

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J360**

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

General Comments

In this entry there were over 30,000 candidates entered from 322 centres. It is very pleasing to report that overall there was a consistency of marking and application of standards, and the responses to a wide range of tasks underlined the clear guidance that the teachers had given in order for students to complete their assignments without any teacher intervention. In general, moderators were pleased to report that they were impressed with what they saw and were particularly pleased to see that many candidates had chosen texts from across the whole selection for both poetry and also Shakespeare.

General Administration

This was excellent overall. Folders were mostly submitted on time and were well presented with detailed annotated comments making the moderation process much easier. In the vast majority of cases the annotated comments helpfully referred to the assessment criteria and indicated that internal moderation had taken place.

The use of Modman and the electronic sampling system clearly facilitated the whole process and centres generally responded promptly to the request for folders.

Centres are by now aware that in January 2014 there will be no entry for this component, and they must make sure that candidates entered next year complete the Controlled Assessment tasks for **June 2014**.

Centres are urged in the future to make sure that the cover sheets for each folder are clearly filled in for all candidates that have been selected in the sample, and that the overall mark on the folder is the same as the one submitted on the final mark sheets. A minority of centres sent the assignments in a separate package to the final annotated cover sheets and the moderator was then left with the task of collating the complete folder before the moderation process could begin.

Centres are also urged not to put individual assignments in plastic wallets as this again is time consuming as they all have to be removed before the moderation process can begin. One staple in the top corner of the completed folio is the most advisable form of collation for the future. Centres only need to include materials that they feel will facilitate the moderation process and which will clarify how the final mark has been awarded.

Generally there was clear evidence that internal moderation had taken place in the vast majority of centres and on this entry there were only some small adjustments needed to a small minority of centres. Marking was generally consistent and centres had been rigorous in their application of the assessment criteria. It was encouraging also to see that centres were using the “best fit” approach when awarding the final mark, and giving more weighting to the poetry piece if this was in fact the better response of the final two for submission. Most centres now appear to have grasped the “best fit” approach in arriving at the final mark for the folder.

Response to Shakespeare

On this entry the vast majority of centres responded to the tasks on *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but there were also responses to *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*. There was clear evidence that the use of the film had enhanced the interpretation of the play, and centres had clearly used the film to stimulate a general interest in the text. Moderators reported that it was pleasing to see the various films used intelligently alongside the text. It was also particularly

impressive that many centres had been able to see a live performance, enabling some candidates to express their enthusiasm for this openly.

A small minority of centres were using alternative film versions of the play that were not on the recommended list that accompanied the tasks. Centres are advised to refer to this list when preparing to show the filmed version before undertaking future tasks.

It is pleasing to report that most centres are getting a sound balance between commenting upon the performed version against the literal interpretation of the text.

Most candidates showed clear and critical engagement with the play and were able to refer to the text to support their observations. Centres had also clearly encouraged their students to look at the set scene in the context of the whole play and this enhanced the final response as a result. Moderators reported that candidates had been well prepared and were able to refer to the characters selected in the context of the rest of the play. There was no evidence to suggest that centres had been anything other than totally diligent and conscientious in their study of the whole play, and then directed this into the selected scene for the final assessment piece.

Response to poetry

The majority of centres responded to the poems by Wilfred Owen, but there were responses to the Browning poems and also to Chaucer, Rossetti, Hardy and Shakespeare.

The responses were generally of a very high standard and centres had applied the assessment criteria consistently. On this entry moderators reported that centres had clearly rewarded close personal analysis and the ability to make clear connections between the texts.

Summary

Generally this was a very impressive entry and centres demonstrated a clear understanding of the specification and responded appropriately. Teachers are to be complimented for their hard work in delivering this component, and their conscientious approach and consistency of standards was reflected in the quality of work that was submitted for final moderation.

A662 Modern Drama

General Comments

In the June 2013 assessment period of the GCSE English Literature J360 specification a total of more than 19,000 candidates at Higher Tier and more than 3,000 at Foundation Tier, took advantage of the opportunity to enter for the Modern Drama units. Foundation Tier candidates in this series accounted for less than 20% of the total entry, suggesting that centres continue to make careful and largely justified tiering decisions, but also indicating that there is some falling away of the Foundation Tier entry in relation to the entry at Higher Tier. It was, however, noted by examiners that the general standard of performance at both tiers revealed some notable improvement on the January series and it may be that centres are refining their entry policies as the specification is “bedding in”. Nonetheless, some examiners did observe that a very small minority of Higher Tier candidates may well have been better suited to answering the more structured Foundation Tier questions and that a similarly small number of Foundation Tier candidates could conceivably have gained marks in excess of the permitted maximum for the lower tier.

The overall quality of the work submitted was generally perceived as of a praiseworthy standard, with the paper being seen as very accessible on the whole. A significant number of examiners commented on what they saw as a general improvement in the overall standard of work and it was also deemed that there were fewer weak responses. It has again been particularly encouraging to note some pleasing traits that may well have reflected a tendency for centres to take on board the messages of previous Principal Examiner’s reports. There seemed, generally, to be stronger evidence of candidates at both tiers of entry having absorbed the advice to contextualise extract questions succinctly, though some examiners commented that a failure to do this was still often a feature of weaker answers. There was continuing evidence of candidates really thinking about which characters are onstage, what they know, what has led up to the extract and what happens as a result of it. In this series there appeared generally to be a pleasing absence of responses that merely worked through the passages as if they were unseen and far fewer references to “readers” in proportion to “audience”, which seems to provide continuing evidence that many centres are now adapting their approaches to the teaching of the play as a performance, seen from an audience perspective, rather than as a text on the page. There remain references to “the book” and even, in some cases, to “the novel” or the “novella” (a likely slip if candidates are also taking A663 in the same sitting). Having said this though, the general consensus was that there was a significant and growing amount of very sophisticated and insightfully analytical work, showing very sound knowledge of texts, evidence of thorough and imaginative teaching and an encouragingly increasing amount of comment directed at the play in performance. A significant number of candidates were able to cite specific productions and film versions that they had experienced and were, therefore, able to see themselves not merely as readers of a text, but as members of an audience and to engage with the ways in which an audience’s reactions are influenced by sound, movement, gesture and tone as well as the crucial effects of dialogue, characterisation and plot development.

The passage-based question remains the preferred option of the great majority of candidates, though there seemed to be a feeling among examiners that there were perhaps fewer candidates attempting the discursive questions than there had been in the January series, where a significant increase had been observed. This could perhaps be a result of what one examiner saw as some “inviting” passages, with which candidates relished the opportunity to engage. A number of examiners did, however, observe that the quality of the discursive responses they saw was very impressive, particularly mentioning 6b and 4b as questions that elicited some very strong answers. Whilst the organisational skills required to address these questions are clearly of a different order to the extract-based option, it seems to be the case that some candidates of all abilities, and particularly the more able, are often better served by selecting a discursive task

and it is to be hoped that the perceived drop in the numbers of candidates attempting this option will not become an established trend.

Examiners generally felt that candidates had been well prepared for the extract-based question and were usually able to get the balance right between dealing with the dramatic detail of the extract and with its wider significance within the play as a whole. It was, however, noted by some examiners that they felt that context-heavy answers were beginning to proliferate again, with much time given to background detail and far too little focus on the extract itself. It was further observed that answers including partially assimilated social and historical material, particularly in an attention to Priestley's supposed Communist leanings and Sherriff's war experiences for example, appear once again to be on the increase. To some extent this may be a knock-on effect of the AO4 focus of the A663 paper and centres should be aware of the different demands of these units. **With this in mind, centres are urged to consider the features of successful and less successful answers that are offered later in this report.**

It is worth noting that the number of feature-logging responses that become an analysis of the linguistic features of, for example, Miller's stage directions or punctuation, which after all are not seen by an audience, are on the decline. One examiner commented on "the minority who organise their answers into (for example) three paragraphs, the first on rhetorical questions, the second on short sentences and the last on alliteration in the stage directions"; such an approach is not helpful to the candidates when addressing the question. More able candidates are often able to assimilate such features with some degree of coherence and, occasionally, relevance, but, for the less able, any appreciation of the dramatic/emotional content tends to be lost, along with the chance of getting a mark commensurate with their abilities.

