

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/21  
Composition

## Key messages

Candidates are reminded to pay particular attention to:

- engaging with all key words in a question;
- planning the development of their writing;
- avoiding predictable or derivative plots and ideas;
- using a tone appropriate to the type of writing specified by the question;
- checking that tenses used are correct and consistent, as appropriate.

## General comments

On the whole, the papers differentiated the range of candidates successfully, with answers ranging from the very imaginative and thoughtful, to ones affected by significant lapses in technical accuracy. There were some very successful, enjoyable and engaging whole scripts, and they displayed great skill in producing sophisticated and mature imaginative writing: indeed, there were some wonderful answers considering the time constraints within which they were produced. Also, such scripts displayed great skill and acumen in exploring argumentative or persuasive types of material, confirming the candidates' all round ability.

Other scripts exhibited greater security in one section than the other, producing rather uneven whole scripts as a result. At the lower end of the range, some responses were rather naive in terms of their subject, construction or exemplification. In the first section, candidates need to steer away from simple derivation of other sources – especially television and film narratives and characterisation. Technical errors relating to expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation were a matter of concern for some candidates.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

There were some solid and efficient responses to the title: most candidates were able to bring out clear contrasts between the sections. The more successful answers portrayed the innocence and gauche mentality of the initiate with insight, and created a genuine sense of the classroom experience. The majority followed predictable lines, especially with regard to the teacher, contrasting initial enthusiasm with bitter disillusionment and boredom. One noticeable weakness was conveying a sense of motivation. Less secure answers tended to focus very much on narrative and rather simple, repetitive contrasts.

### **Question 2**

There was a steady range of material here – the more engaging answers exploited the conventions of the genre with some confidence and style. There was a telling blend of descriptive and narrative elements in such responses. Most answers to this tended to be quite effective: clear focus and clear structure. A number of answers, however, were rather obvious in intent and outcome.

### Question 3

There were a number of effective descriptive pieces which helped to create and sustain ideas of tension and suspense. Atmospheric qualities emerged in such answers without drifting into horror or murder mystery formats. However, many candidates found this difficult in terms of focus. They responded to 'tension' and 'suspense' without paying attention to the instruction to write descriptively. Sometimes 'mist' was never mentioned. There was far too much evidence of candidates re-cycling past exam questions such as the forest, the tunnel and ghost town. The most favoured scenario was a chase/an escape, with lots of sweating, panting and, ultimately, a scene of murder and mayhem with optional zombies. Centres should emphasise strongly to candidates the need to focus on effects of language, underpinned by a straightforward and convincing narrative idea.

### Question 4

The best responses here were those where clear planning and foresight were in evidence. Situations and characters were established and these moved seamlessly towards the conclusion. However, too many answers seemed to tag on the quotation without enough sense of direction. Some candidates did not pay attention to the grammar of the given sentence, often losing the impact of the conclusion because the words just did not fit.

### Question 5

There were some focused and very thoughtful compositions in response to the title; material ranged from an extremely liberal and inclusive approach to a strong argument for the prioritisation of national identity. Opinions were well-argued. It was pleasing to see candidates engaging with this topic with genuine passion.

### Question 6

This title also provoked some carefully constructed and thoughtful responses which managed to create opposed arguments in a balanced fashion. Less secure answers tended to narrow down each case to one or two rather obvious arguments without offering development and exemplification. Voices often did not contrast sufficiently; few bothered with a proper letter layout or knew how to address the recipient and sign off the letter. Candidates should try to avoid slipping into a 'rant' as this is self-penalising: it does not produce writing which fulfils the criteria of the top bands, such as 'expression capable of complex argument.'

### Question 7

This was tackled by a large number of candidates and was, on the whole, handled with real vigour and strength. Arguments were well handled, on the whole, though sometimes became too rambling, personal and unstructured. The incisive response usually fares better. Some candidates, whilst arguing strongly that cosmetic surgery did more harm than good, suddenly felt the need to offer some counter arguments to balance the case, tending to slightly undermine their initial approach.

### Question 8

The most successful answers here kept the title fully in mind, offering practical advice and explanation in an appropriate register for the target audience. Some saw the question as an opportunity to offer advice about national economies and worldwide fiscal policies, which were not audience-appropriate. Engaging answers treated the audience as mature, thoughtful teenagers who lived and enjoyed life on a daily basis. They tapped into the audience's interests and priorities with skill.

