

SPANISH

Paper 8673/04

Texts

General comments

All the questions set were answered and the paper appeared to be at the same level of difficulty as in previous sessions.

The performance of candidates was similar to that of previous sessions although there seemed to be fewer outstanding answers and also fewer very weak scripts. Examiners would like to draw Centres' attention to the following points which played a significant role in determining the mark awarded for an answer:

- poor, sometimes virtually illegible, handwriting;
- inadequate knowledge of the text;
- insufficiently detailed references to the text in the answer, for example failing to mention specific events or characters from the text to illustrate a point. It is not enough to have an idea of the background or context of a text, for example, background information about the Spanish Civil War or the coup against Allende in Chile. The text itself must be used to substantiate statements made;
- not answering the question set.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 – Pérez Galdós: *Doña Perfecta*

Both questions were equally accessible. Option **(a)** was more popular, and many candidates did not answer part **(iii)** fully, by not investigating the importance of Perfecta's role in *el culto* in sufficient detail with references to incidents beyond the extract quoted. Option **(b)** gave much scope for analysing both María Remedios' and Perfecta's role as mothers and the consequences of their actions.

Question 2 – Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

This was a very popular text. In answering option **(a)**, candidates occasionally drifted off the point in giving too much generalised information about the Allende coup in Chile and, as in **Question 1**, part **(iii)** was often not answered in enough detail. The best responses discussed how the senator's jubilation soon turned sour as he found that his position was diminished and he experienced the extreme violence of the new government at first hand in the torture and imprisonment of Alba. He also lost Blanca and his son was murdered. The irony of the situation was that one of his few good deeds in the past, in helping Tránsito Soto, the prostitute, was returned, as she was the only person who could help him locate Alba. In answers to **(b)**, candidates showed considerable preparation of the role of women as revealed in the text. It is important to ensure that the material is focused on the question set, however, and to avoid writing a general essay.

Question 3 – Mario Vargas Llosa: *Los jefes/Los cachorros*

There were good answers to both options. In **(a)**, some candidates were able to give a spirited and detailed account of the effectiveness of Vargas Llosa's narrative technique. Part **(iii)** sometimes tended to be too vague with insufficient focus on the story itself, rather individual musings on the theme 'what if it happened to me'. Since candidates were only asked to analyse the story from which the extract was given, a considerable level of detail was expected. In **(b)**, a variety of stories were chosen and candidates were generally in agreement with the statement given, although a few found the author to be more optimistic.

Question 4 – Fernando Fernán-Gómez: *Las bicicletas son para el verano*

Both options attracted a number of answers. In **(a)**, a significant number of candidates did not focus enough on the text itself, rather giving general opinions on the privations of war and how people manage to cope. They also stated that the family was closer at the end of the war but did not give any examples from the text to illustrate this. Option **(b)** asked whether the text was pacifist or not – it was surprising to note that a number of those who chose this question did not really understand the term, but still managed to present a reasonable argument by showing how the play focuses on the experiences of war for ordinary people and by implication is critical of the effects of conflict in such a situation.

Question 5 – García Márquez: *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*

These were popular questions. Candidates seemed to know the text well but sometimes tended to present pre-learned material which did not quite fit the question set. In **(a)**, candidates were asked to consider the view that this text presents violence and the consequences of such behaviour. The particular aspect of the consequences was often left out or given insufficient attention as candidates gave gory details of the murder. In **(b)**, Examiners expected to see both parts of the question addressed as candidates considered the roles of both men and women in this society, not just women.

Question 6 – Calderón de la Barca: *La vida es sueño*

Option **(a)** was by far the most popular and was generally well answered. Candidates were able to give plenty of examples of *obrar bien* and contrasted these with *obrar mal*. The best answers considered other characters besides Segismundo, for example Basilio and Clotaldo. Option **(b)** attracted some thoughtful responses.

Question 7 – García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

Many candidates chose these questions. In **(a)**, there was much scope for discussing the role of the horse in the play and Examiners saw some detailed and sensitive analyses of the *nana*. Interestingly, a number of candidates did not seem to have encountered the idea of a symbol, but still managed to produce a valid response. The best answers to **(b)** showed thorough knowledge of the text and a sensitive reading, in the ability to consider the actions of the *Madre* and the *Padre* as well as the more obvious characters in response to the question.

Question 8 – Antonio Machado: *Campos de Castilla*

There were a relatively small number of answers on this text. Some were good, but many did not give a detailed analysis of the poems even though they showed understanding of the main themes. This applies to both **(a)** and **(b)**. It is essential that candidates are able and willing to give very thorough commentaries on specific poems if they choose to tackle this text. As they are permitted to take the text into the examination with them, there is no need to learn quotations. Part of the skill which Examiners expect to see in responses to poetry is that of critical analysis with understanding of poetic technique, use of language etc, as well as themes.

Concluding remarks

Although it may appear to be stating the obvious, candidates must be thoroughly prepared for this examination by detailed reading of the texts and practice in examination type questions. It is essential to respond to all parts of the question, as set, and not be tempted to include pre-learned material which is not correctly focused. Most candidates are aware of the requirements of answering three questions as there are fewer rubric infringements and time management is generally satisfactory as the vast majority seem to be able to complete the paper in the time allocated.