones, and there was no change to this. Those candidates who did attempt the general questions often achieved good marks because of the quality of their engagement with the text and the persuasiveness of their arguments, though they were often over-reliant on generalisations and could have benefited from even just a little more specific reference. There are still too many examples of essay questions being answered by candidates exclusively using the material in the passage of the question before on the same text. Candidates need to be reminded that the passage is principally relevant only to the question which is asked on it; using it as the basis of an answer to the second question on the text in question is always going to be, at best, self-limiting and in some cases completely irrelevant.

There was much admirable work from all parts of the world and it is a constant pleasure to read the scripts of candidates who clearly love the subject and engage with their set texts. The best answers were full of well supported personal responses to the questions set, and showed sensitivity to the writers' methods and intentions.

When candidates performed less well, it was usually because they had not adhered closely enough to the terms of the question. Candidates still do not spend enough time on identifying the key words of the question and tailoring their knowledge and understanding to these words. In previous reports, we have made the point that it is worth spending five minutes on underlining the key words and creating a brief plan relating to them before beginning writing. Many candidates do not appear to plan their answers at all before embarking on

them. More successful responses make relevant selections from extracts and poems in answering the question, rather than slavishly working through the text. These stronger responses can, as it were, see the wood for the trees and shape more carefully-crafted arguments with pertinent textual support. Their responses keep the question clearly in focus throughout.

In the poetry section many candidates wrote down everything they had been taught about the poem rather than selecting relevant material to form a coherent response to the question. So many times it was obvious that the intensifiers in the question, the words such as 'vividly', 'dramatically', 'memorably', had been ignored because there was no response to the quality of the writing. All questions offer the opportunity to address AO 3 'recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language', and without an attempt to engage with the writing answers will not reach the higher Bands. The most successful poetry answers explored the precise effects of words and sounds in poems. A close appreciation was, by contrast, not demonstrated by listing a number of quotations and adding only a general comment that the words are vivid or powerful. Listing key words and labelling them a 'semantic field' is in itself description and not analysis. Literary terms can be useful in making concise reference to aspects of the writing, but they *serve* the analysis and do not constitute the analysis itself. Less successful responses often worked through an extract or a poem logging literary devices in an explanatory fashion: e.g. 'This metaphor means...'; 'the poem has an ababab rhyme scheme...'.

Too often candidates included biographical details (particularly with the Hardy poems) in the mistaken belief presumably that these counted as literary comments.

The strongest essays deployed quotation judiciously – that is to say, used only those words actually required to substantiate the point being made and integrated them into own sentences. Excessively long quotations can at best be only inert illustrations of a point, and not an opportunity for close textual analysis. Some candidates used ellipsis to reduce the length of their quotations, but often in so doing cut out the very words that would most usefully support the point being made. Some referred only to line numbers, which demonstrated very little in terms of commentary.

The topping and tailing of essays with general comment is not to the candidate's advantage. Lengthy 'courtesy' introductions setting out what the candidate will do and 'conclusions' which merely re-state points already made (sometimes at inordinate length) have this in common: they reduce the time available to the candidate for the close exploration of how writers achieve their effects. By contrast, succinct introductions which get to grips straight away with the key words of the question enable candidates to focus from the start.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### **Section A: Poetry**

#### **THOMAS HARDY: from *Selected Poems***

**Question 1** Explore the ways in which Hardy creates strong feelings of loneliness in both *The Darkling Thrush* and *Drummer Hodge*.

This was perhaps the most striking example on the paper of candidates ignoring the key words of the question and merely rehearsing everything that they had been taught about the poems, including some spurious points about the effect of the death of Hardy's wife. The two poems are quite substantial and candidates were not expected to cover absolutely everything in them, so it was particularly important for them to select relevantly and to structure their answers carefully. Many candidates effectively wrote two separate essays, leaving themselves little time for their second question. In responses to *The Darkling Thrush* they wrote copiously and generally well on the coldness of the atmosphere, the end of the year and the deathly imagery, but without making the connection to feelings of loneliness. Those who picked out the solitariness of the poet, the fact that everyone else had 'sought their household fires', and the single thrush immediately elevated their answers from a general 'run-through'. Generally answers fared better with *Drummer Hodge* and were sometimes able to argue the loneliness of the situation Hodge encountered, and the pathos of his death and burial far from loved ones in an alien environment. Good answers were able to select and analyse appropriate quotation to help argue their view. Strong candidates were able to seamlessly integrate textual illustration into responses in sensible / perceptively focussed 'bite sized' amounts. Weaker answers contained the usual biographical and historical information within, often, lengthy explanations.

**Question 2** Explore the ways in which Hardy creates such a sad picture in *No Buyers: A Street Scene*.

This was an almost equally popular question and most candidates were able to make at least some response to its sadness. There were some very thorough explanations of the situation, and the parallels between the man and his horse were made much of as was the separation of the man and his wife. Detailed comment on the language (for example, “Dirge-like” and “funeral train”) was needed to lift answers beyond narrative, however.

### **Poems Deep and Dangerous**

**Question 3** In what ways does Armitage memorable portray the speaker’s feeling in *In Our Tenth Year*?

This was not a particularly popular option, but those candidates who did attempt it usually showed a high degree of engagement and there were a few very sensitive readings which explored the image of the harebell, the idea of the watercolour and the way in which the relationship has changed over time. There were assertions about affairs and strain, rather than an understanding of the idea that relationships change and become stronger over time. There was also confusion about the imagery – some candidates assumed that ‘let it go’ meant that the relationship should be let go. Unfortunately there were also some answers which showed very little understanding and which appeared to have treated the poem as an Unseen – never a wise approach.

**Question 4** How does Jennings movingly convey her feelings about her parents to you in *One Flesh*?

This was the more popular option on this text and candidates perhaps found the poem more accessible. They generally showed a satisfactory understanding of the content but could have focused much more strongly on the viewpoint: ‘her feelings about her parents’. ‘Movingly’ was ignored by all but the most successful candidates, which of course meant that the qualities of the language and imagery were not given due attention. Very few mentioned the images of the thread and the feather, or saw the implications of age and death in the poem. Too often there was a general explanation of the poem and the implication or assertion of divorce or separation. There seemed little understanding at times of how relationships change and can become companionable. Very few touched the depths of the poem and the ambiguity of feeling expressed by the poet.

### **SONGS OF OURSELVES: from part 4**

**Question 5** How does Brewster vividly convey a sense of different places in *Where I Come From*.

A popular poetry text and a popular question, which produced a wide range of response quality. The question invited comparison of ‘different places’, yet many candidates simply explained what they thought was happening in the city and then outlined what they thought was the poet’s position on the country. They described the first stanza then described the second stanza, and there was little focus on poetic language and effects. Better candidates got to the heart of the poem and the question by making a workmanlike comparison between the presentation of the city and the presentation of the countryside in the poem. The more analysis of the language they offered and the more thoroughly pointed the contrasting of the pictures was, the more successful their responses.