Comparatively few examples of rubric infringements were reported, with the "multiple" answers seeming rare. There were, however, a number of candidates who appeared to run out of time and failed to complete an answer, though it must be noted that this was often the result of close engagement and exhaustive comment on a text rather than poor exam technique and time management. Some responses still showed a propensity to conflate (a) and (b) questions and attempted to answer the discursive option, using only material from the given passage; a limiting and self-penalising factor.

Whilst the great majority of candidates at both tiers seemed to have been successfully prepared for the demanding task of producing a well-structured response in only 45 minutes, deploying a sound, often impressive knowledge of text, some of the perennial reasons for underachievement still seem to persist. Examination inexperience, evidenced by features such as over long and elaborate plans, brief and undeveloped answers, losing the focus on the question or extract and insufficient textual support, remains the main cause of underachievement. The best extract-based responses still managed to achieve a balance, spending the bulk of their time on the extract itself and moving out from it and returning to integrate comment on its wider importance within the play. The best discursive responses made a judicious selection of material and kept the given question in sight at all times, pursuing the dramatic function of the character/relationship rather than simply tracing their involvement through the play. Redundant, lengthy general introductions were, regrettably, still a feature in some centres and clearly a disadvantaging factor in such a brief examination. Opening paragraphs that detailed Sherriff's war experiences, Priestley's political viewpoints, the social position of women in the early 20th century or even Miller's early years as a longshoreman often did so at the expense of meaningful comment on the dramatic core of an extract or the dramatic function of a character. A succinct and focused introduction often made a massive difference to the quality and structure of an answer, regardless of whether an extract-based or discursive response. Reader-based thematic approaches to plays that focus on the social and historical contexts at the expense of engaging with the dramatic detail, dialogue, characters, the relationships and the candidate's own feelings and viewpoints seem still to be encouraged in some centres. It should again be noted that **AO4 is not assessed in this unit** and, whilst examiners are instructed to credit

sound and **relevant** knowledge of the social/historical context, too heavy a reliance on such features is likely to be self-penalising.

Once again, it is pleasing to report that all six texts were covered in this examination series. *An Inspector Calls* remains by some distance the most popular choice; some examiners reported marking more than 50% of their allocation on this text, though it was generally considered that candidates engaged effectively with it and were able to explore the issues arising with some sensitivity. *Journey's End* and *A View from the Bridge* appear to be the next most popular options, with the latter text eliciting some particularly impressive and insightful responses. *Educating Rita* continues to be studied by a significant number of centres, with candidates seeming to engage positively with the cultural and social issues the play encapsulates, though the humour of the dialogue sometimes proves difficult for some to grasp. *The History Boys* remains a minority choice and, again, the comic dialogue is often appreciated fully only by the most able candidates, though it is a text that has yielded some extremely sophisticated and critically aware answers. *Hobson's Choice* seems to be the least studied of the plays available, being offered by only a small number of centres.

It may be useful to reiterate some general guidelines about the strengths and weaknesses that have typified responses in this series to enable centres to consider these in their planning and teaching of this Unit for future assessment opportunities:

Successful candidates:

- see the texts as **plays in performance** and themselves as **members of an audience**
- see the stage directions as **part of the dramatic action** of the scene and **visualise the onstage action, always** writing about **what the audience can see and hear**
- pay explicit attention to the **wording of the question** and balance attention on **each strand of the question**
- construct succinct and purposeful **opening paragraphs, focusing specifically on the given question**
- select and **integrate brief quotations** to explore the dialogue and to support and amplify their ideas
- **avoid pre-conceived model answers and formulaic approaches** and trust their own direct personal response
- **never** write about the dramatic effects of punctuation.

Less successful candidates:

- see the **texts as pieces of writing only** and themselves as readers
- see the **stage directions merely as pieces of bolted-on written communication** and ignore their significance to the onstage action
- start with a **pre-conceived introductory paragraph**, which is **unhelpfully generalised, biographical, focused on social/historical background or list-like** and says nothing specific about the play or question
- **lose the focus of the question** and use pre-prepared material which has little direct relevance to the question
- **misread the question** and write about the wrong character or moment
- **become detached from the dramatic action** and resort to listing features, such as decontextualised stage directions.

Extract-based questions

Successful candidates:

- devote **at least two thirds** of their answers to **discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself**, but still convey understanding of the whole play context
- begin their response by **locating the extract in the context of the whole play**
- succinctly **establish the dramatic context for the characters and audience** in the opening paragraph
- ground their **reflections on the whole play** firmly in the **detail of the extract**
- pay close attention to the **build-up of dramatic detail** throughout the extract.

Less successful candidates:

- produce **generalised answers with little attention to the given extract**, or approach the extract as if it is an “unseen” exercise and **give little sense of the rest of the play**
- produce a **sweeping opening paragraph** and largely ignore the question
- **rarely offer quoted material** from the extract or, conversely, **copy out large chunks** without any attempt at commentary
- **miss the reference to the given moment** in the question and, as a result, **answer on the play as a whole** with **little or little or no reference to the printed extract**
- **write lengthy analyses of the linguistic features (and even punctuation) of stage directions**, which are, of course, never seen by an audience.

Discursive Questions

Successful candidates:

- **focus rigorously on** (and sometimes challenge) the terms of the question, **maintaining relevance throughout** their response
- **select judiciously** across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments
- **balance their answers** thoughtfully when answering double-stranded questions
- show a **sharp awareness of audience response**
- quote **shrewdly and economically**
- arrive at a **relevant and well-reasoned conclusion**.

Less successful candidates:

- become bogged down in one moment in the play so that the **range of reference becomes too narrow**
- **rely, mistakenly, on the printed extract for the previous question** for their ideas and quotations
- spend too much of their time on **one strand of a two-stranded question**
- completely **lose focus on the question** and write pre-prepared material with limited relevance.

Comments on Individual Questions

The History Boys

A relatively small number of centres selected this text and the majority of candidates were entered for the Higher Tier. The passage-based question **1a** was the preferred option of most candidates and it met with varying degrees of success. Some candidates dealt effectively with the humour of the extract and most were able to see the Headmaster's errors of judgement and understanding, though the stronger answers were able to address both strands of the question, grasped Scripps's function and the wider importance of the scene in terms of the play's central concerns of education and teaching. The best responses, and there were a good number of these, really got to grips with the humour of the Headmaster's clipped tone and the complex status games in which Irwin and the Head are engaged, whilst exploring the wider importance of his views on education and the significance of the extract in introducing the young Irwin and hence the seeds of future conflict. As one candidate put it, "there would have been no plot without the introduction of Irwin".

Question **1b** was a less popular choice and attempted by relatively few candidates. The question demanded relevant selection, thought and development if a balanced argument was to be achieved. Some responses opted to say at the outset which teacher they considered the better and then pay scant attention to the one they had not selected, but the more successful answers were able to comment on the methods of both and explore Bennett's presentation of the educational viewpoints represented by both Hector and Irwin and how these clash throughout the play. Examiners saw this as a thought-provoking question and one commented on an "exemplary answer, arguing strongly for Hector while being fully aware of his failings." In all a well-received question that was, regrettably, attempted by comparatively few.

