

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/01
Paper 1 (Open Books)

General comments

There has been a significant increase in the number of candidates for this Syllabus. Examiners felt there was little if any evidence that newcomers had had difficulties with the requirements of the examination. Indeed, there was a general consensus that standards continue to improve. It was pleasing to see how well most candidates responded to the challenge of literary appreciation.

The set texts varied widely in popularity. *The Crucible* was by far the most popular drama text and in the prose section *Lord of the Flies* and *Mockingbird* came by a long way top of the list. Very little work was presented on Desai, Keatley and Hardy. In the poetry section, caged birds proliferated to the virtual exclusion of anything else. Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the freshest responses seemed to come from work on texts for which there is not a surfeit of attendant 'study aids' on the market.

Some stellar work was seen, and there was also a freshness and directness in the work of many more average-achieving candidates. Examiners were pleased to see scripts with clearly shown detailed knowledge of the texts, with the precise wording of the question usually attended to. Rarely did Examiners find little attempt to answer the question.

A minority of candidates had clearly limited knowledge of the text, particularly when required by the question to range outside the one or two obvious central issues or main characters of that text. For some, close reading of the question was obviously a skill beyond them. Quite often a key adjective or adverb was not sufficiently noted. Candidates are required to pay attention to the presence of words like *moving*, *powerfully*, *vividly*, *amusing*, *memorable* in the question. These ask that they engage fully with the means by which the writer makes things live. This is one of the crucial elements which decide whether or not an answer is worthy of high reward.

Frequently Examiners came across mere assertions of the power or vividness of a word or group of words; for higher reward such answers need to explain *how* this power or vividness are created. Too many seemed, furthermore, content simply to offload, and sometimes parade, technical terminology (this year's favourite was 'anaphora') without engaging with the task in hand, and without explaining how language is being used by a writer and what its effects are.

Empathic answers on drama and prose were quite often encountered, sometimes revealing a remarkable imaginative contact with the writer's world. Samantha, Hale, Buckingham, Elizabeth and Reverend Sykes sometimes spoke with startling truth to the character, though other figures posed greater problems.

There is still the problem of some candidates assuming they need to write extensive introductions and conclusions. Most of these simply produce generalities and much repetition that contribute virtually nothing that is rewardable. While some candidates may have had no more to say than appeared in the body of their essays, it was more often the case that more detailed comment related to the task could have appeared had such candidates allowed themselves more time, with resultant extra reward.

Centres are asked if they could ensure the following: first, if there is a grid on the front page of the booklet, please see that all candidates use it to indicate what questions they have attempted; second, please ensure that each page has a margin in which the Examiner can write; third, please do not tie the sheets together so tightly that it is difficult to turn the sheets; fourth, please do not begin every answer in a new answer booklet.

Comments on specific questions

A Small Family Business

Question 1

This was the most popular task on the play, and was often done well. Most candidates saw the connection with the opening of the play and were able to make invidious comparisons, particularly in regard to Jack and his speech. Weaker ones spent a great deal of time on such things as Ken's state of mind or Yvonne's jewellery, often missing even here the significance of Poppy's change of personality from the beginning of the play. It was also surprising how many did not take notice of the fade-out on Samantha and all that that contributed to the irony when contrasted with the fine sentiments and bonhomie of the final scene.

Question 2

There was much description of Hough's progress through the play, but his *menace* was rather too subtle for some. Others, though, really did do justice to his line in implied threats and the inferences of his creepy sexual nature.

Question 3

There were some convincing assumptions of Samantha's character. Clearly her adolescent mix of surliness, scepticism regarding her parents and uncertainty about her life struck a chord.

A Raisin in the Sun

Question 4

This was overwhelmingly the most popular question on this text. There was much good work seen in response to it. Many brought out rather well the sense of the family being reborn and supported that general idea with detail from the extract. At the other end of the scale, candidates used the task as an excuse to reveal the play as a whole with very little reference to the extract.

Question 5

The few who did this question often chose well and were able to show how the sparks flew, for instance between Beneatha and Mama and Walter and various family members. A minority simply asserted things without any detailed attention to language and action.

Question 6

This was attempted by very few. Some of the work showed very mature insight, but more usually candidates struggled at times to adopt appropriate thoughts and voice.

My Mother Said I Never Should

There was far too little work submitted on this text for for general comment to be appropriate.

The Crucible

Question 10

There were a great number of answers to this question and many of them showed an impressive ability to probe the inferences of the text. It was a very good differentiator, particularly when it came to weighing up Danforth's part in the passage. Quite a few totally misread the signs, thinking that Danforth was the major catalyst for change, sometimes even citing the twisted logic of his rejecting any evidence other than the 'victim's' in a witchcraft trial. Some solved the problem by ignoring Danforth totally.

Question 11

A few really did balance most impressively the detail in the context of the developing drama, but a significant number of responses seemed incapable of addressing how Miller makes John Proctor such a vividly dramatic character. Descriptions of his character abounded but were quite often not linked to the dramatic moments in the play when the audience see him at his most striking. Tellingly, the play was often described as a novel. Usually one just accepts that this is a slip of the pen but here it happened so often that one began to wonder whether this play was being treated as a drama or as a prose tract. Quite often Examiners were told how powerful the audience would have found a stage direction, as if there would be surtitles for them to read in the theatre. Perhaps drama in this mould needs extra effort to ensure that it is approached as something for the stage. (It was interesting that another drama set text with few stage directions like *Richard III* presented few such problems in a very similar task.) Those who did the best were usually those who had some organisational skill in managing material.

