

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/11
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Candidates need to allocate a set amount of time to: identify factors for writing; plan to write; write; check; correct.
- Candidates should adhere to the guidance of writing no more than 400 words for their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the actual task. Candidates should also adhere to the rubric of writing a minimum of 600 words for their **Section B** response.
- Candidates should look at the key instructions in the questions they answer. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the text for a 'blog entry', focusing on 'what you are looking forward to about the expedition' to a 'remote location' and creating a 'sense of anticipation'.
- Candidates should consider the following as part of the planning stage: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed *form* and *audience* as well as the most appropriate *voice* or persona to adopt, the *mood* and *tone* that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable *structure* to employ.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Often, weaker responses lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. Two errors that again occurred quite regularly were those of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops and of writing in sentence fragments rather than in complete sentences. Sentence construction and demarcation are key, followed by accurate use of commas, and then the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

Many candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and some candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, writing engaging blogs aimed at a wide variety of appropriate audiences. Traits of weaker responses were: mainly writing about how excited the writer was, without much specific detail about the expedition; accounts of the first day of the expedition; reports on the whole expedition.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who were able to maintain a close focus on their linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused entirely on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis, usually indirectly by outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (speech, review, or story), a clear focus on the question, and included appropriate stylistic conventions as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lost focus on what the task required. For example, some **Question 2** speeches only focused on one foreign language and many responses read more like an article than a speech. Some responses to **Question 3** were simple recounts of the cookery course and the dishes they made, needing more in the way of critique or personal evaluation of the course. Some **Question 4** stories were missing the required sense of drama and suspense and followed up the prescribed opening by going on to develop a largely unrelated narrative.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You are going to take part in a two-week expedition to a remote location, and you have decided to write a blog about it.

- (a) **Write the text for your first blog entry, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on what you are looking forward to about the expedition, and create a sense of anticipation.**

Most candidates understood the concept of a blog and used appropriate language and structural features. Most candidates wrote an introduction which included a greeting to the audience of their blog subscribers and a brief mention of the purpose of their first blog entry. Most responses were written in informal register with some use of teen and colloquial language. They created a sense of anticipation by using exclamation marks and mentioning specific activities such as discovering wild animals, plants and encounters with native inhabitants of remote islands.

Stronger responses demonstrated immediate engagement with features of a blog, including an appropriate start and finish. Many candidates opened their blogs with a direct address to their readers with phrases such as 'Dear readers'. Some of the stronger responses were set up as a travel blog right from the start with phrases such as, 'Hey fellow travellers'. They gave specific names of remote places like the Amazon rainforest, undiscovered islands in the Pacific or ice caves in Antarctica or the Arctic region and they provided descriptions of the remote destination based on research done before the expedition. This gave them a basis for what to look forward to during the trip, thereby creating a sense of anticipation, as required by the prompt. Stronger responses created immersive descriptions of the remote locations, constantly reinforcing a sense of anticipation and thereby contributing to the overall sense of purpose. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Being an island, Aruba possesses brilliant beaches that are always camera-ready. The sand is a fine white powder that tenderly cushions your toes; the gentle lapping of the waves on the shores is the ocean's invitation for a relaxing swim.'

In some of the most successful responses, candidates took the persona of a scientific expert, such as a biologist, botanist or geologist, who had received an invitation to join the special journey, thereby demonstrating a clear understanding of what an expedition is, as well as an awareness that the event had yet to take place. One strong example of this is seen here: 'There are a plethora of things that I'm looking forward to. It's the Arctic, after all! But what has gotten me giddy in particular over the last few days is the planned "Penguin Search" when we look for large penguin colonies and study how they survive in such a hostile climate. My undying love for these flightless birds motivates me the most to part from my family and head to the Arctic.'

Some stronger responses invited readers to participate, with comments such as, 'Let me know what you think in the comments below' and most also ended their blogs appropriately using phrases such as, 'This is Ava signing out' and 'Until the next post'.

Weaker responses mostly equated the two-week expedition to a holiday to relieve themselves from the stress of daily routine. The detail mentioned in the prompt about the location being 'remote' was also frequently overlooked, with some candidates writing about a vacation to places like Orlando, New York or Paris. The weakest responses often did not name the remote location, referring to it throughout as 'the place' or an unknown location and this was inevitably self-limiting. Other candidates wrote a retrospective account of the expedition and therefore overlooked an important element of the question focus. Use of the past tense for writing the blog had a significantly weakening effect on the overall impression created in quite a number of responses.

The use of the expressions 'I am very excited' and 'I can't wait' were commonly used in weaker responses to fulfil the required sense of anticipation. Blogs written in the form of one continuous block of text, without paragraphing, did little to define and elaborate on points raised. Some responses were more focused on the writer's narrative of packing and preparation for the trip, or their excitement at having a two-week vacation, and merely outlined activities typically available for tourists, such as swimming, ziplining or surfing. Other weaker responses did not address the prompt's detail that the expedition was to take place at a future date, providing a narrative recount of a trip they had already been on and not necessarily of an expedition in the conventional sense.

Many weaker responses were needing in the way of structure, very often without paragraph breaks. Many weaker responses were short, often under 200 words.

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

Most candidates started their commentaries with an introductory paragraph citing audience and purpose and most showed at least some linguistic knowledge, although quite often failed to get beyond simple identification of linguistic features.

Stronger responses maintained a close focus on the linguistic and stylistic choices made for writing the blog, as well as making use of appropriate terminology linked to effect. They identified some features in their writing, using correct linguistic terminology, then subsequently exemplified how and why they had been used to relate to the audience and achieve the intended purpose. For example, one candidate wrote: 'I juxtaposed my perspective of the busy journey there ("rammed overnight buses") with the calm that I hope to find when I arrive in "notoriously isolated" Norway. The opposing connotations of these phrases build a connection between me, as the writer, and my audience of travellers, many of whom enjoy the same sense of isolation.'

Another strong response also clearly connected the aim of using certain text features with the purpose of the text: 'I included a sub-heading "Conquering Antarctica" and a salutation, "LotsaLove, Lizzie." The alliterative qualities of the heading and salutation and the hard "c" consonance of "Conquering Antarctica" make them memorable. Alliteration and consonance have been used throughout the text, "sparse snowy landscapes" and "treacherous trails of tall mountains" for example. This gives the writing an element of musicality, allowing for it to be read with ease and fulfilling the purpose of entertainment.'

Some weaker responses identified a few basic language and structural features but stopped short of analysis. Some attempted analysis but used general phrases such as, 'This makes the reader want to read on' and, 'This makes the audience keep coming back for more.' Others used the vague phrase, 'it creates a picture in the reader's mind' when referencing imagery. The absence of linguistic terminology also negatively affected weaker responses' marks. Most comments in these were limited to the conventions of a blog and the language used without relating these to effects on the audience. Lower-level responses lacked exemplification; many weaker responses merely paraphrased the **1(a)** response or focused solely on structure, with little on language or form, or focused solely on language and gave no consideration to the structure of their text.

Some responses were extremely short and/or wrongly identified linguistic features. Some candidates wrote very little, sometimes just a few sentences.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Speech

You are going to take part in a debate at school about whether everyone should learn more foreign languages. Your headteacher has asked you to open the debate by giving a speech on the topic. Write the text for your speech, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most responses focused quite well on the benefits of learning another language, and frequently linked this to employment opportunities. A summary of the contents of the speech was usually provided in the conclusion, often with a call to action and a valediction to close.

Stronger responses were well planned and gave valid reasons for argument, supported by explanations and clear examples in each paragraph. A strong conclusion usually included a presentation of the strongest evidence of the correctness of the candidate's viewpoint, for example: 'Many people learn multiple foreign languages for different reasons. Personally, I am near fluent in Spanish and know basic phrases in French. This has allowed me to have many conversations I would not have been able to have in English.'

Some of the most convincing responses assumed a role, for example the President of the school's student union, or in one case, a foreign language teacher. Many opened their speeches effectively by engaging the audience, for example: 'Firstly, I'd like to ask you, the audience, whether you are a citizen of your country or do you believe you are a citizen of the world?' Engaging responses had sound, credible arguments. Some candidates focused on 'time allocation' in an already packed curriculum, arguing convincingly that with very modern software, aiding translation, the need to spend hours learning languages was not realistic. Other engaging responses included effective arguments as well as a clear knowledge of debating conventions. Some candidates introduced the implications of prioritising a new language over one's own, highlighting the 'ramifications of language death and culture.' Most cited the need for an understanding of languages in different cultures in a global setting.

Weaker responses tended to be repetitive in their justification for learning a foreign language. Some did not address the key point of the prompt that everyone should learn *more* foreign languages, and were confined to the benefits of knowing *one* foreign language to increase job opportunities, improve ease of communication when travelling abroad, and aid the establishment of friendships within a specific foreign community. Weaker responses sometimes repeated ideas rather than developing them, for example: 'It will help you to communicate with family members. Lots of family members will want to communicate with you.' Some were inundated with statistics to the point that the reader was overwhelmed, while others argued too strongly for one side over the other.

Question 3 – Review

You recently did a one-day cookery course for complete beginners. Write a review of the course, which will be published on a food website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many candidates produced quite effective reviews, although some misunderstood the task, for example by choosing to write a recipe for their favourite dish. In other cases, there was a misunderstanding of form and, instead of writing a review, candidates produced a diary entry or a narrative recount of the day.

Stronger responses were structured deliberately, often focusing on different aspects of the course in sections rather than following a chronological structure. Strong responses were well balanced, believable and informative throughout. The top responses used the purpose and audience of the task to their advantage, making asides to the audience in parenthesis throughout the review, for example: 'While this may be obvious to some of you, it was incredibly helpful for us novices and showed an understanding that not everyone on a food website would be a beginner cook.' Convincing answers created an authentic voice that passed judgement on each aspect rather than just narrating a sequence of events. These were well structured and the audience was engaged. One candidate wrote: 'The kitchen was state of the art: stainless steel worktops and stoves, industrial size ovens, copper pots and pans, a plethora of cooking utensils, many of which were alien to me, and a walk-in pantry and freezer. I was ready to cook!'

Many stronger responses used subheadings to define the places or activities done during the one-day course. This enabled these candidates to produce a coherent piece of writing. Focus on specific highlights of the course – such as kitchen hygiene and sanitation, cooking equipment, safety guidelines, specific recipes prepared and evaluation of the chef/instructor's expertise in each paragraph – made stronger responses describe the place, comment on the experience, and evaluate the learning in an organised manner.

Most stronger reviews concluded well, ending with a sentence or paragraph that gave further credibility to the review and the persona that had been adopted, as in this example: 'Despite my shocking lack of skill in the kitchen, the course proved to be fantastic. For me, the deciding factor was the fact that we could eat the food we cooked, which in my case was not so nice, but everyone else loved it. I would recommend "Growing Beans" in a heartbeat!' A clear recommendation and star rating were often included in the conclusion, along with a justification for the rating.

Weaker responses mainly focused on describing the place and detailing a step-by-step account of cooking the dishes without expressing personal views or evaluating the course itself. A list-like approach to the meals (which included starter, main and dessert, or sometimes breakfast, lunch and dinner), contributed to the failure of some candidates to reach the minimum number of words required. Some candidates took little note of the keywords 'cookery course' in the question prompt and wrote extensively about problems with finding the venue, parking at the venue, or other irrelevant details before addressing the culinary aspects. Such responses lacked the sense of a review for a food website, as in this example: 'It took me 90 minutes to drive to the location. When I arrived, there were a small group of people waiting outside. We had to wait 20 minutes for the chef to arrive. We then went inside to find our work stations.'

Question 4 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *Marc shouted as loudly as he possibly could, but the man did not hear him.* In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates attempted to adhere to the drama/suspense genre but with varying degrees of success; some candidates subverted the tone established in the opening sentence by writing long biographical details about the character Marc, such as his family, career, education, friendship group, even Marc's morning routine earlier that day. Inevitably, such responses were much less successful than those which maintained a close focus on the requirement for drama and suspense. In a commonly used narrative structure, responses began with the question prompt and immediately followed this with a flashback of the events that had led up to the given scenario.

Stronger responses continued the prompt with a vivid description of the elements of the scene, setting the atmosphere of both drama and suspense right from the start of the narrative, and making the piece both imaginable and engaging for the reader, for example: 'Marc shouted as loudly as he possibly could, but the man did not hear him. In the ferocious downpour, his voice was nothing but a whisper muffled by the heavy rain. Marc could hear his pulse singing loudly in his ears, and the vein in his forehead throbbing to the rhythm of his wide strides. He found himself sprinting, his sodden clothes sticking to his skin. The man's expression never faltered; he seemed calm, at ease, his eyes glued to an indefinite point on the dark horizon.' In another strong response, the candidate consistently sustained a powerful setting while building drama and suspense, culminating with a wronged son who sets out to avenge his father. As this candidate wrote: 'By the time the murderers kicked open the door leading to his study, Marc was already gone. All that remained in the room was a teardrop on the desk and a rose on top of the dead man.'

In some stronger responses, candidates interpreted the prompt creatively and with originality, for example, one candidate had Marc getting stuck in a grocery store after it closed, missing an important dinner, which effectively balanced humour and suspense. These responses also interpreted the 'man did not hear him' portion of the response in original ways, such as a fighter ignoring the taunts of an opponent; this response also made use of the countdown to fight throughout their response in order to create suspense and tension. In another story a post-apocalyptic scavenger called out to someone who they know is dead: 'Marc knew the man was dead, but kept shouting and shouting. When was someone going to be alive for once?'

Strong responses tended to focus on a smaller, more limited narrative arc in order to give more attention to establishing setting and character. Setting was often ominous and dark; more effective responses achieved this through imagery such as: 'behind the canopy of the forest, a storm seemed to be brewing, leeching the bright blue from the afternoon sky.' Additionally, showing the character's feelings, such as in 'the words leapt from my throat, worry coating each syllable like thick paint' and reactions rather than merely stating them is what separated the stronger responses from the rest.

Some of the weakest responses were limited to beginning the story as prescribed in the prompt then going on to develop a largely unrelated narrative. A crime, a ghost in a haunted mansion, a misadventure in a remote location and places where there is no help available were some of the common background stories provided to justify the use of the prompt line, which was sometimes written again at the end of the narrative.

In some weaker responses, candidates did not use paragraphs as tools to effectively create the required atmosphere of drama and suspense. Some weaker responses were incomplete, lacking a convincing ending.