**Question 6** Explore the ways in which Halligan uses words and images vividly in *The Cockroach*.

It was quite rare to find a candidate who actually answered what was asked on this poem. Most candidates were clear that the poet compared himself with a cockroach, and some commented on the extended nature of the comparison, but very few discussed how words and images gained their effects and were used vividly. Those few who did this, or even made a fair attempt at doing this, were able to produce relevant material rather than the basic explanation and assertion that constituted most of the responses seen. Too often there was a listing of individual words without any attempt to explore their poetic effect. Often there was an effort to see the poem as a sort of Seven Ages of Cockroach/Man, usually asserted without sufficient textual support. Such an approach did not really engage with the terms of the question and proved self-penalising. The poetic effect most commonly discussed here was ‘personification’ and this was identified in two ways: the movements of the Cockroach were personification because humans move like that; the fact that the Cockroach was a ‘he’ was personification because male humans are identified as ‘he’.

## Section B: Poetry

### JANE AUSTEN: *Northanger Abbey*

**Question 7** In what ways does Austen make this such a revealing and significant moment in the novel?

This text was offered by only a few Centres, but it had obviously been chosen to suit their candidates and there were some very engaged responses. Most candidates found the passage revealing of the mercenary and duplicitous nature of Isabella, but few found much to say about what is revealed about Catherine. Better answers showed consideration of the significance of the moment and the best explored the language and narrative technique, showing awareness of how Austen lets the characters reveal themselves through their speech.

**Question 8** Who does Austen's writing persuade you is the villain of the novel – and why?

Most answers to this question chose Isabella Thorpe as their 'villain', and many tried to use the passage for **question 7** as part of their justification. There was much narrative in such answers. Better answers offered a definition of 'villain', argued a case, and directed their material appropriately. The most popular choices were General Tilney and John Thorpe, of course. There were some wide-ranging responses that evaluated one character against another and used apt detail from the text to support the argument. Disappointingly few candidates explored how the narrative technique revealed the villainy.

### TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

**Question 9** Explore the ways in which Dangarembga makes this a memorable and significant moment in the novel.

There was a wide range in quality of responses to this question. Although there were many good answers, there were also many in which it seemed that candidates could not resist the temptation to write at length about education, emancipation of women, marriage, racism etc missing the point of the question – how the passage was memorable and significant. Only the most successful answers dealt with both strands. The context was particularly important in assessing the memorable and significant aspects of Maiguru's behaviour in the second half of this extract. Many candidates did respond to the surprising nature of this, but few made enough of its significance. Strong candidates were able to discuss the societal/ political issues revealed by her willingness to speak up at last and to contradict Babamukuru, and by her words about the perception and treatment of women. Additionally, strong candidates were also able to discuss the writing as prose, focussing on characterisation and aspects of the setting. Really perceptive candidates thought, for instance, to comment on "“You do!” exclaimed Babamukuru and recovering himself, invited her to continue' or 'Babamukuru cleared his throat. “Er, Tambudzai,” he asked tentatively, “do you have anything to say?”" in order to show how Babmukuru is deflated. Tambu's viewpoint was important here too and only the best answers made much comment on it. Engagement with the writing itself is what differentiated the good answers from the competent or basic responses.

**Question 10** To what extent does Dangarembga's writing make you feel that Tambu loses something of value by trying to gain an education?

Better answers were able to argue that Tambu loses part of her cultural identity and family values, though only a handful of answers were illustrated with sufficient close textual reference. Often when illustrating the life and family she was seen to be leaving behind, one was left with the impression that she would have been a fool not to. Hence the argument was not totally convincing. Few candidates argued that she loses nothing of value, but the question was probably best answered with a balanced response to 'to what extent?' and offering a good range of material to be explored.

### ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

**Question 11** What does Desai's writing make you feel about Mama and Papa at this moment in the novel?

A popular text and a popular question. The question asks for a direct personal response and there was often a surprising lack of focus on the key words 'make you feel about'. There may have been some misreading in that candidates wrote about Mama and Papa's feelings rather than their own. Candidates who began to see Mama and Papa's selfishness, and favouritism of Aruna, their complacency about the way in which Aruna behaves and their use of Uma as an unpaid servant were on the right track, but too often candidates did not

focus fully on Mama and Papa and digressed into discussion of Uma and her general relationship with her parents. In fact, this question often elicited responses which were barely rooted in the passage itself. Very few got down to the necessary level of analysis of the language of the passage to answer the question in real detail. Too many of the responses here were general overviews of the 'Mamapapa' figure of elsewhere in the novel, the result of the inability to focus on the detail of the passage itself mentioned above.

**Question 12** How does Desai's writing make Anamika so memorable and significant in the novel?

Most candidates knew a good deal about Anamika and gave details of this character. Many answers, however, just provided a narrative of her life and did not direct the material fully enough towards the terms of the question. Much was implied, little was explicitly addressed. Better answers focused on the key words of the question: 'memorable' and 'significant', and treated these as separate terms not a sort of composite label. Most of what we learn of her is memorable, but candidates needed to argue this. What made her a significant character was often just reduced to a very general comment on the status of daughters in Indian culture – relevant, of course, but under-explored to the point of becoming almost a 'shorthand' response.

**HELEN DUNMORE: *The Siege***

**Question 13** How does Dunmore vividly convey Mikhael's thoughts and feelings to you at this moment in the novel?

This was a less widely studied text than the other prose texts and so it is difficult to make detailed comments on the questions, but the few answers seen did trace through the passage and at least offered some relevantly selected quotations from it. The problem these responses encountered was in answering the question 'how?' and addressing the term 'vividly'. To answer this question candidates really needed to analyse the writing as fully as possible, and few were either willing or able enough to do so. There was also a notable lack of knowledge of the context, so the suspicion arose that many had approached the passage as an 'Unseen'. Hence there were many responses which offered relevant comments, or just began to develop relevant personal response, rather than offering even reasonably developed material. There is some extremely vivid description of Mikhael's physical state, his dream and of the effect of the phosphorous bombs, and these were usually under-explored. Most were able to see some fear within Mikhail's thoughts, though they were unable to show how the language conveyed the intensity of his feelings. The vividness of the dream was overlooked as was the use of power words like fire. The language use of short sentence repetition at the end was not mentioned by anyone.

**Question 14** What does Dunmore's writing make you feel about the way the Russian Government affects the lives of two of the following characters in *The Siege*? Elizaveta Antonovna, Fedya, Marina Petrovna.

There were so few responses to this question that it is not possible to make meaningful comment.

**GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner***

**Question 15** In what ways does Eliot make this such a striking and significant moment in the novel?

This was a popular question. Few candidates really knew how to respond to the term 'striking' in this context, though most were comfortable tackling the significance of the moment. Most were able to see it as a turning point in the lives of Godfrey and of Silas, though the implications could have been explored much more fully in most cases: very few indeed were clear on the link between this episode and the time sixteen years later when Godfrey gets round to trying to re-claim Eppie. The 'striking' features were handled poorly because candidates were unable to explore the language of presentation here. It was very rare to find a candidate paying attention to the description of the child, for instance, and the pathos in the writing describing the 'connection' between Eppie and Silas at this moment.