Question 12

There were some very impressive assumptions of Hale's character, exactly capturing his anguish in suitably apocalyptic language as he has watched his beliefs and certainties disintegrate. Conversely, a minority narrated the events of the play and/or showed him coolly ready to minister to the flock.

As You Like It

Question 13

The majority of candidates were able to identify some drama in the passage, while weaker answers tended merely to re-tell. Good answers made the points that emotions are high because of Rosalind's banishment in the scene immediately preceding, that the mood here is at first one of sorrow and fear but that it soon turns to one of optimism and energy, and that the audience is moved by the closeness of the bond between Celia and Rosalind. The best answers explored the ways in which new elements are introduced, such as the comparison between the Forest and the Court, and suspense as to whether Rosalind will find her father and Orlando. There was also some discussion of the role of women and the necessity for disguise.

Question 14

Even those who adopted a narrative approach were able to find relevant material relating to the 'happiness' of the play even if 'optimism' sometimes proved elusive. Successful answers were well argued and picked up some of the darker elements of the play, such as the sibling rivalry and the comments of Jaques.

Question 15

There were some very convincing Celias which captured her wit and intelligence as well as the fact that she has just fallen in love. Outpourings of love for Oliver alone did not score very highly, however; there had to be some reference to the text even if oblique.

Richard III

Question 16

Few who attempted this were unable to pick up on the dramatic ironies of the scene surrounding the hapless Hastings, egged on by Catesby's sly innuendoes. Some quite rightly caught the scene's cynical tone and scoffed at the man's naivety and complacency but others were rather too inclined to pity him as he walks to his death, missing his self-esteem which is proof even to Stanley's warnings.

Question 17

There was some splendid work on this task bringing out fully the things which make Richard so riveting. Many clearly saw his relation to the audience and the effect that he has as he wittily and gaily picks off whatever or whoever stands in his way. At the other end of the scale, there were some who did little more than recount his villainous deeds.

Question 18

The responses here were varied. There were some excellent assumptions of the role when candidates had thought themselves into the character. They exactly caught the man's outrage at being dumped and his fears for the future now that he is out of favour. There were a number, though, who did little more than retell events.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 19

The great majority of the poetry answers were on this question. There had clearly been much preparation of this poem and there was some very impressive work indeed which managed to chart its overall meaning and developing structure, as well as probing in detail the effect of various poetic features. Less penetrating answers tended either to wander through the poem, picking out poetic features without much reference to the poem's developing meanings or simply told the Examiners what they thought the birds 'stood for'. A great number of candidates focused on what they saw as the political implications of the poem without engaging with the words at all and it was disappointing that many did not see the importance of the contrast with the free bird.

Question 20

This was not a popular task but it was well done at times by most of those who attempted it. There was some real engagement with the way the poets' feelings were communicated.

Question 21

There were far fewer answers to this and most who embarked on it found it hard to deal with the parameters of the task. Nearly all chose *Plenty* and *Mid-term Break* but most simply attached the concept of surprise to a run through of the poems. It was surprising how many failed to see that one major element of surprise in Dixon's poem was the persona's nostalgia for her childhood.

Keats

Question 22

This was the most popular of the Keats questions. Although candidates generally understood the thrust of the extract there was a disappointing lack of ability to comment on the language. Most answers merely paraphrased or explained.

Question 23

Candidates who chose this question generally knew the poem well and were able to comment on at least some of the imagery. They generally responded to its sensuousness and to the mood created by the personification of Autumn. Some had clearly been exposed to an interpretation relating the seasons to the stages in man's life, but when they focused on this they tended to lose the sense of what made Autumn attractive.

Question 24

This was a minority choice, but candidates attempting it showed knowledge of the poem and there were some good responses to the mood and language which went beyond mere narrative.

Things Fall Apart

Question 25

The answers to this often struggled. It required a clear grasp of the context, of the difference between this man and his predecessor, exemplified by the way Enoch suddenly becomes a power in the land. There was a good deal of mis-reading. Some, for instance, thought that black and white referred to Smith's supposed racist attitudes.

Question 26

The success of answers here rested to some extent upon the choosing wisely and most candidates made sensible choices. What was rather too often missing was a really detailed connection with Achebe's writing. Many thought that simply describing the events was sufficient to answer to the question.

Question 27

There were a few responses that captured Obierika's mixture of sorrow and anger at his friend's situation. Some, however, made him far too warlike and not sufficiently resigned to the inevitable.

Pride and Prejudice

Question 28

There was much good work on this question with candidates relishing the way Austen dismembers the Bingley sisters and reveals their nastiness. Many had no difficulty in responding to the author's acid ironic tones in much of the extract. Certainly there were few answers which did not at least attempt to probe the detail of the extract, though there were not infrequent uncertainties of reading. Some, for instance, did not realise that Mrs Hurst was one of the sisters.

Question 29

This task brought out the best in many. Whilst a number took the usual line of disparagement, and argued well for it, quite a few saw that Mrs Bennet, for all her sillinesses, did have legitimate concerns and worries. This often entailed referring somewhat sourly to Mr Bennet.

Question 30

Though there were some rather inappropriately gushing responses here, there were many more which caught the character's qualities quite splendidly and gave great pleasure to Examiners.

The God Boy

Question 31

This was chosen by the great majority of candidates who answered on Cross, and often with a great deal of sensitivity. There was a tendency to skate over the amusing moments which one candidate suggested was worthy of slapstick comedy at its best. However, nearly everyone was able to detect at least something of Jimmy's underlying hurt, most notably at the end of the extract.

Question 32

There were relatively few answers on this, but these were largely successful and often profoundly responsive to her tragic situation.