Errors which hampered the effectiveness of many responses tended to be centred in grammatical frameworks, with a significant number of candidates making tense and sentence demarcation errors throughout their responses. Another common error was the sudden switching of narrative voice without intention; this frequently took the form of a third person to first person switch as the candidate became more involved in their story.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/12 Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Candidates need to allocate a set amount of time to: identify factors for writing; plan to write; write; check; correct.
- Candidates should adhere to the guidance of writing no more than 400 words for their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the actual task. Candidates should also adhere to the rubric of writing a minimum of 600 words for their **Section B** response.
- Candidates should look at the key instructions in the questions they answer. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the opening to a story about an 'answerphone message', creating a 'sense of drama and suspense'.
- Candidates should consider the following as part of the planning stage: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed *form* and *audience* as well as the most appropriate *voice* or persona to adopt, the *mood* and *tone* that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable *structure* to employ.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Often, weaker responses lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. Two errors that again occurred quite regularly were those of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops and of writing in sentence fragments rather than in complete sentences. Sentence construction and demarcation are key, followed by accurate use of commas, and then the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

Many candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and some candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, writing engaging story openings which successfully created drama and suspense, leaving the audience wanting to read on. Weaker responses often featured poor plot management, an absurd sequence of events, and/or little sense of trying to make the story engaging for an audience.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who were able to maintain a close focus on their linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused entirely on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis, usually indirectly by outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (speech, review, or story), a clear focus on the question, and included appropriate stylistic conventions as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lost focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were simple accounts of the holiday and the activities, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion about the holiday. Some **Question 3** descriptions focused too much on the journey to the building and its outside, while some **Question 4** emails lacked an appropriate tone and did not refer to any specific details from the article.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

Your teacher has asked you to write the opening of a story called *The Voice*, about an answerphone message that someone received from a complete stranger.

- (a) Write the text for the opening of your story, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense.**

In general, candidates managed the **Question 1(a)** task quite well, although some attempted to write a whole story rather than a story opening as prescribed in the question prompt. Effective planning by some candidates meant they created a sense of drama and suspense in their work.

Stronger responses showed an immediate engagement with the question by focusing attention on building drama and suspense, creating vivid settings and tense atmospheres, as seen in this extract: 'It is never a good look when thunder welcomes your arrival. The dark, cold and fearsome house stood in front of Mark. He lowered his glance from his phone up to the highest tower of the stone Edwardian house. It beckoned him to look straight at it, as if it demanded respect.'

'The Voice' aspect of the question should have been an important focus for candidates, both in terms of creating a voice for the protagonist and the 'voice' for the speaker on the answerphone message. Stronger responses excelled in this regard with some quite sinister openings being born out of a simple, but eerie setting. One candidate skilfully created a convincing, child-like voice for a young girl who picks up a message whilst she is all alone in her parents' home. Through carefully chosen lexis, the reader can discern that all is not well for the child. References to a 'dripping spot from the ceiling' and 'Mummy had stopped moving', coupled with the total innocence of the girl, made for a gripping read. The climax was achieved when the girl with her 'tiny fingers' heard the voice on the machine telling her she had 'been selected to play a game called Eternal Happiness'.

Many stronger responses ended their story openings with successful cliff-hangers, as in this extract: 'My heart sank for a second in a mix of confusion and fear, like a child lost in the dark. A chance? What could it mean? I pondered over the various possibilities of what could follow should I ever visit that address. As I went to bed, I thought, "What do I even have to lose? Who knows, maybe Fate is on my side."' Some stronger responses were written in shorter paragraphs and effective sentence fragments that gave the dramatic and suspenseful effect for the opening of the narrative. To quote one of these effective responses: 'Strange. He had just come home from his office job. No wife, no kids, no parents. He certainly didn't have any friends. Who would be sending him a voicemail? No one he could think of. There was no one.'

Weaker responses were written in narrative form but many were needing in terms of structure, very often without any paragraph breaks at all. Descriptions of scenarios that stretched to more than two

paragraphs in length and/or using extremely long sentences weakened the desired effects of drama and suspense. Many weaker story openings were short, often under 200 words.

In some weaker responses, candidates spent too long on exposition and only then introduced the answerphone idea, so that little drama was created for much of the narrative. Many responses did not maintain an appropriate tense, regularly switching from past to present and back again. Dialogue was frequently attempted, but appropriate punctuation and paragraphing was often lacking. Some candidates tried to impress by using adjectives, for example listing two for most nouns, and too many employed rather clichéd phrases, such as ‘raining cats and dogs’ and ‘rushing around like a headless chicken.’ Such attempts often produced the unintended effect of weakening the overall impression of the piece.

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

Most candidates started their commentaries with an introductory paragraph citing audience and purpose and most showed at least some linguistic knowledge. Quite often, responses stopped short at simple identification of linguistic features.

Stronger responses maintained a close focus on the linguistic and stylistic choices made for writing the story opening, as well as making use of appropriate terminology linked to effect. They identified features using correct linguistic terminology, then subsequently exemplified how and why they had been used to relate to the audience and achieve the intended purpose. For example, one candidate explained: ‘I have used the rule of three as “dark, cold and fearsome” to create a tone of foreboding atmosphere. This serves to introduce the audience to the aura of the setting which is not bright, modern and welcoming’.

Another strong response also clearly connected the aim of using certain text features with the purpose of the text: ‘Alliteration is used when describing the heatwaves as “shimmering and shaking”, which helps the reader picture the setting and the world around the characters as hazy and unclear. This sense of disorientation is clear even in the descriptions of the girl’s reaction, where she is unsure whether her “vision is blurry or her hands are shaking.”’

Some weaker responses identified some basic language and structural features but stopped short of analysis. Some candidates attempted analysis but used general phrases such as, ‘this makes the reader want to read on’ and, ‘this makes the audience interested’. Others used the vague phrase, ‘It creates a picture in the reader’s mind’ when referencing imagery. The absence of linguistic terminology also negatively affected marks for weaker responses. Many limited their comments to the structure of their story opening and the language used without relating these to their effects on the audience. Lower-level responses lacked exemplification; many weaker responses merely paraphrased the **Question 1(a)** response, or focused solely on structure with little on language or form, or focused solely on language without consideration to structure.

Some responses were extremely short and/or wrongly identified linguistic features. The weakest responses simply described or paraphrased the story opening, as in this example: ‘In this paragraph, the character of the main character was described. It can be proven from the sentence ‘I am usually a forgetful person’. It shows the character will react and respond to the upcoming problem.’ Some very weak responses were very short, sometimes just a few sentences.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

You have just returned from a one-week activity holiday for teenagers. Write a review of the holiday, which will be posted on a travel website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The most common scenarios given by candidates were about a camping trip, a stay in a resort, or a trip abroad.

Stronger reviews included detail about specific activities rather than extensive descriptions of accommodation, food, or the journey to the facility. They both narrated the activities done during the trip as well as effectively expressing personal opinion of the experience. The evaluation of the week-long events was essential for this review task, such as in this example: ‘Everyday we had a new activity to do. Although

some may have been fun, some just dragged on. One day, we had to get into groups and create something from scratch for five hours. Coming from someone who is not creative at all and has accepted he will never be, this was most certainly not my idea of fun.'

Stronger responses included a sustained description of the setting whilst also reviewing the features provided by the organisation hosting the activity holiday, such as in this example: 'Moving on to rooms, you can expect to receive ones comparable to those of the oligarchs and royalty, fully equipped with the best technology available such as 5G terabit Wifi, 55 inch OLED TVs and surround systems forming the perfect combo with soft quilted sheets and pillows on the king size single beds.' There was a number of mature responses that considered the benefits of going away in order to mature, be more independent, take a well-earned break from school and family, and of the restorative features of a break, for example: 'These little escapes are so good for one's mental and physical health since no one can be perfectly fine for their entire life. It is better to give oneself enough freedom to enjoy life as much as we exhaust ourselves. I took time out to do this, and if you haven't yet, when will you?'

Most stronger reviews were concluded well, with a clear recommendation and star rating often being included in the conclusion, along with a justification for the rating, as in this example: 'Overall I would definitely recommend this holiday to anyone interested in water sports. The food and accommodation were excellent, the coaching was superb and the variety of activities was outstanding, with the kitesurfing being the wild, wet and windy highlight! 10/10 from me (and the same from all the others with me on this top-quality holiday)!'.

Weaker responses, on the other hand, often consisted of a daily account of the holiday without considering that the piece was supposed to be intended for a travel website. A listing of the activities without personal comments did little to encourage or discourage the audience and therefore defeated the purpose of a review. Furthermore, a few candidates chose to write a whole continuous piece and did not make use of paragraphs to organise their text. Even though they were meant to be reviews of an activity holiday for teenagers, to be published on a travel website, many answers were fixated on self, cost, luxury travel, a luxurious holiday experience, and sightseeing that related more to restful holidays for mature adults. Such holiday accounts had little to do with activity other than making or cementing friendships or interacting with animals and observing scenery in commodified outdoor settings.

Question 3 – Descriptive piece

Write a descriptive piece about a busy office. In your writing, focus on the sound, light and movement inside the office to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.

There were some well-written answers with carefully crafted phrases as well as precise imaginative and descriptive detail. Most candidates demonstrated some focus on sound, light, and movement, to varying degrees.

Stronger responses used appropriate and imaginative choices of language that captured the mood and atmosphere. One such response described the office with a conscious crafting of language: 'Looking outside the window, a short escape can be felt, only for the realisation to sink in that the outside world is just as automated for the working man as this very office we seek escape from. The yellow streaks of natural sunlight barely make it through the opposing buildings, another beacon of hope stripped away. Humanity amongst this environment of an official warzone seems an alien concept, a plastic jungle with animalistic laws.' The overall feeling was that busy offices were not very pleasant places. The offices were varied and the people recognisable to all adults which resulted in quite a lot of mature, tongue-in-cheek, and entertaining writing. The attention to detail in the strongest responses was excellent, and many candidates successfully focused on the minutiae of people and their actions in the working environment.

Many candidates made use of figurative language to effectively describe the activity in a typical office, which usually included staff movements and the sounds of office equipment. They focussed on sound, light and movement effectively, for example: 'The air hummed with activity. The rapid click of the stapler was drowned out by the deep voices of the gray-haired men stepping out of the elevator. Early morning sunlight streamed through the windows and highlighted the thin layer of dust on the young receptionist's desk.'

Many stronger responses incorporated the descriptive elements of the piece within a narrative of an office activity, such as in this example: 'Yet more unfortunate news. One of the editors slammed the fax machine in frustration, breaking it. He was given a stern lecture by the vice editor-in-chief. When it rains, it pours. Slowly but surely as the day concluded, things were starting to wrap up. The yelling died down and was instead replaced by sighs of relief.'

In weaker responses, descriptions of the office were in need of development and coherence. Some candidates relied too much on narrative instead of focusing on detailed descriptions, along with overusing onomatopoeia in an attempt to achieve the 'sound' aspect of the task. Many weaker responses provided descriptions of the elements of a busy office as independent pieces from each other. This resulted in some repetition of descriptive vocabulary. In some weak responses, paragraphing was not observed, which resulted in one long piece of writing. Other weaker responses were mainly narrative and many did not construct any imagery around an office, being limited to factual accounts, such as: 'There was coffee brewing and lots of people at computers.'

Question 4 – Email

You recently read a newspaper article which said that having a lot of possessions does not always make people happy. You decide to write an email to the editor, in response to this article, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Nearly all candidates acknowledged the article in their opening address and many created quotations from the imagined article in order to develop their opinions, for example: 'Your journalist spoke about appreciating the little things in life. I wholeheartedly agree.' Those who did reference the article gave various reasons for agreeing with the statement in the prompt, while a few candidates justified the contrasting viewpoint, such as in this example: 'I enjoyed reading your recent newspaper article about the negative effect that a lot of possessions can have on our happiness. Whilst I agreed with many of the points raised in the article, I felt that the author did not focus on pressure placed on us by society to have a lot of possessions. In daily life we are bombarded by advertisements for new goods and products.'

Successful answers were well organised, got straight to the point and used discourse markers effectively. A large majority of responses were appropriately formal and of the general opinion that you need at least some possessions to make you happy, with one candidate noting: 'Possessions really do make you happy because I have never seen a man sad in a Bugatti.' Nearly all made the point that family and friends were important for happiness. Many candidates chose to include fictitious statistics or quotes from experts to prove their points; generally these were quite sensible.

Stronger responses not only included reasons points of view, but provided insights on the effect of possessions on people's happiness, for example: 'When people view the world as an everlasting race to the top, they rarely stop to notice that they're wasting their lives on pointless things. It is so unfortunate that they never realise this issue because society could potentially crumble if generations ahead care about their personal belongings and fame above all else.' Stronger responses also gave reasonable, balanced arguments on how accumulating possessions does not always make people happy, as expressed here: 'In terms of money, the relentless barrage of possessions will leave one in debt. The valued costs after depreciation will raise one's anxiety, sending pangs of agony through your worn-out skin. Furthermore, there is the crippling siege of fear, marred only by insecurity.'

Weaker responses demonstrated minimal attempt at organisation, with inaccurate sentence demarcation errors further affecting the coherence of the writing. Candidates seemed to struggle with conveying many relevant ideas and some seemed to go off track very easily, resulting in a rant to the editor. Weaker responses were commonly in need of more developed rationale behind opinions, and were also categorised by generalised content with a loss of focus, as in this example: 'Money is a very important and basic need for daily life. Everyone could make statements saying that money does not buy happiness. But at the end of the day we still need it and cannot buy happiness but it is a source through which we can get happiness.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/13 Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Candidates need to allocate a set amount of time to: identify factors for writing; plan to write; write; check; correct.
- Candidates should adhere to the guidance of writing no more than 400 words for their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the actual task. Candidates should also adhere to the rubric of writing a minimum of 600 words for their **Section B** response.
- Candidates should look at the key instructions in the questions they answer. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the text for a 'leaflet', giving 'advice on how to reduce household waste' and creating a sense of the 'importance' of doing this
- Candidates should consider the following as part of the planning stage: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed *form* and *audience* as well as the most appropriate *voice* or persona to adopt, the *mood* and *tone* that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable *structure* to employ.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Often, weaker responses lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. Two errors that again occurred quite regularly were those of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops and of writing in sentence fragments rather than in complete sentences. Sentence construction and demarcation are key, followed by accurate use of commas, and then the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

Many candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and some candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, writing effective leaflets which gave clear and sensible advice. Weaker responses wrote poorly structured leaflets about recycling or reducing the amount of rubbish without much, if any, specific detail.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who were able to maintain a close focus on their linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused entirely on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis, usually indirectly by outlining the structure of the piece.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (speech, review, or story), a clear focus on the question, and included appropriate stylistic conventions as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lost focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were simple recounts of a camping trip, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion about the campsite. Some **Question 3** stories lack the required sense of drama or suspense, while some **Question 4** letters lacked an appropriate tone and did not refer to any specific details from the article.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You belong to an environmental organisation which is concerned about the amount of rubbish that people throw away. You have offered to produce a leaflet which explains how people can reduce their household waste.