**Question 16** How does Eliot vividly portray Silas's loneliness before Eppie comes into his life?

This question required candidates to analyse well-selected detail from relevant moments early in the text. Unfortunately, very many candidates were only able to offer a general narrative overview of some of some relevant incidents, which led to Silas becoming the reclusive figure he seems to be later in the story. Hence there was some knowledge and understanding evident, but little material which attempted to answer how the 'vivid' portrayal is achieved. Loneliness was asserted, and sometimes convincingly argued, but the 'how' of the question was almost always left to the situation Silas is placed in, not explored through the language Eliot employs. A few better answers were able to mention the striking image of the spider, and made some elaboration on Silas's relationship with his gold, for instance, but these were the exception. There were

surprisingly few allusions to the way in which the villagers treat him with suspicion largely because of his cataleptic moments. Quite a number ran out of material very quickly and moved on to describe Silas's life with Eppie.

### **SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle***

**Question 17** How does Hill's writing make you feel at this moment in the novel?

Some candidates did not read this question carefully enough and tried to offer feelings that the characters experienced in the passage. Generally, however, candidates responded to the question set, though feelings were often very general, and sometimes opinions rather than emotional responses. Good answers looked closely at the passage and responded to the fact that Kingshaw was, in this situation, in the ascendancy; seemingly feeling free and more in control. Hooper was, by comparison, more fearful and less comfortable – a matter of much rejoicing for the majority of readers. What distinguished good answers was the range of material that was considered, the response to Kingshaw's moments of comparative dominance, and – often – the comparison between this and similar moments in *Hang Wood*. Best answers were always willing to explore the language of the passage in presenting this episode.

**Question 18** How does Hill's writing powerfully show that Kingshaw is an easy target for Hooper's tormenting?

This question invites an analysis of Kingshaw's character, but too often candidates focused on Hooper instead of Kingshaw. Candidates seemed to find it difficult to home in on the wealth of material which illustrates Kingshaw's sensitivity and susceptibility to bullying, and instead focused on Hooper's dominance. Answers were not properly focused on the idea of an 'easy target', and this limited the effectiveness of response to the terms of the question set. Once again there were quite a few instances of candidates attempting to answer this question using the passage connected with **question 17**, and this made it almost impossible for them to do themselves justice on this question.

### **ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

**Question 19** How does Stevenson make this moment in the novel so tense?

Candidates often handled this question well. A good answer needed to focus on the language of the passage, and many candidates got off to a good start by examining the normally quiet Poole's exclamation in the first line of the extract. Close analysis of the passage characterised all of the better answers to this question, and the more detail and intelligent inferences that were made from the exploration of this the more effective the answers became. Weaker answers confined themselves largely to the situation described, but even these sometimes referred to the nervousness and anxiety of the characters here, and sometimes to the language which made this obvious. Weakest answers tended just to re-tell the extract and imply that it was tense from the description of the action.

**Question 20** Explore one moment in the novel where Stevenson's writing makes you feel particularly shocked.

This was a much less popular question on this text, and candidates who offered it often struggled to supply sufficient detail of the 'moment' they selected. They usually merely re-told an incident saying they were shocked by it, without tackling why this was the case. What, in effect, was missing was the 'exploration' of the incident that the question demands. A few good answers looked very closely at the way their chosen moment was presented by Stevenson.

### **from *Stories of Ourselves***

**Question 21** How does Lurie make the narrator such a likeable character here? (*My Greatest Ambition*)

Quite a number of candidates answered this question, and many found the narrator amusing rather than likeable. Clearly there is some overlap here, but more careful direction of the material they chose would have improved their responses and enabled them to develop them much more thoroughly. Very few answers considered the tone of the passage – the voice of the narrator – and this had a slightly limiting effect on the overall quality of response. Generally, however, most candidates were able to find something to respond to in this character, though the narrow range of quoted detail was often a discriminating factor in their ability to develop relevant responses. A few weak answers merely re-told or paraphrased the passage.

**Question 22** Explore the ways in which Graham Greene makes the story *The Destructors* both disturbing and amusing for you.

Candidates answering this question found it difficult to respond convincingly to the ‘amusing’ nature of the story, and though almost universally those answering claimed they found it both disturbing and amusing, they never really managed to show what was amusing and why they found it so. Most were able to find the systematic destruction of a listed building by a bunch of young children quite disturbing, though efforts to show why they were doing this often took over the entire answer and psychology was often asserted totally without argument. It was all to do with the war which had just ended. Fair knowledge of the story was frequently displayed, and some relevant detail was often included, but few answers were able to offer much of a response to the way Greene presents the story which itself is key to making it both amusing and disturbing.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 2010/13**  
**Poetry and Prose 13**

## Key Messages

In order to do well in this subject, candidates should be discouraged from:

- writing long introductions explaining what they are going to do, or summarising the whole of their answer in advance
- writing long conclusions repeating what has already been said
- giving a great deal of unneeded biographical information
- commenting on how the use of commas and colons adds to the mood and tone of a poem
- commenting on rhyme schemes and verse forms without relating them to the question
- using the passage in the passage-based questions to answer the discursive question on a text
- over-reliance on using terminology rather than focusing on explaining the effect of the language.

And most significantly:

- treating a poem or passage as an Unseen exercise.

Success will come from:

- a relevant and carefully argued response to the question
- detailed knowledge supporting the points made
- careful commentary on the writer's choice of words and on the effects created
- an individual and perceptive personal response.

## General Comments

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There was much admirable work from all parts of the world and it is a constant pleasure to read the scripts of candidates who clearly love the subject and engage with their set texts. The best answers were full of well supported personal responses to the questions set, and showed sensitivity to the writers' methods and intentions.

When candidates performed less well, it was usually because they had not adhered closely enough to the terms of the question. Candidates still do not spend enough time on identifying the key words of the question and tailoring their knowledge and understanding to these words. In fact, many of them do not appear to plan their answers before embarking on them. More successful responses make relevant selections from extracts and poems in answering the question, rather than slavishly working through the text methodically in order.



These stronger responses can, as it were, see the wood for the trees and shape more carefully-crafted arguments with pertinent textual support. Their responses keep the question clearly in focus throughout.

In the poetry section many candidates wrote down everything they had been taught about the poem rather than selecting relevant material to form a coherent response to the question. So many times it was obvious that the intensifiers in the question, the words such as 'vividly', 'dramatically', 'memorably', had been ignored because there was no response to the quality of the writing. All questions offer the opportunity to address AO 3 'recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure and form to create and shape meanings and effects', and without an attempt to engage with the writing answers will not reach the higher Bands. The most successful poetry answers explored the precise effects of words and sounds in poems. A close appreciation was, by contrast, not demonstrated by listing a number of quotations and adding only a general comment that the words are vivid or powerful. Listing key words and labelling them a 'semantic field' is in itself description and not analysis. Literary terms can be useful in making concise reference to aspects of the writing, but they *serve* the analysis and do not constitute the analysis itself. Less successful responses often worked through an extract or a poem logging literary devices in an explanatory fashion: e.g. 'This metaphor means...'; 'The poem has an ababab rhyme scheme...'