Question 33

Again only a few answers were seen, but most captured well the man's spiteful venom.

Games at Twilight

Far too little work on this text was submitted to make general comment appropriate.

Lord of the Flies

Question 37

This was a very popular choice and elicited a full range of responses. There was much that looked profoundly into the way Golding's symbolism works in this passage in the various descriptions of the fire, the sea and the mountain. As importantly, many picked out how Ralph's actions and speech suggest this is a watershed in his view of Jack and the hunters. Conversely the task revealed those candidates who could only repeat learnt mantras and could not engage with the detail of the writing.

Question 38

There were some very interesting answers on these two characters. Clearly the vote went, one suspects quite rightly, to Roger. Many felt that his comparative shadowiness and lack of emotion made him truly scary. Some answers mined details to support this which were extremely impressive as evidence of detailed knowledge. Indeed there was very little work here which did not show at least some evidence of this.

Question 39

Though Simon says little in the novel, a few candidates made a good attempt at creating appropriate thoughts for him, conveying his concern for the boys, his sense of something evil within them, and his desire for thought and contemplation. Examiners felt, though, that the majority answering on this rather struggled to find an authentic voice.

Far from the Madding Crowd

Question 40

There was a good deal of paraphrase in response to this question but the best answers were able to relate Troy's appearance in the passage to his behaviour elsewhere in the novel.

Question 41

There were some good choices here, particularly Bathsheba's opening of Fanny's coffin, and, as ever, candidates were more or less successful in the extent to which they went beyond narrative to exploration of mood and atmosphere.

Question 42

Better answers managed Boldwood's growing excitement well here. There was some confusion in weaker answers over the sequence of events.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 43

This was a hugely popular task and was usually done at least competently. It was, after all, not very difficult to pick out some salient, not to say obvious, points of comparison. However, quite a few did not really range very widely over the extract, missing such things as Atticus's role as a father later on in the passage which makes a startling comparison to Ewell. Also, it was often a sign of the better answers that the significance of the confrontation being mediated through the voice of the town gossip was considered, as was the effect on the reader of Atticus's complacency in regard to Ewell's continuing threat.

Question 44

This was usually competently done but rarely impressively. The problem lay in the selection of a range of material which showed the development of Scout's character. Sometimes crucial moments were missed or the candidate lost the thread of the argument and just described isolated moments in her life. Not infrequently her dispersal of the lynch mob was used to illustrate her maturing, when the point is that it is her innocence which deflates the mob's brutal intentions.

Question 45

A few outstanding assumptions of the Reverend Sykes's character were read. Sometimes, though, the selection of material was not always particularly judicious. To ignore what the future holds for the Robinson family, for example, is hardly to be expected of this man and sometimes his tones were hardly those of a gentle cleric.

Into the Wind

Question 46

Most of the answers on this text were to this question. Most at least captured something of the man's profoundly unpleasant personality but not that many quite mined the depths of Dahl's contempt for this kind of authority figure. Indeed, some argued that he was really only doing his job when faced by a road hog.

Question 47

The few candidates who attempted this task seemed to be vague about what constituted the setting of their chosen story. They rarely had very much to say.

Question 48

Again there were few answers to this question, but those who attempted it captured the prisoner's voice very well. They conveyed his dignity and contempt for his captors whilst making his fear very apparent. The best answers also made detailed responses to the physical surroundings, such a striking part of the story.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/02
Coursework

General comments

As usual, each Centre will have received a short report on its submission. What follows is essentially an attempt to paint the overall picture and to highlight some of the recurrent features of these reports .

This year saw a large increase in the number of Centres taking this component. It is pleasing to note that this did not seem to affect the quality of work overall, the efficiency with which internal moderation in the main was generally carried out, nor the high standard of the folders' physical presentation.

However, Moderators reported further examples of the problems which featured in previous years. In some cases the syllabus is still not being read with sufficient attention. Moderators still came across candidates only offering one poem or one short story in their folders and presenting fair copies of assignments with no teacher annotation. Teacher annotation is important on two levels. Firstly, it is immensely helpful to external Moderators in gauging whether there is a meeting of minds regarding the quality of work and it allows Centres the chance of persuading external Moderators to see things from their point of view. Secondly, it effectively means that the teacher is validating the work as the candidate's own.

Centres should note that for 2011 the advice offered in the syllabus has been altered to the following : *'Assignments should be between 600 and 1000 words. This is a guideline. Candidates must not confuse length with quality. Although no assignment is penalised per se because of its length, assignments significantly under or over this word count guidance may be self-penalising.'* A circular has been sent to all Centres pointing out that this advice pertains to coursework being submitted in 2009 and 2010 as well.

As regards to the work submitted, the Moderators were often full of praise, expressing the genuine enjoyment they had found reading a Centre's folders. The great majority of texts chosen were appropriate for the syllabus. It was rare to come across a folder which showed little or no evidence of work and thought. In many Centres the results were impressive.

In the majority of cases a Centre's assessments were accepted without change. Otherwise there was very occasional evidence of slight caution in the marks awarded, or more often, a slightly over-generous rewarding of candidates. However, in almost all cases adjustment through scaling was effected without difficulty since the order of merit was correct. This showed that the principal task of the internal Moderators had been done with diligence.

It is recognised that standardisation within a large Centre can produce professional tensions but the fact remains that offering coursework, and therefore taking the advantage of having the assessment of one's candidates to some extent in one's own hands, carries the responsibility of ensuring that all the teachers march in the same direction. That this did not always happen was evidenced by some wide variations in some Centres when it came to showing on the Student Record Card the ways in which the folder fulfils the assessment criteria relevant to the mark awarded. In one Centre, for instance, the Moderator found the teacher of one set expanding at some length on the reasons for the mark, while another set's folders were prefaced simply by single sentences along the lines of *"These are strong B essays."* - which did nothing to add to what could have been deduced from the mark on the folder. In a few Centres the comments on the Student Cards of some sets were clearly written in ink or word processed, whilst others were scribbled in pencil to the point of being indecipherable.