- (a) **Write the text for the leaflet, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, give advice on how to reduce household waste, and create a sense of the importance of doing this.**

Although the question was well-received, some candidates overlooked the initial wording of the question about belonging to an environmental organisation. The question generated some passionate responses from candidates with genuine concerns about climate change and the factors that are attributed to it being expressed by many. Most candidates recognised and handled the explanatory and motivational nature of the assignment well. Some responses did not quite meet the form and style of a leaflet. Some candidates strayed into green issues more generally and offered advice on saving resources such as water and electricity. A great many mentioned climate change and were able to effectively create a sense of urgency, especially with the use of statistics.

Stronger responses made use of a varied vocabulary and a variety of rhetorical and argumentative techniques. They outlined the problem of not dealing with household waste with references to 'eco systems', 'destroyed habitats' and how 'Things Can Change.' Stronger responses demonstrated effective use of emotive language, such as with this rallying cry for action: 'Earth is in our hands, and it is our responsibility to take care of it. We only get one planet and pollution caused by excess trash is slowly killing it. Join us in taking a stand for the environment and for our futures.'

Many candidates adhered to the form of a leaflet by presenting the advice in sections, often using subheadings in question form to directly address the reader, and following these up with relevant advice. Positive language with a friendly tone were hallmarks of stronger responses, which also offered practical solutions such as recycling and reusing, as in this response: 'Another great way to reduce waste in your household is to invest in a composter. Composters take food and other trash and turn it into soil that can be used in gardens, backyards and more. Not only will you be cutting back on waste, but you'll be helping the environment in the process!'

Others explored ideas of more thoughtful shopping, such as using refillable containers and sustainable bags for carrying, avoiding pre-packaged food and planning in advance so that only food which could be eaten within a certain time was bought. Some advised against impulse buying of something which might have only limited use and might soon end up in landfill sites. On the subject of re-using, one candidate wrote: 'The possibilities are endless, but our environment's resources are not.'

Some weaker responses presented the advice as a sequence of brief bullet points, in some cases disregarding the need to assess the importance of reducing household waste. A small number of candidates misunderstood 'household waste', and wrote about the importance of people keeping their homes clean and tidy, sometimes with the help of a paid cleaner. Some of the weakest responses offered a generalised response to the question which focused on environmental issues and/or climate change without giving advice on ways for readers to reduce their household waste specifically. Such responses lacked clear focus on the question. Other weaker responses tended to repeat arguments and became wordy, for example: 'Step three. After all that if the item is able to be recycled then recycle it. So it is not thrown away but used in another way. The final step, just keep up with the first steps and you'll start to make your healthy impact.'

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

Most candidates started their commentaries with an introductory paragraph citing audience and purpose and most showed at least some linguistic knowledge, although did not often get beyond simple identification of linguistic features.

Stronger responses maintained a close focus on the linguistic and stylistic choices made for writing the leaflet, as well as making use of appropriate terminology linked to effect. They identified some features in the **1(a)** response, using correct linguistic terminology, then subsequently exemplified how and why they had been used to relate to the audience and achieve the intended purpose. For example, one candidate explained: 'I used parallelism in my sentences in order to draw analogies that will help the reader understand my suggestions and why they are important. For example: 'The best way to take out fewer trash bags is to take in fewer shopping bags!' The double use of the word 'bags', with the change in out/in and trash/shopping, helps to illustrate the intended change in the readers' actions.'

Another strong response also clearly connected the aim of using certain text features with the purpose of the text: 'I ask a question about how much waste the average household produces each day and then respond with "too much". This accomplishes both the task of drawing the audience's attention and directing them to the central focus of the text, which is that waste is a major issue. The answer of "too much" creates a sense of curiosity as to why it is excessive as well as a sense of worry because too much of something carries a negative connotation.'

Some weaker responses wrongly identified linguistic features. The weakest responses simply described or paraphrased the story opening, as in this example: 'The text I just wrote about trying to stop people wasting rubbish is persuasive. I say that because I stated that the leaflet would help them to stop wasting and I state why they should stop wasting it in the first.' Some very weak responses were extremely short, sometimes just a few sentences.

Some weaker responses identified a few basic language and structural features but stopped short of analysis. Some attempted analysis but used general phrases such as, 'This makes the reader want to read on' and, 'This makes the audience interested.' Others used the vague phrase, 'It creates a picture in the reader's mind' when referencing imagery. The absence of linguistic terminology also negatively affected the marks of weaker responses. Most comments were limited to the structure of the story opening and the language used without relating these to their effects on the audience. Lower-level responses lacked exemplification; many weaker responses focused solely on structure, with little or nothing on language or form, or focused solely on language and gave no consideration to structure.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

You have just returned from a camping holiday in another country. You decide to write a review of the campsite that you stayed on, which you will post on an international travel website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

A number of candidates overlooked the key words 'camping holiday' in the question and referenced luxurious hotels instead. Audience was also overlooked by some candidates, with there being little sense of the response being written for an international travel website. Most candidates did recognise the need to

comment on the location, which sometimes included some travel details, though a few candidates spent too long describing a journey.

Many stronger responses seemed to have been written from personal experience and showed a believable enthusiasm for locations as diverse as Japan (where the wide range of outdoor activities was praised), Canada (where glamping and a breakfast of pancakes with maple syrup dripped straight from the branch of a tree had left a good impression) and Bulgaria (where the basic lifestyle and simplicity of the artwork reflecting the country's culture were eloquently appreciated). Some emotive lexis was used to persuade the audience of the delights available; however, practical snags, for example in the booking system or the lack of hot showers, balanced the aspects which were recommended

Stronger responses balanced description, personal experience and recommendations, with many mentioning the helpful campsite owners, availability of fuel for campfires and clean facilities. Many stronger responses had a clear introductory section giving a brief resume of the location/site/overall rating. Selection of material was important for a successful response, which included opinion and an assessment of the campsite. One successful review began thus: 'Last week I had the honour of staying in what I now consider to be the best campsite I have ever seen; perhaps the best campsite in the world! I have visited many campsites before but I have never been in such a nice community-centred one. I got the opportunity to meet multitudes of new, interesting people, many of whom shared similar interests to mine'

Stronger reviews typically ended with an effective conclusion, summing up the holiday, as in this example: 'My experience at the campsite was wonderful, and I highly recommend it to anyone and everyone. Whether you are traveling alone, with family, or with friends, I guarantee that you will enjoy a trip there. I have already booked it for my summer trip and I am sure it will become my favourite camping location.' A clear recommendation and star rating were often included in the conclusion, along with a justification for the rating.

A common oversight observed in the work of some weaker responses was overlooking the need to review the event and these were almost wholly recount in nature with perhaps a cursory nod to the review form/purpose in the penultimate or final paragraph of the response. Such responses often read like accounts of a holiday, rather than a review. Other weaker responses produced were quite one-sided, either being unrelentingly negative about the facilities available or praising the range of activities with little information about the practicalities of arranging the trip or accessing the campsite.

Question 3 – Story

Write a story called *Gone!* about an important object that mysteriously disappears. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

There were many engaging and, in some cases, well-crafted responses. Answers were varied, ranging from security guards and directors discovering missing museum relics/artefacts to lost jewellery/watches that were often family heirlooms. A significant number were written in the horror genre with the important object being a kidnapped or missing person; such stories were often overly complex or not well enough explained, leaving the reader confused.

Stronger responses made use of dialogue and strongly descriptive verbs and adjectives to create drama and suspense, as seen in this example: 'My fingers groped around the fabric, connecting with nothing. I took a breath, trying to ease my fears, and searched my other pocket.

'Viv?' one of the other girls said, likely noting my frantic movements. 'Where's the key?'

The 'important object' was subject to a variety of interpretations, from a missing piece of jewellery, a wedding gown, a scientific report, to a hamster called 'Biscuit'. The latter involved a young, rather lackadaisical young man, hamster-sitting for his sister. The story was full of humour which led to outrageous panic when the hamster went missing. From such a simple idea, the candidate was able to create a world of chaos and frenzy as the lazy young man desperately searched his sister's home, having become 'Biscuit-less'. The 'rodent', with its 'bulging eyes', appeared in the end and peace was restored. Strong responses, such as this one, created variations in mood and atmosphere, often building towards an intense feeling of despair.

Drama and suspense were created in stronger responses by a variety of means, including short sentences, such as, 'Rage thrummed in her ears.' One very moving story centred on the narrator's lucky socks having gone missing before an important interview, which proved unsuccessful. It gradually emerged that the socks had regularly been played with by the owner's dog and that the real problem was, in fact, the death of the dog.

Some weaker responses gave overly long accounts of the search for the missing object, with whole responses sometimes being given over to searching drawers and cupboards, only to express relief at the close when the mysteriously disappeared object reappeared. In addition, weaker stories tended to include sudden endings which were not particularly effective. The choice of the important object was key to creating the sense of drama and suspense required by the question. However, some candidates chose poorly with mobile phones, homework, and other such everyday items being at the centre of the ‘mysterious’ disappearance, and such responses inevitably lacked the required level of drama and suspense to be successful.

Many stories were not planned well, resulting in unsatisfactory endings or poorly managed cliffhangers. There were issues of poor paragraphing, poor punctuation – especially of dialogue – and poor control of tenses. Candidates should be aware that short stories rarely work well if there are too many characters, if the timeline is prolonged, or if they try to recreate a movie plot.

Question 4 – Letter

You recently read a newspaper article which said that maths should not be a compulsory school subject. You decide to write a letter to the editor, in response to this article, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many candidates who opted for this question produced quite convincing arguments. Most thought that maths should be compulsory at school, and certainly at primary/elementary school. Reasons offered were generally quite thoughtful and included that maths is nearly always helpful in later life and it teaches skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, self-discipline and determination. A few candidates rather overused mathematical jargon. Some candidates chose to include fictitious statistics or quotes from experts/teachers/professors to prove their points; generally, these seemed quite sensible. Contrastingly, some candidates cited maths as a stressful and difficult subject, which most candidates did not understand, and which should not, therefore, be a compulsory subject.

Stronger responses were well balanced and organised, stressing the importance of maths in everyday life and for future careers, usually making reference to the imaginary article, which made for more convincing and authentic letters. Most pointed out many of the everyday uses of basic principles in balancing household budgets, checking bills and tax demands and measuring quantities. More sophisticated responses put forward ‘influential historical contributors’ such as Einstein and Turing, elaborating on what the benefits to mankind of their mathematical calculations had been. Many kinds of technological and medical advances whose pioneers had to rely on their mathematical abilities were eloquently cited. A key strength in some candidates’ work was the acknowledgement of the editor as the audience, using an appropriately judged voice.

Stronger responses were often written from the role of a concerned parent or candidate. Much attention was given to the wide range of applications that require skills in mathematics, as in this example: ‘As a mother of three children, I cannot explain the joy and frustration that the word ‘mathematics’ brings to me. My youngest son, Raj, absolutely hated math but one day he went to school and came back smiling and laughing, and jumping into my arms. His teacher had begun using a Rubik’s cube. She had taught the children how to solve it and then connected it to math.’ Stronger arguments took examples from real life, whilst also making use of rhetorical techniques, for example: ‘Would you really trust a building that was designed by an architect that did not know how to accurately calculate lengths of critical support structures?’

Weaker responses were often repetitive. They sometimes veered from the topic, or did not develop ideas beyond a few simple points: for example, commonly used arguments were that most people do not use any maths in their adult lives and that some people are just not good at the subject. Often, the conventions of formal discursive writing, such as clear, logically arranged paragraphs and discourse markers, were not observed.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Candidates should consider the terms of the question carefully and identify the main area of discussion before selecting relevant material to address the task.
- Although specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** questions, the most successful responses are informed by a precise context to the passage, related to the main area of discussion in the question.

General comments

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare and almost no candidates appeared to have time problems. All but a very few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real enjoyment and engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

- (a)** Candidates should have a clear approach in mind for addressing the questions. This should include considering the terms of the task carefully, to establish what is the main focus of the question and deciding on their own general response to point at issue. Many questions offer a challenge or proposition on a key area of the text and it is vital, if the candidate is to answer the question relevantly, that this is clearly recognised before the candidate starts to select appropriate material to introduce into the essay. Focusing on the key terms of the task set is an important first step in producing a relevant and focused answer.
- (b)** Passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. However, knowledge of the rest of the text helps to develop a candidate's argument. When answering a passage-based question candidates will find it helpful to identify the context of the passage early in their answer. This might be what has happened immediately before or is about to happen, or it might be a key moment for a particular character. If the passage is an extract from a longer poem the context would be the wider text. For a complete short poem, the context might be textual or some other appropriate information, for example biographical or historical.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with very few responses on either option.

- (a)** There were relatively few responses seen to this question, though most learners were able to select relevant material from the text around which to structure their response. Weaker answers often summarised the married relationships in the play, focusing on Beatrice and Alsemero, with

some able to draw comparisons with Albion and Isabella in the subplot. Better answers at this level were aware that the character in the relationships had different attitudes, contrasting for example 'Beatrice's desire to win Alsemero by any means, fair or foul, with Isabella's quick-witted fidelity to her husband', as one suggested. More competent answers explored the 'odd attitude to marriage shown by Alsemero's use of the 'virgin test' and Beatrice's sacrificing of her wedding night to her waiting maid', as one said. Such ideas were developed in better answers into considering the concerns that were displayed in such attitudes, ranging from 'how men want to control women, differences in gender and class differences', as one essay summarised it. Such ideas were often well supported by specific references to the text. Very good answers analysed how the dramatists use these 'different attitudes as a key tool of characterisation, so that De Flores – a serving man – might enjoy Beatrice's sexual favours but never aspire to be her husband', according to one essay. Others were shocked that 'even at the end Beatrice is ready to confess to murder but still wants to convince her husband she has been faithful to him', an attitude perhaps 'learned from her dominating father', as one suggested. Good answers were aware of how different audiences might respond to such dramatic moments differently – 'the focus on female virtue by so many of the male characters might be seen as normal to the contemporary, not doubt mostly male, audience, but to a modern spectator seems so abusive and controlling', as one stated. Where such arguments were supported by some awareness of context and some analysis of the underlying dramatic methods, the answers did very well.

