

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8695/21
Composition

Key Messages

It is recommended that to secure higher marks candidates pay particular attention to:

- planning the development of their writing
- avoiding more predictable or derivative plots (Section A) and ideas (Section B)
- using a tone appropriate to the type of writing specified by the question.

General Comments

Some very able writing was in evidence: original, thoughtful and perceptive work was seen by Examiners.

At the higher end of the range, there was skilful use of descriptive elements and structure in responses to Section A and cogent, well exemplified argument in responses to Section B. At the lower end of the range, it was most often lapses in technical areas and expression that limited the marks that could be awarded.

In the main, candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task, but a number needed to address the question focus and consider more carefully the nature of the guidelines of the task (as shown in words such as 'character and motivation', 'setting', 'mood', 'mystery' or 'suspense'; or a prescribed structure: e.g. opening to a novel or short story).

Audience and purpose sometimes needed to be more convincing in Section B. Tone would be a particularly useful area to address and focus upon in classroom practice for such tasks.

A significant number of candidates produced work that was well short of the lower word limit.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

There were some very effective answers where responses captured the mood and setting very imaginatively, often using the present tense. There was often a fusion of descriptions of people – usually opposing sets of fans – and places. The better answers brought out vivid contrasts; less effective answers tended to make the second piece simply the negative image of the first piece ('There were cars....There were no cars').

Less effective answers seemed to offer a narrative rather than descriptive approach, with the writer at the centre, offering too narrow a perspective. In such answers there was often a tendency towards formulaic structures: steady build-up of expectations in the arriving crowd (sometimes a focus on participants, too) in the first piece, contrasting emotions of the winning and losing sides and their supporters in the second piece. These tended to be stronger on 'mood' than 'place'.

Better answers included first and third person narratives, with third person sometimes a more appropriate choice, as this could give the narratives greater range with settings. When approached with imagination, this task produced some excellent descriptions based on detailed sensory perceptions.

Question 2

This question allowed candidates to offer imaginative and carefully constructed narrative elements combined with a sense of character and motivation. The most successful answers did this very well indeed; some answers were genuinely entertaining and intriguing. Less successful ones needed to show some sense of planning and direction. Sometimes those did not make 'deception' the hinge. Some candidates ignored the question wording and wrote about a character being motivated generally.

There was an impressive mix of first and third-person narration and a range of character types, jilted lovers, duped espionage agents and mistrusting offspring of secretive parents being the most prevalent. The title certainly lent itself to some tense, atmospheric openings culminating in cliff-hangers or the introduction of problems promising further confrontation and misunderstandings.

Less effective answers tended to focus on stitched-up spies out for revenge only, with little character development and over-reliance on dialogue. A number of plots were based on somewhat clichéd ideas of sentimental love stories, which worked well if carefully and engagingly handled but which often descended into unoriginal and predictable outcomes. The problem in some scripts was that deception was not clear until the end and/or very contrived: a story not building character or motivation but something totally unrelated until the end.

Question 3

This was the most popular narrative choice. The title produced a full range of responses – from the atmospheric to the mundane. Most responses developed the idea of a threatening presence in the forest. Effective compositions created a mysterious, at times gothic, ambience and sustained this approach throughout; others produced a less effective focus of the Hansel and Gretel type, or unloaded narratives which seemed rather random in their direction and credibility.

Stronger responses were carefully crafted with a well-managed climax. A number of candidates wrote third-person narratives where the employment of the omniscient narrator allowed some explication of a suspenseful situation whilst describing a mysterious locale. Equally, when the first-person was used it made for a genuine build-up of mystery and fear, due to the restricted perspective and limited knowledge of the main character. The best answers used the forest to intrigue, leaving the reader to want to know more about the characters and the situation.

Less effective responses tended to list a series of events, some of which were quite unconvincing. Quite a few forgot they were writing with the forest as the main title. Several thought that if the final sentence mentioned it they were covered. On the other hand some relied, unhelpfully, on simply offering descriptions of a forest as though that were a means to an end: simple, sometimes effective, descriptions were delivered but did not invite the reader to sense the next chapter or the novel as a whole. Candidates need to avoid derivative and clichéd writing. Conventional horror film narratives found their way into many answers; many were influenced by zombies, monsters, wolves, serial killers and the like. Some managed unsettling and genuinely eerie content, but there were volumes of glowing red eyes and their ilk. Some candidates ignored the requirement to 'write the opening' and killed off the narrator at the end.

Question 4

This was a less popular choice but produced some rounded and clearly contrasting monologues, often involving neighbours disputing over pets, noise or gardens/property boundaries and perceived social snubs. The imaginative ones contained some careful use of vocabulary and dialect. Successful answers conveyed a clear and strong sense of different dialogue structures, tone and feelings as well as voice, often differentiated by age or gender. Some were quite thoughtful and well structured, allowing the same incidents to be seen through contrasting perspectives.

The most notable difficulties some candidates had with this task related to tense, because they did not understand the monologue form. A common pitfall was including mixtures of narrative with the delivery of the character's comments so that it became unclear at which point the speaker was addressing the audience. Some wrote play scripts. A number were a rambling stream-of-consciousness rehearsal of grievances. Distinctions of contrasting voice were not very convincing or effective in the less able scripts. A

recommendation for teaching in this connection would be to encourage candidates to practise adopting very different voices, perhaps through classroom hot-seating activities on novels or short stories, considering the same incident from a wide range of viewpoints.

Section B

Question 5

This title was a popular choice and elicited some strongly argued, rational essays underpinned by a clear sense of voice, purpose and audience. Some were able to relate the contemporary and historical significance of the Olympic Games to political and social issues and debates very well. Candidates seemed to be well informed about this topic (even if a significant number thought they originated in Ancient Rome rather than Greece), and there was a sense that some had debated the issue previously.