Hobson's Choice

There were very few centres attempting this text in this examination series, with what would seem the vast majority of candidates entered for the Foundation Tier. Most responses seem to have been to **2a**, with candidates mostly responding successfully to the conflict between Maggie's forthright, business-like approach and the materialism and snobbishness of her sisters in their attitudes to Willie. The stronger answers were able to see the significance of the extract in terms of the play's wider concerns of equality and improvement and the irony of the conflicts here when one considers the play's outcomes.

At the time of writing, very few responses to Question **2(b)** had been reported, but examiners felt that those seen had handled the question competently and displayed a clear awareness of the growth of the relationship in terms of Willie's developing confidence and Maggie's role in encouraging it. The stronger answers were able to set this within the contexts of the play's wider themes of equality and changing gender roles.

A View from the Bridge

An increasingly popular text, possibly only now exceeded by *An Inspector Calls*, that again appears to have been both well received and well taught by centres and greatly enjoyed by candidates.

The extract question (**3a**) was by far the most popular choice on this text and demanded both discussion of context as well as of the wealth of material available in the dialogue and staging. It was successfully answered by the majority of candidates, who were fully alert to the pivotal nature of Eddie's decision and were able to comment on the destructive power of his inner torment. Stronger answers displayed a clear understanding not only of the dramatic nature of the scene, but also of its context within the play as a whole; how we have arrived at this point and foreshadowing where events are leading. Miller's stage directions were generally related to the onstage action and the symbolism of the glowing phone booth was often explored productively, as was the writer's language. Some of the strongest answers had a sophisticated insight into Alfieri's powerlessness here, his role as choric narrator, the nature of tragedy and his final

speech about the law. Examiners reported that there was a particularly pleasing response to this question, with a high proportion of very strong answers. Examiners also commented that Foundation Tier candidates seemed to benefit greatly from the directive bullet points in the question and that many Foundation Tier answers focused clearly as a result, consistently meeting Band 3 criteria.

Although the majority of candidates on this text went for the extract-based response, question **3b** seems to have been competently answered by those candidates that attempted it, though it must be said that this was a comparatively small minority. It may well be that the very powerful and packed nature of the extract may have led candidates away from the discursive option here. Most examiners felt that candidates had a good sense of the supportive nature of the relationship revealed in their conversation in Act One and in Beatrice's encouragement both for Catherine's growing independence and her burgeoning relationship with Rodolpho. Most also recognised the importance of the relationship in terms of Eddie's growing obsession, but only the strongest seemed to relate this to the growing sexual tension in the house and few considered their joint pleas to Eddie in the final scene. Some answers tended to lose focus on the relationship and its dramatic function and tended to embark, perhaps unsurprisingly, on a study of Eddie's unacknowledged incestuous feelings for Catherine.

An Inspector Calls

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the most popular choice of text by some distance and answers to **4a**, the passage-based question, generated the full range of achievement at both tiers of entry, with candidates clearly appearing to have engaged with the play and to have understood the dramatic context and to have at least some awareness of the wider significance of the extract. Many examiners commented on the fact that the bullet points proved a particularly helpful steer at Foundation Tier, but it was noted that some answers at both tiers didn't really show a full understanding of the nature of the argument between Sheila and Gerald and one examiner felt that the extent to which candidates were able to explore Gerald's evasive behaviour here was a useful discriminator. Some took his apparent protectiveness of Sheila at face value and some seemed to think that they were acting together to hide the truth from the Inspector, though the vast majority clearly knew the play and the role of the characters in the suicide of Eva Smith. Gerald's reaction to the Inspector's question about protecting young women from "unpleasant and disturbing things" and the irony of the attitudes towards women shown here and elsewhere in the extract were seen as often providing a key discriminator and the strongest were able to link this to Priestley's views on class and the different treatment afforded to women from different classes. Sheila's growing maturity and willingness to accept responsibility, as opposed to Gerald's shiftiness, were often discussed by better answers, and related to the generation gap and the wider issue of collective responsibility that is at the core of the play. Many stronger answers saw the beginnings of Sheila's taking on the Inspector's role and viewpoint later in the play and the Inspector's emotive reminder of Eva's death as evidence of the Inspector's increasing power and one candidate aptly commented that he "interjects and takes control of the storyline as if directing the rudder on the inevitable sinking of the Titanic". There were still a minority of answers that became side-tracked by the play's political message at the expense of exploration of the dramatic detail of the extract and some went a little too far in announcing Sheila's "road to Damascus" conversion to socialism.

Question **4b** was attempted by a much smaller, though nonetheless significant number of candidates, probably being the most popular (b) question, and was probably done equally well as the extract-based option, with the majority able to show a secure understanding of the relationship between Eric and Mr Birling. Some candidates tended to adopt a character sketch approach, commenting on one character and then the other, often showing understanding of both, but not really focusing on the dramatic significance of the relationship to any great extent, which is perhaps surprising, allowing for the opportunity afforded by the breakdown of the relationship to consider Priestley's wider concerns in terms of the generational divide and social responsibility. Early signs of the dysfunctional relationship, Birling's lack of knowledge of his own son, his poor parenting skills and the conflict over Eric's involvement with Daisy/Eva and the

theft of the money were common features of successful responses. The better answers managed to stay focused on the nature of the failed relationship, the reasons for its failure and the dramatic consequences, particularly in their different reactions to the news that Goole is not a real Inspector and that no girl has apparently died. Such stronger responses were able to link the relationship to Priestley's themes of the generational divide and collective responsibility and explore Birling's refusal to accept any responsibility in contrast to Eric's genuine remorse.

Educating Rita

Educating Rita was a reasonably widely-studied text in this series, with the majority of candidates opting to attempt Question **5a**; a particularly popular option for Foundation Tier candidates. The passage and question allowed good scope for meaningful answers with the majority easily able to pick up on the differences between Frank and Rita in terms of language and class issues, though one examiner rightly pointed out that the identification of the sources of humour does not always come quite as comfortably and that, whilst many pounced on 'off me cake', some saw the state of the staffroom "as part of Rita's sad schooling rather than an example of her wit". That said, the question was generally well-handled and candidates at both tiers were able to pick up on both strands of the question to respond, at least to some extent, to the cultural and class issues that are apparent. The stronger answers were able to focus on Rita's sense of her own separation from what she wanted in life and her desperation to acquire it; her desire to change was recognised by most. Many were able to identify Rita's own sense of emptiness at this point and such stronger answers also responded well to the symbolism of the pencils and the ashtray, with a clear recognition of Rita's final "Let's start!" comment, in the wider context of the play. Some noticed Rita's decision not to buy a new dress and the best related this to the dress that Frank gives her at the end of the play.

Question **5b** was, predictably, the less popular option on this text, but those that attempted it appeared to have a clear sense of the effect of the experience on Rita in terms of her development as an educated woman and were able to cite as evidence the "new" second-hand clothes, the increased confidence and the willingness to engage with the "proper" students. Better answers to this question focused on both Rita's growing confidence in dealing with literature and on the fact that the changes are not necessarily all for the better. Such responses showed a clear grasp of the fact that the first signs of Rita growing away from Frank and his influence and of Frank's clear disquiet at the prospect become apparent after her return and were sometimes able to detect the first signs of the pretentiousness and developing intellectual arrogance that Frank comes to hate. Answers generally were able to select relevantly and keep the focus of the question, though only the more able seemed to engage effectively with the humour of Russell's dialogue.

Journey's End

A popular text, but there was some comment among examiners that it appears now to be rivalled by *A View from the Bridge* in terms of the number of centres choosing to study it for this unit, though it still appears to be enjoyed by the majority of candidates and **6a**, as in previous series, remains the most frequently attempted question, eliciting the full range of responses. The majority of candidates were able to focus on the contrasts between the age and experience of Raleigh and Osborne, though not all detected Osborne's sensitive steering of the conversation into a form that will be comforting and reassuring for the younger man and there were varying degrees of response to the "moving" nature of the exchange. One examiner commented that many moved effectively through the extract "without really engaging with its moving qualities per se ... but were able to pick up on the Osborne/Raleigh relationship well and the context of the moment." Raleigh's youth and inexperience were well observed, though this sometimes led responses away from the dramatic detail and into a focus on a lost generation and the conditions in the trenches. The best answers showed sharp focus on the opening dialogue, Raleigh's nerves and fear, his naivety and hero worship and the sense of a lost world revealed in the conversation about rugby, school and past times. Strong answers often saw the writer's dialogue and stagecraft here as a way of creating empathy for the characters and thereby amplifying the impact of their deaths on an audience.