- (b) There were more answers to this question, though still a minority choice overall. Weak answers often struggled to put the passage in its textual context, seeing the exchange as indicative of 'a troubled relationship where the male is eager for a more physical bond than the woman is ready for.' Better answers at this level did have some knowledge of the overall relationship between De Flores and Beatrice and were able to summarise it, often in detail. The success of this approach was limited by how well any points made were supported from the given passage. Better answers, aware of the context of the murder of Beatrice's fiancé by De Flores at her request, were able to unpick the different attitudes shown here to the question of De Flores's reward. There were some sound discussions of the two characters at this level of response 'her selfish, upper-class attitude to buying him off, sharply contrasted by his desperate, unhealthy lust for her', for example. Other good responses developed this into exploring the effect of 'her naivety and his Machiavellian manoeuvrings' on the audience, who 'might well be shocked by the duplicitous nature of humans in this passage.' Good answers explored a number of related concerns – the effects of murder, her moral degradation here and in the play generally, differences in attitudes to sex, gender and class differences, for example. Very good answers focused on the dramatic methods in developing such ideas. Many at this level noted the 'structural use of asides from Beatrice to reveal her character as realisation of her position dawns on her,' as one said. Others at this level noted how her 'language and attitudes remind us that she is at this stage still a young, even innocent, girl, oblivious to the enormity of what she and De Flores have done,' as one suggested. Others argued that De Flores 'strips away her innocence step by step with his better understanding of the ways of the world', though some learners thought she was 'a girl faced by a predatory, ruthless and controlling man, as signalled by his threatening language and physical intimidation'. Very good answers often explored the dramatic action, the tone and even, for some, 'the almost humorous responses she makes to De Flores's urgent demands'. Where such arguments were linked to appropriate contexts from the wider text, the answers did very well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

Overall, this was the second most popular drama text on the paper, though the majority of learners chose the passage question.

- (a) This was a relatively popular choice, with nearly all learners able to select relevant material with which to address the question. Weaker answers retold more or less relevant parts of the 'story', with many appropriately focusing on Angelo, who 'despite his apparent beliefs in God and morals becomes a hypocrite and virgin-violator', as one argued. Better essays at this level were able to contrast the actions of Angelo and the Duke, and what they revealed about religion, with some linking their arguments to 'Isabella's evident religious beliefs as she is training to be a nun, though this does not prevent both Angelo and the Duke trying to coerce her into a relationship with them', as one summarised it. Sounder answers developed beyond the three central characters. Some, for example, noted 'Lucio's almost deferential words to Isabella at the nunnery,' with others considering how 'Shakespeare contrasts religious and moral attitudes, showing how hypocrisy is

rife in both,' as one put it, with Isabella's 'hypocrisy over Marianne as offensive to the audience as is Angelo's abuse of his power'. Good answers noted how the dramatic methods expose and contrast the different attitudes, so that Angelo's soliloquys, the Duke's disguise as a Friar and Isabella's nun's costume all help the audience to see that religion is a significant force in Vienna. Other good answers saw how the different attitudes created humour through Barnardine, the unmasking of the Duke at the end and even in the exchange between Isabella and Claudio in the prison. Where such arguments were supported by appropriate textual references and some awareness of context, the answers did very well.

- (b) This was the third most popular question in the drama section. Weaker answers often had little or no knowledge of the relevant context, with some learners confused by the relationship between Angelo and Escalus, the nature of Claudio's crime and the context to the entrance of Elbow and his prisoners. Better answers at this level were able to contrast Angelo and Escalus as 'symbols of two very different kinds of justice,' with many noting how the severity of Angelo is 'directly contrasted with Escalus's more lenient approach, especially in his asides', as one learner argued. Successful responses to this question invariably had a clear knowledge and understanding of the textual context and so were alive to the 'dramatic irony of so much of what Angelo says here, just before he encounters Isabella for the first time'. Good answers developed such arguments thoughtfully, noting how 'Escalus, like Isabella, understands that the law is man-made and that there is a higher authority', whereas others saw how 'Shakespeare uses Angelo's arrogance and certainty at this point to set him up for the shock of meeting Isabella and his fall from grace'. Very good answers explored the effects created by the entrance of Elbow and his prisoners, as 'his malapropisms and no doubt some physical, slap-stick humour from the clowns serve to undermine the gravity that Angelo has created'. Others thought the passage showed the underlying corruption of justice in Vienna, 'as the hypocrite Angelo commits worse crimes than Claudio or Pompey are accused of,' according to one. This was developed by those who thought the Duke was no better, 'having created the problem in the first place by his failure to take responsibility', and later in the play using his disguise to 'manipulate honest characters like Isabella, Marianne and the Provost into breaking the law', as one explained. Learners who looked carefully at the language and imagery of the passage, while exploring such concerns, often developed some very good analyses and did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was not a popular choice of text, with most learners choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) This was the least popular question on the paper, with only a few learners choosing it. Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text and some understanding of Soyinka's concerns. Weaker answers tended to focus on Jero himself, summarising his character and actions, at times in great detail and with some accuracy. Better answers at this level also summarised the actions of some of the other beach prophets such as Ananias and Shadrach, who 'at least show that Jero is not as bad as he could be, since he is more honest than they are', as one suggested. Sounder answers developed these contrasts with some clear and specific references to the text. More developed answers noted that the 'prophets are symbolic of different sins', as one suggested, 'even Jero who has pride and lust'. They were also a key element in 'Soyinka's satire of organised religion and how it exploits the gullible', as one said. Some remembered that even the government document refers to them as 'cut-throats and riff-raff'. The beach prophets were 'criminals and hypocrites, only interested in money and power', for some learners. Good answers explored how Soyinka shapes the audience's response in detail: Jero's use of the language of commerce – careers, trade, customers – was analysed well in some responses. The contrasting characterisation of the prophets, how the 'velvet-hearted Jero ruthlessly exploits anyone who falls for his image' was set against 'the thuggery of Ananias and the hypocrisy of Shadrach', for example, was well explored in good essays. Answers at this level also considered Soyinka's use of staging and props, such as the uniforms in *Jero's Metamorphosis* to 'highlight how materialistic and shallow the prophets were', as one essay suggested. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text and some appropriate awareness of relevant contexts, the responses were very successful.
- (b) This was the more popular **Question 3** choice. The weakest answers were unable to place the passage in a specific context, often making general comments about Rebecca's role here and in the wider text, suggesting an unfamiliarity with the play. Better answers at this level were able to

summarise her actions in the wider text and in particular her relationship with Jero, briefly touched on in the passage. Her femininity and beauty were often discussed at this level, though not always linked to the passage. Sounder answers saw her as ‘a foolish religious enthusiast, taken in by Jero’s religious cant’, according to one. Others developed this, noting her sharpness in dealing with the executive and the clerk. Some noted the comedy of the situation, as ‘the executive finds himself out manoeuvred by a mere woman’, as one said. This concern was often well explored, with some learners seeing ‘more proof of the misogynistic culture that Soyinka is satirising’. Other learners saw her as a symbol for ‘female victims of the male gaze everywhere, yet gutsy and confident in herself’, as one suggested. Her characterisation though also included ‘her blindness in thinking Jero has saved her, when he is in fact exploiting her, because of the file’, and for some she was not ‘naïve at all but exploiting the situation just like all the other characters’. Good answers analysed some of the language and dramatic action, how, for example, she is ‘young woman, young lady, religious maniac, all terms used to undermine her’, though for others her use of religious language ‘twisting everything the executive says is very comedic’. Good answers were alive to her significance in Jero’s scheming and how she is a sympathetic character in this play, contrasting with Amope’s role in the first play, because ‘she is there to develop the reader’s positive response to Jero himself’, as one essay argued. Very good essays developed their arguments with precise reference to the passage and the wider text, integrating contextual points and some perceptive analysis of language, action and tone.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text on the paper with most learners choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) This was the third most popular question on the paper. Nearly every response was able to find relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold the story of their relationship, often with detailed knowledge of the text and in some cases showing understanding of the significance of some of their actions. Better ones at this level did explore the characters as well as their actions. Many noted ‘Maggie’s neediness and craving for attention from Brick’, while others contrasted this with ‘the way Brick hides behind indifference and alcohol’. Sounder answers developed such ideas, linking these behaviours to ‘Williams’s themes of how the emptiness of the American Dream is reflected in the emptiness of the relationships in the play’, as one learner suggested. Other answers explored how Brick and Maggie are contrasted with Mae and Gooper, as well as with Big Daddy and Big Mama, with some seeing how ‘these contrasts and parallels help the audience to see that Brick and Maggie are central to the play’s meaning, because they are a more relatable couple than the others’. Good answers noted the significance of Skipper to their relationship: ‘Brick’s latent homosexuality is like Big Daddy’s cancer, misdiagnosed and ultimately destructive’, as one learner suggested. Many good answers explored Williams’s presentation of sexuality through their relationship, looking, for example, at Brick’s language to Big Daddy, Maggie’s actions and words to prove herself to Brick and how Williams contrasts them positively with ‘the disgustingly fecund Mae and Gooper, whose children are merely weapons to win the prize of Big Daddy’s fortune’, as one essay suggested. Very good answers were focused on the dramatic methods, noting that ‘the play’s setting in Brick and Maggie’s bedroom makes them central to everything, whilst also highlighting the public nature of the relationship and the family’s interest in their sexuality’, as one put it. They were also seen as central to ‘Williams’s exploration of wealth, through Brick’s indifference and Maggie’s desperation to keep it because of her childhood poverty’. Contrasts with Mae and Gooper on this point were often well developed, alongside the different attitudes to children, Big Daddy and the possible inheritance. Many answers were able to support such arguments with detailed and precise textual references and with a perceptive grasp of relevant and at times illuminating contexts, from Williams’s biography and American life and attitudes in the 1950s.
- (b) This was the second most popular question on the paper. Weaker answers often struggled to place the passage in the context of the wider text, though did have some knowledge of the characters and the relationship. Most were also able to shape their responses to address the task, in terms of audience response. At this level answers tended to be quite narrative in their approach, telling the story of Brick and Big Daddy’s relationship in detail. The success of this approach was determined how well the narrative choices were connected to the given passage. Better answers were aware of the rising tension between the characters and many referred to some of the dramatic devices, though analysis was often limited. The use of stage directions, the setting of the bedroom, the fireworks and children in the background were often highlighted as effecting how the audience

might respond. More competent answers, often aware of the preceding discussions about Skipper, were able to develop such ideas, noting how 'Big Daddy's increasing anxiety, signalled through his language, repetition and stage directions, is contrasted with Brick's seeming indifference', as one suggested, though others also noted that 'Brick's demeanour, acting gravely and soberly and his stillness at the end of the extract make the audience understand the high emotions here', and others noted that 'this is still a father and son, facing a terrible situation together', as one learner put it. Good answers noted how many of the play's concerns, such as sexuality, mendacity and 'the characters' inability to communicate their emotions', are developed in this scene. Other good answers explored the dramatic methods in more detail, such as the use of pathetic fallacy, the 'symbolic crying of Gooper's child', the use of capitals to suggest raised voices and the dramatic action with Big Daddy 'going from quick, decisive movements in grabbing the crutch to his crumbling face as the fear of death takes hold'. Very good answers also looked at the language, with Williams's use of repetition, the violence of Big Daddy's words, the interjections from the children and Mae, the significance of the off-stage song, all well discussed and analysed. Many saw the significance of the passage for the audience as 'watching how Big Daddy changes from the ruthless, strong patriarch into a defeated dying human before our eyes', as one said. Such interpretations, where supported by precise references and appreciation of Williams's dramatic choices, were very successful.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a relatively popular text in **Section B** with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold the narrative, often in detail, with better ones at this level offering some personal responses, ranging from 'he is like a comic book monster in Arthur's castle', to 'though frightening in his size and strength, it is also a bit comic when he rides out of the hall, holding his head under his arm'. Better answers developed this contrast by looking at Armitage's choices in more detail – his size, his colour and his language were often analysed in detail. More competent responses remembered that the Host and the Green Knight 'are one and the same character, Sir Bertilak', as one noted. This enabled some learners to explore Armitage's use of contrasts and structure in building up to the climax of Sir Gawain's keeping his promise. Good answers often explored the mythical qualities of his presentation, with some good use of contexts and textual support. The symbolic nature of the Green Knight, his castle and even the green girdle was often well discussed, and many good answers contrasted his description with that of Sir Gawain and, in some cases, also King Arthur. Themes such as justice, chivalry and honour were often well explored at this level. Other very good answers noted Armitage's development of the Green Knight from 'a threatening, murderous enemy into an understanding human, chivalrous host and even a friend', as one suggested. Very good answers always revealed a thorough and perceptive knowledge of the text and its context, as well as an ability to explore Armitage's style analytically.
- (b) This was a popular choice on this text and the third most popular **Section B** question. Weaker answers sometimes struggled with some of the details of the poem, at times suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. Better answers at this level were able to give a broad context, often referring to 'Sir Gawain back in the castle, about to become the prey of the host's wife', as one noted. Most were aware of the 'hustle and bustle created by Armitage in this passage', noting that 'everyone in the court seemed to be caught up in the excitement of the hunt', as one learner suggested. More competent answers explored some of the poetic methods – the use of alliteration, how 'all of the senses are invoked by Armitage's descriptions', and the use of specific detail, such as 'the three bellowing notes'. Others explored the effects of the animal imagery in words such as 'wolfing'. Good answers also discussed Armitage's concerns: humans and nature, violence, hunting as a theme, predators and prey – with good links to Sir Gawain and the Lady – and conflict, were all well considered. The scene for some was 'an insight into the everyday life of a male dominated castle', as one suggested, though the 'contrast of this scene with Sir Gawain pretending to sleep', was also well discussed. Very good answers noted the 'sudden intrusion of the narrator who is neither the Green Knight nor Sir Gawain', and considered this made the 'scene more immediate and credible', as one suggested. Very good answers also linked the passage thoughtfully to the wider text and often had a very good grasp of relevant contexts.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with the **(b)** passage option marginally the more popular choice.