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## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **SECTION A: POETRY**

#### **THOMAS HARDY: from *Selected Poems***

##### **Question 1**

Most responses to *On the Departure Platform* showed an understanding of the surface aspects of the poem: the departure of the speaker's loved one and his sadness as she walks further and further away from him down the platform. Stronger responses explored the symbolism of the barrier, the effects of the visual descriptions, in particular, the images of darkness and lightness ('but a spot', 'lamplight's fitful glowers', 'nebulous white'). Only the strongest responses considered the sense of vanishing emotionally as well as physically and the nostalgia in 'But never as then'.

The strongest responses to the relatively long poem *The Going* were able to select relevant material judiciously, whereas less successful responses adopted an explanatory approach as they worked their way through the poem stanza by stanza with sometimes scant regard to the actual question. The strongest responses traced the journey of the speaker from his feelings of anger and shock at his loved one's dying to his memories of when they were at their happiest, finishing with his regrets and sense of despair.

##### **Question 2**

The most successful responses engaged sensitively with the ways in Hardy conveys the speaker's loneliness and grief. They explored perceptively the contrast between the present and past, considering the effects of his fond memories of the early days of the relationship. Some candidates wrote eloquently about how moved they were by the use of direct address to the dead partner and the sense of age and feebleness conveyed in the poem's final lines. There was evidence in a number of responses that background autobiographical material got in the way of fresh and personal responses, with points glossed and asserted rather than the poetry explored.

## **Poems Deep and Dangerous**

### **Question 3**

The most successful responses showed a clear engagement with the poem's ideas and explored the striking effects of the imagery Arnold deploys in *To Marguerite*. They were particularly effective in writing about the comparison of humans to islands, and to the image of once united continents being kept apart. They analysed the effects created by the depiction of the sea as having an 'enclasp' and being 'unplumb'd, salt, estranging'. They considered the impact of the fire of longing being cooled as soon as kindled. Less successful responses adopted an explanatory and assertive approach to the supposed meanings of the poem as they worked through line by line, occasionally logging similes and metaphors. The weakest responses offered paraphrase and did not address the question's key words.

### **Question 4**

The strongest responses conveyed a genuine enjoyment at Mitchell's whimsical tone in capturing the individual and diversity of people. These responses were alert to the final stanza's perhaps surprising assertion, in view of the speaker's detailed description of people, that they elude definition. Most candidates were at least able to explore the effects of the personification of the stomach, the comparison of eyes to birds, the list of scents or the similes relating to taste. Less successful responses worked through the poem explaining features rather than exploring specific effects, which resulted in comment at a surface level only.

## **Songs of Ourselves: from Part 4**

### **Question 5**

This was a very popular question. The most successful answers recognised the three distinctive sections of the poem: the appearance and predatory instincts of the pike; the gruesome incident with the captive fish; and the speaker's memory of fishing fifty years earlier. By providing an overview of this kind, these candidates were better able to select relevant material that charted the growing sense of awe and fear as the poem progresses. There was much evidence of close exploration of the effects of particular words such as 'tigering', 'killers', 'malevolent' and 'horror', and candidates enjoyed analysing the more gruesome imagery. Occasional interpretations compared the malevolence of the pike with that of humankind, though these points were sometimes asserted as fact rather than substantiated by close reference to the detail of the poem. The least successful responses worked exhaustively through the poem, summarising content rather than exploring Hughes' poetic techniques in creating feelings of fear. Others chose lines from the poem in a random fashion in responses that lacked coherence. Quite a few responses were unselective and did not get round to exploring material in the later stanzas of the poem.

### **Question 6**

The strongest responses to this popular question explored the peculiarity of the similes in the first stanza, the lavishness of the language in the second stanza and the extravagance of the instructions given. These responses were alert to the possibility that the poem was open to alternative interpretations. By contrast, a number of responses worked slavishly from biographical knowledge of Rossetti's life, and made each line and image a clue to be solved in relation to a rigid religious interpretation that excluded any other. Indeed, less successful responses tended to gloss, explain and assert rather than explore how Rossetti uses words and images strikingly. Comments sometimes read as regurgitated footnotes to the poem rather than truly personal responses to Rossetti's writing.

## **SECTION B: PROSE**

### **JANE AUSTEN: *Northanger Abbey***

### **Question 7**

Examiners did not see many responses to this question. In the ones seen there was generally a sound understanding of how Austen reveals Catherine's innocence and sense of morality, and Henry's tactful kindness in dealing with Catherine's close questioning and not revealing his true opinion of Isabella, whilst being as honest as he can in the circumstances. Whereas some saw Henry's solicitousness, others saw condescension. Candidates would have benefitted from making better use of the dialogue in the passage to substantiate their points with greater analysis of the language, thereby noting Austen's use of irony.

### Question 8

There were too few responses to make worthwhile comment.

### TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: *Nervous Conditions*

#### Question 9

Most responses demonstrated an awareness of the context of the extract, namely that the women, who were not present at the start of the *dare*, have just interrupted proceedings. Most found Takesure's fecklessness and cowardice a source of entertainment, expressing the view that he damages his case by exaggerating Lucia's powers. The latter's partly-suppressed amusement was also found entertaining. The most successful responses commented on how the details of the extract revealed the unequal relationship between the sexes, exploring in particular the interchange between Maiguru and Babamukuru. Her obedience, albeit reluctantly given, is bound up with Babamukuru's concern with how others might perceive his ability to control his wife. This is especially poignant as he is there to preside over a meeting about an 'immodest woman' who will not do as she is told. Essays were most convincing where they related ideas about patriarchy to the specific details found in the extract.

#### Question 10

There were only a few responses to this question. Responses made reference to Chido's attempts to mediate between Nyasha and their father, with specific mention of the events during and after the dance when Nyasha and her father come to blows. Only the strongest of these responses explored in detail the extent to which Dangarembga's writing portrayed Chido as a loveable character.

### ANITA DESAI: *Fasting, Feasting*

#### Question 11

There were many successful responses which addressed the question's key word 'disturbing' directly, by exploring what the extract reveals about Anamika and her unhappy marriage to an ugly, insufferably arrogant bridegroom who was not appreciative of her looks, intelligence and kind nature. Candidates' greatest fury was reserved for the mother-in-law who kept Anamika as little more than a servant dining on whatever was scoured from the pans she cooked with. There was genuine sadness that this match was made for mercenary reasons, and not for love, and anger that a suspicious death goes unremarked because it takes place within the family behind closed doors and concerns a woman. Less successful responses were those which were a paraphrase of the passage, and also moved on to discuss events outside the passage at the expense of analysing what was before them.

#### Question 12

The strongest responses explored the detail of Desai's portrayal of Arun in the United States: a portrait of a young man out of his element and temperamentally unsuited to life with the USA. He is bewildered by its customs and the emphasis on consumption; depicted in different ways in relation to the different members of the Patton family, who have various 'issues' with food. Some referred to Mr Patton's derisive words about Arun's vegetarianism. Some stronger responses linked Arun's cripplingly withdrawn behaviour and lack of emotional development to his upbringing under the relentless pressure from his father.