There were proportionally far fewer responses to Question **6b**, yet it was probably the second most attempted discursive option after **4b** and the consensus was that it was generally well done by those who attempted it. Examiners remarked that responses ranged across the whole spectrum of opinion, from those who expressed complete sympathy for Hibbert to those who perceived him as a snivelling coward, who lacked any sense of comradeship. Inevitably, there were responses that adopted the character study approach, despite the clear steer of the question towards Hibbert's dramatic impact and function. Successful responses were able to explore Hibbert's fear and desperation to escape the front line and the scene in which Stanhope threatens to shoot him featured in the majority of answers as highlighting Sherriff's use of Hibbert to exemplify the terrors of war that ordinary men had to endure. The strongest answers appreciated Sherriff's use of Hibbert as a dramatic contrast to the quiet heroism of Osborne, Trotter and Raleigh and to the flawed heroism of Stanhope, exploring the wider themes of comradeship and the effects of war upon men. Such responses were often able to see both sides; the "little worm, trying to wriggle home" and the frightened little man placed in a terrifying and extraordinary situation through none of his own choosing. As one examiner remarked "Hibbert generally got a lot more sympathy (from candidates) than he does from Stanhope."

SPaG

In this, the second series that includes the SPaG mark in this unit, it is perhaps worth reiterating some general observations on candidates' performance and adding one or two others. The level of achievement for SPaG was seen as largely very sound, particularly at the Higher Tier, with few candidates at either tier falling into the Threshold performance band. Three areas for attention were highlighted by examiners: the fact that a number of substantial scripts were presented as one "paragraph" running up to three sides of an answer booklet, the tendency of some candidates to spell the names of dramatists and characters consistently incorrectly e.g. Priestly, Shiela, Osbourne, Raliegth (sic) and the widespread misuse or omission of possessive apostrophes. The ways in which a well-paragraphed and punctuated response makes the candidate's argument clearer should provide an extra impetus to address this problem and centres may well feel that, as SPaG now holds nearly a fifth of the total marks on the Higher Tier paper, it is worth encouraging candidates to pay more attention to the spelling of dramatists' and characters' names, the use of commas to separate clauses, the correct use of apostrophes and to the spelling of specialist terms.

A663 Prose from Different Cultures

General Comments

The number of schools submitting students for the unit was about 300, entering a total of 21,000 candidates. On this occasion fewer than 3,000 were Foundation Tier, representing only about 14% of the entry. Given the fact that some schools entered only a few candidates it is probable that there was significant number of re-sits among this year's entry. The relatively small size of the Foundation Tier will also reflect the fact that many schools no longer enter the whole cohort for English Literature, though some still do, and it is often a pleasure to read scripts from candidates whose academic skills are limited but who have clearly enjoyed the novel and have made connections between the lives of the characters and their own; this was particularly evident on this occasion in the responses to Curley's wife in question 1a - *Of Mice and Men*.

The quality of work in the Foundation Tier was a little lower than in January through the range, with only a small number of candidates scoring in the top half of band 3 (suggesting they should perhaps have been entered for the Higher Tier). There were also more responses in band 5, indicating some lack of ability to organise and sustain a relevant response, though again the number of very weak answers and rubric errors was, encouragingly, very low.

Notwithstanding the above, we still read many solid responses in the Foundation Tier in band 3 and at the top of band 4 where the bullet points often helped candidates organise and sustain their writing. Though the general standard of work in the Higher Tier was again impressive, candidates who under-achieved often did so because their response was thin and sketchy. The advice given in January, '*Candidates who are not expected to gain grade B or above may well benefit from being entered for the Foundation Tier*', still applies.

Of Mice and Men continues to be most schools' text of choice with the passage-based question much the more popular; indeed question 1a was chosen by over 80% of Higher Tier candidates and over 90% of Foundation Tier. The advantages and disadvantages of the extract question have been aired in more than one previous report on the examination. There is always the issue of balance in the a) question; to what extent candidates should range beyond the extract, and I will return to this issue in comments about individual questions. The b) question requires a sound knowledge of the whole text so that candidates can go swiftly to a page in the novel to extract a precise fact or a quotation, but if they have that then the question is designed to give them every opportunity to explore themes and characters in order to attain highly.

Once again both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Tsotsi* produced more than their fair share of strong answers with both passages providing ready opportunities to create effective links to the social context. There were more *The Joy Luck Club* responses than usual attracting able candidates who generally did well while numbers for the other two novels were small; this is perhaps more surprising in the case of *Anita and Me* which is, arguably, a novel that offers something of value to a wide range of tastes and abilities.

Overall, the opinion of most examiners was that, while the standard of Foundation Tier work may have slipped back a bit, in the Higher Tier it continues to improve. It is a tribute to the hard work of candidates both in preparation for this exam and in the exam room itself, and to the effectiveness of teachers, that the average mark is well up in band 3, showing 'good overall understanding' of the material. Responses are mostly of a fair length, written in properly structured paragraphs, often with effective topic sentences, and demonstrating an ability to use quotation to support points. While examiners sometimes note a slight dearth of successful response to language, there is strong agreement that the incorporation of AO4 (integrated contextual information) continues to improve. Where there is still a problem it may be to do with too much context (often in passage-based questions where links are not well made and the

focus on the question and the passage are lost) and also in the fairly common scenario where the concentration on contextual information has squeezed out any attention to the author's choice of words.

It is striking how many candidates are now steeped in the PEE approach to paragraph structure. It was noted this time round that those who follow the expanded PEEZ approach (PEE plus Zoom) tend to produce a significantly more detailed and successful response, although occasionally it was clear that some lower ability candidates had been instructed to do this but were selecting their 'zoom' word with no underlying rationale or understanding, crucially undermining the effectiveness of the technique.

Comments on Individual Questions

Of Mice and Men

1a

Note that much of the comment on 1a is about strengths and weaknesses in candidates' approaches to the question and as such many of these observations could well be applied to other questions. Because this was such a dominant choice it serves best to exemplify said strengths and weaknesses.

General comments

Questions relating to Curley's wife always inspire a committed personal response to the character and this was no exception. A wide range of vigorously and colourfully conveyed opinions was noted. There were some candidates disinclined to revise their poor view of her, as learned from Candy among others and confirmed by her treatment of Crooks, while others felt that the wool had dropped from their eyes leaving them feeling guilty about their previous low opinion. Both views and the more conventional type of partial re-appraisal were acceptable and could attain highly though it is regrettable that a few candidates were prepared to express a rather cold, misogynistic view of her.

Assessment Objective 4

It was clear that candidates were aware of the AO4 requirement in this question, and in the Higher Tier there were very few responses that did not address this, with varying degrees of sophistication. Instances of candidates simply "bolting on" contextual information were rarer; many were successful in integrating a range of contextual links. Responses that placed Curley's wife, for example, in the social hierarchy of the ranch and could examine the implications – "even Lennie won't listen to her" – were well rewarded. Less sophisticated answers were able to make some straightforward, if simplistic, comments on the role of women and/or the "American Dream".

Some candidates, fully primed in the importance of contextual links, saw the character entirely as a stereotype, representing nothing else than the disenfranchisement of women in that society. That is part of her story but it reduces her not to pick up on the details of her character that make her come alive on the page. This kind of response also tended to deal in sweeping generalisations, principally that women then were all either domestic slaves or prostitutes.

