

# SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41

Texts

## Key messages

- Candidates should study the stylistic and thematic qualities of the text and not simply the storyline.
- Candidates should ensure that they read the question carefully and plan the essay to address directly the issues raised.
- Essays should be well-structured with an introduction, development and conclusion.
- Essays should include detailed references to the text to support the argument without retelling the whole story.
- References to the text must be correct, for example names of characters.
- Any background to the text must be accurate, for example the date the text was written.
- In **Sección Primera**, part (iii) of **Question (a)** is designed to be the main focus of the task. The best essays give brief answers to parts (i) and (ii), and discuss part (iii) in depth, with reference to the text as a whole.

## General comments

Examiners commented that the general standard of work was good; candidates had studied the texts carefully and presented answers legibly. However, greater focus on the question set and improved essay-writing skills would benefit a large number of candidates.

In some cases candidates did not clearly indicate which question they had chosen to answer and Centres are requested to remind candidates to write the question number, e.g. '2(b)', before they start their essay.

## Comments on specific questions

### **SECCIÓN PRIMERA**

#### **Question 1** Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a) Many candidates answered this question. Parts (i) and (ii) were well answered although some responses were too long, and included a lot of storytelling. The best answers to part (iii) found a number of examples of key dialogues in the novel that displayed how the author used this technique. This may have been to deepen the reader's understanding of Castel, or to allow the reader to witness the relationship between María and Castel, for example. Answers needed to go beyond a discussion of the dialogue in the Post Office in the printed extract. Some very good answers also discussed the use of interior monologue. In any case, the answer required reference to the '*técnica literaria*' and not simply a list of conversations.
- (b) This was also a popular question. There were some very interesting essays where candidates were able to balance the presentation of Castel as an individual reacting to experiences which affect many and analyse the extent to which the author focuses on one rather than the other. Weaker answers tended to over-generalise the '*temas universales*' issue and made little reference to the text.

#### **Question 2** Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

- (a) This question attracted many responses. Answers to parts (i) and (ii) were generally good and many explained the conflict of interests clearly. In response to part (iii), Examiners rewarded essays which analysed how individuals use their power or authority and assessed to what extent this was a poisoned chalice. High-scoring answers also referred to the role of the King. Essays which reflected on the nature of power in general, without specific reference to the text, could not achieve high marks.

- (b) This question focused on the issue of justice. The best answers analysed who had committed an injustice in the play and how he or she had been punished. Some candidates were not sure about Pedro Crespo's position as *alcalde* and the extent of his legal powers. The best answers included reference to Isabel's fate and the role of the King. Some candidates took the view that this was not the '*tema clave*' and then wrote an essay on honour. It is possible to compare and contrast more than one aspect, provided the essay is focused on the theme referred to in the question. Rewriting the question with no reference to the central issue raised in it does not fulfil the requirements of the paper.

**Question 3** Luis Sepúlveda: *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*

- (a) This was chosen by a large number of candidates. Parts (i) and (ii) were generally well answered, although some did not understand exactly what was happening and few recognised the humour at the *alcalde's* expense. Many essays in part (iii) made no reference to the novel as a whole, basing the argument on the printed extract only. The best answers showed a deeper understanding of the conflict between '*los blancos y los indígenas*' and the ability to relate this to the author's overall intentions.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this question, where candidates analysed the meaning of '*un mundo diferente*' in the context of the novel and made perceptive comments. Other essays were too general, discussing the environment and related issues, without making sufficient connections and references to the text.

**Question 4** Lauro Olmo: *La camisa*

- (a) There were only a few answers to this question. Candidates used the extract fairly well in part (i) although some details were missed. Part (ii) was fully answered. Part (iii) asked candidates to consider both political and economic aspects and essays focused mostly on the economic, as this is probably the most predictable issue. In order to reach the higher mark bands, candidates needed to respond to all parts of the question and therefore some reference to politics was essential. The best essays referred to the news, for example, and indications of censorship.
- (b) There was a small number of responses to this question. The main criterion for success here was careful reading of the question. Candidates were not asked to give a character study of Juan, rather to consider how his role is central to the play as a whole. Candidates need to be sure they are writing an answer to the question set and not reproducing a pre-prepared response. Many good answers also considered the role of other characters, widening the analysis, but kept the focus firmly on Juan.