Responses were mostly well structured, with stronger candidates producing well developed and logical discussion. Better answers widened their arguments to include all aspects of the proposition. Appeals to global harmony were successfully made, while the economic benefits to the host country were argued.

Weaker responses were still quite clearly structured but the development of arguments was less secure. Some made digressions into the spirit of the Olympics Games, its history and traditions and its motivational properties (especially for the young – wholesome role models, etc.), with not nearly enough consideration of the central proposition – ‘a complete waste of money’ - and in them little notice was taken of the recommendation in the statement, ‘...should be abolished’.

Question 6

There were some very noteworthy attempts where candidates succeeded in adopting the appropriate format and style, while incorporating conventional modes of address and drawing on relevant and focused examples and lines of argument. Most candidates maintained a good sense of audience.

There were some excellent responses in terms of persuasion and engaging with audience. By contrast some did not have a clear enough structure for their writing while some did not find enough content to interest their readers. Other less effective answers offered reams of sensible advice unsupported by any rationale.

Sometimes there was some confusion over the audience. Some candidates began with an appropriate voice but were not able to sustain that voice throughout. Some wrote the article as a lecture in a very serious way or in a highly moral tone which failed to engage, though the ideas might have been good. The weakest responses were flawed technically and lacked engagement with their audience, except sporadically.

Good scripts featured effervescent, bubbly prose capturing the target audience, a youthful journalist dynamic in a convincing manner. They contained very knowledgeable advice concerning healthy diet and training regimes. The best engaged both the serious and the light-hearted perspectives and were holistic in response, moving beyond eating, drinking, smoking and sport to empathising with the individual emotionally. Wide ranging ideas and a lively voice characterised these answers. A recommendation for success in such tasks in the future would be for candidates to widen their focus, including both genders in their advice if appropriate.

This question required a response to form; not all answers were explicit in responding to a ‘magazine article’ – but the better ones used the second and third person, rhetorical devices and personal appeals, while ensuring that their articles had shape.

Question 7

This was a very popular question across the range of ability, prompting very keen and informed answers from candidates whatever their geographical location and cultural background. Candidates seemed to enjoy the relevance of the material and seemed very well informed about the protocol of social networking sites and the arguments for and against their existence. The best grappled with the pros and cons for the individual and society as a whole. There was an impression of clear and vocal sentiments in a large number of these essays. Most candidates seemed fully aware of the potential dangers, going beyond the threat from stalkers to consideration of malware and methods of cracking Facebook’s security protocols. Many wrote about how they would like to ban Facebook.

Occasionally, less focused answers drifted into detailed narratives about cases of assignations and their consequences, moving away from the central issues of the question. Weaker work tended to list points without much development which meant there was some repetition when candidates ran out of new ideas. Some answers on social networking sites wandered into consideration of media technology in general, considering issues such as lack of sport, the growth of laziness, not eating well and lack of health in people. The weakest responses were flawed technically and had few ideas.

Question 8

This generally produced steady and competent ideas, supported by a reasonable choice of examples and arguments. Some candidates seemed to rein in their thoughts here and perhaps played a little safe. In lower scoring answers, some had a problem with 'debate' or had few ideas, while others had speaker A cover one area and speaker B an entirely different area. This in itself was not an issue but in such answers there was little or no sense of persuasion, and the speakers tended to rely on simple assertion. Candidates here often had a reasonable or good sense of audience but were less clear about what points would support their two arguments. Though it was tackled the reasons given were not always compelling. Many adhered to the required format – a school debate – though the tone was not always right.

More successful work featured some considered and well-planned writing. Rhetorical devices such as triplets, pointed repetition of key words, questions, and appeals to an audience raised achievement. Those who did well responded in their second speech to the points made in the first.

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Audience and purpose sometimes needed to be more convincing in Section B. Tone would be a particularly useful area to address and focus upon in classroom practice for such tasks.

For good marks answers need to show technical accuracy. In many scripts agreement, tenses and plural endings were not secure. Here candidates very often confused tenses, especially when they chose to begin their story or description in the present tense. Very often they were unable to maintain this.

Accurate punctuation is important: candidates can make their work more effective by apposite punctuation between and within sentences, noting especially the correct use of the apostrophe and the semicolon.

Paragraphing and discourse markers are important props which add to the structure and coherent progression of ideas in a text. There was often a lack of paragraphing and signposting in responses to both sections of the paper. When conversation was used in stories, many candidates failed to start a new paragraph for each change of speaker. Other errors, such as punctuating conversation, were also frequent. Mastering this crucial skill would not only allow candidates to present their ideas in a more logical sequence, but enhance the reader's understanding of the material accordingly, helping answers to get higher credit.

Candidates need to be aware of the importance of a varied vocabulary. A teaching recommendation is that candidates should select the key words/phrases from the question and note alternatives to provide a vocabulary bank.

Candidates should make sure they write full and developed answers. There were a number of answers which were too short, giving little sense of a fully-addressed answer. There is no need to include a word count.

In discussion work, many candidates discussed the topic in very general or abstract terms. They could benefit from teaching which emphasises the need to find concrete examples to exemplify the points under discussion. Many candidates had difficulty handling impersonal writing. Often they started using 'one would think that...' and then operated an uncomfortable mixture of you/they as the need for pronouns continued and they were unsure what to use. Perhaps a more assured use of the passive voice could be recommended here. A number of candidates used adjectives where adverbs were needed. Quite a few used slang or colloquial words in fairly formal contexts. Candidates need to understand the importance of a formal register where appropriate.