The best responses focused mainly on the extract, while offering brief but illuminating contrasts with her behaviour in her two previous appearances. They also contextualised her situation as a vulnerable woman in an aggressively male environment in an age suffused with sexual discrimination.

Assessment Objective 2

The very best responses focused significantly on Steinbeck's language and used it to identify important character and thematic points which contributed to the creation of sympathy in the extract. However, impressive word-level analysis was disappointingly thin on the ground; as mentioned above it seems to have been to some extent elbowed out by AO4. However, it can

function crucially as a discriminator, especially at the top end, distinguishing band 2 work from band 3 and band 1 from 2. For instance the number of candidates who latched on to ‘tumbled’ and discussed its effect in suggesting Curley’s wife’s desperate enthusiasm was very small; more, though still a minority, were comfortable writing about ‘passion’ in that vein, perhaps because this is not such a figurative usage. The oxymoron in ‘small, grand gesture’ wasn’t picked up on; more candidates thought that this was evidence of acting ability than of its absence.

Other strengths

- The use of quotation, particularly embedded quotes, is increasingly well done. Few candidates now don’t quote and many use them neatly and thoughtfully to illuminate their analysis, though often candidates who made good points supported by apposite quotation could have earned themselves extra marks by developing their analysis in a little more depth and detail – moving beyond a simple comment towards extrapolating a deeper point linked to context or the text as a whole.
- Length of responses was almost universally appropriate – examiners saw few answers which required a comment referring to length, perhaps a function of some serious effort in exam practice.
- Candidates had clearly been inspired to respond personally to the text which led to some engaging and provocative essays.

Weaknesses

- There were a number of misconceptions that sometimes weakened responses. The most prominent one was that she was a talented actress and her dream of Hollywood stardom has been almost within her grasp (the influence of today’s TV talent shows?) and only snatched away through the machinations of her mother. A benchmark for a response getting to band 3 or beyond was that it recognised she was a victim of unscrupulous and deceitful behaviour, which exposed her youth, naivety and vulnerability. Candidates who took her words at face value that “her ol’ lady stole it” were generally likely to do less well.
- There were also a few fundamentally misguided candidates who thought Curley’s wife had singled Lennie out in order to proposition him either sexually or as a ticket out of the ranch.
- A number of candidates thought that Curley and his wife had been together for years.
- One questionable approach which is still noted is that of those who came with a preconceived list of things to mention: the set-piece paragraph on Steinbeck’s use of the vernacular or on the cyclical structure of the novel were two that appeared regularly and often added little to the quality of the response.
- There was a tendency by candidates to allow the two questions to bleed into one another so that either ‘dreams’ or ‘Curley’s wife’ might appear at inappropriate length and examiners had to perhaps re-assess, notwithstanding the number at the start, which question was being answered.

1b

This question tended to be chosen by candidates with a good overall knowledge of the text and many were effective in providing evidence, often in the form of quotation from various points in the novel. Most focused principally on George and Lennie as one would have expected with some, usually but not always the higher attaining, adding Candy, Curley’s wife and Crooks to the list of characters with broken dreams. Curley’s name was mentioned quite often too, perhaps surprisingly: based on two passing references to his boxing prowess and success in the ring he is included among the dreamers and the shattering of his dream along with his hand recounted.

Candidates were generally comfortable with the theme which had clearly featured prominently in their preparation. Many managed to highlight the various dreams throughout the novel very fruitfully and a few produced a coherent argument comparing the dreamers and their despair to the comparatively ‘contented’ dreamless – Slim, Carlson. It was interesting (and not anticipated) that candidates differed on whether they felt that Steinbeck considered dreams desirable and necessary to keep going in bad times or a waste of time and a guarantee of disappointment. The

best responses tended to focus more precisely on key words in the question – ‘powerful force’ in the Foundation Tier and ‘importance’ in the Higher, rather than simply trolling through the details of a number of characters’ dreams which tended to lead to a rather narrative approach.

Focus on George’s attitude to the dream was often an indicator of work at the highest levels. His relationship to it changes after Candy gets involved and responses that picked out and examined this change tended to do well. Candidates differed markedly in their view as to whether George and Lennie’s and Curley’s wife’s dreams were ever viable, but most saw their power to inspire and motivate and, in the case of Lennie, comfort and control.

The incorporation of links to the Assessment Objectives was a key discriminator here. Most candidates made valuable references to the social context by contrasting the dream and the reality but references to Steinbeck’s use of language here – as so often in responses to the b) question – were scanty. Effective points about the role of dreams in the novel’s structure were made by some higher attaining candidates but close textual analysis, particularly at word and sentence level, was hard to find. A brief examination, for example, of how George’s tone of voice and expression change when he is recounting the dream to Lennie in chapter 1, would have gone some way to fulfilling the requirement to specifically target AO2.

To Kill a Mockingbird

2a

This was the third most popular question and along with 6a the only other one that attracted any great number of responses. It differentiated well among candidates: the first paragraph offers some quite challenging opportunities to target AO2 in examining the description and also the narration; the rest focuses on the drama being enacted below and links straightforwardly into the social context. There are six characters involved in the action, giving plenty of material for candidates to get their teeth into.

Examiners were impressed by the quality of work offered. One wrote, *‘There is, of course, a wealth of imagery and symbolism to explore. I was especially taken with analyses of “the gun was empty...” and references back to Atticus the sharpshooter and the rabid dog. Many more took the obvious point about the Mockingbirds and the Radley Place. Really good answers did something on Heck Tate and the singularly different role he plays here: and the way it is described. The very best gave calculated and complex accounts of the narrative voice. There were few weaker responses to this.’*

Another commented, *‘Q2a inspired some passionate writing which demonstrated engagement with the text. Most candidates had no problem with exploring language and context here. Able candidates were particularly sensitive to the atmospheric opening paragraph.’*

Able candidates also targeted AO4 by making effective passing reference, for example, to contemporary court cases and some, impressively, made a distinction between the situation in 1936 when the book is set and in 1960 when it was published, citing its contribution to the burgeoning civil rights movement.

Weaker responses tended to be characterised by prepared paragraphs on context and on the mockingbird motif, without much focus on the question; some ignored the end of the passage, where Reverend Sykes and the others stand, despite it being one of the most moving moments. A few weak answers seemed unclear about what part of the trial is featured here, mixing up the roles of judge and jury and not appreciating that this is the moment of the verdict.

2b

There were few answers here, though the ones we did read were generally very good. Questions relating to secondary characters are mostly ignored but I feel that is a pity as they can combine the main advantage of the passage-based question (a narrower range of reference) with those of the discursive essay (the scope to develop the response, showing a wider

knowledge of content and theme.) Mrs Dubose's participation in the novel is almost exclusively restricted to one chapter, so she is easily located by anyone with a working knowledge of the text, but she offers rich opportunities to target both AOs: Lee's description of her contains some of her most vivid writing and she links easily to several of the main themes of the novel.

The contradictions in Mrs Dubose's character, specifically her rabid, racist views juxtaposed with her immense courage, were effectively highlighted by a high proportion of candidates and the opportunity to quote Atticus about 'standing in others' shoes' was often taken and well rewarded. Close reference to the key words in the questions – 'memorable', 'significant' (H) and 'important' (F) was also a strong feature of responses to 2b.

Tsotsi

6a

Examiners once again wrote admiringly about the responses to *Tsotsi* especially 6a: *'As I have found before the students that answer on this text are often able to analyse the effectiveness of language and to interweave contextual ideas. I found this again this year – the most sophisticated answers I marked were in answer to this question.'*

'The best answers I saw were for Q6. 6a allowed candidates to pick out some of the strong quotes from the useful passage to use as material on which to base their comments.'

'Candidates wrote with real engagement about Morris's plight and unfeigned indignation about the government that had turned its back on him.'