Fortunately this applies to a very small proportion of the Centres. More widespread were Moderators' concerns about the nature of the assignments being set for candidates. It is extremely rare now to find awful assignments which simply tell the candidate to write about the text. Most are now more focused than that. However, quite frequently Moderators felt that tasks could have been better or more narrowly focused and written in a way which ensured that the assessment criteria central to the awarding of the top grades could be met. The most common factor missing was a requirement to engage on a personal level with literary

language and the author's craft. For example, a task which simply asks the candidate to 'discuss the themes of *The Tempest*' will almost certainly elicit a series of paragraphs, often leaning unduly on study material, itemising the supposed issues of the play and nowhere exploring how Shakespeare makes this content into a gripping drama. Moderators quite frequently pointed out that a simple choice of words can make a great difference to the nature of a task, and encourage candidates to meet the higher grade criteria. Injunctions such as *discuss*, *show*, *explain* do not encourage personal engagement and individual thought in the same way as a word such as *explore* or a phrase such as *How do you think* at the beginning of the task. Good assignment setting is, therefore, an essential part of ensuring that candidates can display their abilities to the full. Guidelines are to be found in the Coursework Training Handbook. Past papers too can be extremely helpful when it comes to searching out appropriate modes of questioning.

In conclusion, though, it should be stressed that, overall, Moderator comment was overwhelmingly positive and the Moderators enjoyed reading much of the work they saw.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/03
Unseen (Alternative to
Coursework)

General comments

Overall, examiners were delighted at the standard of responses to this year's paper. Increasing numbers of able candidates are choosing this component and welcoming the opportunity it affords to exercise their skills in close reading. There is plenty of evidence that the majority of candidates are well-prepared, have read widely and have the technical skills to analyse the material presented. There were few very weak scripts. The quality of written communication was generally good, and most candidates had little difficulty in appreciating the content of their chosen passage or the situations described. The bullet points were often successfully used to give shape to responses, and ensure that the writer's craft was at least to some extent addressed.

This session the poem was far more popular than the prose extract; indeed, about three quarters of candidates chose **Question 1**.

It is evident that Centres make good use of the Examiners' Reports, and guide candidates to make careful use of the framework provided by the questions and bullet points, and to make frequent reference to the text followed by analytical comment in order to substantiate their personal responses. There is increasing evidence that candidates are developing awareness of the writer's craft, and the impact of a writer's choices on the reader's response to characters and situations. Responses to this paper have become increasingly literary, and less inclined to mere paraphrase or reconstructed narrative.

However, candidates might be advised to make better use of the time available for reading and planning. There were a significant number of over-long answers, with evidence of candidates beginning their response before they had really considered the overall impact of the passage or feeling it necessary to comment at inordinate length and sometimes rather speculatively on every detail, only to run out of time for an overall evaluation of how the text works. A much smaller number of responses were too short for candidates to do full justice to their abilities. It is difficult to gain high marks in an answer which demonstrates excellent overall understanding of a text, but which gives very little detailed support, through quotation or comment, to show how the writing leads to the conclusions drawn. A guideline length of response for this paper would be between three and four sides of A4; 600-800 word responses which show a judicious selection of material would be quite capable of reaching the top band, and it should not be necessary for candidates to write more than a thousand words. Those who do are unlikely to demonstrate concision and clarity of critical argument. Quality of writing is not formally assessed in this paper, but those candidates who wrote most cogently, made the most successful selection of details, and had an overall appreciation from the beginning of their essays of the thrust and direction of the texts were those who achieved the highest marks.

Some of the very long scripts were written in great haste. A number of these very long answers lacked coherence and became extremely repetitive. There is no reward for copying out the rubric to the question, repeating the wording of the bullet points, or copying out very long quotations. The purpose of quotation should be to support a critical argument by close observation of how writers use language, and therefore the most effective quotations are often single words embedded within the candidate's own sentences. Those who take time to read and achieve an overall understanding of the passage first, and then plan an argument which will explore, stage by stage, how they reached that understanding, are not only more concise, but also more precise than those who put pen to paper as quickly as they can, and only gradually work their way towards making sense of the overall mood and tenor of the text.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

Most candidates understood the content of the poem and wrote well about the meaninglessness and pointlessness of the man's life of repetitive drudgery. They took up the invitation in the first half of the question to construct a personal response. Most felt sorry for the man but a few despised him (a perfectly valid response) and a few became rather moralistic, or adopted a therapeutic approach, suggesting he should not be defeated by life, ought to pull himself together or find another job. Some also saw the third bullet point as an opportunity to give the man a lecture on what he should do. Good responses in this syllabus need to be *literary* responses: candidates should be advised to address the question as a whole, and ensure that their focus throughout is on the words of the poem and how the poem and its images provoke a reader's individual response. They should not be trying to fit the words to their own arguments and reconstructed narratives.

