

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41

Texts

Key Messages

1. Candidates are advised to read the questions carefully and be sure that they understand their chosen questions before they begin to write. It is advisable to underline or circle key words in the question and plan the essay around these.
2. Candidates are advised to introduce essay answers by defining the terms (key words) briefly, in the context of the text studied, in their opening paragraph.
3. Candidates are advised to check that they have answered the question, rather than simply re-told the story. Incidents, characters, and/or quotations from the story should be used to support their arguments.

General Comments

The majority of candidates demonstrated that they had studied the texts closely. There was also evidence that candidates were experienced in answering practice examination questions. Key Message 1 is particularly important as a significant number of candidates did not read the question accurately and instead seemed to be responding to a question set on a previous examination paper (e.g. see comments below on **Q5(a)**).

A number of candidates had acquired awareness of the plot of the texts studied but did not have a full understanding of the motivation of the characters within the context of the work or the literary themes. They also tended to project contemporary attitudes onto the texts or characters, which were not always appropriate.

In *Sección Primera*, the answers to the three components of option **(a)** are not intended to be of equal length. Candidates will note that **(i)** and **(ii)** require brief responses, linked directly to the published extract. This means that candidates may be able to give a full answer in one or two sentences. **Part (iii)** is more wide-ranging and asks candidates to analyse aspects of the extract in the context of the whole text. Therefore this will be a much longer answer, in which the candidate can show understanding and appreciation of the text in depth.

Most candidates followed the rubrics correctly. There were some instances of answering the wrong combination of questions, including responding to both **(a)** and **(b)** on the same text.

It is important to check carefully when mentioning names of characters, authors and the historical context of texts. If these are muddled it can be difficult for Examiners to follow the candidate's train of thought.

Examiners had considerable difficulty reading a significant number of scripts due to extremely poor handwriting. Candidates are advised to find a way of writing legibly as Examiners only mark what they can read.

Comments on Specific Questions

Sección Primera

Question 1

Juan Rulfo: *Pedro Páramo*

- (a) Examiners saw some good answers, but many essays dealt with the questions rather superficially. Not all candidates identified the extract correctly. The best responses included analysis of the character of padre Rentería with reference to a number of incidents, significantly his meeting with the priest from Contla, and discussed the Church in a wider sense – links with landowners and its role in the revolution, for example.
- (b) There were more answers to this option. Successful essays were well structured, contrasting the idyllic past of Comala as described by Dolores, with the situation found by Juan Preciado. The best responses demonstrated candidates' ability to refer to the text to support their argument, than simply narrate without analysis.

Question 2

Lope de Vega: *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*

- (a) A number of candidates gave vague answers in (i) and (ii). These options are designed to elicit brief, accurate responses. In (iii), the best responses focused on the Comendador's arrogance and the way he abused his position of power. This was a more successful approach than those who concentrated on Casilda, suggesting that she actively considered a relationship with a noble.
- (b) There was much potential for responses to show the hierarchy of the society depicted in the text. Most contrasted the nobility and *campesinos*, but did not understand Peribáñez's standing at the opening of the text. The best answers showed the conflict between different strata of society rather than only describing the differences in wealth and power. Candidates also mentioned the powerful female characters – the Queen and Casilda.

Question 3

Jorge Luis Borges: *Ficciones*

- (a) There were a few very good answers which identified the information to (i) and (ii) correctly and then structured part (iii), clearly comparing and contrasting the theme of treachery, rather than describing the stories. Most mentioned some of the key aspects of ambiguity, identity and the theme of circularity often found in Borges' work.
- (b) This was a popular choice for the text. Candidates tended to discuss the structure of the detective story and the sense of mystery often found in his work. The most popular choice of stories was *El fin* and *El sur*, although some referred to *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, which was possibly more productive. There was also scope to consider why Borges chose this format and how the author used it to explore deeper themes.