Weaker responses, while able to focus on Morris's disability, his emotions, and the repulsive elements in his existence, were less successful in connecting his plight to the wider context of apartheid South Africa. Occasionally they went to the other extreme, writing about the appalling political situation, with its numerous oppressive laws without much reference to the passage itself.

6b

There were few responses but again the ones we saw were mostly effective. Answers usually focused on the shocking murder of Gumboot, which is perfect for the task. Several candidates wrote movingly and subtly about the arrest of Tsotsi's mother, and how it set him on his life-journey.

The presence of *Tsotsi* on the GCSE specification has been questioned because it is such a harrowing novel and I understand teachers wanting to steer clear of it for that reason, but, judging from the responses we read year by year it is successful both in terms of the quality of work (especially in making effective links to the Assessment Objectives) and in the level of engagement and personal response. It is also in clear third place in terms of responses seen this time.

The Joy Luck Club

4a,b

We have had small numbers of schools using *The Joy Luck Club* since the specification's inception and the numbers have grown modestly so that it is now probably our fourth most popular novel but still with a lot less than 1% of the market. 4a offered plenty of opportunity to contrast traditional Chinese culture with the new generation's Americanised attitudes. Best answers here wrote insightfully about Waverly's patronising approach contrasting with her mother's tart, unspoken responses, and recognised in the last lines, the first glimmerings of a new phase in Waverly's historically fractious relationship with her mother. A few weaker responses missed the key change in mood towards the end. Effective focus on AO4 was a feature of most answers.

4b was very rarely seen but the very few who opted for it showed an impressively sure grasp of what is, by far, our most narratively complex novel.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

5a,b

Candidates wrote enthusiastically about the fight in question 5a, some managing to make sound points about Doyle's use of language in their enthusiastic citing of the gory details. Links to the social context were harder to define and we were looking for some level of understanding of the social pressures on Paddy which made him in a different way almost as much of a victim as Sean Whelan. Some candidates wrote with considerable insight into Paddy's situation here, offering both sympathy for his predicament and censure for his callously aggressive behaviour. However, given the lack of numbers it is difficult to offer confident conclusions about the success of the question in allowing candidates of all abilities to maximise their attainment.

Few examiners saw examples of 5b. The ones I saw, all from able candidates, displayed an impressive ability to find and organise relevant material from throughout the second half of the novel.

Anita and Me

3a,b

Few examiners read responses to 3b. Responses to 3a were very variable in quality but some were effective in highlighting the tension in Meena between the urge to get close to Anita by emulating her and the influence of her upbringing pulling her back.

It is surprising that *Anita and Me* should be vying for the position of least popular novel on the list. It deals with issues that are interesting to young people in a lively, humorous way and it is accessible, pacy, and includes several exciting set pieces. Incorporating AO4 into responses to both these questions would have been relatively straightforward for all but the least able candidates. However, we saw too few answers to either option to draw any safe conclusions about the effectiveness of the questions.

Conclusion

Characteristics of high achieving responses:

- focus on the question, referencing key words occasionally in the body of the response as well as in the opening paragraph
- illuminating references to the social, cultural and/or historical context
- illuminating references to related events in other parts of the novel (passage-based questions)
- effective use of embedded quotations
- use of direct quotations with attached comments tying the quote back into the point being made; often also back to the initial (topic) sentence of the paragraph (PEE structure)
- specific analysis of language (AO2). This could include the novel's structure; the use of figurative language; the use of irony; reference to grammatical and graphic features (punctuation, sentence length, italics)

Characteristics of middle and low achieving responses:

- failure to maintain a link to the question: this could involve a long introductory paragraph about the novel or the historical context; a lapse into narrative, recounting the action; a marked switch of focus away from the passage in the a) question
- no specific focus on the AOs
- targeting AO4 by way of sweeping generalisations about the social context
- making the context more important than the novel: for example, some candidates are beginning to write principally about real events like the depression, with some illustrations taken from *Of Mice and Men*; or regarding Curley's wife as primarily a stereotype representing an oppressed group and writing about the lack of opportunities for women in 30s America with some of the evidence taken from her life

- targeting AO2 by identifying language features without any consideration of their effect or linking to the question: this is particularly common in relation to, sound features (especially alliteration); the use of dialect; some forms of word-level analysis focusing on inappropriate examples often introduced by the term 'lexis'
- long quotes
- a lengthy opening preamble, either on context (see first bullet) or to tell the examiner about the candidate's intention: *'In this answer I will show...'*
- 'play' seems to be the default term for a work of Literature – it is not just novels but poems too that are so misnamed – so it is not all about the influence of films of *Of Mice and Men* etc. Authors get the same treatment: Priestley and Sherriff are the favourite aliases for Steinbeck but we get Brighouse and Russell quite a bit too. On a similar theme, it is good to see candidates using names for parts of speech (mainly verbs, adverbs and adjectives) when analysing language, though, when they are applied wrongly it can undermine rather than enhance the quality of the comment.

A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry

General Comments

Examiners reported seeing a range of scripts that, at the top were astonishingly good, showing sophisticated critical perception, and, at the bottom, weak with little evidence of understanding the texts they had studied. In between, there were numerous thoughtful responses to both prose and poetry texts, showing understanding of character, themes, the language writers choose, and the effects of those choices. In general, candidates seemed to have been entered at the appropriate tier, though a number appeared to have been entered at the wrong one. This is particularly damaging for weaker candidates entered at Higher Tier, where unsatisfactory performance can lead to candidates being unclassified.

The principal problem with weaker responses appeared to be difficulty of finding and keeping the focus on the terms of the question. Focusing on the precise question asked is a strategy candidates would do well to keep in mind as they develop their responses. On occasion essays which began with clear and focused statements lost that clarity as the response evolved. On occasion, for example, candidates substituted “exciting” for “entertaining” in the question on the *Animal Farm* extract, and consequently encountered problems in endeavouring to find the pigs’ drunken behaviour exciting. Responses to the same question sometimes deviated into quite lengthy accounts of life in the Soviet Union and the oppression of the peasants under Stalin. Awareness of Orwell’s satire is more than helpful in understanding of *Animal Farm*, but responses needed to focus closely on the extract and not on historical background.

Some examiners noted that searching prose extracts and poems for literary devices was less prominent this year, and that responses often sought to bring out the effects of such devices when found. However, there was still considerable faith in enjambment’s protean qualities; it was variously credited with allowing a poem to flow, to speed up and slow down lines, to convey a wide variety of emotions, and to assist prose writers to create a variety of effects. Responses too often made use of “positive” and “negative” as apparently precise terms to describe effects; to write, for example, that the child in *A Constable Calls* has a negative view of the constable, or that the voice in *To Poverty* has a negative view of poverty is unhelpful and requires considerable amplification. It does not, as some responses suggested, precisely illustrate the effects of an author’s choice of language.

Examiners also noted the almost ubiquitous use of the word “audience” in responses. This is indisputably the right word to use for A662, but it seems quite inappropriate when applied to the reader of a novel or a poem, though Zephaniah’s poems might be the exception on this unit. To use “audience” in discussion of the different genres suggests considerable misunderstanding of what an author is looking to achieve in his/her choice of genre, language and structure; or simple carelessness in failing to differentiate between how an audience in a theatre responds and how a reader of a poem like Clarke’s *Cold Knap Lake* might be responding to the effects of the poet’s words in “the bliss of solitude”. The similarly almost ubiquitous “juxtaposition”, apparently and wrongly believed to mean exactly the same as the humbler, two-syllabled “contrast”, is an unwelcome term, used, presumably to confer a Latinate form of distinction on responses. “Foreshadowing” was also a popular term, often used perfectly correctly, but also too often used to refer to events that had occurred previously; for example, Golding’s reference to the deaths of Piggy and Simon hanging over the island “like a vapour” was sometimes stated to be foreshadowing these deaths.

