



General Certificate of Education

Classical Civilisation

CIV1C Aristophanes and Athens

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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CIV1C Aristophanes and Athens

General Comments

The entry for this option was comparable to that for summer 2009. The average performance was also very similar.

The most common weaknesses were

- difficulties in sustaining an evaluative argument that was focused on the exact wording of the question
- a failure to explain the judgements with reference to sufficient well-chosen details over the whole scope of the essay
- relying too heavily on generalisations instead of critical examination of the prescribed primary sources.

However, the questions also elicited a good number of structured and informed arguments which demonstrated a high level of knowledge and understanding and a sophisticated ability to analyse and evaluate. Clearly many candidates had not only approached this area of study with enthusiasm and commitment, but had also developed both appropriate academic skills and perceptive insights into an aspect of the classical world.

Section One

Option A

In the 1-mark questions there was a considerable difference in performance between Questions 02 and 04, for which the answers were generally well known, and Question 01, which fewer than half the candidates answered correctly. Question 03 also revealed imprecise recall of the text among many candidates, with two thirds of them making two acceptable points and about half making one.

In Question 05 some candidates merely described what the Megarian and Boeotian did – and in some cases, quite irrelevantly, how Dikaiopolis treated them – but most were able to draw some inferences about their characters from their actions and words and made some attempt to discuss both similarities and differences. Indeed, there was a greater proportion of Level 3 and Level 4 answers to this question on a wider issue than to Question 10 on the comic techniques in the passage.

This higher level of attainment was even more marked in Question 06 when compared to Question 11. Some candidates misinterpreted ‘tragedy’ in the question as anything unfortunate rather than as specifically the dramatic genre, but even then they were guided by the bullet points back to some of the key scenes. Most candidates were familiar with Aristophanes’ repeated use of *Telephus*, though sometimes detail was rather imprecise. The main weaknesses tended to be failures either to give enough attention to tragic parody in the later parts of the play or to devote some time to considering the importance of tragedy and tragic playwrights as sources of humour in relation to others. The best answers demonstrated a quite sophisticated appraisal of Aristophanes’ methods in entertaining his audience.

Option B

This option was rather more popular than Option A. Many candidates were perhaps attracted by what they perceived to be the ease of Questions 07, 08 and 09, which generally elicited a better knowledge of detail than the corresponding questions in Option A. However, as already

noted, the overall standard of response to the evaluative Questions 10 and 11 was less good.

In Question 10 most candidates made some attempt to categorise the types of humour, though not always accurately – for example, ‘eager pricks’ is not innuendo, as was commonly asserted – and not always covering the full scope of what is present in the passage. More limited, however, was the number of candidates who went on to discuss, however briefly in the confines of a 10-mark question, how typical this particular mix of techniques is.

Many candidates were apparently taken by surprise by Question 11, and some openly expressed this. Answers tended to be a rather disjointed sequence of paragraphs on each of the bullet points rather than an argument with an overarching theme, and to include a large amount of generality rather than analysis based on detailed knowledge of the text and its context (Spartan invasions of the Attic countryside had not in fact occurred since Cleon’s capture of hostages from Sphacteria). Relatively few candidates understood that the majority of Athenians, and so presumably of the audience, were farmers for whom peace, as celebrated by the chorus and symbolised by the females Trygaeus rescues, meant a return to an idealised threat- and toil-free land of plenty and festivity. The countryside is, therefore, an important element of the main theme of the play, peace.

Section Two

Option C

Question 12, the more popular of the two in Section Two, was also the better answered, with well over half the candidates reaching Level 4. This was because they adopted a clear point of view – usually that Aristophanes’ treatment of Demosthenes and Nicias is mild compared to that of Lamachus and particularly Cleon – and sustained an argument that justified this position with well chosen details from the texts.

Option D

The level of accurate knowledge demonstrated by candidates who attempted Question 12 was not consistently shown by those who attempted Question 13. Recall of what happens in *Peace* after the flight to heaven was often particularly imprecise, as it had tended to be in Question 11. As in Question 11, too, many candidates fell back on visiting the bullet points in turn rather than constructing an overall argument using the bullet points as an *aide memoire*. Candidates who did put forward a point of view – for example that Dikaiopolis, as the link in a more complex plot with a greater number of themes and issues, has to take on a wider range of characteristics, if not greater complexity, than Trygaeus – and supported it with detailed evidence from both plays were well rewarded.