- (a)** Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices of poems included *The Laboratory*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess* and *Women and Roses*, though overall a wide range of poems were selected and often relevantly discussed. Weaker answers were at times unsure of the content of their chosen poems, suggesting a lack of knowledge and understanding, though most answers at this level were comfortable in paraphrasing what happened in the poems. Better answers at this level tended to summarise the characters involved. For example, 'The Duke in *My Last Duchess* is obsessive and controlling, just like the lover in *Porphyria's Lover*, and both of them murder their partners out of jealousy', as one learner stated. More competent answers identified a range of 'strong emotions' in the poems: 'Browning writes about all emotions from jealousy and hatred, to love and desire', as one learner summarised it, with stronger answers at this level often considering language and imagery in detail, particularly 'the violence of the Duke's words in *My Last Duchess* and the sinister, almost gleeful words of poison of the scorned woman in *The Laboratory*', as one essay said. Good answers developed such points into considering Browning's typical concerns: male dominance, obsessive behaviour, jealousy and envy of rivals, lovers and colleagues, desire and passion were all well discussed and exemplified. Answers at this level were also adept at considering a wide range of poetic methods, with Browning's use of the dramatic monologue – and hence unreliable narrators –, characterisation and surprising plot twists, often considered alongside the more obvious poetic choices of rhythm and rhyme. Many good essays, for example, considered pathetic fallacy an important aspect of Browning's writing, 'whether to emphasise violence as seen in *Porphyria's Lover* or to exaggerate desire in *Meeting at Night*', as one suggested. Very good answers also integrated relevant and at times illuminating contexts, often biographical or historical, into their discussions, as well as precise and accurate quotation from the text.
- (b)** Weaker answers were often unsure of the context for this extract from a much longer poem, suggesting uneven knowledge of the text. This led to some insecure readings of the passage, such as 'the Mayor wants the piper to get rid of the rats, but he gets rid of the children'. More successful answers at this level did know the details of the poem's story and were at times distracted into retelling it, with a consequent lack of focus on the given extract. Some answers were able to consider the significance of the passage in terms of the overall story: 'the metaphorical "rats" in the town hall think that they can get one over the piper, but of course they can not', as one put it. More competent answers considered Browning's concerns, with some seeing this as a conflict between the different classes, or 'his satire of the greed and corruption of those in power at the expense of the apparently weak and helpless', as one essay stated. Others noted how 'the pragmatism of the council is set against the magic realism of the time and space travelling Piper'. Good answers explored the language in detail, often contrasting the words of the Mayor and the Piper to good effect. Other good answers noted Browning's use of symbols, such as the wine and the children, to establish the contrasting views. Only a few learners were able to explore Browning's use of rhyme and versification with any confidence, though these were useful areas for detailed analysis. Very good answers were often able to integrate references to the wider text and relevant contexts, as a useful means of developing their arguments about the given passage.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** This was one of the least popular questions on the paper. Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems, with which to address the task. Popular choices of poem included *Catrin*, *Seal*, *Scything* and *Baby-sitting*, all of which provided useful material, often contrasting in tone, for learners to shape their responses. Weaker answers were at times confused about the details, though many at this level had a clear basic grasp of the events in their chosen poems. This enabled most answers to address the question in part – 'in what ways' – and often, with a considered choice of poems, include a broad contrast of Clarke's attitudes and approaches to 'mothers'. More competent answers also addressed the second part of the task – 'with what effects'

– for example discussing how ‘Clarke undermines the human mother’s inability to let go in *Catrin* by showing how the seal by instinct knows when to leave her pup behind’, as one suggested. Good answers considered Clarke’s poetic methods in detail – the use of contrasting settings, the ‘simple domestic situations of gardening or staying out late, she uses to explore themes of life and death and growing up’. Most importantly for many learners her use of symbols, ‘which force the reader into feeling certain emotions – the abandoned seal pup, the unbroken umbilical chord and the grim reaper’s scythe’, as one suggested. Other good responses explored language and imagery in detail, with, at times, very good analysis of the extended metaphor of the umbilical chord and its effects. Biographical context was often well integrated into the discussion at this level of performance as well as precise, detailed references to the text.

- (b) This was the more popular choice on this text but overall only a minority of learners chose it. Some weak answers had little knowledge of the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen, with limited success. Better answers were able to give an accurate summary of the poem, though some learners tried to explain exactly what the narrative was line by line, without giving an overview of the poem on which to build their interpretation. At this level analysis tended to be limited to ‘feature spotting’ such as: ‘similes are used in the presentation of the young woman’, or ‘Clarke uses specific language to make her points clear’, without providing examples or further commentary. Some learners, even more competent ones, avoided discussion of the final lines of the poem, with a consequent weakening of the interpretations offered. More competent learners understood the use of the two parts to shift from one place to another and from one tone to another, with some noticing that the parts were of different lengths. The difference ‘between the gentle death of the woman and the ghastly after-shock for those left behind’, as one put it, was well explored by good responses, with some learners analysing how the language differentiated the two. At this level, learners were able to see the poem as a whole rather than as a sequence of lines, and were more successful in establishing meaningful elements of the presentation. Very good answers analysed the poetic methods in detail, for example the metaphor of the yacht and ‘how it symbolized her journey into the next life’, or for others ‘represented her fragility and that she was going on a journey’. Other good responses analysed the effects of the white sheet, ‘which linked back to the yacht and its sails, even though she is in bed at home, thinking she is in bed in a hospital,’ as one put it. Very good answers also explored the ‘sheer depth of contrast between the hot, gentle, silent day and the weeping, huddling, support of the pub scene’, as one suggested. Many good answers explored the language and imagery in detail, though only a few were able to consider poetic form with the same confidence. Where answers were informed by appropriate contextual references the essays often did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage (b) option.

- (a) This was very much the minority choice on this text. Nearly all of the responses were able to select relevant poems with which to address the task, though some weaker learners were insecure in their knowledge of the poems they had chosen. Popular choices were *The Buck in the Snow*, *Australia 1970*, *The Spring* and *The Sea and the Hills*. Basic responses tended to summarise their chosen poems, pointing out in what ways they were linked to nature, with more organised responses at this level achieving the required ‘comparison’ through the structure of their essays. Better answers at this level chose contrasting poems to emphasise the comparisons being made. Essays at this level sometimes offered a too-literal description of the poems, concentrating on meaning, with little appreciation of the poetic methods. More competent answers did consider how the poets ‘present the natural world’, often looking closely at language and imagery, noting for example how ‘the violent words are sometimes at odds with the peacefulness of the setting’, or ‘how the natural world is brutal as an innocent buck in a picturesque setting was fated to have a violent death’. Good candidates were able to develop such ideas with understanding of the poetic concerns: the human impact on nature – generally seen as malign –, the violence of natural forces, the essential beauty of nature, and nature’s capacity to inspire, heal and nurture. Very good answers were able to integrate contextual references within an essay structured around the comparison of the poems. Many responses, at all levels, revealed a personal engagement with and some empathy towards many of the poems considered. As one essay suggested, ‘human disregard for nature and its creatures is contrasted with the consolation that nature can bring to the broken-hearted’.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper with nearly half of the entry choosing it. Some very weak answers had little knowledge of the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen, with limited success at unpicking some of Louisa Lawson's references and concerns. Basic answers often had at least some understanding of Lawson's poem and were able to offer a generally relevant summary, though at this level there were unsupported speculations and assertions about the identity of 'she', from 'a famous but not forgotten queen' to 'a murdered heiress buried in the mud'. There was in these essays little focus on either the poetic methods or their effects. Some weaker answers did identify literary features such as imagery, simile and caesura but were only able to do so without analytical commentary. More competent answers were often aware of appropriate contexts and were able to relate them to their interpretation, most often Lawson's 'feminism' and religion, linking 'her self-sacrifice in the poem to Jesus's sacrifice on the cross', as one suggested, though few were aware of the biblical reference in the title. At this level learners often considered the question/answer structure of the poem, the 'language of sacrifice and battle' as one put it, and some of the structure of the verses. Good answers developed the analysis further, noting for example 'the shift from past to present tense which makes 'she' relevant to the current reader', as one noted. Other good answers discussed the various concerns in the poem: women's rights, abuse of power, passion contrasted with indifference, the power of the individual to effect change and social and gender injustice were all well explored, often with personal engagement. There were many engaged and fully analytical responses seen, showing a secure, and at times a sophisticated grasp of the literary features Lawson employs to present the 'she' in the poem. Very good answers often integrated the contextual points seamlessly and explored the nature of the dialogue itself – 'women of the past and present, both young and old or wise and ignorant are all included in this conversation', as one suggested. Others noted the effects of the rhymes and the 'shifts between positive and negative language as 'she' is revealed to the reader to be an emblematic symbol of the struggle central to the female experience', as one expressed it.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was a popular text in **Section C**, with the majority of learners choosing option (a), the discursive essay.

- (a) A popular question. Weaker answers retold Briony's narrative in some detail, with some unable to keep a relevant focus and spending too much time recounting what happened to Robbie and Cecilia. Better answers at this level did focus on the specific details of Briony's 'sin against her sister and lover and what it led to for all of them', as one said. There was at times some confusion about the narrative perspectives and McEwan's narrative structures, but more competent responses were able to discuss how the separate sections of the novel 'formed a complete picture of Briony and her guilty attempts to make amends', as one said. Good answers did explore the 'fictional and metafictional layers of narration, which McEwan uses to question how a novel actually works', as one learner suggested. This led some to good discussions on the role of the narrator, and in what ways in this text, 'Briony is both reliable and unreliable'. Other good responses discussed how McEwan makes 'her a gifted writer, yet a spoilt child at the same time', as one put it. There was a general agreement with the proposition though many parts of the narrative were questioned – 'did she in fact ever work in a hospital?' one learner wondered, whilst others were disappointed at 'the reality that Robbie and Cecilia died miserably while Briony had a successful life', though only very good answers went on to use that as a way of considering McEwan's concerns for 'the gap between lies and truth in life and fiction', as one noted. Very good essays ensured that such arguments were supported by detailed reference to the text, some awareness of McEwan's methods and appropriate contexts.
- (b) This was a popular choice of question overall. Weaker answers summarised Briony's narrative to this point in the novel, with only a few recognising its significance as part of the novel's climax. There was a general lack of contextualisation at this level, though some responses were able to discuss Briony's character as she reacts to the changes in the Tallis's houses. More competent answers did focus on the changes, and the significance of some of the details that had disappeared, such as the island and the lake. Others discussed the passing of time and how 'McEwan shifts perspectives so that we are not sure if she really was at Emily's funeral', as one put it. Good responses analysed some of the methods, with many discussing the narrator and the narrative structure. This led into consideration of the 'unreliable' narrator, which was for some 'an essential part of how the reader sees Briony, even here at the end of the novel', as one said.

Language, symbols and the use of detailed description were often explored at this level, with some precise references to the wider text. Some learners noted how though, 'now an old lady, Briony is still obsessed with the past and her "sin"', as one put it, with good answers able to focus on details from the passage relevantly, such as Grace Turner's bungalow and the rhododendrons, as well as integrate appropriate contextual references.

Question 10

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice in this session with very few answers seen on either option.

- (a) Most of the responses identified relevant stories with which to address the task. Popular choices were *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, *The Tower*, *Gabriel-Ernest* and *The Black Ball*. Weaker answers retold the narrative of the stories, with limited awareness of the specifics of the question. Better answers at this level had some knowledge and at times understanding of the concerns of the writers, though this was not always shaped to the task. More competent answers were able to select more precisely and identify specific differences. The time shift in *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* was a popular choice, with some sound interpretations of how the writer builds suspense in the reader, by 'playing with our sense of what Farquhar thinks is happening and what is in fact happening', as one suggested. Similarly, Jack's changing view of his mother and the paper toys in *The Paper Menagerie*, 'shows how the passing of time makes us see things differently and perhaps truly for what they are', as one suggested. Good answers analysed some of the methods used by the writers, such as flashback, foreshadowing and the narrative perspective, with very good responses able to support such points with specific reference to the text. Some learners were able to integrate contexts relevantly into their arguments, with one noting for example that 'Bierce in his story uses actual historical events in order to trick the reader into falling for his narrative trickery', as one put it. Very good responses always had secure knowledge and understanding of the stories and a perceptive grasp of how the different writers' choices effect the reader's experience.
- (b) Most responses were able to give a broad context to the passage and show some knowledge of the full story in general. Weaker answers tended to retell the story up to this point or offer a summary of the events of the given passage and what had preceded it. Better answers at this level were able to explore how the events in this passage 'were the climax of the tension that had been building up, though the expected victim turns out to be different', as one put it. More competent answers focused on the ending more closely, in terms of the narrative and the characterisation of Van Cheele. Good responses looked closely at language and punctuation, noting how Saki creates 'tension through the use of pathetic fallacy – the fading light and the setting sun – and by showing us Van Cheele's panicked reaction', as one learner saw it. Other responses discussed some of the concerns here, such as the supernatural, guilt and myth as opposed to science and the nature of reality. Very good answers were aware of the irony of the memorial brass erected for the 'unknown boy', while others analysed how Saki leads the reader to 'the climax of the "shrill wail of fear" but leaves the reader even at the end uncertain as to what really happened', as one suggested. Successful responses all had a good knowledge of the whole text and were able to explore in that context how Saki resolves the story successfully.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with an even split of responses between the two options.

- (a) Most responses were able to address the task relevantly, with nearly all learners focusing on the river and its importance in the novel. Weaker answers summarised Huck and Jim's journey on the raft, often in good detail. Many noted that the river was 'a symbol of freedom from the unfairness of life', and that on 'the river all men were equal'. More competent answers developed these ideas, so that, for some, 'humans were shown as more treacherous and dangerous even than the snakes on the river', as one put it. Others saw that the natural world was 'where Huck belonged away from the civilising effects of the town', with some noting that his life with Pap was better in the wilds of the forest. Good answers explored some of Twain's methods – the use of the first-person narrator, the presentation of a child's view of the world through language choices and 'through Jim's simple words and understanding, an appreciation of the beauty and immensity of America'. Good answers always had a detailed and thorough knowledge of the text and, in some cases, a firm grasp of relevant contexts, though some essays would have been more successful with a greater focus on Twain's methods.
- (b) Weaker answers often had a limited grasp of the context and were often confused as to the background to Huck's situation, why the men were waiting and why he had butter under his hat. Better answers at this level were able to explore the contextual narrative relevantly, though at times getting side-tracked into too much detail about Tom and Jim's rescue. More competent responses focused on some of the details in the passage, noting for example how 'Twain presents Huck as still a child in his language and ideas', though others saw his 'willingness to be "licked" to keep Jim's secret as heroic', as one suggested. Good answers were alive to tone and often noted the tension between 'the seriousness of Huck's predicament and the comedy of its presentation'. Very good answers analysed the contrast between Huck's narrative and Aunt Sally's words, with some exploring the concept of an unreliable narrator. Very good answers could also place the passage precisely in its context, often appreciating that 'much of the effect of the passage and the novel generally comes from serious situations being presented through Huck's eyes', as one essay put it, 'so that his almost childish language creates humour and anxiety in the reader'.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Candidates should consider the terms of the question carefully and identify the main area of discussion before selecting relevant material to address the task.
- Although specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** questions, the most successful responses are informed by a precise context to the passage, related to the main area of discussion in the question.