### HELEN DUNMORE: *The Siege*

#### Question 13

The most successful responses pointed out how this extract from a story by Mikhail relatively early in the novel prepares us for the depiction of the devastating effects of hunger and winter on the people of Leningrad later in the novel. The most successful responses sustained critical analysis of the writing, in particular the personification of the boastful General Hunger and his powerful descriptions of the physical and mental effects of hunger on young and old. The tone of the extract is disturbing in its sheer lack of humanity. These strong responses explored in detail the effects of the use of repetition and similes characteristic of the fairy tale genre. Less successful responses tended to explain rather than explore the effects of language features. The least successful responses showed only a rudimentary grasp of the

content, sometimes offering a literal interpretation of General Hunger, which gave the impression of the extract being read as an unseen text.

#### Question 14

There were a few responses to this question which took the line that the women in the novel were more admirable than the men. Contrast was made between Anna and her father: the former selfless, tenacious and able to work for survival; the latter self-centred and needing others to help him survive. Some stronger responses made a powerful case for the increasingly admirable qualities of Marina as the novel progresses.

#### GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

#### Question 15

Most responses were able to offer overviews of the content of the extract, a turning-point in the novel, which movingly reveals the contrast between the introverted and selfish old Silas and the outgoing and generous-hearted new Silas. The strongest responses selected references from the extract judiciously in order to support their argument, whereas less successful responses tended to work through the passage exhaustively, explaining the content. The most successful responses explored Eliot's use of natural imagery, the comparisons made between Eppie and gold, and Eppie's role in leading Eppie back into the community and religion. Better answers recognised the choice of natural, colourful and vibrant images in the second paragraph as a direct counterbalance to the darkness, both physical and metaphorical, in which he had lived for so many years. Weaker responses lacked detailed reference to the passage and critical analysis of Eliot's use of language.

#### Question 16

There were too few responses to this question to make worthwhile comment.

#### SUSAN HILL: *I'm the King of the Castle*

#### Question 17

Stronger responses referred to the gothic elements in the writing with its initial short, urgent sentences and the establishment of a hostile setting. In addition, many recognised the power of the narrative stance in enabling the terror felt by Kingshaw to transfer directly to the reader. There was detailed exploration of the effects of the unexplained noises in the dark and Kingshaw's immobility when he puts the light on. Most responses grasped the immediate context that Hooper has witnessed Kingshaw's terror at the attack by the crow, and is using this to torment him by placing a stuffed crow on his bed. Some answers sacrificed the opportunity to examine language in close detail in favour of writing more generally about the foreshadowing aspects of the passage, with the specific incident placed into a sequence of events leading up to Kingshaw's suicide. In addition, some weaker answers focused on only few select paragraphs, thereby sacrificing the opportunity to show understanding of a developing narrative.

#### Question 18

Most responses condemned both Mr Hooper and Mrs Kingshaw for their selfish inability to appreciate what is going on between the boys. Some admired Mr Hooper to an extent for his willingness to take on the care and upkeep of an eleven-year-old boy, and for an apparent desire to do the right thing. But this admiration quickly evaporated with the slap he gives Kingshaw. Mrs Kingshaw was generally regarded as without any merit, many seeing a mother ruled only by her self-interest and having no motherly instincts towards her son. Some responses offered Mrs Fielding as a model mother in comparison with Mrs Kingshaw.

#### ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

#### Question 19

The most successful responses commented on the insincerity of Jekyll's appeal to Lanyon's friendship, and referred to the manipulative nature of this and other aspects of the letter. These stronger answers recognised the effect that his grovelling had upon the reader's perception of Jekyll as a character and grasped the full extent of his diminished stature. Most responses showed a sound understanding of Jekyll's insistence on the

urgency of the mission and its timing; they explored the use of listing, imperatives, repetition and the detail of the instructions in conveying Jekyll's overwhelming desperation.

### Question 20

The strongest responses explored in some detail the dramatic stages of the plot: Poole's arrival at Utterson's; the servants' behaviour on their arrival at Jekyll's; the slow build-up to the breaking down of the door; Hyde's suicide; the search for Jekyll and failure to find him; and the discovery of the letters. Whereas less successful responses covered this territory by describing or explaining the plot, better responses explored the writer at work, responding in detail to the key words of the question: 'Explore the ways in which Stevenson...'. They explored the dramatic action, especially the fetching of the axe, the positioning of the servants and bashing the door down. They considered too the dramatic realisation of both Poole's and Utterson's fears and suspicions, the vivid descriptions of Hyde's behaviour and death, and the implications of what remains unsolved. Some candidates limited their performance by using only the extract for **Question 19** as a source for their answer. This misguided approach meant that they covered only a narrow territory and demonstrated little knowledge of the key moment in the novel indicated in **Question 20**.

from *Stories of Ourselves*

### Question 21

The strongest responses engaged perceptively with the detail of Soueif's narrative method, showing a real sympathy for the narrator and what made the extract so moving. They were able to contextualise the extract, noting its position near the beginning of the story and providing some indication of future events in the story. There was much detailed exploration of the juxtaposing of the narrator's past and present life, the intensity of love for the man in the earlier stages of their relationship and her failed efforts to integrate with his society. The strongest responses explored the use of symbolism. Less successful responses tended to describe and explain the content, often without an awareness of what happens elsewhere in the story. Such awareness would be important in any account of what made this particular extract so moving.

### Question 22

Those who chose the son in *The Son's Veto* demonstrated a sound understanding of the son's selfishness in thinking only of his own position in society and provided suitable textual reference for support. The most successful responses recognised the irony of having a Christian minister who is so unkind, cruel and unfeeling to the person who is supposed to be the closest to him in the whole world. Others pointed out his unforgiving stare at Sam at the funeral as evidence of the power of class snobbery which hardens his heart irrevocably and diminishes him as a person. His mother's willingness to accede to his wishes amounts to fear; he has totally destroyed her self-confidence and ruins her life as a result.

*Her First Ball* responses were generally less successful. Leila's wide-eyed innocence and excitement were recognised, though sometimes recounted in an overly narrative fashion without explicit reference to the key words of the question. The strongest responses commented on the ways in which Mansfield depicts the almost dream-like haze through which Leila experiences her arrival at the ball, referring to the fairy-tale elements of the 'waltzing lamp-posts' and the 'satin shoes' which 'chased each other like birds'. Most responses showed a sound understanding of how earth-shattering the encounter with the fat man was for her. Better responses also noted her youthful resilience to the experience and her regained pleasure by the end of the ball which 'became one beautiful flying wheel'.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 2010/22

Drama 22

## Key messages

- Most answers would be improved by direct and accurate quotation from the set passage or text as a whole, in order to support the points made.
- Answers which avoid a narrative or descriptive approach and respond to the question are the most successful.
- Successful answers show awareness of the dramatist's methods and intentions.
- A detailed response to the drama genre was a feature of strong answers.
- Some candidates are not paying sufficient attention to the language the writers use. This is preventing a high level of achievement.

## General comments

In answer to the passage-based questions, the simplest route to improvement would be for candidates to use brief, well-integrated direct quotations and then to comment on the effects the dramatist creates. There were many instances this session of candidates referring to five lines of text and leaving the Examiner to decide which of these were relevant. Successful candidates read the question carefully and thought about its implications. They did not use the passage to tell the story of the play or as a peg on which to hang an answer to a question from a previous session.