Nevertheless, most candidates used the second half of the question and the first two bullet points skilfully to produce a response critically alert to the effects of the poem's language, form and structure. The poem's stanza form gave an easy shape to candidates' own responses. This was perhaps another reason for the question's popularity and evident success. A stanza-by-stanza approach is perfectly valid, provided candidates are aware of the overall thrust of the poem. Most saw the repetitive, circular and above all anonymous nature of the life of the man described, but fewer noted the use of the past tense, or the change away from the third person and into the present tense in line 16 and in stanza five. These imply that the poet's intention may be more satirical and judgemental than sympathetic. There was comment on rhyme and rhythm, but usually on the level of how 'enjambment helps the poem flow' and how the rhyme scheme reinforces the repetitive dullness of the man's life. Comment on rhythmic variation and changes of pace and tone were rarer, although these shape our perception of the man's defeat in stanza four. Only the best candidates noted the ironic contrast between the sing-song perkiness of the poem's rhythm and its far darker content.

A discriminating attribute of good answers was the recognition that they were reading verse rather than prose, and the perception of considerable complexity behind an apparently simple narrative. There was good attention to words. Many commented on the hint of violence and disgust as the man 'throttled' the morning paper, the lack of pleasure betrayed by how he 'gargled' his instant coffee, the submissiveness of the way he would 'creep' between the sheets, and how each dawn the mirror 'blabbed' the truth he wanted to hide from, thus renewing the self-defeating cycle of his existence. Weaker answers tended to construct over-literal readings of details without seeing them in the context of the poem as a whole. These would see his 'old sickness' as evidence that he was old or dying, take 'cost' and the fact that he is travelling by train as indications of poverty and (a remarkably frequent misreading) see him addressed by footballs, rather than footfalls, in stanza four, even imagining that his football team was as unfulfilled as he is. Others thought the pavement or his feet were literally talking to him: as one put it, 'there's nothing more scary than talking feet'. There is a difference between painstaking and genuinely careful reading. A better answer, for example, seized on the sibilance of 'six' and 'sickness' and declared that these words seem to 'spit spitefully' at the reader.

Good answers avoided narrative speculation, and appreciated the anonymous, automaton-like existence of the man and often saw him as an exemplary figure of a wage slave alienated by the work-driven nature of the modern world. Many appreciated the contrast between his rush to work and his painfully slow return, and were able to explain how that contrast is created. There was also lively understanding of the difference between the 'snufflings of defeat' by day and the 'derring-do' at night. Good answers picked up the child-like simplicity of the imagery of the dreams: they not only saw a romance in these dreams which was singularly lacking in the description of his day-to-day existence but also appreciated the unlikelihood that this fantasy world could bring him any solace in the real world.

Strong responses were distinguished by a willingness to tackle the difficulties of the fourth and fifth stanzas instead of passing over them, and an appreciation of the impact of the sound effects of the verse. They questioned who is speaking in stanza five, and noted how this generalises from the specific case of the man's own 'self-mocking' awareness of defeat. They supported their understanding with comment on the effects of the assonance in 'shuffling' and 'snufflings' and the onomatopoeic qualities of the words, the lengthy sound of 'yawned' and how the rhythms and open vowels of the fourth stanza enact the man's tired sense of defeat. In contrast, they noted the alliterative burst of life in the penultimate stanza, with its obvious alliteration in 'bold and blue', the injection of a colour which was lacking in his monochrome daily life, the energy of the assonance of 'thrust lustily' and the hammering heart-beat of 'derring-do'. Many felt that 'heart' and 'romances' were precisely what was missing in other stanzas. Those who appreciated this as the

expression of the poet's ironic response to a clichéd and improbable fantasy were probably closer to the satirical thrust of the poem than those who felt that the man simply needed the love of a good woman.

While many viewed the final stanza as bathos, few questioned why this might be so. Many were clearly moved by the isolation and sense of worthlessness that it expresses. The best saw how the mirror's reflection and the truth it tells return us to the poem's title and rehearse an uncomfortable truth about the difference between escapism and reality. While only a few candidates picked up the dark humour of this moment, most appreciated its desolate pathos. It was also gratifying to note the extent to which candidates showed awareness that writing about poetry is different from writing about narrative prose. There was a sense that they had sounded the poem out in their heads, even within the constraints of the examination room, and appreciated how the sounds enact the coldness of the poem's concluding message.

Question 2

Far fewer candidates addressed the poignancy of Kiran Desai's combination of sharply observed humour and the poignancy of separation and loss in the prose extract. Those who were prepared to negotiate their own way through the passage's length, depth of descriptive detail and slightly forbidding orthography often did very well, not least because the passage offered so many opportunities for detailed comment on the power of language and the writer's craft. Candidates should be prepared to spend more time reading, and to select the details which illuminate their own response, rather than feel a need to produce exhaustive commentary. Those who attempted this question received helpful direction from both the rubric and the bullet points, which should have helped them to identify the sources of humour and pathos, and identify the passage's central metaphor.

Nevertheless, some candidates disadvantaged themselves by assuming the watchman and the cook were the same person, or confused Biju and his father. Candidates need to take time over dialogue and capture the voices of characters in order to identify who is speaking; writers do not need to spell this out for them. Weaker candidates who did understand the situation tended to paraphrase it, or to list comic moments without knowing how to express ways in which the writer achieves humour. Sometimes they constructed narratives of their own, assuming that the distance and difficulty of communication between father and son suggests they are not close emotionally. (The evidence of the text goes the other way.)

The passage has been written in a way that captures the commotion and disorder of the situation. Good candidates saw this and made sense of it. They enjoyed the vignette of a large family crowded around one telephone, the sense of chaos, and the idea that the cook himself needed to be informed to whom he spoke. They found humour in the nosiness and persistence of the watchman's family, and their ineffectual and probably counter-productive attempts to improve the quality of the line. The more able candidates laughed at the ways in which the children were plucked from the tree as if they were fruit. They appreciated the humorous contrast made by the writing between the life and sounds of Uttar Pradesh and the modern technological mode of communication which leads the cook 'by natural logic' to shout down the line, and for Biju to 'shriek' back in exasperation. Good candidates saw the difference between the words that the father and son use and the emotions they wish to communicate and how 'the shadow of their words was bigger than the substance'.