**SECCIÓN SEGUNDA**

**Question 5** Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) There were very few essays on this question. The answers showed understanding of the post-war situation and most related this to the conflict between Ramón and Juan.
- (b) This question elicited few responses. Essays studied the nature of religion as evidenced in the life of members of Andrea's family, and considered the morality of decisions made in difficult circumstances. Death was analysed from a number of points of view including the effects of the Civil War and Ramón's suicide.

**Question 6** Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

- (a) This question attracted a large number of responses and many candidates wanted to show their detailed knowledge of the text. However, it is important to select examples to support an argument rather than retell the whole story. The best answers presented a view, for example that unhappiness was due to love, unrequited love, social norms or traditions, and then illustrated this with references to the text. Most focused on Tita, Pedro and Rosaura, with the more thoughtful responses including Gertrudis, Esperanza and Alex.
- (b) This was also a popular question. The majority of candidates chose to blame Mamá Elena, others focused on social expectations. The most successful answers took a wider view and analysed to what extent a number of influences or individuals contributed to '*la maldad*'. As with the previous question on this text, it was tempting for some candidates to list events which could be described as bad without analysing them. This type of essay cannot access the higher mark bands.

**Question 7** Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

- (a) This question was well answered by candidates who understood the nature of traditional society. There are many references in the text to illustrate this, and examples of individuals who took a more liberal view. Candidates who wrote about Lorca's examination of society and its effects on the individual characters in the play achieved a higher mark than those who concentrated on the author's personal experiences and difficulties.
- (b) A very large number of candidates chose this question. The most perceptive essays were structured so that they traced the way the portrayal of Yerma changes throughout the play separately from the way that she comes to terms with her situation. A significant number of essays demonstrated some misunderstanding of the play: many believed that Yerma killed Juan in order to begin a new relationship with Víctor. Yerma's situation was often discussed in a modern context, missing the point of her distress. This text is the one that attracts most speculation beyond the play itself, which is not relevant. Candidates must concentrate on the text, and show detailed knowledge of the narrative and ideas, within the context in which it is set. There were still many examples of essays referring to the play being written during the Franco dictatorship. Well-prepared candidates reacted to the issues with passion and understanding, producing some powerful essays.

**Question 8** Alfonsina Storni: *Selección de poemas*

- (a) The responses to this question were either very good, showing careful preparation of the poems, or weak, suggesting an off-the-cuff answer. The best essays addressed all parts of the question, identifying the main themes and giving a critical study of the poetic language. Candidates do not need to copy out many lines of poetry; a brief quotation is sufficient.
- (b) The quality of answers to this question mirrored that of (a). Many candidates had studied the work in great detail and were able to select and analyse appropriate poems. The essays also included relevant references to the life and times of the author. Centres who chose to prepare this text equipped candidates with the specific skills necessary to write about poetry effectively. This is essential for success in relation to poetry more than to prose or drama.

**Resources**

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## General comments

There were a moderate number of rubric infringements where candidates had answered too many or too few questions, or had chosen to answer on the same text twice.

Poor handwriting can be a real barrier to communication and Centres are asked to impress this on candidates. Examiners found a small number of scripts extremely difficult to assess for this reason.

Candidates have the best chance of success in this paper by using their knowledge of the text, and their skill in analysis, by taking time to read the questions more carefully and choosing appropriately. Examiners report a significant number of examples where candidates had responded to part of the question only, or had taken a very generalised approach. This could be a result of a misplaced desire to show knowledge of the whole narrative. Answers in the highest mark bands were clearly focused with selective use of illustration from the text.

## Comments on specific questions

### **SECCIÓN PRIMERA**

#### **Question 1** Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

- (a) Candidates responded well to parts (i) and (ii). Answers to part (iii) tended to focus on the final words of the extract, discussing Castel's subsequent pre-meditated violent actions. Candidates could have used the extract more to analyse Castel's state of mind and his mental processes.
- (b) This question gave rise to a number of interpretations of love in the novel. Many discussed Castel as obsessed rather than in love with María and referred to the confused nature of the relationship as a mixture of maternal and sexual love. María's feelings were also analysed and the strongest answers mentioned the ambiguity in her relationships and the fact that most of the reader's knowledge of María is recounted by Castel, and therefore is not objective.