Question 4

Antonio Buero Vallejo: *El concierto de San Ovidio*

- (a) Some candidates did not see the deeper meaning in parts (i) and (ii); the patronising and hypocritical attitude. These points led directly to part (iii) and the *moraleja* of the play. The best answers recognised the immoral exploitation of the *ciegos* for personal gain, and the contrast in attitude toward them by Valentín. Some also related the moral of the play to the political situation in Spain at the time the play was written and saw this as the central message.
- (b) This question was one example of the need for careful reading of the question. Candidates sometimes missed the word *positiva* in the question, and simply focussed on *tragedia* . This

severely limited the marks available. There were some interpretations which indicated knowledge of the plot but fairly superficial understanding of the themes. The positive aspects would be the reaction of Valentín Haüy and possibly the death of Valindin as the aggressive bully. However this led to the tragic death of David. The positive outcome would be in the future and as much as a result of a change in attitude rather than an immediate effect. This would also fit in with the interpretation of the work as a metaphor for the political situation in Spain at the time the play was written.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*

- (a) This question was the primary prompt for Key Message 1, above. A large number of candidates read *idealismo optimista* as a synonym for hope and produced an essay based on 'is there any hope in the novel?'. The main focus of the essay was then usually a contrast between the attitudes of the colonel and his wife, with mention of the *gallo*. This clearly reduced the number of marks available as candidates were not answering the question on the examination paper.

Candidates could have begun by quoting: '*La vida es la cosa mejor que se ha inventado*', which encapsulates the colonel's idealism and optimism. The political life of the town is an essential part of the theme – the colonel maintains his position as a liberal idealist despite the murder of his son. The incident when the colonel comes face-to-face with his son's assassin and stands his ground shows how he maintains his dignity and sees the effects of a brutal society which has debased individuals. The colonel is hopeful, but candidates needed to explain why – the colonel has ideals and lives by them. Reference to other characters in the text, as well as the wider society, in the light of his idealism gave a clearer perspective. For example, Sabas has no ideals as he put personal gain as the motivation for his life and betrayed his political views and his friends, allying himself with those who were his enemies, in stark contrast to the colonel. The *gallo* also represents the colonel's ideals as he is honouring the memory of his son who sacrificed his life for the right of free speech and political beliefs.

- (b) This option was a little less popular than (a). The majority of candidates understood the role of an omniscient narrator and some recognised the power of descriptive passages. Many tended to deal with the fact that the omniscient narrator knew everything by including too much narrative. An interesting comparison with the use of dialogue could have enabled candidates to analyse the relative effect of literary techniques.

Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) The best responses to this option showed how the author had written a multi-layered novel dealing with complex themes and introducing a wide range of characters. The focus on one family in the main gave a stable central group of individuals who then developed in different ways. The socio-political context was presented through the experiences of the main characters and drew the reader into the setting. A number of candidates chose one or two themes, such as the position of women or the effects of an oppressive right-wing government and showed how the author explored them. Knowledge of *el realismo mágico* as a literary device was rarely demonstrated. Candidates generally knew the novel well, but did not always select references to best effect and tended to narrate too much.
- (b) This question also raised issues referred to in the Key Messages, in that many candidates did not read the instructions carefully and wrote responses in which they contrasted one or two specific male and female characters. The question asked candidates to analyse the contrast between the presentation of women as creative and original individuals, versus the aggressive and conservative nature of men. The more general approach may well touch on the question but would also include much irrelevant information. The best answers selected a small number of characters and used depth of knowledge to show how attitudes developed, and in some cases changed, according to circumstances.

Question 7

Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

- (a) The best responses analysed the Madre's influence in the development of themes and the plot. Some candidates demonstrated how her personality had been affected by experiences and how she was influenced by the society in which she lived. Most candidates were able to use the text well by supporting their arguments with quotations, although some of these were too long.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this question. Candidates understood that there was a conflict of irreconcilable destinies in that Leonardo and the Novia were destined to be together, yet the Novio was destined to die. These ideas were supported by an appreciation of the social context and the many dramatic features, which seem to lead inexorably to the tragic outcome. A fair number of answers were overwhelmed by narrative and simply told the story and then concluded the ending was destiny. As in other questions, candidates must focus on the key words and ensure their answer responds directly to the question asked.