Strong answers were characterised by the ability to find humour in the ways in which the watchman's family continually succeed in insinuating themselves into the drama of the situation, even achieving the last word. They also saw the humorous way in which Biju's imagination conjures up the sounds, smells and textures of his homeland over the phone wire, even hearing the improbable - and ultimately triumphant - chorus of the frogs. However, they also noted that Biju 'wanted to weep' and that the cook puts down the phone 'trembling', and so they detected the 'true emotion' behind the clichés of impaired conversation. They saw the frustration behind the humour of the repeated 'HELLO?'s and appreciated the way the writer used capital letters and punctuation to reinforce this difficulty in communicating which goes beyond the merely literal. Good candidates responded to the frustrations and the sadness, noticing the father and son's concern for one another and their unwillingness to enlarge on their own troubles, their even lying to conceal these. They could appreciate the anti-climax of the passage's conclusion and the spare way it is communicated, in a single line paragraph stating 'But the phone remained mute.' The best answers enjoyed both the extravagance of the writing and its subtlety, seeing the hollowness of the cliché 'Everything all right' and how little reassurance it really provides. The difficulties of communicating were understood by these candidates, at a deeper level than the literal. Such candidates appreciated both the cultural context of this metaphor – several commenting on how this reflected difficulties in their own multicultural and international lives – but also understood how such global perspectives are actually addressed through the style of the writing itself. It is the writer's powerful command of the resonances of the English language, expressed through the descriptive passages and the gaps between the dialogue which the question actually asks candidates to

explore, and which this paper really wishes to address. While Biju and his father have very little to say, and their conversation begins and ends with 'Hello?', plenty is said by the writer to reveal Biju's homesickness and the father's affectionate concern. The most able saw how closely what is amusing and what is sad are intertwined both in the writing and in the reader's response. Such complexity of response is likely to be highly rewarded: the ability to move beyond the straightforward and evaluate the impact of the writer's craft and purpose marks out a purposive close reader. The best candidates communicated such a sense of purpose from the first sentence of their answers.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/04

Paper 4 (Closed Books)

General comments

There has been a significant increase in the number of candidates for this Syllabus. Examiners felt there was little if any evidence that newcomers had had difficulties with the requirements of the examination. Indeed, there was a general consensus that standards continue to improve. It was pleasing to see how well most candidates responded to the challenge of literary appreciation.

The set texts varied widely in popularity. *The Crucible* was by far the most popular drama text and in the prose section *Lord of the Flies* and *Mockingbird* came by a long way top of the list. Very little work was presented on Desai, Keatley and Hardy. In the poetry section, caged birds proliferated to the virtual exclusion of anything else. Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the freshest responses seemed to come from work on texts for which there is not a surfeit of attendant 'study aids' on the market.

Some stellar work was seen, and there was also a freshness and directness in the work of many more average-achieving candidates. Examiners were pleased to see scripts with clearly shown detailed knowledge of the texts, with the precise wording of the question usually attended to. Rarely did Examiners find little attempt to answer the question.

A minority of candidates had clearly limited knowledge of the text, particularly when required by the question to range outside the one or two obvious central issues or main characters of that text. For some, close reading of the question was obviously a skill beyond them. Quite often a key adjective or adverb was not sufficiently noted. Candidates are required to pay attention to the presence of words like *moving*, *powerfully*, *vividly*, *amusing*, *memorable* in the question. These ask that they engage fully with the means by which the writer makes things live. This is one of the crucial elements which decide whether or not an answer is worthy of high reward.

Frequently Examiners came across mere assertions of the power or vividness of a word or group of words; for higher reward such answers need to explain *how* this power or vividness are created. Too many seemed, furthermore, content simply to offload, and sometimes parade, technical terminology (this year's favourite was 'anaphora') without engaging with the task in hand, and without explaining how language is being used by a writer and what its effects are.

Empathic answers on drama and prose were quite often encountered, sometimes revealing a remarkable imaginative contact with the writer's world. Samantha, Hale, Buckingham, Elizabeth and Reverend Sykes sometimes spoke with startling truth to the character, though other figures posed greater problems.

There is still the problem of some candidates assuming they need to write extensive introductions and conclusions. Most of these simply produce generalities and much repetition that contribute virtually nothing that is rewardable. While some candidates may have had no more to say than appeared in the body of their essays, it was more often the case that more detailed comment related to the task could have appeared had such candidates allowed themselves more time, with resultant extra reward.

Centres are asked if they could ensure the following: first, if there is a grid on the front page of the booklet, please see that all candidates use it to indicate what questions they have attempted; second, please ensure that each page has a margin in which the Examiner can write; third, please do not tie the sheets together so tightly that it is difficult to turn the sheets; fourth, please do not begin every answer in a new answer booklet.

Comments on specific questions

A Small Family Business

Question 1

This was the most popular task on the play, and was often done well. Most candidates saw the connection with the opening of the play and were able to make invidious comparisons, particularly in regard to Jack and his speech. Weaker ones spent a great deal of time on such things as Ken's state of mind or Yvonne's jewellery, often missing even here the significance of Poppy's change of personality from the beginning of the play. It was also surprising how many did not take notice of the fade-out on Samantha and all that that contributed to the irony when contrasted with the fine sentiments and bonhomie of the final scene.