A significant number of candidates did not read the precise question wording carefully enough. This was particularly marked in the task specifying 'opening to a story'. Here some candidates proceeded to write a whole story and tried to pack too much plot into too short a space. Another instruction often ignored was "in your writing create...". There was also evidence that in many scripts limited planning had taken place, especially in Section B responses where careful argumentation and explanation are important to success in the tasks set. Candidates should be advised that 5-10 minutes worth of planning would be sound practice. Also, five minutes could be set aside for the checking of work for accuracy.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

This was a popular choice and candidates at the higher end of the range displayed imaginative and thoughtful ideas, capturing the moods and qualities of the settings with a good degree of flair. Some answers seemed to rely a little too much on the clipped sentence approach so that what masqueraded as sentences were, in reality, phrases separated by full stops. Most candidates understood the sense of contrast regarding both mood and place. Those who engaged fully with the question clearly understood this with a highly-structured and marked differentiation of all the senses: sight, sound, smells, taste and even touch.

Middle-range scoring candidates were able to access the basics of the city experience, sometimes engaging the reader with contrasting flashes of clear, vivid, visual representations with some aspect of sound and emotion. Less successful answers relied on a narrative focus or attempted to produce formulaic descriptions of city centres. These employed simple, factual lists of what they could see by day and then by night and tended to go through fairly monotonous detail of the day from getting up in the morning; often the second piece lacked subtlety and tended to describe the absence of what was there before and what the people who had been there earlier in the day were now doing, rather than what could actually be seen.

Question 2

This allowed candidates to focus on the worlds of crime or secret liaisons and some answers captured murky underworlds with aplomb. There were some very imaginative presentations of character and motivation, incorporating dialogue (the punctuation of which still left room for improvement in some cases) with precision and effect in that the quantity of it was not overwhelming.

The best candidates set up a scenario which determined character and motivation fairly strongly at the start and built upon it. They were also able to establish the setting and background of the characters and why/where the meeting should take place. There was also a clear sense that more was to come, leaving the reader on a plausible cliff hanger.

Some more clichéd responses were about forbidden love and tended to be complete short stories (which was not required by the task). When this happened stories usually turned into plot summaries. Some plots were totally unrelated to the title until the end and then became contrived. Less effective responses attempted straightforward narratives with few convincing clear-cut characters and/or little motivation. Sometimes, potentially good effects/plots were undermined by poor punctuation and expression, rendering the final product disjointed and ineffective.

Question 3

This was very popular. The open nature of the title allowed for varied interpretations, with candidates clearly relishing the opportunity to engage in some genre-based narration: the mainstays being apocalyptic, natural disaster, crime, and science fiction writing about worlds or dystopias set in the future. Many examples of lively writing were seen. Many candidates managed to note the demands for mystery and suspense, leaving a dénouement (if only one of sorts) until the final paragraphs.

Where thought and planning were involved the title was allowed to be the central focus, but less effective compositions tended to see it as something to tag on to the end of the material in a rather haphazard way. Those who concentrated on building up atmosphere did well; those who wanted to tell an entire (complicated) story were less successful. With the latter, the sense of the novel was not apparent. Complete episodes rather than beginnings characterised the weaker end and, with some, the 'darkness' was not at all apparent. The best responses included psychological, emotional darkness which engaged the reader immediately and promised some sense of a story yet to come.

Section B

Question 4

This was less popular but produced some quite skilful answers, displaying sharp and precise contrasts between the protagonists. Often, the underlying opposition was based on jealousy or social class and perceptions that the boss was having a far easier time than the lowest paid worker. Some answers made effective use of the blindness of a superior in understanding a lower grade colleague.

With the less effective answers, the concept/genre was often misunderstood. At times the composition took on the form of a diary, at others a conversation. The most notable problems related to tense in those who did understand the genre. Other pitfalls included mixtures of narrative with the delivery of the character's comments so that it became unclear at which point the speaker was addressing the audience. Distinctions of contrasting voice were sometimes not convincing, hence creating characters who lacked sparkle, individuality or interest.

The best answers, by contrast, created a clearly strong sense of different dialogue structures, tone and voice as well as feelings.

Question 5

This evoked some very personal and strongly held opinions. A good number of candidates who chose this option found plenty of apt examples to illustrate their points.

There was an opportunity for a distinctive and emotive voice here but quite a few candidates became sidetracked, losing focus on the title and drifting into a general consideration of animal welfare issues. They were limited in relevant discussion in terms of examples and exploration. Once the point had been made – that human beings do not have the right to inflict suffering of any kind on animals – the candidates did not have any means of developing the argument. Many talked about circuses or zoos rather than sport, while some made slightly unconvincing assertions such as that horse racing would lead to the extinction of horses; and human beings' use of farm animals would lead to their extinction.

The question provided for much sympathetic and thoughtful writing but almost always resulted in arguments in favour of the proposition, making little attempt at the balance which would have made for a more complex and interesting discussion. The best answers wove arguments with exemplification while acknowledging cultural counter-arguments too.

Question 6

Many candidates produced steady and effective articles combining an appropriate form of address and precise register. There was clear advice and guidance, supported by an understanding of some of the difficulties the target audience may be facing or about to face. Strong answers kept the main title in constant focus, persuading and engaging with their teenage audience.

Some weaker answers were not able to sustain that voice throughout. Some wrote the article as a lecture in a very serious way or in a highly moral tone which failed to engage, though the ideas might have been good. The weakest responses were flawed technically and lacked engagement with their audience, except sporadically. Some candidates wrote around the subject in very abstract terms; more successful answers had a number of well-structured paragraphs which discussed more specific aspects of the subject.