Question 8

Rosalía de Castro: *En las orillas del Sar*

- (a) Candidates who choose this text are usually well prepared and are familiar with the terminology and techniques in analysing poetry. The best essays are those which are able to structure their response in a thematic way, comparing and contrasting ideas referring to Nature from both poems as they work through their answer. Examiners look for a personal response which is fully supported by detailed references to the text and understanding of the writer's focus.
- (b) In this option, candidates are able to choose whichever poems they feel express the theme of religion and analyse it. Examiners are open to any choice of verses, provided they are relevant to the theme, and also accept the candidate's own interpretation, subject to understanding of the many aspects which make up a poem. These include lexis, imagery, metre, setting, voice and other linguistic devices.

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/42

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General Comments

The majority of candidates demonstrated that they had studied the texts closely. There was also evidence that candidates were experienced in answering practice examination questions. The first 'Key Message' is particularly important, as a significant number of candidates did not read questions accurately and, for example in **Q4(a)(iii)**, missed out part of the question. In this case, '*el tema de la traición y del perdón*' focused mostly on the treachery aspect and did not deal adequately with forgiveness.

A number of candidates had acquired awareness of the plot of the texts studied but did not have a full understanding of the motivation of the characters within the context of the work or the literary themes. They also tended to project contemporary attitudes onto the texts or characters, which were not always appropriate.

In *Sección Primera*, the answers to the three components of option **(a)** are not intended to be of equal length. Candidates will note that **(i)** and **(ii)** require brief responses, linked directly to the published extract. This means that candidates may be able to give a full answer in one or two sentences. This was particularly relevant in **Q1(a)(ii)**, where candidates could have simply explained that the paragraph described a typical early morning scene in the Comala of Dolores' memory which seems idyllic. **Part (iii)** is more wide-ranging and asks candidates to analyse aspects of the extract in the context of the whole text. Therefore this will be a much longer answer, in which the candidate can show understanding and appreciation of the text in depth.

Most candidates followed the rubrics correctly. There were some instances of answering the wrong combination of questions, including responding to both **(a)** and **(b)** on the same text.

It is important to check carefully when mentioning names of characters, authors and the historical context of texts. If these are muddled, it can be difficult for Examiners to follow the candidate's train of thought.

Examiners had considerable difficulty reading a significant number of scripts due to extremely poor handwriting. Candidates are advised to find a way of writing legibly as Examiners only mark what they can read.

Comments on Specific Questions

Sección Primera

Question 1

Juan Rulfo: *Pedro Páramo*

- (a) There was some confusion regarding the context of the published extract. The best essays showed how Juan Preciado was moved to visit Comala in response to Dolores' memories and the resulting experiences. They also referred to the contrast in the past and literary present in the accounts of the other individuals in the village. Some candidates spent too long on (ii) – see comments above regarding the balance of the different parts of this type of question.
- (b) Most candidates were able to describe the three characters mentioned. Some good essays then went on to analyse how the presentation of Pedro's sons contributed to the themes of the novel. Miguel was generally considered to be the key figure, in that he was recognised by his father and seemed to have inherited many of his traits. There was some confusion as to the legitimacy of the sons; this factor was less important than the contrasts between them and how they interacted with other characters.

Question 2

Lope de Vega: *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*

- (a) The extract was intended to elicit the theme of love between Peribáñez and Casilda and the strength of their relationship, which would enable them to withstand the challenges ahead and lead to the positive dénouement. Good essays selected the relevant references to support this, showing how Casilda rejected the promise of wealth and status offered by the Comendador and remained faithful in all respects to Peribáñez. Some candidates dealt with the class difference as the main issue, which rather limited the scope of their answers.
- (b) One of the key points in answering this question was to show how the arrival of the Comendador disrupted the harmony of the rural life enjoyed by the villagers. The newcomers brought different values which challenged the local people. This conflict became the central motif of the play. Harmony was restored at the end of the play when the monarchs re-established the order in society shattered by the Comendador's actions. Many essays discussed the differences in attitude, but did not always understand the underlying theme.