Answering a question by referring almost solely to stage directions was a prevalent feature this session. Whereas some responses made effective use of the directions as having implications for an actor's interpretation of a role or movement and expression on stage, others wrote as if an audience can read the directions and be affected by them. Such responses often ignored the content and context of the dialogue, where the dramatic impact is inevitably the greatest. Some responses were limited by a description or explanation of the passage rather than an analysis of its impact and effects.

In answer to the discursive questions, candidates would benefit from learning quotations from the play as a whole. Often sound and developed arguments were restricted by lack of close textual reference in support.

The strongest responses gave a clear line of argument, used a wide range of material, avoided using the passage in the previous question and refrained from re-telling the narrative. There were a few responses this session where candidates thought the discursive question related to the passage question. Candidates need to be clear that the two are entirely separate.

Responses which paid attention to key terms in the question, such as: 'strikingly... memorably... powerfully... entertaining', and considered the language, action and interaction in the drama achieved the best results.

The most useful introductions were those which focused attention immediately on the question and avoided lengthy context-setting, or giving historical background information. The time spent writing conclusions which merely re-iterated points already made could have been better used to give a wider range of ideas or more detailed analysis.

There is still a need for candidates to number their questions correctly. Some write no number at all, some write two numbers for one question. Candidates should also be reminded to spend the same amount of time on each question on Paper 22. The strongest issue with examination technique stemmed from a lack of focus on the question set.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Section A DRAMA**

#### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

##### **Question 1**

This was answered well when candidates commented on it as an 'introduction' to Kate and analysed 'striking' features such as her insistence that Larry is alive, her defensiveness over Ann's arrival, and the vividness and emotional power of her nightmare. Strong answers placed themselves in the position of an audience who have partial knowledge at this stage of the play and, therefore, find it odd that Kate is pleased at the memorial tree falling down. They then commented on how the seeds of the drama as a whole are sown for the audience in this passage. Less effective answers explained the scene and its retrospective context.

##### **Question 2**

This question was answered most successfully when candidates explored the impact of the relationship between Steve and George Deever on George himself, and subsequently on the play as a whole. Many answers were merely explanatory or narrative. The best looked at the powerful impact George's meeting with his father has had, as shown in the confrontation between George and the Keller family. There was also an exploration of the contrasting paths the George/Steve: Joe/Chris relationships take in the play and the themes of guilt, betrayal and justice embodied in this relationship. Weaker answers confused Steve and George.

#### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

##### **Question 3**

Many candidates showed a sophisticated awareness of Priestley's aims, and of the political ideas in the play. Some expressed these more effectively than others. Strong answers to this question selected the dramatic effects such as the Inspector's taking control, the power of his presence and language and the generational conflict which ensues on his departure. The dramatic effectiveness of his final speech, with attention to its imagery, featured in such answers but was ignored in less focused responses. Less successful approaches described the events or featured misconceptions, such as Eric not being regretful and Birling offering a bribe to the Inspector.

##### **Question 4**

Approaches to this question were varied, with some looking at Eva's portrayal via her encounters with the Birlings and Gerald and their descriptions of her. Others looked at how Priestley makes her the Centre of attention and a symbolic representative of the oppressed working class, her non-appearance made effective by the supernatural intervention of the Inspector championing her cause. These approaches gave candidates more scope than one which narrated the other characters' involvement with her, without saying much about Eva herself or considering Priestley's artistic decisions.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

##### **Question 5**

There were a wide range of responses to this question, and a tendency to use the passage as a consideration of Shylock as victim or villain in the play as a whole. Those who avoided repeating inappropriately a question from a previous session fared better. The best answers understood that the question asks about the candidate's mixed feelings, not Shylock's, remembered that this is the audience's first encounter with him, scrutinised the passage carefully, understood that Shylock qualifies 'good man' to mean financially 'sufficient', and could see that his accepting a risky deal hints at an ulterior motive, amplified by his asides and comments on eating with Christians. There were effective, sophisticated and exploratory readings but also answers which narrated subsequent events, wrote extensively about the 'pound of flesh', which occurs after the passage, and ignored the question altogether.

### Question 6

The strongest responses ranged widely across the various examples of 'false appearances' in the play and looked at their significance, rather than merely observing them. Discrimination sprang from the convincing nature of the argument and the candidates' ability to provide precise evidence. Some took this as an opportunity to write about Shylock as victim and Antonio as villain, which though valid and ably executed by some, often tended to cover familiar ground without really engaging with the appearance/reality theme. There were some surprising misunderstandings of 'false appearances' as meaning minor characters, and some candidates retold the events of the casket choosing without relating this to the question. Many chose Portia's disguise in the trial scene and its significance in freeing Antonio, but often without being able to refer to the text in any detail.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

### Question 7

Effective answers looked at the comic syntactic confusion of Quince's speech, the aristocratic response to it, the amateur nature of the Mechanicals' approach to drama, Bottom's breaking of the fourth wall and the comedy of walls with moving parts and lions who may speak. Less effective approaches wrote in a general way about the lovers' chaos being over, wedding preparations and the play within a play idea being entertaining in itself, thus avoiding much close contact with the passage.

### Question 8

Much consideration was given to the idea of male dominance and candidates found many similarities in Theseus and Oberon's treatment of their wives, interference with the lovers and putting things to rights at the end of the play. Attention to the striking nature of Shakespeare's portrayal of the two characters was the discriminating factor here. Weaker answers were hampered by an inability to refer to episodes such as Theseus's judgement of Egeus's case for Hermia's marriage to Demetrius in any detail.

#### **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest***

### Question 9

Answers which understood the striking difference between Gonzalo's reaction to the shipwreck and the island, and the behaviour and responses of Antonio and Sebastian, fared well. Such responses also registered Alonso's grief and his own brother's lack of compassion. The contrasting responses to nature were explored and the significance understood. Less confident answers had difficulty identifying who said what in the dialogue, did not distinguish between the characters or realise that Sebastian and Antonio were speaking 'aside', wrote as if the men were all behaving in the same way, and confused Antonio and Alonso.

### Question 10

Most candidates could relate many examples of good overcoming evil in the play, but sophisticated answers either demonstrated an overview of the repentance/forgiveness theme or explored Prospero's overcoming of his desire for revenge. Knowledge of the plot was strong, but fewer candidates really engaged with the vividness of episodes such as the tempest itself, the banquet/harpy scene, and the comically unsuccessful Stephano/Trinculo/Caliban plot to kill Prospero. There was a tendency to treat the play as a novel rather than to place any emphasis on the vivid 'masque' effects Shakespeare uses. The most sophisticated answers questioned the degree to which good does overcome evil, especially with reference to Caliban and Antonio and Sebastian.

#### **OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest***

### Question 11

Candidates managed to focus far more successfully on the entertainment factor in Wilde's play this session. Strong answers were aware of the context and situational irony, enjoyed Jack's melodramatic performance of grief, were amused by Miss Prism's absurdly unsympathetic and paradoxical statements and Dr Chasuble's sermon for all seasons. They commented on the comedy surrounding the christening and knew that the dead 'Ernest' was just about to make an unexpected appearance. Answers which avoided generalised comments about Wilde's satire on Victorian values, with little reference to the passage, fared best.



## Question 12

This question was answered well when candidates noted the 'how far' element of the question and understood that Cecily was not totally sweet, simple or innocent, though she had some of these attributes.