The most successful answers engaged both serious and light-hearted features. These were holistic in response, moving beyond topics such as eating, drinking, smoking and doing sport, to empathising with the individual emotionally. Wide-ranging ideas and lively voice marked out the best.

Question 7

The quotation prompted some strong opinions, with some understanding the reasons — often social and financial — why people might download material; they also appreciated the moral and intellectual arguments about its illegality. The title's moral dilemma made some candidates think very hard, with some admitting that they had downloaded material whilst recognising some of the condemnation this might expose them to.

Weaker answers had a limited range of ideas, with some sidetracking into technology and its advantages and disadvantages as a whole, which sometimes became repetitive. There were predictable ideas about how obsessive it made people and how it was going to hurt the entertainment industry. (Some were not sure about the word 'justified', taking it to mean 'legalised' or 'regulated'. The latter interpretation may have come from word-processing, as in justifying the margin, so the deduction was that it meant to 'regularise' downloading. The result was that the ethical element was not really dealt with.) In tackling this question, candidates would do well to focus on a range of what constitutes stealing and morality proffering some suggestions as to how they might persuade people this is so; or, otherwise, argue that downloading is a deserved freedom, or how a compromise might be reached to the satisfaction of all concerned. The best grappled with the pros and cons for the individual and society as a whole and were fully informed. These candidates had clearly grappled with the moral and ethical issues of this topic and so there were strong views decidedly expressed. There was some very penetrating understanding of the economics of different entertainment and media-industry vehicles.

Question 8

This allowed some degree of choice. Those tackling it usually focused on driving laws and drinking laws. In general, candidates who chose this topic had a good sense of audience. The question seemed to touch a nerve with a number of candidates who felt they were not allowed by their society or culture to grow up. Effective answers produced a range of exemplification and insights.

Answers sometimes took on too many 'activities' at once, to their detriment. There was a sense that some candidates were trying to cover too much ground in too little detail, with insufficient attention to developing a coherent argument using rhetorical devices and persuasive language, because they might have perceived that addressing more 'legal age limits' would find more favour with the Examiner. In some cases, the difficulty was in not being specific about current age limits and then arguing for changes – the discussion was too generalised and therefore became unfocused. Candidates sometimes confused criminality with legal age limits.

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This allowed some degree of choice. Those tackling it usually focused on driving laws and drinking laws. In general, candidates who chose this topic had a good sense of audience. The question seemed to touch a nerve with a number of candidates who felt they were not allowed by their society or culture to grow up. Effective answers produced a range of exemplification and insights.

Answers sometimes took on too many 'activities' at once, to their detriment. There was a sense that some candidates were trying to cover too much ground in too little detail, with insufficient attention to developing a coherent argument using rhetorical devices and persuasive language, because they might have perceived that addressing more 'legal age limits' would find more favour with the Examiner. In some cases, the difficulty was in not being specific about current age limits and then arguing for changes – the discussion was too generalised and therefore became unfocused. Candidates sometimes confused criminality with legal age limits.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/91
Poetry and Prose

Key Messages

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Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.

Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must be very detailed, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. Poetry answers should focus on the set poem.

Answers should focus on the writing of the texts, avoiding dwelling on the biography of their authors.

Candidates should focus more closely on the language, imagery and structure of prose and drama as well as poetry.

General Comments

Candidates demonstrated a real interest in what they had read and often wrote with a genuine appreciation of the effectiveness of literary methods. There were a number of detailed, scholarly and penetrating discussions of the texts in response to the questions set. Such essays inevitably were closely focused on how those texts are constructed and how the writers employ specific diction, imagery and other devices to provoke particular responses in the readers or audiences. Often the essays were perceptive in their acknowledgement of the variety of possible responses. However, many candidates relied on a recall of character and plot, sometimes with what they termed a 'theme'. Such approaches cannot be fully successful in answering the questions set, which always focus in some way on how the text is written. Weak responses lapsed into narrative summary and characters were discussed almost as if they were real people, rather than the imagined constructions of their authors.

Candidates should note these issues are particularly important in the passage based questions. Every passage based question demands close commentary on the writing and candidates who do not address this requirement will not score high marks. All answers on the paper require quotation to support points, but in the passage based questions the material for the quotations is provided on the question paper. It is therefore vital that candidates examine the writing of the passage in very close analytical detail, whether it is poetry, prose or drama.

Question Specific Comments 9695/31

Question 1 Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*

- (a) Favoured poems used in response to this question were 'Whatever Happened to the Elephant', 'Sujata: The First Disciple of Buddha' 'Genealogy', 'Angels' Wings' and 'The Echoes in Poona'. Candidates succeeded best when they were able to recall the poems in sufficient detail to select appropriate quotation to support their points. Such essays commented on how point of view is established in the poems through diction and imagery and some commented on how structure and form are used to juxtapose a child's point of view with that of an adult.

- (b) This was quite a popular option, though many candidates struggled to move beyond recounting the narrative of the poem. Since the poem is about a lack of narrative, this created difficulties. More perceptive candidates appreciated the moment of stasis created by the baby 'asleep' and commented on ways in which Bhatt makes the inconsequential moment memorable, combining a colloquial informality of diction and reference with the resonant imagery of 'Beethoven's piano'. Candidates commented on the contrast between inside and outside, the promise of 'rich round fullness', echoing the pot of tea and pregnancy, and the way the short line 'in the air' prepares for the piano image. Some candidates made illuminating connections with other poems in the collection to develop points about '29 April 1989'.