Question 2

There was much description of Hough's progress through the play, but his *menace* was rather too subtle for some. Others, though, really did do justice to his line in implied threats and the inferences of his creepy sexual nature.

Question 3

There were some convincing assumptions of Samantha's character. Clearly her adolescent mix of surliness, scepticism regarding her parents and uncertainty about her life struck a chord.

A Raisin in the Sun

Question 4

This was overwhelmingly the most popular question on this text. There was much good work seen in response to it. Many brought out rather well the sense of the family being reborn and supported that general idea with detail from the extract. At the other end of the scale, candidates used the task as an excuse to reveal the play as a whole with very little reference to the extract.

Question 5

The few who did this question often chose well and were able to show how the sparks flew, for instance between Beneatha and Mama and Walter and various family members. A minority simply asserted things without any detailed attention to language and action.

Question 6

This was attempted by very few. Some of the work showed very mature insight, but more usually candidates struggled at times to adopt appropriate thoughts and voice.

My Mother Said I Never Should

There was far too little work submitted on this text for for general comment to be appropriate.

The Crucible

Question 10

There were a great number of answers to this question and many of them showed an impressive ability to probe the inferences of the text. It was a very good differentiator, particularly when it came to weighing up Danforth's part in the passage. Quite a few totally misread the signs, thinking that Danforth was the major catalyst for change, sometimes even citing the twisted logic of his rejecting any evidence other than the 'victim's' in a witchcraft trial. Some solved the problem by ignoring Danforth totally.

Question 11

A few really did balance most impressively the detail in the context of the developing drama, but a significant number of responses seemed incapable of addressing how Miller makes John Proctor such a vividly dramatic character. Descriptions of his character abounded but were quite often not linked to the dramatic moments in the play when the audience see him at his most striking. Tellingly, the play was often described as a novel. Usually one just accepts that this is a slip of the pen but here it happened so often that one began to wonder whether this play was being treated as a drama or as a prose tract. Quite often Examiners were told how powerful the audience would have found a stage direction, as if there would be surtitles for them to read in the theatre. Perhaps drama in this mould needs extra effort to ensure that it is approached as something for the stage. (It was interesting that another drama set text with few stage directions like *Richard III* presented few such problems in a very similar task.) Those who did the best were usually those who had some organisational skill in managing material.

Question 12

There were some very impressive assumptions of Hale's character, exactly capturing his anguish in suitably apocalyptic language as he has watched his beliefs and certainties disintegrate. Conversely, a minority narrated the events of the play and/or showed him coolly ready to minister to the flock.

As You Like It

Question 13

The majority of candidates were able to identify some drama in the passage, while weaker answers tended merely to re-tell. Good answers made the points that emotions are high because of Rosalind's banishment in the scene immediately preceding, that the mood here is at first one of sorrow and fear but that it soon turns to one of optimism and energy, and that the audience is moved by the closeness of the bond between Celia and Rosalind. The best answers explored the ways in which new elements are introduced, such as the comparison between the Forest and the Court, and suspense as to whether Rosalind will find her father and Orlando. There was also some discussion of the role of women and the necessity for disguise.

Question 14

Even those who adopted a narrative approach were able to find relevant material relating to the 'happiness' of the play even if 'optimism' sometimes proved elusive. Successful answers were well argued and picked up some of the darker elements of the play, such as the sibling rivalry and the comments of Jaques.

Question 15

There were some very convincing Celias which captured her wit and intelligence as well as the fact that she has just fallen in love. Outpourings of love for Oliver alone did not score very highly, however; there had to be some reference to the text even if oblique.

Richard III

Question 16

Few who attempted this were unable to pick up on the dramatic ironies of the scene surrounding the hapless Hastings, egged on by Catesby's sly innuendoes. Some quite rightly caught the scene's cynical tone and scoffed at the man's naivety and complacency but others were rather too inclined to pity him as he walks to his death, missing his self-esteem which is proof even to Stanley's warnings.

Question 17

There was some splendid work on this task bringing out fully the things which make Richard so riveting. Many clearly saw his relation to the audience and the effect that he has as he wittily and gaily picks off whatever or whoever stands in his way. At the other end of the scale, there were some who did little more than recount his villainous deeds.

Question 18

The responses here were varied. There were some excellent assumptions of the role when candidates had thought themselves into the character. They exactly caught the man's outrage at being dumped and his fears for the future now that he is out of favour. There were a number, though, who did little more than retell events.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 19

The great majority of the poetry answers were on this question. There had clearly been much preparation of this poem and there was some very impressive work indeed which managed to chart its overall meaning and developing structure, as well as probing in detail the effect of various poetic features. Less penetrating answers tended either to wander through the poem, picking out poetic features without much reference to the poem's developing meanings or simply told the Examiners what they thought the birds 'stood for'. A great number of candidates focused on what they saw as the political implications of the poem without engaging with the words at all and it was disappointing that many did not see the importance of the contrast with the free bird.

Question 20

This was not a popular task but it was well done at times by most of those who attempted it. There was some real engagement with the way the poets' feelings were communicated.

Question 21

There were far fewer answers to this and most who embarked on it found it hard to deal with the parameters of the task. Nearly all chose *Plenty* and *Mid-term Break* but most simply attached the concept of surprise to a run through of the poems. It was surprising how many failed to see that one major element of surprise in Dixon's poem was the persona's nostalgia for her childhood.

Keats

Question 22

This was the most popular of the Keats questions. Although candidates generally understood the thrust of the extract there was a disappointing lack of ability to comment on the language. Most answers merely paraphrased or explained.