A reference to Cecily's more assertive and acerbic moments at the tea party scene with Gwendolen with apt quotation featured in the best answers, and ample evidence, on the other side of the argument, given of her fantasy life, romantic obsession with 'Ernest', flower watering and familiarity with spades. Less successful responses had ideas but could not support them with close textual reference.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 2010/23

Drama 23

## Key Messages

- The strongest answers show awareness of the texts as drama scripts designed for performance.
- Most answers would be improved by closer textual reference, with direct quotation from the set passage or text as a whole to support the points made. Paraphrased reference is helpful but key quotations, used appropriately, will always lift the quality of an answer.
- Close and sustained attention to the wording of the question is a key feature of successful answers.
- Candidates need to focus more clearly on the language of the dialogue that the writers use. Excessive concentration on the wording of stage directions or on the writer's use of punctuation is generally unhelpful.

## General Comments

The best approach to extract-based questions is to establish the dramatic context quickly and then devote the bulk of the answer to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself – in the light of the question. Any whole-play reflections should be securely grounded in the detail of the extract.

The best answers to discursive questions focus rigorously on the terms of the question, address all the strands of the question, and range selectively across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments. Candidates who can weigh up competing arguments often prove to be the most successful.

A key feature of good answers is the selection of brief, well-integrated quotations to support and amplify ideas, accompanied by commentary on the effects created by the dramatist in these quotations.

Successful candidates see the texts as scripts for performance and themselves as members of an audience in order to visualise the onstage action and the staging, and respond to the evolving drama. Candidates are unlikely to engage fully with the drama if they regard themselves as “readers” only, and discuss stage directions as if they are merely tacked-on pieces of written communication. Too much speculation about the responses of different audiences (Elizabethan, Victorian, Post-WW2...) can obscure the candidate's own response.

The best introductory paragraphs focus on the terms of the question and on the particular text, and avoid unhelpful generalisations, biographical details or lists of techniques. The best conclusions avoid repetition and ensure that the question has been answered, often with the addition of a final, fresh idea.

The tendency to use labels (“capitalism...the American Dream...social responsibility...white magic...survivor guilt...satire...”) as if they speak for themselves and require no further exploration or supporting detail, proved unhelpful in many answers. The term “dramatic irony” was widely misapplied.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons***

#### **Question 1**

Successful candidates understood the climactic and pivotal nature of the scene, and often placed Chris's anguish in the context of his previously close relationship with his father and his faith in him. Close attention to the onstage action (the "*pursuit and escape*", the fist pounding, the stumbling, the weeping...) and to the powerful features of the dialogue (the interrogation, the repetition, the interruptions...) allowed candidates to convey the intensity of the emotions in the extract. Many engaged thoughtfully with the feelings of both characters and explored Joe's increasingly feeble attempts to deny the truth, in the face of Chris's fury and disillusion. The very best paid particular attention to Chris's only long speech, understood the impact of his own wartime experiences and identified the powerful contrast between the attitudes of son and father. The emphasis on Joe's loss of humanity in the description of him as an "animal" was often thoughtfully handled. Less successful candidates suggested that Chris is specifically blaming Joe for Larry's death at this point or that Chris has really known of Joe's guilt all along. There was a damaging tendency to launch into long thematic discussions of social responsibility or the American dream, and to lose contact with the extract, or to rely on feature-spotting and comments on punctuation divorced from the dramatic context.

#### **Question 2**

Candidates found much to say about Sue and Jim, if rather less about the Lubeys. Strong answers focused sharply on the dramatic function of these four characters, rather than drifting into story-telling or individual character studies. Jim's understanding of other characters, notably Joe, Chris, George and Kate, was often thoughtfully conveyed and his choric role sometimes suggested. The compromises he makes to earn money and the tensions in his marriage were sometimes cleverly related to the Kellers, and his admiration for Chris was particularly well handled. Sue's cynicism, dissatisfaction and materialistic values were also placed intelligently in the context of conflicts in the Keller family, particularly between Chris and his father, and her conversation with Ann proved a fruitful area for discussion. Frank was often seen as complicit in the maintenance of Kate's delusions about Larry, and all four seen as complicit in the neighbourhood's acceptance of Joe's guilt. The apparently contented and uncomplicated Lubeys were seen as the lucky ones who have escaped the damaging effects of the war, in contrast to the Kellers, to Ann and to Lydia's former admirer, George. Less successful candidates found the role of the Lubeys particularly hard to address and struggled to recollect helpful features like Frank's ill-timed arrival with Larry's horoscope chart, his good fortune in avoiding the draft, and Lydia's former relationship with George.

### **J.B. PRIESTLEY: *An Inspector Calls***

#### **Question 3**

Most candidates wrote confidently about the unsympathetic portrayal of Mr Birling in this extract and were able to link his smug indifference to the wellbeing of his employees to many of the play's significant issues, often building on the reference Eric makes to his rejection of the notion of "community". Although there was much focused comment on the rising tensions and the power struggle between Birling and the Inspector, candidates tended to focus rather too much on the play's themes, at the expense of close attention to the dramatic detail of the extract. The strongest answers brought out the effect of the Inspector's brief but challenging remarks and questions – on Birling, on Eric and on the audience. The best also looked in some detail at Eric's increasing willingness to confront his father and Gerald about their callous attitudes as employers, and at Birling's condescending treatment of his son. The irony in Birling's characterisation of Eva as a "good worker" was sometimes sensitively explored. Less successful answers tended to drift into unhelpfully generalised reflections on "capitalism" and "socialism", or into a narrative reworking of the "chain of events", and to lose contact with the extract.

#### **Question 4**

The best answers to this question demonstrated onstage conflict between Sheila and her mother by focusing in detail on two distinct moments. Particularly fruitful moments included: their different responses to Gerald's unexplained absence at "work"; Sheila's warnings to her mother about "beginning all wrong" with the Inspector; her demonstrations that she has greater knowledge of Eric and of Meggarty, and much greater sympathy for Eva despite her mother continuing to bully her and treat her like a child; and the many examples of her willingness to accept her guilt and to learn, in the face of her mother's arrogance and self-righteousness. Less successful candidates found specific moments of mother-daughter conflict hard to

identify and tended to offer contrasting character studies or a sweeping commentary on “generational differences”, rather than vivid dramatic detail. Some even focused on parts of the Inspector’s interrogation of Sheila when Mrs Birling is absent from the stage or simply lumped Mr and Mrs Birling together to demonstrate parental failings.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Merchant of Venice***

**Question 5**

Careful reading of the question was the key discriminator here. Many candidates wrote convincingly about the second (“friendship”) strand of the question but found little to say about their specific impressions of Bassanio and his feelings for Portia, almost as if they were ignoring the second page of the extract. Nevertheless, there were many strong answers which paid close attention to the language (like the arrow metaphor, the Jason allusion, the money references...) to reach interesting, and often convincingly critical, conclusions about Bassanio. Some candidates even pursued the implications of the word “prodigal”, to suggest that the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio is very much that of an errant son and an indulgent, forgiving father. Most candidates understood the trust and intimacy between the two men and saw the dangerous consequences of Antonio’s generosity very clearly, although some, relying rather more on their memory of productions they may have seen than on scrutiny of the extract, became bogged down in speculation about Antonio’s sexual preferences.