General comments

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare and almost no candidates appeared to have time problems. All but a very few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real enjoyment and engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

- (a)** Candidates should have a clear approach in mind for addressing the questions. This should include considering the terms of the task carefully, to establish what is the main focus of the question and deciding on their own general response to point at issue. Many questions offer a challenge or proposition on a key area of the text and it is vital, if the candidate is to answer the question relevantly, that this is clearly recognised before the candidate starts to select appropriate material to introduce into the essay. Focusing on the key terms of the task set is an important first step in producing a relevant and focused answer.
- (b)** Passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. However, knowledge of the rest of the text helps to develop a candidate's argument. When answering a passage-based question candidates will find it helpful to identify the context of the passage early in their answer. This might be what has happened immediately before or is about to happen, or it might be a key moment for a particular character. If the passage is an extract from a longer poem the context would be the wider text. For a complete short poem, the context might be textual or some other appropriate information, for example biographical or historical.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with very few responses overall.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

- (b) There were only a few answers to this question. Nearly every response was able to offer relevant opinions about the relationship. Very weak answers had an insecure knowledge of the text generally and consequently the relationship, where speculations such as ‘they are obviously about to get married’, severely hampered the success of the interpretations offered. Better answers did have knowledge and understanding of the preceding murder of Alonzo and were better able to discuss the significance of the passage to the relationship. Weaker answers retold the events leading up to this exchange, with more successful answers interlacing their summary with pertinent comments about ‘her moral and social outrage is contrasted to his unrelenting pursuit of her virginity’, as one said. More competent answers noted how the dramatists use this exchange to explore many of the play’s wider concerns: gender issues, male abuse and control of women, attitudes to sexuality and class differences. Such discussions were more successful when they were explored in the context of their relationship and Middleton and Rowley’s methods of characterisation. Beatrice’s ‘innocence and perhaps gullibility are starkly exposed here as she becomes aware of the seriousness of what she has done and the terrible consequences she now has to face’, as one suggested. De Flores was seen as ‘the true villain, who following the cruel murder of Alonzo now uses it to blackmail Beatrice into a sexual relationship’, though others were more condemnatory, ‘as this is little more than a shocking abuse of Beatrice’s situation by a predatory rapist,’ as one said. Very good answers looked closely at the language differences, ‘her pleading and begging, is in sharp contrast to his ruthless language of threat and coercion and to her own cursing of him earlier in the play’, as one noted. Where such points were supported by precise reference to the passage, the answers did well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text in this session, with most learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) Learners who chose this question generally had at least a basic knowledge of the text on which to base their responses. Weaker answers tended to focus on the Duke, disguised as a Friar, and retold his involvement in the play in their own words. The success of this approach increased as the learner revealed more awareness of the dramatic effects of his disguise. ‘It is a shocking moment for those on stage when Lucio pulls off his hood to reveal it is the Duke’, as one suggested. Better answers making this point added that ‘the audience, of course, knows only too well that the Friar is the Duke, and this created comedy when he is talking to Lucio’, as one explained. More competent answers ranged more widely in the text, considering Mariana’s disguise as Isabella, the head of the murder used to represent Claudio and Elbow’s disguise as a tapster. Again, better answers at this level discussed the dramatic effects, rather than only explaining the situation. Good answers expanded the concept of disguise, with many suggesting that Angelo was ‘even more disguised than the Duke, hiding his lust and depravity beneath his stern, puritan exterior’, according to one, before integrating contextual knowledge and understanding by exploring Shakespeare’s ‘satire of puritanism’ more generally. Angelo’s disguise was seen as ‘the central plank in the structure of the play’s plot’, as one essay noted, though for others it was ‘the source of nearly all the moral dilemmas on stage – should the Duke act more directly, does Isabella give in to him and what is real justice’, as one learner summarised it. Some good responses saw disguise in nearly all of the characters, from Isabella, ‘who is disguised to herself and her brother’, to the Provost ‘who disguises what he really knows to avoid trouble’. Very good answers explored how such ambivalence ‘created dramatic tension and were important in Shakespeare’s characterisation’, as one noted. Very good answers were well structured and organised, controlling their selected material so that argument, support and analysis were given equal weight in a focused and sophisticated interpretation of the play and its contexts.
- (b) Nearly every response was able to address the task relevantly. Weaker responses summarised the connection between Angelo and Isabella, though at times unsure as to where this particular exchange occurred. Some answers at this level lost focus by retelling the full history of their relationship, with a consequent loss of focus on the detail of the passage. Better responses at this level considered the two characters, as individuals, noting ‘that her attempts to change his mind show her innocence and immaturity, in the face of his unshakeable certainty that his in the right’, as one said. More successful responses to this question invariably had a clear knowledge and understanding of the textual context, competent answers discussing, for example, ‘how the characters at this stage are like lawyers arguing a legal point’, with some showing how ‘his coldness is soon to be penetrated by her passion for her brother’s life’. Good answers explored the contrasts and similarities in their language and imagery, suggesting ‘they are more alike than they

think and both are about to be shocked into fundamental changes', as one put it. Many good answers noted that 'Angelo's "tomorrow" is the crux word that changes this scene and the course of the play, as Isabella suddenly realises the gravity of Claudio's situation and her genuine concerns for his life rush to the surface', as one said. At this level there was awareness of the dramatic situation, the significance of 'her sudden passion' in its effect on Angelo, the role of Lucio and the setting of 'the judge's chambers with inevitably the man in charge dominating the weak, powerless woman', as one put it. Very good answers analysed the details of language, imagery and dramatic action carefully, noting how Shakespeare 'develops the dramatic tension in terms of their relationship, using the seriousness of the point at issue, Claudio's life', as one suggested. Others explored Angelo's dismissive words and behaviour, his 'pompous legal justification of the sentence, which Isabella so neatly, at the end, turns into a personal comment on Angelo as a tyrant', as one expressed it. Answers which supported such arguments with close reference to the passage and awareness of textual contexts did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- (a) This was a popular question overall though a minority choice on this text. Weaker answers tended to list the various parent and child combinations and summarise the story of the relationships, with little awareness of Williams's dramatic methods. Better answers at this level often concentrated on Brick's relationship with Big Daddy, with some general sense of how it is presented, through their one-to-one dialogues. More competent responses saw how the relationships are contrasted, nearly always referring to Brick and Gooper's very different attitudes to Big Daddy and at times Big Mama. These relationships were seen as revealing many of the play's concerns such as attitudes to wealth, ambition, rivalry and sexuality. Mae and Maggie were also contrasted in their differing attitudes to children, with many suggesting that 'Maggie clearly does not like the "no-neck monsters" and only wants a child to secure the inheritance', as one learner suggested. Good answers did focus on the dramatic presentation, with some seeing this relationship as a 'a key tool in Williams's characterisation'. Other learners analysed the language carefully, noting, for example, how Mae and Gooper react when Big Mama calls Brick her only son. Symbols were also well discussed at this level: the cashmere scarf, the legal papers and the morphine, for example. Very good answers considered the effects of the dramatic methods, noting how the sibling rivalry 'created tension and conflict in the play', as one learner suggested. The use of stage directions, dramatic actions such as the smacking of the child, and untimely entrances and exits were all well analysed. Overall, though, it was considered that the dramatic exchanges were the crucial element in the presentation, which enabled Williams to explore 'the cruelty and the emotions generated by a dysfunctional family', as one said. Where such interpretations were supported by detailed reference to the text and an appreciation of relevant contexts, the answers did very well.
- (b) This was a very popular question overall with nearly half of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers tended to summarise what happened to Maggie in the play, with only a general awareness of the passage. Better answers at this level linked their comments and personal response to some details from the passage, with many answers noting her 'chattiness which is casual but also appears to be a nervous reaction', as one learner suggested. She was variously considered catty, lonely, jealous, desperate, smart and humorous, with the majority of learners having some sympathy for her situation. More competent answers recognised Williams's methods of characterisation in her language and in her attitudes to some of the central concerns: wealth, status, class and children. This last concern was often discussed as 'a key issue in understanding Maggie', as one suggested. 'Her attitudes to Mae and Gooper's children reveal she does not like children', though other answers considered 'her desire for a child is never maternal but simply to help them get Big Daddy's fortune', as one essay summarised it. Good answers noted her language choices and were able to analyse the humour in her description of the family party. Other essays concentrated more on her relationship with Brick, for whom 'she appears to be performing, trying desperately to get his attention', as one essay noted. Her self-awareness and need to be desired were much commented on, with the significance of the mirror well analysed in some good answers. Very good answers considered the effects of Williams's dramatic choices – the stage directions, her changing

moods, her tone of voice and, for some most importantly, Brick's responses or lack of them, were all 'open to interpretation so that the audience is as bemused by her as Brick seems to be', as one essay argued. Other very good answers explored her 'choric function, so that the audience learns about the family tensions and conflicts at this early stage of the play', as one learner stated. Where such points were supported by precise references to the passage and some appreciation of relevant contexts the essays did well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular text in **Section B** with only a small minority of responses, nearly all of whom chose the passage **(b)** question.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance
- (b) There were only few answers to this and all of them had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text on which to base their responses. Weaker answers responded to the gory detail of the Green Knight's beheading, often paraphrasing the events, though with limited grasp of its significance. Better answers at this level had some awareness of style, noting, for example, how 'Armitage uses a matter of fact descriptive tone to describe the gruesome action', as one learner commented. More competent answers developed this idea, commenting on the omniscient narrator and the 'highly descriptive way the scene is portrayed', as one noted, citing Armitage's use of detail and repetition. Good answers analysed the action and the methods more closely, with some finding the 'image of the head being kicked like a football almost humorous', though others noted how 'the tone becomes more sinister', as the headless torso recovers the head and mounts his horse. Good answers also considered Armitage's poetic methods, such as language and alliteration, and there were good analyses of alliterative verse, which became very good as the effects of the poet's choices were discussed. For example, one essay noted how 'the smoothness of the strike is shown in the repeated "f"s of "the fat and flesh so far"', while another essay referred to how the strength and determination of Gawain is reflected in the short plosive sounds of 'plants his left foot firmly'. Very good answers were aware of the significance of this action to the poem as a whole, integrating wider text references to show good understanding and appropriate contexts to show secure knowledge.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a relatively popular choice overall in this session.

- (a) This was the minority choice of question on this text. Popular poems to address the task were: *A Light Woman*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St Praxed's Church* and *Confessions*. Desire was generally seen as a negative emotion, leading to at best disappointment and at worst murder. Weaker answers were nearly always able to summarise the poems accurately and add some personal response as a commentary. Better answers at this level had some understanding of Browning's concerns and, with careful choice of poems, the response often had an implicit contrast in the different effects that desire might have. For example, 'the Bishop desires a wonderful tomb so he will never be forgotten, but in *Confessions* he wants to remember how his desires were fulfilled when he was alive', as one summarised it. More competent answers explored the power of desire, as a key effect on the various narrators. This included the Bishop's desire for the trappings of wealth, the speaker's desire for revenge in *The Laboratory* the Duke's desire for control in *My Last Duchess* all of which 'show how desire leads people to break their vows, to violence and cruelty, and even murder', as one summarised it. Others discussed how desire is 'more important than religious or moral principles', citing the Bishop from St Praxed's and the Mayor of Hamelin. Good answers considered how Browning presents desire. Many learners had secure understanding of the dramatic monologue and first-person narrators and were able to analyse some of their effects in their chosen poems. Other good answers looked at language and imagery – the poison in *The Laboratory*, the use of nature in *The Last Ride Together* and the storm in *Porphyria's Lover* were at times well analysed. Very good

answers also considered Browning's use of pathetic fallacy and especially symbols, with the roses in *Women and Roses* and the picture in *My Last Duchess* proving fruitful ground for developed, perceptive analysis. Such answers always supported points with close reference to the poem and an appreciation of appropriate contexts.