Question 2. Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) Nearly every candidate who answered this question wrote about 'The Darkling Thrush'. Among other poems considered were 'The Year's Awakening', 'Beeny Cliff', 'At Castle Boterel' and 'The Convergence of the Twain'. Most essays pursued the argument that Hardy uses references to the natural world and imagery drawn from it to reflect mood and these were successful when carefully illustrated with relevant quotations. Some interesting answers broadened the argument, many of these referring to 'The Convergence of the Twain' as a poem where Hardy represents nature as dangerous and vengeful, quite contrary to his more habitual depiction. These answers clearly constructed an argument in response to the question set.
- (b) 'Afterwards' was a very popular choice. Successful candidates addressed the requirement to comment closely on Hardy's use of language, with appreciation and analysis of imagery as well as considering the phrasing and tone of the rhetorical questions. Such answers often commented on the progressive and cyclical structure of the poem, commenting on the way each stanza is introduced as the poem moves from day to night and from spring to winter, with the suggestion of rebirth at the end. Candidates noted the anonymity of the commentators, and the irony that, while the poem reinforces a desire to be remembered as an appreciator of nature rather than as a poet, this is communicated through a carefully fashioned poem. Some answers commented on a wistful, lamenting tone, while others saw the poetic voice as pathetically egocentric. There is much to comment on in the poem, and candidates were rewarded for exploring its details.

Question 3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) This question was designed so that candidates could interpret 'loss' widely, and so they did, with warfare a frequent subject as well as loss of love, life and youth. The most frequently used poem was, appropriately, 'One Art'. This was often discussed very well, with close attention to the poem's development, form and structure, closely related to the question. Other poems often considered were 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death', 'Tears Idle Tears', 'For Heidi with Blue Hair', 'You Cannot Do This,' 'Cambodia' and 'Anthem For Doomed Youth'. Essays which described the type of loss, sometimes, illustrated with quotations, did not achieve great success, but there were very many sharp and thoughtful pieces of writing on the language, imagery and structures chosen by poets to present the idea of loss. The strongest essays kept the imperative 'compare' very much in mind, moving between their two chosen poems in an informed way.
- (b) Successful answers to this question, and there were many, discussed the structure in some detail, noting the change in mood at the beginning of the fourth stanza and the link between Immortality in the first and Eternity in the last. The personification of Death as a Gentleman Caller, together with a Chaperone, clearly appealed to candidates, and 'kindly' and 'civility' were read appropriately. Some candidates commented on the effects of the change in tense from past to present in line 22 and pointed out that unawareness of time is experienced only when facing eternity after death. Dickinson's characteristic use of capitals and dashes was generally interpreted as her way of emphasising important words and creating pauses to demonstrate the slowness of the journey and the jolting rhythm of the carriage wheels. The ending with just a hyphen to symbolise the eternity ahead of the speaker was another common comment. Less successful answers identified examples of alliteration, repetition and personification without discussing their effects.

Question 4. Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

- (a) This was a popular question, though answers were frequently limited by being confined to a consideration of the various characters with a religious dimension, particularly Helen Burns, Brocklehurst and St John Rivers. These worked well enough as examples of the different kinds of Christianity Jane encounters, though really successful answers moved well beyond these limitations, noting the question was about 'Jane's characterisation' rather than about religious characters. Stronger answers focused on the influence of these and other characters on Jane: Helen's instructions on forgiveness, the rejection of Brocklehurst's hypocrisy and the presentation of her decision to resist St John's attempts to make her submit to his interpretation of God's will and agree to marriage. These answers identified pivotal moments in the novel when Jane's religious convictions and sense of identity are seen to shape the decisions made. The most successful answers picked up from the cue quotation and focused very clearly on Jane's characterisation through her understanding of religion, her prayers and relationship with God.
- (b) This passage rewarded candidates who were able to blend consideration of the context with very detailed examination of the dialogue. Very alert answers were able to pinpoint that at this stage, Rochester knows more than either Jane or the reader. Such precise observations and knowledge underpinned high quality answers, allowing candidates to explore the subtleties of Rochester's responses and the way in which not only Jane, but the reader too, is manipulated. Some candidates effectively considered the difference between a first and second reading of the passage. Strong answers paid attention to the vivid quality of Jane's description of her horrific visitor, with appropriate consideration of the Gothic genre and explored the structure of the dialogue: Rochester's short questions and Jane's longer responses before that structure is reversed with Jane's ominous proleptic 'Not yet.' Some discussions were informed by consideration of the respective statuses of Jane and Rochester signalled in their dialogue and there were some strong personal responses to Rochester, often suggesting that the final flinging of his arms around Jane is to control his own shuddering rather than to comfort Jane.

Question 5. Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) In general, responses to this question showed sound knowledge of the text and a convincing engagement with elements of the question. There was some useful commentary of the ways in which the two girls act as foils for one another and symbolise different aspects of colonialism. Some answers described differences in the characters without much supporting reference, while strong answers were detailed and well supported. In contrasting the characters, candidates wrote relevantly about the rural poverty of Tambu compared with the educated middle-class western upbringing of Nyasha and developed comments on the position of women in Shona society. Good answers presented a range of ideas, and discussed how the girls had been affected by their experiences with some apt quotations, while the strongest also commented on the importance to the comparison of Tambu's first person narration, particularly considering the end of the novel.
- (b) Candidates usually focused effectively on the question but were varied in their success at engaging with the passage in an appropriate degree of detail. The tendency was to be able to respond well to the ideas in the passage that helped answer the question but fewer candidates engaged with the nuances of language, form and structure. Those who did so noted the passage's shift from 'we' and 'us' to 'I' and commented on the implications of vocabulary such as 'herded', 'recruit' and 'privilege'. Discussion of the superior attitude of the nuns was helped if candidates noted the inappropriateness of questions on 'acorns', 'gumboots' and 'snow shoes' for African children. Many answers showed evidence of strong personal response, which was rewarded if supported by such attention to detail as this. Many candidates criticised the arrogance of Tambu in this passage, for example, but the strongest answers were able to demonstrate a tone of gentle but critical ironic humour in the narration of her younger self.