Question 3

Jorge Luis Borges: *Ficciones*

- (a) Examiners were looking for discussion of Borges' view of society and the way he interprets chance as an influence. This could then lead, in a number of ways, to analyse a number of themes found in the story given on the Question Paper as well as many others. The key to achieving a coherent argument lies in structuring the answer according to theme or idea rather than recounting the narratives.
- (b) This question gave candidates the opportunity to follow a wide range of approaches. A very good answer may introduce some of Borges' main literary devices but then refer to themes or messages in those same *Ficciones*. The candidate may compare one of the more realistic stories with one of the more complex, or take a theme such as treachery and show how this is dealt with in two different pieces. Examiners looked for some understanding of Borges' original way of tackling ideas and how these were conveyed to the reader.

Question 4

Antonio Buero Vallejo: *El concierto de San Ovidio*

- (a) Candidates understood the extract and were able to give good answers to (i) and (ii). In **part (iii)**, candidates sometimes only dealt with half of the question – either treachery or forgiveness. Few essays analysed the full range of treachery – by the Prioress, Valindin, Adriana, David and Donato, in different ways. The idea of ‘*perdón*’ requires more thought and explanation, highlighting the motivation or ability of characters to forgive, and why.
- (b) This question was approached in a number of ways. The majority view is that David is the victim who suffers in order that blind people will have a better future thanks to individuals such as Valentín Haüy. Others interpreted the work as a metaphor for the political situation in Spain at the time of writing, showing how the Church and the state (represented by Valindin as a dictatorial leader) colluded to exploit those who were weaker due to their economic circumstances or other factors. The hope again rested in David, who was prepared to stand up to this and challenge authority on an equal basis and the reaction of liberal-thinking people who could see a better alternative in the future. The fact that David died suggests that success and change would only come after many more battles.

Sección Segunda

Question 5

Gabriel García Márquez: *El coronel no tiene quien le escribe*

- (a) This question was very accessible and most answers referred to the contrast between the colonel and his wife or the colonel and Sabas. It was important to structure the essay in a logical way, for example considering the differing values of the colonel and Sabas, and then those of the colonel and his wife, showing how the author uses the contrast to add depth and understanding to the novel.
- (b) This was the less popular option on this text. Candidates could analyse many aspects of the technical and stylistic expertise of the author. The omniscient narrator, the use of dialogue, the images and metaphors or the apparently simple style could be included.

Question 6

Isabel Allende: *La casa de los espíritus*

- (a) Although candidates usually know the text well, they sometimes find it difficult to resist narration to display this. In this question, candidates needed to begin by explaining what ‘*el orden natural del mundo*’ means in the context and then show how the individuals would be affected by any change, therefore justifying the actions taken to defend the status quo. Candidates needed to understand the political situation presented in the novel and to be aware of Pedro Segundo and Esteban Trueba’s views.
- (b) Answers to this question also needed to explain the political changes and then explain how the female characters were affected, or sought to be involved in possible changes. Candidates knew a lot about the characters but tended to be less confident in analysing the political aspects.

Question 7

Federico García Lorca: *Bodas de sangre*

- (a) The best answers argued that Leonardo deserves both condemnation and admiration, depending on point of view. Essays showed that Leonardo had genuine feelings for the Novia, which had been suppressed as the marriage was not acceptable to society, and surfaced on the occasion of her marriage. Many responses argued that he was wrong to challenge society’s rules, but was acting according to his instincts. Answers which projected contemporary attitudes onto the characters

and/or plot were less successful, for example suggesting that divorce was possible or that the Novia could remarry. Candidates must focus on the text as a work of literature.

- (b) This question was also very accessible and those candidates who chose to answer had clearly studied the importance of the use of colour in the play. Some had difficulty in showing whether this expressed a pessimistic view of life. Most understood the dramatic effect, in particular the use of the colour red.

Question 8

Rosalía de Castro: *En la orillas del Sar*

- (a) Candidates who have experience of critical analysis cope well with this type of question. Essays do not need to include detailed quotations, but selected words or phrases may be helpful as support for the argument. It is normally better to structure the answer in a thematic way, presenting each aspect of religious faith rather than a line-by-line commentary.
- (b) This question gave much scope to candidates to show their appreciation of the presentation of the theme of love as an essential element of life. Examiners look for understanding of the poems chosen and a clear argument. Candidates are free to challenge the question, as the mark scheme focuses on the quality of the argument combined with depth of awareness and knowledge of the text.