**Question 2** Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

- (a) Strong answers focused on the differing views of justice and honour within the hierarchical society depicted in the play, and how this came to a climax with the execution authorised by Pedro Crespo. The role of the King also needed to be understood as order is re-established after the chaos. Perceptive candidates studied the nature of the relationship between Don Lope and Pedro Crespo, despite their differences of belief.
- (b) There were few responses to this question which focused on the predominance of action within the play, and the consequential effect on characterisation and development of themes.

**Question 3** Luis Sepúlveda: *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*

- (a) Responses to this question showed good understanding of the novel. Parts (i) and (ii) were well-answered. Part (iii) needed a clear focus, which was indicated by the reference to *el tema de la obra* in the question. The best answers identified the theme, explained how it is expressed in the extract, and then traced its development throughout the novel.
- (b) Fewer candidates chose this question but answers again reflected close study of the text. The theme was discussed effectively through the actions of the main characters.

**Question 4** Lauro Olmo: *La camisa*

- (a) Candidates knew the play in general terms but needed more detailed understanding to give a full response to all aspects of the question. Part (ii) was not always understood; the best answers mentioned Lola's strong sense of pride and ambition. Part (iii) tended to be too generalised. The best essays traced the psychological decline of Juan, as well as some of his friends, taking solace in alcohol, for example, and analysed the imagery of the *camisa* and what it represented.
- (b) This question elicited few responses. Examiners looked for detailed understanding and the ability to select references effectively, showing how the individual characters were defined by their reaction to the common situation.

**SECCIÓN SEGUNDA**

**Question 5** Carmen Laforet: *Nada*

- (a) Candidates found a lot to say about Román. Many saw him as the puppeteer, controlling members of his family from his attic room, and developed this interpretation effectively. The best answers analysed the nature of his relationships with a range of other characters, including that with Ena's mother. Most discussed how the theme of the Civil War was portrayed through Román. Candidates showed knowledge and understanding of the novel.
- (b) This question gave rise to some interesting arguments where candidates debated the relative merits of the two titles. The most thoughtful responses considered that the original title, *Nada*, was the more powerful as it encapsulated the themes more effectively. *Andrea* was generally seen as too narrow an interpretation. Many candidates used the text well to support their argument and had engaged fully with the text.

**Question 6** Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

- (a) This was a popular choice. The vast majority of candidates challenged the statement in the question, arguing that the more unusual aspects of the narrative added to the success of the novel. Essays showed how the recipes and the preparation of food were important to the understanding of Tita's emotional state and how her feelings were conveyed. Candidates related well to the text and generally used references sensibly.
- (b) Many candidates also answered this question. There was some confusion as to the meaning of *feminista*. Some answers listed the female characters and told their stories, on the premise that the fact that most of the characters are female makes it a feminist novel. The better essays analysed the role of women as depicted in the novel and made a detailed assessment.

**Question 7** Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

- (a) This was another popular text. Many candidates answered this question fully, looking at the issue of frustration from a range of points of view. The strongest answers considered the experience of several characters and the influence of tradition. Candidates showed good knowledge of the text and related to the issues presented. It is essential to keep an answer firmly based on the text itself and to avoid imagining what happened next, or to project the problems to a more modern context.
- (b) This was less popular than **Question (a)**, but still attracted a number of answers. There were some interesting discussions defending Juan, who was seen to be acting correctly in protecting his reputation and showing strength in bringing his sisters to watch over Yerma. Victor was generally criticised as weak, running away from temptation. There was scope for candidates to explore this question in several ways and all approaches were valid, provided that the argument was supported with detail from the text.

**Question 8** Alfonsina Storni: *Selección de poemas*

- (a) There were too few answers to this text to make specific comments. In general, those who had made a close study of the poems and learned how to write a critical analysis did well.
- (b) Essays on this question focused on the theme rather than the technical aspect of poetry. Candidates who had studied the poems closely and were able to select appropriately had a good basis for their answer.

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