Question 6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) *The Door in the Wall*, *To Da-Duh In Memoriam*, *Journey* and *Sandpiper* were popular stories chosen to engage with this question, though other stories were considered too. Most candidates showed a reasonable working knowledge of each story as a whole but did not always support this with quotation and precise reference. Therefore, many answers tended to have a slightly narrative quality, rather than engaging rigorously with 'ways in which.' However, all candidates were able to relate their chosen stories relevantly to the question, with some interesting interpretations of what constitutes being 'out of touch' – and some interesting comparisons between how characters responded to their being so. Answers which engaged with how the narrative is told, and used detail to support the answer, scored highly.
- (b) A number of candidates answered this question without a clear detailed knowledge of the story of which it forms the climax, and thus treated it as an unseen passage. Such answers were not able to contextualise the extract and relied on narrative summary. Confident answers explored the position of the narrator, who closely follows the correspondent's experience, and contextualised the passage within the camaraderie of the men in the boat and the savagery of the sea. There was focus on the description of the man on the beach, combining the ridiculous with the saintly, the power of the sea turned momentarily benign as the correspondent is 'flung with ease' toward the shore, the simplicity and courtesy of the dialogue in such a wild situation. The answers which focused on 'the way the climax is presented' examined the tale's melancholy twist, as the dénouement seems to be salvation before the final discovery of the dead oiler.

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Question 7. Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) Most candidates demonstrated thorough understanding of the presentation of Alan's parents and their roles in the play. There were some particularly poised and sophisticated answers to this question with original analysis, well-integrated support and good use of alternative interpretations. Candidates often wrote at length, with relevance and insight. Less successful answers presented a less detailed exploration of Dora and Frank, often lacking close reference and quotation to support points.
- (b) Many candidates wrote convincingly about the use of stage directions and setting in this passage, as well as the language of Dysart's speech. Most candidates demonstrated knowledge of Dysart's 'journey' to this scene, which was appropriate context if handled concisely; in some answers this became a summary of the play and took attention away from the extract. Strong answers noted the scorn expressed in Dysart's speech, looking at both vocabulary and sentence construction, while candidates with a sense of theatre noted the effects of the shifting address to the theatre audience and to Alan, with thoughtful comment on the last three lines of stage direction.

Question 8. William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part 1*

- (a) Many candidates approached this question only in part through a comparison of Hal and Hotspur without considering King Henry IV himself. Some more organised answers which considered the King had a tendency to focus on the burdens of kingship more than the attractions. The strongest answers presented a thorough consideration of both aspects with appropriate textual support and development.
- (b) In answers to this question, some weak candidates lost focus by explaining the immediate context and neglected the detail in the passage. Stronger answers sought to explain Hal's behaviour and showed how his language revealed his informal relationships with the other characters, commenting on the use of hyperbole and opposites for comic effect. Such responses often commented on the warm relationships evidenced in the scene, which distract Hal from his princely duties, seen in the rejection of Sir John Bracy.

Question 9. Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar named Desire*

- (a) Stronger responses kept a proper balance between a detailed examination of specific scenes in the play and broader discussion of William's background and his ideas about the new working class macho culture as typified by Stanley. They showed some awareness and appreciation of the dramatic impact of the action, some aspects of the language and the music. More modest answers tended to give some detailed accounts of obvious scenes though not many dealt with the rape scene in any detail. Some of the weaker answers attempted to argue that the violence was necessary to the play.
- (b) Strong answers showed that candidates had a clear understanding of Blanche's manipulative character and looked closely at way in which she manipulates Mitch, commenting with some astuteness on the degree of calculation in the reference to her packing and her class superiority. Few commented on the reference to the 'streetcar named Desire' though even modest answers could explain the irony of her fear of being 'lost'. Most candidates were able to demonstrate Mitch's nervousness through stage directions and halting dialogue. Less confident answers concentrated unnecessarily on filling in the back story to explain Blanche's behaviour.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/92
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Question Specific Comments 9695/32

Question 1. Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*

- (a) The very few candidates who attempted this question wrote, often perceptively, about 'For Nanabhai Bhatt', '3 November 1984' and 'Wine from Bordeaux'. The quality of the answers depended strongly on how much detail the candidates recalled from the poems, enabling them to write about the 'means' and 'effects' of Bhatt's treatment of political events.
- (b) This was a more popular choice and most candidates managed to recognise the child's and adult's perspectives in the two sections of the poem. There were many and varied personal responses: some suggested that the poem is an attack on religion and an adult's mature rejection of childlike naivety of belief; others saw the poem as a plea for animal rights. Perhaps the most interesting was the argument that Bhatt herself, in exile, had lost her Indian 'head' and was troubled by her identity. Some argued that the first section represents appearance, myth and fantasy while the second represents reality through the adult viewpoint. Many were able to

comment on ways in which Bhatt creates the child's persistence in the first section, noting the innocence and preoccupation with discovering logic and truth.