- (b) Weaker answers sometimes struggled with some of the details of the poem, at times suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered. More capable responses at this level did have knowledge of the poem and, at times, understanding enough to offer a personal response to the speaker's situation, often noting the how 'the speaker changes from hero to villain, though the details are kept vague by Browning', as one summarised it. Competent answers were often more directed and focused in their arguments and could move beyond paraphrase and summary. Answers at this level were alive to the shifting moods of the speaker, and where this was supported by awareness of Browning's choices of language and imagery, the answers did well. These answers often explored Browning's use of dramatic monologue and where this led to discussions about the first-person narrator and the effects such as immediacy and reader engagement, the answers became good. At this level there was some awareness of the wider text, with links made to poems such as *The Lost Leader* evidencing good knowledge of the text. Other good answers were wide ranging in the choice of poetic methods analysed, with some able to link the poetic metre to the rhythm of the rider at the start and his execution at the end. As awareness of the effects of the poetic choices became more analytical, such as how the 'the speaker moves from a glorious past in events and verb tense into a miserable present', as one essay remarked, so did the answers become more successful. These answers often considered the verse form – 'a ballad style and therefore a narrative', as one learner noticed – and symbols, such as the roses and the gallows. Very good answers combined such analytical shrewdness with a thorough knowledge and understanding of the poem, shaping their interpretation to the question and supporting by appropriate contextual details.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with most learners choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question, with most learners able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices were *Ichthyosaur*, *Lunchtime Lecture*, *Sunday*, *Ram*, *Apples* and *Cold Knap Lake*. Weaker responses were nearly always able to summarise their selected poems, with success dependent on how relevant the personal views and comments were. Better answers at this level did shape their summaries to show they related to the past and at times showed understanding of some of Clarke's concerns: how the past influences the present, continuity of life, life and death, and, for most learners the most important, memory. More competent answers shaped their argument around these concerns directly. Childhood memories of the past were seen as influencing Clarke's view of the world, such as 'the tension and lack of affection in her childhood home creating her own attitudes to children in for example *Catrin* and *Baby Sitting*,' as one learner suggested. Sound answers also considered some of Clarke's poetic methods, the 'cold, analytical tone in for example *Ichthyosaur* showing a lack of emotion', as one learner noted, though others thought the 'memories of childbirth, such as the umbilical chord and the blood in *Catrin* suggest a traumatic experience still haunting her'. Very good answers analysed some of the methods in detail, especially Clarke's language choices 'often graphic and shocking, such as the skull in *Ram*', as one learner said. Imagery, symbols and verse form were also very well discussed at this level. These answers often had precise references to the poems, an awareness of contexts and some appreciation of the different ways the poems might be interpreted, so that *Cold Knap Lake* 'might be a childhood memory in which her mother was a heroine or a half-remembered nightmare where "All lost things lie", including innocence', as one learner perceptively argued. Nearly every answer thought the past was central to Clarke's view of the world, 'since change and natural transformations are central to all life, including humans'.
- (b) This was a popular choice of question. Weaker answers at times struggled with some of the details of the poem, such as 'musk' and 'cromlechs', suggesting the poem was being discussed as an unseen. Interpretations built on uneven knowledge were nearly always restricted and unconvincing. Better answers at this level did have a basic knowledge and understanding and produced a relevant summary of the poem's events and the relationship between the dog and the hare. More competent answers saw this relationship in terms of predator and prey, the cruelty of nature and the cycle of life, with some essays linking these concerns to the wider text. Good answers

considered the language and at times its effects, so that 'the use of "courted" makes it sound like a romance', as one learner suggested. Other good answers analysed the description of the hare: 'beautiful in life and death', though others saw 'Clarke's typical gruesome focus on gory details, such as the blood and snapped rib', as one learner summarised it. There was good analysis of the dog as well, the excitement of the hunt and the effect of the word 'gift' often well discussed. Very good answers saw the poem metaphorically as well. As one suggested 'on the surface a simple tale of the countryside seems to represent the violent cruelty of life', while for others 'the beauty of the natural world is contrasted with the violence and harshness of life in it'. Very good answers did consider poetic methods, the imagery of the seasons, the versification and Clarke's use of free verse were well discussed at this level. Where there was precise supporting quotation from the poem, appropriate reference to the wider text and relevant contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question. Most learners were able to choose relevant poems to address the task, with popular choices including *In the Park*, *The Storm-Wind*, *Father Returning Home* and *Stabat Mater*. Very weak answers struggled with some of the details of their choices and were unable to find relevant material to answer the question. Better answers at a basic level were able to summarise the poems and shape their supporting personal responses relevantly, though some were distracted into discussing their own homes and limiting the development of their arguments. More competent answers were more focused on the task, often choosing contrasting poems in order to have comparison and contrast built into their argument. This worked well with *Father Returning Home* and *Stabat Mater*, for example. At this level, knowledge and understanding were sound so that arguments about the 'dreariness of homelife', or 'the lack of love and emotion', were always rooted in the specifics of the text. Good answers considered poetic methods in detail, most often language and imagery. For example, 'calling him Mr Hunt tells the reader how distant and formal the husband and wife relationship was, reflecting the child's home', as one learner argued. Other good answers considered the poetic methods, such as voice, point of view, use of rhymes and verse form, often building in a contrast between their chosen poems. These answers became very good as the depth of analysis increased, along with the selection of supporting quotations and, in some cases, an awareness of appropriate contexts.
- (b) This was the most popular choice of question on the paper. Weaker answers at times struggled with some of the details of the poem, suggesting it was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered. Better answers at this level had at least a basic knowledge of the poem to support their personal responses. Recognising the poem was about 'a broken relationship and the heartbreak that follows', some learners were distracted into recounting their own experiences, with a consequent loss of focus on the poem. More competent answers had a sound overview of the poem, 'the speaker's spiritual awakening from the depths of a lovelorn depression', as one learner summarised it. This enabled some answers to explore how Raine presents the changing moods of the speaker, with many noting how the poem is split into two halves. Better answers at this level discussed some of Raine's concerns, such as the healing power of nature, the fragility of human relationships, the search for tranquillity and the calmness after the passion. Good responses developed these ideas by looking closely at Raine's methods. Choices of language and imagery were often well analysed, with some learners also able to discuss Raine's use of rhyme and verse. Very good answers also considered the effects of the choices, noting, for example, how 'the lack of rhyme on "desire" in line 12 emphasizes this word, linking it back to the opening line, and thus highlighting how the speaker's mood has changed', as one response argued. Personification, enjambment, caesura and Raine's use of dialogue were often similarly analysed and discussed. Where the analysis was supported by precise references to the poem and some awareness of relevant contexts, the answers always did very well.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 10

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice in this session with answers only seen on option **(b)**

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers often lacked knowledge and understanding of the story in general, so that some answers seemed unaware that this was the ending of the story, for example. Learners with at least a basic knowledge were able to discuss in what ways the narrator's experience is an appropriate climax to the preceding events. At this level, the approach was often by way of summary and paraphrase, with the relevance of the supporting comments and personal response establishing the level of success. More competent answers did focus on Fitzgerald's concerns and methods, for example her characterisation of the narrator, 'who becomes increasingly irrational here and throughout the story', as one noted. Other sound responses also considered the characterisation of Singlebury, who from being 'an inoffensive, almost unnoticed, hard worker is now a ghoulish and terrifying threat'. Good answers developed these ideas by close examination of Fitzgerald's methods. For example, the first-person narrative, 'makes the narrator's experience very immediate for the reader', as one noted, though other learners wondered 'if he is simply unreliable and what we are witnessing his guilt for sacking Singlebury coming to life'. These arguments were supported by close reference to and analysis of specific points in the extract. Very good responses looked at the language and narrative voice in detail, with some, for example, analysing the effects of the change of tense in the final paragraph. Those who remembered that the narrator was writing a report to his superior were able to develop these arguments perceptively and often showed a sophisticated understanding of Fitzgerald's methods and their effects.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Candidates should consider the terms of the question carefully and identify the main area of discussion before selecting relevant material to address the task.
- Although specific references to other parts of the text are not a requirement in **(b)** questions, the most successful responses are informed by a precise context to the passage, related to the main area of discussion in the question.

General comments

The general standard this session was once again satisfactory with candidates achieving marks in the highest levels on nearly every text on the paper. Rubric errors were rare and almost no candidates appeared to have time problems. All but a very few candidates were able to show at least a basic knowledge of their chosen texts and many learners showed evidence of a real enjoyment and engagement with them.

There are two general issues to address this session:

- (a)** Candidates should have a clear approach in mind for addressing the questions. This should include considering the terms of the task carefully, to establish what is the main focus of the question and deciding on their own general response to point at issue. Many questions offer a challenge or proposition on a key area of the text and it is vital, if the candidate is to answer the question relevantly, that this is clearly recognised before the candidate starts to select appropriate material to introduce into the essay. Focusing on the key terms of the task set is an important first step in producing a relevant and focused answer.
- (b)** Passage-based **(b)** questions need detailed focus on the extract printed on the question paper in order to analyse the writing closely. However, knowledge of the rest of the text helps to develop a candidate's argument. When answering a passage-based question candidates will find it helpful to identify the context of the passage early in their answer. This might be what has happened immediately before or is about to happen, or it might be a key moment for a particular character. If the passage is an extract from a longer poem the context would be the wider text. For a complete short poem, the context might be textual or some other appropriate information, for example biographical or historical.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with only a few responses overall.

- (a)** Most answers were able to select relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to discuss sex within a relationship on a character-by-character basis, with De Flores and Beatrice always the main focus, but at times appropriately contrasted to Isabella and

her would-be lovers in the sub-plot. Better answers at this level focused more on the attitudes of the characters, identifying 'the destructive lust that de Flores has for Beatrice is mirrored by her understated yet evidently sexual response on first seeing Alsemero', as one suggested. The 'madness' of Antonio and Franciscus also was derived from sexual desire', as another essay suggested. More competent answers explored the gender differences, noting the 'lustiness of the men, such as Alibius and De Flores in contrast to the purity of Isabella and, to start with, Beatrice', as one essay put it. Other answers remembered Diaphanta's reaction to her night with Alsemero and the 'high price she had to pay for her enjoyment', as one noted. Some essays also contrasted Alsemero to Beatrice with his untainted, almost religious, reaction on first seeing Beatrice. Age-related interpretations were also seen: the age differences of the women to their suitors and lovers, for example. Good answers addressed the presentation of the different attitudes more directly, noting the various contrasts and parallels but also considering language. The 'virginity' test administered to Diaphanta and then to Beatrice was often discussed, as a 'symbol of male attitudes to female sexuality', as one stated. Very good analyses were seen of some of the dramatic methods. For example, De Flores's 'sexually charged but somehow repulsive groping of Beatrice's cast-off gloves', with very good answers exploring the nuances of the language and the imagery. Other answers noted 'the destructiveness of sex in terms of characters like Beatrice, her defenceless, pitiful first encounter with De Flores in stark contrast to her abandonment at the end', as one noted. Where such answers were supported by references to the text, with some awareness of appropriate contexts, they did very well.

- (b) Nearly every response was able to place this passage near the end of the play, as Alsemero 'realises the truth about his wicked wife', as one explained. Weaker answers summarised the situation in the passage but were distracted into retelling the plot up to this point in the play, often in great detail. Better answers at this level focused on the three characters, offering personal responses to them, with many sympathetic to Alsemero's situation and 'appalled by Beatrice's capacity for deceit even at the end', as one learner said. More competent answers considered the dramatists' characterisation, with some finding 'her desire to appear chaste, yet admitting to murder, an odd reversal of what a modern audience would expect'. Her attempts to distance herself from De Flores and justify her actions were seen as either surprising or typical, with some contrasting Alsemero's shocked response to De Flores's honesty and acceptance of their fate. Good answers explored the language, and its effects on the audience, the imagery of death and violence and the pace of the action, all of which, 'build up the tension as the play moves to its bloody climax', as one learner noted. Others noted how the dramatists contrast the 'responses of the villainous couple' through dramatic irony – 'she would commend me to the gallows', for example. Very good answers were alive to the nuances of the methods and their effects, noting for example how 'Alsemero's responses reinstate true morality into the audience that has been sucked into empathising with murderous adulterers', as one response expressed it. Dramatic action was well explored at this level, with the entrance of De Flores often seen as a 'particularly tense moment, with audience's fearing for Alsemero', though as some noted 'unlike Beatrice, he remains true to himself and his love for her, even as she rejects him'. At this level of engagement there was some excellent analysis of language seen, for example, how 'De Flores's use of rhyme serves to accentuate the impact of the word "whore"', and the 'clarity of Alsemero's judgement in suggesting Beatrice is De Flores's "prey"'. Answers at this level supported points with precise quotation from the passage and confident reference to the wider text, whilst shaping their arguments to the demands of the question.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text, with a majority choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) This was a popular choice, with every answer having a personal response to Angelo and many finding some relevant support for their views from the text. Weaker answers retold Angelo's story in their own words, with little or no attention paid to the given quotation. Better answers at this level were able to shape the response to contrast 'Angelo at the start, stern and moral, with Angelo at the end, corrupt and broken', as one essay put it. Most responses at this level discussed his 'moral decline, that ultimately leads to his desire for death', as one essay suggested. More competent answers saw the contrasts between 'Angelo and the "dead" Claudio, who have had sex with their betrothed', though others thought the 'bed-trick, leading to his eventual marriage to Mariana, was also morally suspect', as one said, 'and suggestive of the deep-rooted moral corruption that still lurks in Vienna at the end of the play'. Good answers focused more on Shakespeare's

presentation, tracing the progress in how Angelo is described, often in opposites: untried/experienced, sincere/hypocrite, 'snow-broth' blood/sensual race, for example, were all explored fruitfully. Other good answers noted how Shakespeare contrasts what others say about him with his own words, with some noting his own 'bemusement with his apparent need to corrupt the purity of the religious Isabella.' Very good answers focused on the dramatic methods in detail, exploring the various contrasts, such as Angelo with Claudio or with the Duke, the language and imagery used by others and Angelo himself in describing his actions and state of mind. Other responses argued for the importance of his soliloquys to how an audience judges him. Some answers noted how Shakespeare contrasts what the 'audience hears about him with what they see in front of them', as one noted. Nearly all learners agreed with Angelo's quoted view, seeing his original treatment of Mariana, the forced violation of what he thought was a nun, the carried through execution of Claudio and his shameful attempts to cover it all up by his accusations against Isabella, 'all worthy of the death penalty, which Shakespeare outrageously denies his audience', as one argued. Such answers often had very detailed and perceptive knowledge and understanding of the text, as well as appropriate contexts, to support their arguments.