Literary Heritage Prose

The most popular prose texts were *Lord of the Flies* and *Animal Farm*. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* attracted a considerable number of candidates, but there were comparatively few responses to *Pride and Prejudice*, *Silas Marner*, and Hardy's *The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales*. The vast majority of responses were to the extract-based questions, with, in the case of each text, the discursive second question being the less attractive option.

Pride and Prejudice

Comparatively few candidates chose to answer on *Pride and Prejudice*. The extract-based question was usually answered well by candidates who drew upon their later knowledge of Wickham to approach the extract with full awareness that Wickham is a liar who bears a strong grudge against Darcy. Such responses offered careful evaluation of his words, recognising that Elizabeth, already prejudiced against Darcy and towards Wickham, allows herself all too readily to be taken in. Some responses accepted Wickham's words at face value, believing that they confirmed the impression already given of Darcy's "abominable pride"; these focused on what the extract reveals not about Wickham and Elizabeth, but, thoroughly misleadingly, about Darcy.

There were strong personal responses to Lady Catherine, who clearly inspired as little affection in readers as she does in Elizabeth. Good responses allowed discussion of Lady Catherine to develop beyond one particular encounter with her, and to range across her words and behaviour both at Rosings and Longbourn. There is much to dislike about Lady Catherine and candidates seemed to enjoy the opportunity to air their dislike with plenty of support from the text.

Silas Marner

Comparatively few candidates chose to answer either of the *Silas Marner* questions. Those who did almost invariably responded to the extract-based question. They were usually able to comment in some detail on the effect of the loss of his gold on Silas, and his increasing despair culminating in his cry of desolation. There was often close focus on Eliot's choice of language to convey the alteration of Silas's mood from anticipated joy to despair.

Lord of the Flies

The extract-based question inviting discussion of sympathy for Ralph was very popular with both Foundation and Higher Tier candidates. At Foundation Tier the question included the phrase "at this moment in the novel", and, at Higher Tier, "here". Candidates were invited; therefore, as is the case in extract-based questions, to focus closely on the extract, and, for the many that did, there was plenty of material to discuss. The context was usually provided, though some candidates thought that the extract came from the pursuit of Ralph involving the whole tribe of boys. Sympathy was often felt for Ralph's wounds, his isolation following the deaths of Simon and Piggy, his hunger, the loss of both the conch and Piggy, and his certainty that Jack would never leave him alone. Good responses often included discussion of Bill and Ralph's awareness that "this was not Bill"; Robert, his spear and threatening pebble; and the ominous "Feast today, and then tomorrow ...". Convincing responses at Higher Tier took the opportunity to discuss Golding's choice of language, considering the colours of Bill's stripes, the descriptions of Ralph reduced to worming his way out of the ferns and sneaking forward with flared nostrils and dribbling mouth, the sight of Robert beginning to "gnaw", the comparison of the deaths of Piggy and Simon to "a vapour" that "lay over the island", Ralph's "spasm of terror", for example. Good responses made much of the last line of the extract where Ralph cries aloud, "They're not as bad as that. It was an accident." Often this was seen as his attempt to deny what he knew and what he was anticipating; and sometimes as a sign of his belief in human goodness, a less convincing interpretation, perhaps, in the light of what candidates sometimes saw as the novel's "message" about the darkness of man's heart.

Good responses, as indicated above, focused closely on the extract. Sometimes candidates took too long to engage with the extract, providing lengthy accounts of how Ralph found himself in the covert, tracing his degeneration from elected chief to dirty injured outcast. Others responded to individual names and objects and provided long digressions on Piggy, Simon, the conch, Robert's pebble, stone-throwing and the death of Piggy, hunting and killing pigs (Ralph here seen as a pig-substitute), or the deterioration of Ralph's relationship with Jack. Such digressions, especially at Higher Tier, proved to be distractions that left no time for discussion of Golding's language.

A reasonable number of candidates opted for the question on Jack as a frightening figure. The best responses tended to be those that selected areas of the novel, or aspects of Jack's character, that to them best illustrated what was frightening about Jack. Less successful were those that tried to trace Jack's degeneration from chapter chorister and head boy to painted and murderous savage; these usually either ran out of time before reaching the point at which Jack painted his face, or limited themselves to discussion of Jack's first appearance, his orders to the choir, his preference for being called Merridew, and verbal unkindness to Piggy, to depict him as frightening. Much apt relevant material was accordingly overlooked.

Responses to both questions often included material not made relevant to the set question. Candidates seemed anxious to show their understanding of the themes of the novel, spending time on the darkness of man's heart, the Second World War, democracy versus dictatorship, or perceived similarities between Jack and Hitler at the expense of the question. Candidates need to remember that a question does not invite them to tell everything they know about the novel, but only that part of their knowledge needed to answer the set question.

The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales

The Hardy option was taken by few candidates. The extract was sometimes rather tentatively approached, some candidates believing its drama arose from the fact that Stockdale was proposing marriage for the first time, and being turned down. Others appeared unaware that Lizzy was a smuggler and Stockdale a minister, and that the conflict arose from Lizzie's refusal to abandon her family's traditional occupation. Candidates who understood the source of the conflict usually analysed the extract to good effect.

Responses to Phyllis and her sad life were rather mixed. Strong responses focused closely on selected episodes to illustrate its sadness, whilst weaker ones tended to narrate the tale and leave it to the examiner to infer why her life was sad.

Animal Farm

The extract-based question was very popular with both Foundation and Higher Tier candidates, most candidates engaging with both "entertaining" and "saddening". The most successful responses focused on the pigs' consumption of the whisky and its effects on their behaviour. This enabled them to comment in detail on what they found entertaining, most notably Napoleon's rapid gallop round the yard, the effect of the hang-over on the pigs in general and Napoleon and Squealer in particular. Many candidates were able to develop their response to what was entertaining beyond simple amusement at pigs drinking alcohol, noting Orwell's choice of language to describe Napoleon's appearance and Squealer's dejected and uncharacteristic dullness. Napoleon's "solemn decree" was seen by many as typical of the reaction of one who has indulged not wisely but too well, and his subsequent and hypocritical volte-face was included in what was entertaining. Many responses recognised that the incomprehension of the animals was saddening, as was their loss of the paddock. A number of candidates linked this to the fate of Boxer, who had nowhere to enjoy his hoped-for retirement. Rather endearingly, a number of candidates invited examiners to draw upon their own, no doubt extensive, experience of hangovers to understand how Napoleon and Squealer were feeling. Some responses made no reference to the case of whisky and the drunkenness of the pigs, but commented only on the

breaking of the commandments concerning wearing clothes and drinking alcohol; these found it difficult to engage with what makes the extract entertaining. Comparatively few candidates noted that the animals' surprise at hearing the strains of "Beasts of England" was probably because it had been banned; many thought that the surprise was because "the strains" were mixed up. Few candidates understood why the animals laid straw down outside the farmhouse, some assuming that straw was the equivalent of what is now known as "a floral tribute".

At both tiers, interpretations of "entertaining" and "saddening" were sometimes a little surprising. A number of candidates found the tears in the animals' eyes entertaining, whilst others were saddened by news of Napoleon's imminent death, on the grounds that, although he was a cruel tyrant, "nobody deserves to die". However, there were some excellent answers to this question from candidates who focused closely on the extract and on Orwell's language. Often there was also strong personal response from candidates who felt that Napoleon and Squealer, though they might not "deserve to die", thoroughly deserved the worst torments that a hangover can inflict.