Question 2. Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) There were a number of thoughtful answers which focused on the terms of the question and showed Hardy's concern with the passage of time. There were some good examples of close textual reference with accurate quotation; equally, many candidates referred only in general terms to the poems. The most popular poem for this answer was 'The Darkling Thrush', but the following were also popular: 'Afterwards', 'The Voice', 'The Man he Killed', 'A Church Romance', 'The Self Unseeing', 'The Going', 'Beeny Cliff' and 'At Castle Boterel'. The strongest answers were those which selected two poems which treated different aspects of time, or treated time in different ways, and were able to develop a comparison. Answers which dwelled on Hardy's biography were seldom strong.
- (b) Candidates demonstrated strong personal response and recognised the particular context of the poem. However, many candidates dwelt inappropriately on Hardy's regret about his wife Emma's death, often to the exclusion of focus on the language and structure of the poem itself. Biographical information should be used sparingly – the questions are about literature. Some candidates also produced intelligent summaries of the poem without detailed engagement with the language. The strongest answers considered the poem's poetic voice, sometimes considering to whom the haunter addresses the poem. The tone of quiet intimacy was often noted, with comments on how the lines and stanzas structure the developing thought towards the final note of 'peace'.

Question 3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) This question required candidates to focus on the construction of poems and how the structure conveyed meaning, rather than to focus on the meaning itself. Answers which sidestepped the direction of the question and discussed the content with little attention to structure were self-limiting and received little reward, while essays which clearly explored form and structure – stanzas, metre, rhyme, enjambment, line lengths, punctuation – were successful. Some strong answers compared Owen's use of the sonnet form with Sassoon's varied sentence length and use of caesurae, the way Nichols and Mew use indents and spacing, the use of single and multiple stanzas, or careful regular punctuation with Dickinson's dashes. The strongest answers looked closely at structure and related it to ways in which it communicates the central issues of each poem.
- (b) This question was very popular and candidates focused on analysing and exploring the poem. There were many strong, careful answers, though a number limited themselves by failing to note the word 'anticipation' in the question. Successful answers discussed the changes of pace in the poem created by the different verbs and references to distance and made incisive comments on both its visual and auditory effects. There were also thoughtful comments on the two stanza construction, the rhyme scheme with the couplets in the Centre of each stanza and the use of the present tense. A number of candidates explored a potential sexual reading of the poem, often in intricate detail.

Question 4. Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

- (a) There were some excellent answers to the question on Bertha Mason, demonstrating articulate and very well supported arguments about her significance. Some strong answers presented a sympathetic portrayal of Bertha, while weaker responses wrote about parts of the novel where Bertha is seen, usually with a narrative focus. The character was often considered as a narrative device of symbolic significance, with some thoughtful considerations of Bertha as Jane's alter ego, the Gothic, suppressed sexuality and feminism. Many candidates referred effectively to the historical context of the character and Victorian views on colonies and madness, though in some cases the contextual information and speculation outweighed the discussion of the novel itself.
- (b) Strong answers to this question focused closely on the passage and were able to comment on a range of linguistic and structural features. The language, imagery, repetitions, questions and sentence structures were discussed in confident answers. In terms of contextual knowledge, most candidates understood Jane's dilemma in leaving Rochester and the role her conscience plays in the extract. However, a number of answers were weak, failing to 'comment closely' as the (b) questions always require, and either retold the passage in their own words or summarised the

events of the novel up to the point of Jane's flight. Candidates are reminded of the need to focus on the language and structure of prose in the same way as poetry.

Question 5. Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) Although some weaker candidates produced general essays about women in the novel, more successful answers focused well on Maiguru's characterisation and her role. Such answers looked at her pride in her family's time in England, her pet names and subservience to Babamukuru and crucially at the revelation of her own education and her temporary departure from the family household. Her characterisation as an example of cultural hybridity, which is seen in a more extreme form in Nyasha, was often at the heart of these strong answers.
- (b) There were some detailed approaches, but a number of responses failed to focus on the terms of the question and look at the detail of the text. More successful answers focused on ways in which the extract reveals aspects of Tambu's character and the differences between herself and Nyasha. These answers looked at Tambu's careful descriptions of the wedding preparations together with her tone, revealing her sardonic dislocation from events. Examples of diction such as 'ridiculous', 'play-acting', 'show' and 'comedy' were noted, contrasted with 'Sweet', 'wonderful', 'generosity' and 'occasion'.

Question 6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) In responses to this question, some candidates retold their chosen stories accompanied by limited comment addressed to the question. More successful candidates demonstrated a clear overview of the stories and were able to construct essays using detailed references relevant to the question. These answers focused on the word 'present' in the question and discussed structure and other literary devices used by individual authors. *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, *Tyres*, *The Open Boat*, *Sandpiper* and *To Da-duh, In Memoriam* were stories often used by candidates to answer the question.
- (b) There were many strong answers to this question, as candidates found the passage accessible and often were able to write in detail about its writing and effects. Many candidates commented on the narrator's emotional control at the beginning of the passage, where dynamite and shooting are discussed dispassionately, compared with the horror of the description of the slaughtered bodies in the third paragraph. Others noted that the central action of the passage is about human relationships and pointed out that the extract shows the importance of such normality in the midst of war. There were intelligent comments on the presentation of individuals, the Germans, the Maquis and the Mayor, who all have parts to play in wartime life as depicted in the excerpt.

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Question 7. Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) Most acknowledged the difficulty of sympathising with Alan Strang, but noted that this is what the play encourages. Candidates considered the presentation of Alan's parents and how his upbringing enables the audience to develop sympathy for him. Some of the strongest answers looked carefully at Dysart's role, which communicates both the horror of Alan's actions but also the possible reasons for it, as well as demonstrating Dysart's own sympathy for Alan. As Dysart guides the play and addresses the audience directly on several occasions, his role was recognised as crucial by several candidates.
- (b) Most answers to this question were well organised and discussed the use of stage directions as well as dialogue. Some stronger answers commented on the emergence of Dysart as a character in his own right and the development of his role from psychiatrist to 'patient' of sorts, recognising the honesty between him and Alan at the end of the extract. Sharply observant answers noted Alan's short lines and questions, indicating his apprehension and contrasted his colloquial vocabulary with Dysart's professional language.