- (b) Successful responses to this question invariably had a clear knowledge and understanding of the textual context, referencing, not only the Duke's disguise as a friar but also key moments such as the preceding conversations with Isabella about the bed-trick, Lucio's attack on the Duke's honesty and morals to the 'friar' and his persuading of Claudio to accept his execution as just. Weaker answers summarised the various plots and the Duke's role in them, often with only general references to the given extract. Better answers at this level did focus more on the passage, often with a paraphrase of the exchanges and a summary of some of the contextual references. Nearly all at this level saw the Duke as 'a crafty schemer, needlessly putting Claudio and Isabella through hell, when he could have simply taken back his position and put an end to it', as one suggested. Other, more competent responses, saw him variously as 'a lying manipulator, ironically dressed as a humble friar', or 'a benevolent ruler trying to right the wrongs of his previous misjudgements', often finding compelling evidence for both points of view in the extract. His disguise was much discussed – 'what enables him to persuade Isabella and Mariana into the dubious bed-trick is here used as a tool to question the workings of justice in his own kingdom', as one learner thought. This 'ambivalence to the Duke is precisely where the "problem" of the play lies', as another wisely suggested. Good answers noted the methods of characterisation – the dramatic irony of his situation, the humour in his questions about the Duke to Escalus, his shrewd comment about Angelo's 'needing to live up to his judgements, even though the Duke knows he is not and would not', and the use of soliloquy to 'let the audience see into his state of mind', as one put it, 'so that his shock about Angelo becomes very obvious'. Very good answers were always aware of the significance of this extract to the play as a whole and to the Duke's characterisation, often seamlessly integrating wider text references into the flow of the argument.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was not a popular choice of text, with most learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Answers which had a secure knowledge of the context for this passage were able to explore the dynamics in the relationship with some confidence. Weaker answers, without this knowledge, responded to the relationship as though it were central to the play, often summarising the two characters involved with some accuracy, but unsure as to the overall significance of Ananias. More competent answers recognised this exchange as 'showing the audience at the start of the second play how Jero is gaining power and influence through blackmail', though for others 'Jero is simply smarter and more knowledgeable than his victims'. Others linked the exchange to Soyinka's 'satire of religion in general and the prophets in particular, as two chancers jostle for position', as one learner expressed it. Good answers developed such ideas, noting how 'Jero's superiority and the audience's positive response to him, is created by his domination of such low-life characters'. Other good answers analysed some of the dramatic methods: language, stage directions and stage actions were often discussed, with some considering the effects of 'the contrast between the tall, impeccably dressed Jero and the dirty, strongman physique of the wrestler'. Very good answers tracked the progression of the discussion, identifying how Jero 'gradually but remorselessly takes control of the at first confident Ananias and turns him into his henchman', as one response

expressed it, with careful analysis of language and action in support. Very good answers always had a secure knowledge of the wider text, enabling them to discuss perceptively the significance of this relationship to Jero's characterisation and to the plot as a whole.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular drama text on the paper, though nearly all of the learners chose the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers retold the story of how Big Daddy had made his fortune and how the play focused on 'the rivalry between the brothers to claim the inheritance', as one suggested. Better answers at this level were able to contrast the attitudes of Brick and Gooper, as well as their wives, Maggie and Mae. Most responses thought the 'scheming and planning of Gooper and Mae, even using their children as leverage on Big Daddy, was reprehensible', as one learner put it. Such ideas were at times well contrasted with Brick's apparent indifference to money and Maggie's determination not to become poor again. More competent answers linked these points to Williams's methods of characterisation, noting that 'even the Reverend was callously using Big Daddy's cancer as a way of getting money for his church', as one response mentioned. Others focused on the attitudes to wealth rather than the characters, some learners arguing, for example, that Big Daddy's attitude had 'led to him becoming so dominating in the family', though his previous poverty was often compared to Maggie's, leading some responses to argue that they were very similar in other ways too. Good answers, secure in textual knowledge and understanding, connected the various attitudes to Williams's other concerns, such as mendacity, class and the conflict within family relationships. Very good answers developed their interpretations of characters and concerns by looking closely at Williams's dramatic methods: language, contrasting characters, symbolism and dramatic action were all well analysed in these essays. The arguments too were more sophisticated and complex. For some, money was 'only the catalyst that brought the hidden tensions and rivalries to the fore', as one learner suggested. For others, 'Big Daddy's cancer was destroying him just as his vast wealth was destroying his family', as one expressed it. The different attitudes to wealth 'simply reflected the personalities of the characters on stage, Brick's cool indifference contrasted with Gooper's driven need for recognition, Maggie's terror of poverty contrasted with Mae's desire for status and Big Daddy's bullying and abuse linked to Big Mama's indecision and devotion', as one succinctly summarised it. Many of these essays were able to range widely in the text, supporting their points with precise references and a secure awareness of contexts.
- (b) This was the second most popular question on the paper and nearly every response had relevant opinions about Brick, Maggie and their relationship on which to base their essay. Weaker answers tended to respond in a general way to the passage, using it as platform from which to share their, often detailed, knowledge of the play generally. Better answers at this level kept the focus on Maggie and Brick and linked their personal response to the passage directly. Maggie's attitude to children was a popular discussion point. 'The way she describes her nephews and nieces does not suggest that she would make a good mother', suggested one learner, though for others 'her understanding of what Gooper and Mae are up to shows how smart she is'. More competent responses noted how one-sided the discussion is, with 'Maggie using the threat of Gooper cutting Brick out of the inheritance as a means of getting Brick's attention', as one response noted. The way she revealed Big Daddy's cancer and Brick's response to it was often discussed – 'her matter of fact tone jars with the only time he shows any interest in her monologue', as one learner put it. Good answers looked carefully at Williams's dramatic methods. Her 'Southern drawl, and constant chatter giving a misleading easy going image of the couple, which his indifference at this point supports', as one essay remarked. Language, stage directions and dramatic actions were often well analysed at this level, revealing for some 'Maggie's obsession with her looks and Brick's lack of interest in her'. Others noted important details such as Brick responding 'sharply', Maggie drawing the blinds 'to keep out the revealing light' and the background noises intruding into the bedroom. The setting was a fruitful point of analysis at this level – 'the casual conversation of a dysfunctional couple in an intimate setting, touching on many of the serious issues of the family and the play', as one learner suggested. At this level the essays often had a confident grasp of the wider text and were able to support their arguments relevantly and appropriately.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B** with most learners choosing the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) There were only a few essays seen on this question. Nearly all learners were able to select relevant material from the text to address the task. Weaker answers often listed what they considered the key symbols and summarised where they appeared in the text. Popular choices were the green girdle, the axe, Sir Bertilak's castle and the Green Knight himself, with most learners able to place them in the context of the tale as a whole and, at least partly, discuss their significance to the poem's meaning. Others explored Armitage's use of colours, usually green and gold, symbolic for some of fertility and wealth respectively. More competent answers considered the effects more directly. The green girdle, for example, was for some a symbol of 'Gawain's lack of honesty and true chivalry', as one noted, though others saw it as 'symbolic of his humanity in a world of magic and deceit'. Other sound answers noted the conflict between the pagan symbolism of the pentangle and the 'constant references to Christian symbolism such as the cross and the churches', as one noted. Good answers were able to develop their analysis of the effects with secure understanding of the contexts behind some of the symbols – the pentangle was often thoroughly dissected and explored, for example. Other good answers argued that 'pretty much everything in the poem is symbolic, from the beheading in Arthur's court to the slight wound given to Sir Gawain at the end', as one learner suggested, with convincing arguments seen on the centrality of 'the pagan myth of death and rebirth symbolised in the Christmas tide setting for the two acts of violence', as one put it. Good answers were always able to support their arguments with precise references to the text and an assured understanding of the poem and its contexts.
- (b) This was the more popular choice on this text. Learners who had a sound knowledge of the text and were thus able to place the passage in its context were at a great advantage. Some weaker responses were unsure about the relationship here, wondering 'why the knight is rejecting his lover', as one essay put it. Better answers at this level did know the background to the lady's attempted seduction and were able to at least in part consider the significance of the passage to the poem as a whole. More competent answers recognised this exchange as a 'a test of Sir Gawain's chivalry and chastity', whilst others thought it 'a key moment in the development of the beheading game as the knight's worthiness is challenged by inevitably a woman', as one learner argued. Good answers followed the battle of wits in detail, noting the Lady's seductive language and Sir Gawain's studied politeness. The setting of his bed chamber was explored fruitfully, with some good answers contrasting the hunting scenes for 'Sir Gawain is as much the prey of the wife as the boar is of the husband', as one succinctly put it. Good answers developed the analysis of the language of love and chivalry in detail, with good understanding of the wager with the host and of Sir Gawain's situation. The few responses who were able to explore Armitage's alliterative verse with understanding often did well, though very few considered other poetic methods such as rhythm and tone with any confidence.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a popular choice of text in **Section B**, with the majority of learners tackling the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant poems with which to address the task, the most popular choices being *The Laboratory*, *My Last Duchess*, *The Confessional* and *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, though a few very weak responses did use the poem from the **(b)** passage question, suggesting a limited knowledge of the text and inevitably restricting the success of the response. Most essays saw anger as presented through the characters, with weaker answers telling the stories of the Duke, the scorned lover and the jealous monk, often in detail, but staying at a narrative level of response. Better answers at this level were partly able to discriminate between the types of anger, 'the righteous anger of the betrayed speaker in *The Confessional* is more positive than the pettiness of the speaker in *the Spanish Cloister*', as one noted. Better answers noted how anger was often 'against or within the church', reflecting Browning's attitudes to organised religion. Other answers saw anger as 'an emotional response to a perceived betrayal by a lover or a partner', as one learner said. Competent answers explored Browning's methods of

presentation: dramatic monologue was a popular discussion point, as were Browning's choices of language and imagery, such as references to 'poison in *The Laboratory* and status in *My Last Duchess*, which reveal the true state of mind of the speakers', as one learner argued. Few answers were able to explore Browning's poetic methods more generally, so that little mention was made of the use of rhyme and rhythm, for example. However good essays did show confident development of the arguments and secure knowledge and understanding through detailed references to the text, with some supported by appropriate contexts as well. These essays invariably did well.

- (b) This was the most popular choice of question in **Section B**. Weaker answers sometimes had a lack of knowledge of the details of the poem, suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered, which were often speculative in their view of the relationship. More capable responses did have knowledge of the poem and, at times, understanding enough to discuss some the relationship relevantly. Many learners attempted a running commentary, going chronologically through the poem. This was more successful where the essay offered an overview of its meaning in the introduction. Some essay, using this approach, mismanaged the time so that the final verse was only briefly considered. Competent answers were alive to the shifting moods of the speaker, and where this was supported by awareness of Browning's choices of language and imagery, the answers did well. At this level the narrative voice was often analysed, 'as a disappointed male, though in this case neither violent nor jealous', as one learner remarked. Good answers were more wide ranging in their consideration of the poetic methods, noting 'how the language reflects the lover's shifting moods', or 'Browning's use of enjambement mirrors the speaker's flowing fantasy about this last ride', as one learner suggested. Other successful answers noted the use of interior dialogue, reported speech and the shifting tenses of the verbs to good effect. Very good answers offered more developed readings of the poem. For example, how 'Browning mixes the emotional and the physical through the metaphor of the ride', while others at this level explored his use of the natural world 'to create a positive setting for a poem about disappointed love', as one learner argued. Where such arguments combined a thorough knowledge and understanding of the poem, with perceptive analysis, shaped to the question and supported by well-selected contextual details, they were always very successful.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with the vast majority of learners choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Weaker answers sometimes had very limited knowledge and understanding of the poem, suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretations offered, which were often speculative in their view of the events, such as the speaker having wounded her child with the scythe, and there were some misunderstandings as to what a scythe is. Basic answers were able to outline the situation, noting that this 'is a regular, normal activity, gardening, but leads to high emotions', as one learner summarised it. Better answers at this level noted Clarke's typical concern of 'humans and nature and how they affect it badly', according to one. More competent answers developed from the surface events into more metaphorical interpretations. 'Was this the speaker's guilt over childbirth and its traumas, as seen in *Catrin*', one wondered and for others the crushing of the warbler's egg was symbolic of the 'thoughtless way humans damage a vulnerable environment'. Some responses at this level did get distracted into interesting yet ultimately irrelevant personal responses on climate change and current environmental issues. Good answers stayed focused on the given poem and explored Clarke's poetic methods in depth, with some perceptive analysis seen of the language and the imagery, as well as personification, particularly of the scythe, and the anthropomorphism of the warbler. Very good answers considered the effects of Clarke's choices. Many noticed the use of the present tense, 'which gives an immediacy to the narrative and draws the reader into the middle of it', as one learner suggested. Other answers explored stanza form, line length, Clarke's use of free verse (sometimes erroneously referred to as 'blank verse') and internal rhymes, all of which were at times well analysed. Where these analyses were fully integrated into the learner's interpretation of the poem the essays did very well indeed.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice overall, with the vast majority of learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Nearly every learner had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem, with those who were aware of the context of Hardy's biography at an advantage in understanding the speaker's feelings. Some weaker answers attempted a chronological discussion, going through the poem line by line, though without an introductory summary of the poem's overall meaning, such an approach was often piecemeal and disjointed. More competent answers were able to trace the progress of the speaker's feeling 'from desolation to a kind of acceptance that there might be hope', as one learner summarised it. For many responses this was reflected in nature, as 'the poem shifts from desolate winter to the springlike joy of the thrush', as one essay expressed it. Good answers explored the details – noting for example the 'aged thrush mirroring the speaker', or 'evensong, carolings and blessed suggesting a religious hope for the speaker', or 'how the dreary winter scene mirrors the speaker's loneliness'. Good analysis of the effects of the rhymes were seen and in very good answers some awareness of the rhythm of the poem, 'surprisingly light and almost jaunty', as one noted 'given the topic of the poem'. Many answers discussed Hardy's use of pathetic fallacy, often with some perception, and other good answers considered the 'effects of some of the archaic diction such as haunted, coppice and illimited', which 'suggests how long the speaker has been grieving'. Very good answers always supported their points with close reference to the poem and integrated appropriate contextual points into their arguments seamlessly.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 10

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice in this session with very few answers seen on option **(a)**.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a few answers seen on this question. Weaker answers tended to offer a narrative summary, which became more pertinent in proportion to the learner's knowledge of the rest of the story. The accompanying comments then were able to refer some of Ellison's key concerns: racism, father and son relationships, work and parenting. More competent responses were able to develop these ideas by close reference to the text and some awareness of Ellison's methods. Most at least noted the first-person narration, with sound answers discussing some of the possible effects of this narrative choice – unreliability, immediacy and a single viewpoint were commonly suggested. Good answers considered other narrative methods as well, such as the use of dialogue, telling narrative details – preparing lunch was often cited – and the language choices. The interactions between father and son, whose sensitivity to his father's mood was seen as a significant point in exploring the relationship, were key to addressing the task successfully, but always needed to be in the context of the wider text, so that references to the 'fellow and the

hands' were given their full wight. Where such discussions were structured and focused on the task with a clear sense of purpose, the answers did very well.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with only a few responses seen on the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Most responses were able to give a broad context to the passage and show some knowledge of the novel in general. Weaker answers tended to retell the story up to this point or offer a summary of the events of the given passage and what had preceded it. More competent answers did focus on the relationship and Jim and Huck, noting that the first-person narration 'always gives the reader Huck's view of things, even what Jim is thinking', as one essay put it. Better answers at this level noted that the dialogues revealed something about the characters and their different worlds. More competent answers looked at Twain's concerns closely, most commonly friendship, racism and traditions and superstitions. Good answers explored how the relationship was revealed through the dialogue: Huck's guilty hiding of the secret – 'showing how he did not want to lose Jim's friendship', – Jim's attitude to natural events and 'the influence this has on Huck', and the 'easiness of a relationship where Huck enjoys tricking Jim and yet is very concerned when things go wrong', as one learner suggested. Good responses looked closely at language and punctuation, noting how Twain creates identity 'through his use of slang and Huck's childlike view of the world'. Some answers were able to analyse Twain's choices, such as the narrative voice and symbols, such as the snake, its mate and Pap's whisky, and the effects they create on the reader. Where such interpretations were supported by specific detail from the passage and an appreciation of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.