Comparatively few candidates chose to answer Question 5b, on a moment or two moments when the pigs' treatment of the other animals seems particularly cruel. In general, better answers focused on just one moment, provided a clear personal response, and, in the case of Foundation Tier candidates supported the choice with plenty of textual detail. Better Higher Tier responses took the opportunity to look closely at Orwell's choice of language to depict the pigs' cruelty. Responses that offered discussion of two moments were often narrative-dependent. Weakest responses discussed more than two moments and were often simply descriptive.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

This continues to be a fairly popular choice of text. As is usually the case, the extract-based question attracted more responses than the discursive 6b question, which was attempted by comparatively few candidates. They found ample to respond to in the extract, most seizing upon Hyde's calm trampling over the child's body, his lack of remorse and the effect he has on Mr Enfield, the doctor and the women. Better responses found much to say about Stevenson's language, and some candidates saw the setting, the black winter morning and the absence of a policeman as a thoroughly appropriate backdrop for Hyde's first appearance. Candidates sometimes commented on the name on the cheque, suggesting that it might be a forgery, but very few actually identified the name. Few candidates, fortunately, strayed from the extract to discussions of the duality of man, but there were some digressions to the hidden vices of the Victorian gentleman, Jack the Ripper, and the theme of secrecy represented by the door. As with the name on the cheque, comparatively few candidates commented on the ownership of the door.

There were too few responses to 6b for helpful comment to be made.

Poetry

Examiners reported seeing a considerable number of poems by Armitage, Duffy and Heaney, some by Zephaniah but very few by Clarke and Cope. There were plenty of responses, particularly at Higher Tier to the Unseen Poem. As in previous years, candidates often responded to the Unseen with a freshness sometimes missing from responses to the poems with which the classroom had perhaps made them over-familiar. Responses to poems from *Reflections* often began with a general introductory sentence or two and then, as early as the second paragraph, began to identify and discuss rhyme, often at some length and to little effect. This all too often prevented them from engaging with the question. For example, a candidate intent on illustrating how Armitage's language brings people's strange behaviour vividly to life does not tellingly introduce his/her case by identifying the rhyme in *Poem's* third verse, not least if no comment is made on the effect of the rhyme. Candidates sometimes also felt the need to comment on a poem's structure at very considerable length. AO2 refers to language, structure

and form contributing to a writer's presentation of ideas, themes and settings. However, structure and form sometimes contribute less to this presentation than the language the poet uses. The art really lies in deciding how important the poet's language and use of structure and form are, and, if language and structure can be separated, to devote the precious forty-five exam minutes to whichever is more important.

Providing an answer to the question and introducing immediately what the poem is about, should take precedence over a painstaking search for what may be minor literary devices.

Good responses to the poetry questions engage with the language of the poem and not simply to the situation it depicts. Some responses to *Visiting Hour* at Higher Tier did little more than argue that the poem was moving because everyone has been in a hospital at some time and has seen the colours on the walls and inhaled its characteristic smell. Similarly some candidates avoided discussion of the language of *The Good Teachers* simply by appealing to a shared common experience of being at some time in a school, so we all know that we do not like all teachers but that we, and they, have favourites. Such an approach ducks out of the challenge of engaging with the language.

A final grievance of examiners: poems do not have paragraphs.

Reflections

There were too few responses to the poems of **Gillian Clarke** and **Wendy Cope** for useful comment to be made.

Armitage

Armitage was a popular choice, candidates most commonly opting to write on *To Poverty* or *Hitcher*. There were many good responses to *To Poverty*, the personification being regularly identified, and language details such as "like Siamese twins" were often well handled. The conversational and colloquial style was also confidently discussed by some. It was felt that Armitage's humour was often missed; possibly the word "disturbing" encouraged candidates to take a humourless approach to the poem, with some inveighing against a society that had failed to eliminate poverty and forced Armitage to go for weeks on end without butter on his bread and superfluous to bed; the antisocial meanness of Schofield's compelling Armitage to sit for thirteen weeks on the floor of his shed whilst the broken bones set was also sometimes deplored.

Hitcher was a popular choice with candidates at both tiers. The strangeness of the persona's behaviour was understood and well-illustrated, and candidates clearly enjoyed their encounter with this poem. *Poem*, *True North* and *Without Photographs* attracted few candidates.

Duffy

Duffy was also a popular choice, with most who wrote on her poems choosing to do so on *The Good Teachers*. Most who did so understood the reference to the school photograph, and commented on the mischievous nature of pupils who made a double appearance in it. There were clear explanations of making "a ghost" of Miss Ross and detailed discussions of Miss Pirrie. Perceptive responses considered the sarcastic/ironic tone of the poem's title and of the description of the good teachers in the third stanza. These also engaged with the complexities of the last stanza.

Stealing was a popular choice of poem at both tiers, with candidates finding the portrayal of the speaker sufficiently striking to make him/her an object of psychoanalysis. This was sometimes at the expense of exploration of Duffy's language, but those who kept language at the forefront of their minds did well.

Who Loves You often attracted good responses. The worries of the voice, often understood to be a mother or a lover, were seen as exaggerated through love, and much was sensibly made of the poem's use of repetition. Here candidates were able to comment perceptively on the structure of the verses, as were the few who chose to respond to *Answer*.

Heaney

As ever, Heaney was a quite popular choice. There were many good answers at both tiers to what the boy finds so frightening in *A Constable Calls*. Candidates at Foundation Tier provided considerable textual detail to illustrate the boy's fear, ranging from his observation of the threatening bicycle and the holster, his awareness of his father's lie, and the bicycle's ominous ticking departure. Candidates recognised the reasons for the boy's fear, often commenting skilfully on the terse conversation between the constable and the boy's father. The "black hole in the barracks" and the heavy Domesday book ledger came in for frequent comment. Some candidates felt that the boy was frightened that he might be lodged in the "black hole, while others felt that his fear was for his father. Many linked the boy's fear to the differences between the Catholic and the protestant communities. This poem offered candidates an excellent opportunity to display their ability to respond to the language, and it was taken with both hands.

A number of candidates explored *An Advancement of Learning* and *Death of a Naturalist*, tracing childhood fears and how they are brought to life. Such fears are most vivid in the second stanza of *Death of a Naturalist*, but candidates often considered that the potential the flaxdam has to frighten in the first part of the poem is fulfilled in the second part; or that its attractive harmlessness accentuated the unexpected horror in the second part.

There were comparatively few responses to *Punishment* and *The Summer of Lost Rachel*. Candidates were able not only to focus closely on the victim in *Punishment* but also to consider the image of the "artful voyeur" standing dumbly by when the victim's "betraying sisters ... wept by the railings". There was sensitive consideration of *The Summer of Lost Rachel*.

Candidates responded well to these Heaney poems, their answers often being a pleasure to read.

Zephaniah

There were a number of responses to Zephaniah's poetry. The strongest were on *Breakfast in East Timor*, which gives scope for language comments. Most responses were to *Room for Rent*, where candidates felt considerable sympathy for the voice in the poem, and condemned the racism evident in the first two stanzas and the attitude of the landlord in the third.

Unseen Poems

Foundation

Stewart Conn's *Visiting Hour* was a quite popular choice. Candidates were usually able to make valid comments on the first stanza, recognising the freeing of the fish from under the ice, though opinion was somewhat divided on whether or not they were alive. Good responses detected that the link between the two stanzas was the passage of time. The helplessness of the watcher at the bedside to free the sufferer as the sufferer once freed the fish was sensitively discussed.

Higher

There were some very powerful responses to Norman MacCaig's *Visiting Hour*. Candidates found much to say about its language, responding well to "bundled into a lift" and linking the visitor's repeated determination not to feel to the nurses' ability to carry their burden of pain. There were thoughtful valid comments on the shortness of sentences in the third stanza and the description of the "withered hand ... on its stalk". Some of the language, unsurprisingly, needed teasing out; the smell that "combs my nostrils" was something of a stumbling block. Some candidates provided no comment on the final two lines as time constraints kicked in, but usually they had done enough by that time to deserve a high mark.

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