Question 23

Candidates who chose this question generally knew the poem well and were able to comment on at least some of the imagery. They generally responded to its sensuousness and to the mood created by the personification of Autumn. Some had clearly been exposed to an interpretation relating the seasons to the stages in man's life, but when they focused on this they tended to lose the sense of what made Autumn attractive.

Question 24

This was a minority choice, but candidates attempting it showed knowledge of the poem and there were some good responses to the mood and language which went beyond mere narrative.

Things Fall Apart

Question 25

The answers to this often struggled. It required a clear grasp of the context, of the difference between this man and his predecessor, exemplified by the way Enoch suddenly becomes a power in the land. There was a good deal of mis-reading. Some, for instance, thought that black and white referred to Smith's supposed racist attitudes.

Question 26

The success of answers here rested to some extent upon the choosing wisely and most candidates made sensible choices. What was rather too often missing was a really detailed connection with Achebe's writing. Many thought that simply describing the events was sufficient to answer to the question.

Question 27

There were a few responses that captured Obierika's mixture of sorrow and anger at his friend's situation. Some, however, made him far too warlike and not sufficiently resigned to the inevitable.

Pride and Prejudice

Question 28

There was much good work on this question with candidates relishing the way Austen dismembers the Bingley sisters and reveals their nastiness. Many had no difficulty in responding to the author's acid ironic tones in much of the extract. Certainly there were few answers which did not at least attempt to probe the detail of the extract, though there were not infrequent uncertainties of reading. Some, for instance, did not realise that Mrs Hurst was one of the sisters.

Question 29

This task brought out the best in many. Whilst a number took the usual line of disparagement, and argued well for it, quite a few saw that Mrs Bennet, for all her sillinesses, did have legitimate concerns and worries. This often entailed referring somewhat sourly to Mr Bennet.

Question 30

Though there were some rather inappropriately gushing responses here, there were many more which caught the character's qualities quite splendidly and gave great pleasure to Examiners.

The God Boy

Question 31

This was chosen by the great majority of candidates who answered on Cross, and often with a great deal of sensitivity. There was a tendency to skate over the amusing moments which one candidate suggested was worthy of slapstick comedy at its best. However, nearly everyone was able to detect at least something of Jimmy's underlying hurt, most notably at the end of the extract.

Question 32

There were relatively few answers on this, but these were largely successful and often profoundly responsive to her tragic situation.

Question 33

Again only a few answers were seen, but most captured well the man's spiteful venom.

Games at Twilight

Far too little work on this text was submitted to make general comment appropriate.

Lord of the Flies

Question 37

This was a very popular choice and elicited a full range of responses. There was much that looked profoundly into the way Golding's symbolism works in this passage in the various descriptions of the fire, the sea and the mountain. As importantly, many picked out how Ralph's actions and speech suggest this is a watershed in his view of Jack and the hunters. Conversely the task revealed those candidates who could only repeat learnt mantras and could not engage with the detail of the writing.

Question 38

There were some very interesting answers on these two characters. Clearly the vote went, one suspects quite rightly, to Roger. Many felt that his comparative shadowiness and lack of emotion made him truly scary. Some answers mined details to support this which were extremely impressive as evidence of detailed knowledge. Indeed there was very little work here which did not show at least some evidence of this.

Question 39

Though Simon says little in the novel, a few candidates made a good attempt at creating appropriate thoughts for him, conveying his concern for the boys, his sense of something evil within them, and his desire for thought and contemplation. Examiners felt, though, that the majority answering on this rather struggled to find an authentic voice.

Far from the Madding Crowd

Question 40

There was a good deal of paraphrase in response to this question but the best answers were able to relate Troy's appearance in the passage to his behaviour elsewhere in the novel.

Question 41

There were some good choices here, particularly Bathsheba's opening of Fanny's coffin, and, as ever, candidates were more or less successful in the extent to which they went beyond narrative to exploration of mood and atmosphere.

Question 42

Better answers managed Boldwood's growing excitement well here. There was some confusion in weaker answers over the sequence of events.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 43

This was a hugely popular task and was usually done at least competently. It was, after all, not very difficult to pick out some salient, not to say obvious, points of comparison. However, quite a few did not really range very widely over the extract, missing such things as Atticus's role as a father later on in the passage which makes a startling comparison to Ewell. Also, it was often a sign of the better answers that the significance of the confrontation being mediated through the voice of the town gossip was considered, as was the effect on the reader of Atticus's complacency in regard to Ewell's continuing threat.

Question 44

This was usually competently done but rarely impressively. The problem lay in the selection of a range of material which showed the development of Scout's character. Sometimes crucial moments were missed or the candidate lost the thread of the argument and just described isolated moments in her life. Not infrequently her dispersal of the lynch mob was used to illustrate her maturing, when the point is that it is her innocence which deflates the mob's brutal intentions.

Question 45

A few outstanding assumptions of the Reverend Sykes's character were read. Sometimes, though, the selection of material was not always particularly judicious. To ignore what the future holds for the Robinson family, for example, is hardly to be expected of this man and sometimes his tones were hardly those of a gentle cleric.

Into the Wind

Question 46

Most of the answers on this text were to this question. Most at least captured something of the man's profoundly unpleasant personality but not that many quite mined the depths of Dahl's contempt for this kind of authority figure. Indeed, some argued that he was really only doing his job when faced by a road hog.

Question 47

The few candidates who attempted this task seemed to be vague about what constituted the setting of their chosen story. They rarely had very much to say.

Question 48

Again there were few answers to this question, but those who attempted it captured the prisoner's voice very well. They conveyed his dignity and contempt for his captors whilst making his fear very apparent. The best answers also made detailed responses to the physical surroundings, such a striking part of the story.