Question 8. William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part 1*

- (a) A number of responses contained developed and articulate arguments supported by well-selected textual reference. There was appropriate use of personal response and most candidates made their choice clear, considering the qualities of either character. While most candidates sided with Falstaff, acknowledging his humour and close relationship with Hal in the course of the play, a significant number of carefully argued responses developed convincing arguments for Prince Henry, looking at the duties and responsibilities of a future monarch.
- (b) Some weak answers to this question relied heavily on narrative summary, recounting the history of the rebellion in order to account for its ending. More successful answers looked closely at the dialogue of the extract, noting the stoicism of Worcester, the confidence of the King's speeches and the honour evident in the Prince's speeches. The acknowledgement of this, and the unity evident between King and Prince at the end of the scene was commented on frequently.

Question 9. Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar named Desire*

- (a) There was some evidence of candidates misreading this question and discussing different locations referred to in the play, from the apartment to Belle Reve. The question's actual focus was on the apartment itself in its quarter of New Orleans, established by the initial stage directions and the actions and references of the play. Candidates who recognised this wrote about the poor, rather seedy working class setting, the world of Stella and Stanley, contrasted with Blanche's expectations and background. Strong answers focused on ways in which Williams creates and characterises this setting, through the set design itself, lighting, music, references to the streetcar, street vendors, Stanley's companions, and the way they create a world for the play in which Blanche is so much an incongruous stranger.
- (b) Strong answers to this question showed a good understanding of Blanche's character in the context of the encounter with the Young Man and effective comments were made on Williams' use of stage directions and symbolic features such as the cigarette and the 'blue piano'. The best answers looked closely at the dialogue and stage directions, charting Blanche's attempts at inappropriate intimacy and the Young Man's growing discomfort, with the context of the audience's understanding of her loneliness and history.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Question Specific Comments 9695/33

Question 1. Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*

- (a) The few candidates who chose this question wrote about poems such as 'The First Disciple', 'The Peacock' and 'Swami Anand'. Some responses showed an awareness of some aspects of the language but on the whole, there was little exploration of the methods used to present memory and the past. The language, imagery, structure and other poetic methods are always at the heart of these questions, so candidates who limit themselves to a discussion of content restrict the marks available to them.
- (b) The strongest answers gave clear accounts of the poem and the narrator's attitude to the experience described, focusing on the contrast between the forensic detachment of the scientist and the human interest though very few essays examined the significance of title and the figurative language or had the confidence to discuss form and structure. Some responses commented on the adult perspective of the experience as distinct from the experience itself, which proved a successful focus.

Question 2. Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Though there were very few answers on Hardy, there were some very good answers to this question on 'The Voice' examining how form and a range of poetic methods contribute to the tone. There was some particular sensitivity to sound effects. Weak answers focused unnecessarily on biographical information without paying sufficient attention to the writing of the poem.

Question 3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) Candidates usually made sensible choices to discuss the poetic treatment of death, often opting for the war poetry, Dickinson, Bishop and Baxter's 'Elegy'. Answers often displayed an impressive command of quotation and made genuine efforts to analyse the treatment of the topic with appreciation of a range of poetic methods and effects. Competent answers were clear on meaning and point of view with some understanding of the effects of language. Less successful answers were often unbalanced, with, for example, one competent exploration being followed by a thin summary, or over-investment in biographical material.
- (b) Only the strongest answers on 'Time's Fool' managed to explore the treatment of time and arrive at a coherent interpretation of the poem. Most essays adopted a running commentary approach; many considered the use of natural imagery but struggled with the development of the narrator's feelings and consideration of time. Less confident candidates attempted to paraphrase and looked at rhyme schemes and caesuras in a mechanistic way.

Question 4. Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

- (a) Most candidates who attempted this question were successful in discussing Rochester and St John as opposites. The strongest responses presented articulate arguments evaluating the usefulness of this view, with most agreeing that it is a helpful structural perspective in understanding the novel. While most referred to these characters as polar opposites, there were also some good arguments that hinged on the controlling features of both men. Successful answers looked not only at the presentation of the characters themselves, but also Jane's response to them and their influence on the development of her character and therefore also the structure of the novel.
- (b) Most candidates who attempted this question commented on the presentation of Jane's suffering. Personal engagement was often particularly strong, with candidates showing sympathy for Jane's plight. Weaker responses relied heavily on narrative retelling, while the strongest engaged closely with the writing of the extract, noting the creation of the narrative tone of desperation and the lack of sympathy in the dialogue with the shopkeeper.

Question 5. Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) The most successful answers looked at different versions of bravery, using such stories as *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Journey*, *The Open Boat* and *Tyres*. The focus on different kinds of bravery often encouraged candidates to discuss different narrative methods of dealing with it, leading to some fruitful discussions. Although comparison was not specifically required by the question, candidates often found that comparing the approaches of the two stories helped them structure their answer. Less confident and less successful answers tended to concentrate on the characters and plots of their chosen stories.

- (b) This was a very productive question and most answers considered some of the effectiveness in the writing and the significance of specific details within the extract. Most focused on the relationship with the husband, in particular focusing on the narrator's 'foreignness' but many also considered the relationship with Lucy. Strong responses appreciated the significance of the conversation about mirages and showed depth by considering the implication of the husband's 'sidelong glance' and smile. The strongest answers understood how to 'comment closely' and produced perceptive appreciations of the writer's use of diction and sentence structure to present the character's feelings. Weaker answers focused on the situation itself or failed to address the question by explaining the reasons for the narrator's disappointment or discussed the difficulties of cross-cultural marriages more generally.

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There was only a very small handful of entries for this paper, too few to make a general comment appropriate.