**Question 6**

The best answers to this question suggested a range of possible responses to Jessica and Lorenzo and grounded these responses firmly in the detail of the play. They were seen as young lovers, devoted to each other and risking all in a daring nocturnal elopement, bridging the religious divide and offering a romantic antidote to the play’s bigotry. Jessica was perceived as a thoroughly sympathetic character, driven to escape from her hellish home by a repressive father, charmingly embarrassed by her boyish disguise and unflinchingly kind to Launcelot. The romantically moonlit scene which Jessica and Lorenzo share in Act Five was often explored to demonstrate their love and intimacy. There were contradictory impressions, however, usually based on the theft of Shylock’s jewels and gold, and on Tubal’s reports of Jessica’s profligacy, and there were also reservations about Jessica’s readiness to convert to Christianity. Some candidates were unreservedly hostile to both characters, but tended to assert critical conclusions (that Lorenzo is using Jessica, that their relationship is flawed and unhappy, that they are only interested in money...) without convincing support, though some took their allusions to doomed couples and their teasing exchanges in Act Five as evidence that their own relationship is doomed. Some lost contact with the question and tried to re-work essays devoted to Shylock. The strongest answers suggested a balance of feelings and made use of well selected reference to the text.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream***

**Question 7**

Close attention to the language and to the shift in mood within the extract was a central feature of successful answers to this question. The liveliness and pace of Puck’s humorous report to Oberon and the ways in which the mechanicals’ panic and Titania’s deluded love are conveyed were often thoughtfully handled, with careful exploration of the impact of particular images and couplets. Hermia’s dramatically evolving moods – anxious, suicidal, threatening, wheedling – were traced in some detail, and the dramatic ironies of her complete faith in Lysander when we know him to be in pursuit of Helena (under the influence of hallucinogens) and of our knowledge that Puck has juiced the wrong Athenian, thoughtfully unpicked, along with the effect of the framing device involving us watching Oberon and Puck watching Hermia and Demetrius. The best selected and explored the effect of specific ironies (“The sun was not so true unto the day As he to me”), of Hermia’s Titania-style images of global disorder and of the bitter, violent exchanges between Hermia and Demetrius. Less successful candidates skimmed over Puck’s long speech as if humour and drama were thought to be mutually exclusive, and focused almost entirely on the final part of the extract. It was widely believed that Puck, not Oberon, had applied the juice to Titania’s eyes.

**Question 8**

Confident candidates were able to weigh up the “extent” of the question and to suggest that despite their suffering, Helena and Hermia do not embrace victim-status and fight for the happy endings that they both achieve, with Hermia in particular defying her father, her Duke and the law in the process. It was much more common, however, for candidates to simply accept that the women are hapless victims of their patriarchal

society and to select evidence accordingly. The opening scene provided a fruitful area to demonstrate Hermia's apparent powerlessness, and the humiliating rejections endured by Helena at the hands of Demetrius were also explored in some detail. Some thoughtful distinctions between the two women emerged and Helena was felt to be the more likely candidate for victimhood, given her desperate and unrequited love, her insecurities and her willingness to betray her childhood friend. Even her happy ending was thought to be illusory given that Demetrius is still well and truly juiced. Weaker answers drifted into narrative and summarised their misfortunes without answering the question directly

### ***WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: The Tempest***

#### **Question 9**

Some candidates took up the opportunity to feel sympathy for Caliban with such enthusiasm that they ignored all counter-arguments, and either minimised the significance of his attempted rape of Miranda or ignored it altogether. The most successful candidates addressed the "extent" of the question directly and shaped more balanced arguments by exploring the language used by all three characters onstage. There was much sympathy for Caliban based on the first half of the extract, and on Prospero's violent abuse of him and threats of torture. Caliban's loss of his mother, his claim to the island, his initial love and kindness towards Prospero and Miranda, his subsequent confinement, powerlessness and enslavement were all cited as strong grounds for sympathy, until the revelation of his attack on Miranda. Strong answers noted the tone of Caliban's unrepentant revelling in the fact of this attack. Less successful answers were distracted from the detail of the extract by lengthy and generalised reflections on ideas such as colonisation or nature/nurture, or simply sided with the underdog based on narrow and highly selective references to the text. Some insisted that Prospero has killed Sycorax as part of his usurpation plan.

#### **Question 10**

Many candidates concluded that Miranda is indeed "perfect and peerless" and produced convincing and well-supported arguments based on her initial kindness to Caliban, her concern for the shipwrecked mariners, her sincere and passionate love for Ferdinand, her beauty, her modesty, her good humour and her sense of filial duty. Confident candidates attributed the description to Ferdinand and addressed the "How far" of the question directly, occasionally making subtle suggestions that her naivety (in seeing the treacherous castaways as "goodly", for instance) makes her somewhat less than perfect, or that she appears particularly unforgiving in her dealings with Caliban or that she occasionally disobeys her father. Less successful candidates took the word "peerless" literally and spent large parts of their answer showing that Miranda has no friends, or got bogged down in a very narrow range of ideas and references. A small minority misread the question and thought that the quotation was Miranda's "view" of other characters.

### ***OSCAR WILDE: The Importance of Being Earnest***

#### **Question 11**

Most candidates conveyed a sound awareness of the context for this extract, and were able to explore the layers of dramatic irony and the misapprehensions under which Cecily and Gwendolen are labouring. The most confident candidates made clear distinctions between what we know and what the young ladies onstage know, and saw this as a major source of entertainment: that Algy and Jack have both pretended to be Ernest (and Jack might turn out to be an Ernest), that they are now pretending to be brothers (but will turn out to be brothers), the ladies have both been deceived but are, in fact, engaged to different men so have no grounds for their current disagreement... and so on. However, the very best answers declared themselves, not just in the understanding of the dramatic ironies, but in the attention they paid to the sources of humour in the dialogue itself. Detailed exploration of the humour in the forced politeness and suppressed anger, especially in the presence of Merriman, in the increasingly formal address terms, in the citing of diary evidence, in the subtle point-scoring and assertions of social and geographical superiority was the principal characteristic of very strong answers. Less successful candidates picked out quotations and described them as "funny" or "entertaining" but found it difficult to explain why, or drifted into generalisations about Wilde's satire on Victorian values.

## Question 12

The most successful candidates were able to maintain their focus not only on the relationship between Jack and Algy, but also on the sources of amusement for an audience. Jack's romantic devotion to Gwendolen was often effectively contrasted with Algy's initial cynicism about marriage, and the humorous similarity between Algy's "Bunburying" in the country and Jack's "Ernesting" in the town was thoughtfully explored. The sibling rivalry in the food-scoffing arguments and in their mutual mockery was explored, and the fact that they do turn out to be siblings noted as a final entertaining twist. The farcical elements of the relationship, like the timing of Algy's arrival in the country, posing as the fictional Ernest just after Jack has announced his demise, were less well handled, and some answers were undermined by the drift into narrative. There was a tendency to write separate character studies and to contrast them as if Algy is completely dissolute and untrustworthy, and Jack a model of probity.