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Other scripts exhibited greater security in one section than the other, producing rather uneven whole scripts as a result. At the lower end of the range, some responses were rather naive in terms of their subject, construction or exemplification. In the first section, candidates need to steer away from simple derivation of other sources – especially television and film narratives and characterisation. Technical errors relating to expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation were a matter of concern for some candidates.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

There were some sound and solid answers. The more effective answers really created a strong sense of motivation and voice, whilst enabling sharply focused contrasts to emerge. They stressed specific examples of product details, which provided lively and often engaging insights into both character and motivation – especially concerning “top of the range” items which required extensive persuasion like cars or expensive perfume. Most candidates were able to distinguish the start and end of careers with illustrative contrasts, usually to show enthusiasm at the beginning and jaded cynicism at the end. Less secure answers seemed to drift into rather repetitive ideas without developing a further sense of character and personality. Weaker answers tended to use one long description of a career without much contrast, or a list of events without much recourse to analysis of character. First person accounts were generally more vivid.

### **Question 2**

There were some very successful answers which clearly established a sense of the season so that it became a motivating factor in the sequence of events and development of characters: these were done with some finesse and imagination. Others did indeed convey a sense of mood and place, but did not appear to have a direct connection with the topic: just seeming to use the season as a tagged on device for any story at hand. Candidates read ‘tale’ in diverse ways – yet produced engaging and effective interpretations of the title.

### Question 3

This was a popular choice and produced a range of response ranging from physical darkness, psychological darkness and mysterious stories from the past – secrets hanging over the present. One of the most effective answers was set in a psychologist's office: the patient travelled from spiritual darkness to enlightenment. Many preferred to denote "darkness" as metaphorical, and included evil or very misguided characters and/or situations, which was accepted as an effective approach if it remained within the "descriptive" parameters. Less successful responses tended to draw on elements of horror stories alone. The generally weaker answers were based on a lot of simple linear narratives rather than descriptive pieces. Some contained merely lists of events rather than specifically tension-inducing or suspenseful situations; the usual few had a clichéd "it was all a dream" ending, although there were one or two very effective responses where the dream/nightmare related specifically to an accompanying or a parallel 'real-life' situation, and hence reflected (invariably catastrophically) on it. Alternatively, there were a lot of rather vague abstract angst-ridden cries of desolation without much description of what it was that was so dark. There was a lot of rather contrived wandering about in forests as well.

### Question 4

The best responses here were those where clear planning and foresight were in evidence. Situations and characters were established and moved seamlessly towards the conclusion. Too many answers seemed to tag on the quotation without enough sense of direction. Competent answers often relied on the solving of a crime, with handy CCTV cameras or a technology obsessed protagonist. "Prediction" caused a few problems: perhaps some candidates were unaware of a precise enough definition; some played it safe with gypsy fortune-tellers and adults with an "I told you so, youngster" attitude.

### Question 5

There was some provocative argument in responses to this title. Some writers felt that such a system of reward would motivate teachers and focus their attention: others believed that such a process would prove divisive and lead to a lack of people willing to join the profession. Strong responses were often either thoughtful about the perceived injustice of the statement and/or very specific about the economic implications to the teacher, school/college and society in general. Candidates were very careful not to name any of their own teachers and should be congratulated on their discretion. Some heartfelt material was produced which seemed to chime with writers' own experiences, both positive and not so positive. A lot of answers were balanced discussions often using personal experiences within a school or college environment to provide illuminating observations on the teacher-candidate relationship. A good number of answers were staunchly on the 'side' of the teachers, frequently pointing to the fact it simply was not fair that one teacher might lose out just because they had a few classes of lower-achieving, or disruptive, candidates. Weaker answers were rather unstructured and unplanned, though often with plenty of ideas rather randomly expressed; many candidates found it difficult to organise these points effectively.

### Question 6

This was, on the whole, handled quite adroitly, especially where both sides of the argument were explored with some development and insight. There were issues of health considered and matters of age and wisdom also came into play. This was a good question for those candidates who needed a strong structural element as a starting point. The better responses usually reflected two very different "voices", often with an elderly person writing in to say the age should remain the same. There were a lot of very negative points about teenage driving, but also about the snail's pace of old people's cars. Some comments about the day-to-day lives of elderly people were very perceptive without detracting from the topic. These included discussions about health issues, caring for grandchildren and the necessary provision of goods and services (including a proper public transport system) for these citizens. Again, specificity reaped its own rewards. Letter formats were variable – especially the choices of opening and close.

### Question 7

This was a very popular choice and elicited some very personal and persuasive responses, founded on strong arguments and exemplification. The overall opinion seemed to shift against the notion of beauty contests because of the perceived notions they apparently created. Candidates produced, at best, thought provoking answers about the kind of society which tolerated such practices and explored what such contests teach us about ourselves and the ways in which we consume the media in particular. For example, the "Toddlers and Tiaras" type of event brought out some perceptive comments about deluded and interfering parents who had probably been victims themselves and who were passing on the madness to their

unsuspecting babies. Extensive discussions were offered about the perils of anorexia/bulimia, plastic surgery/Botox procedures and self-enforced dieting in general; many candidates commented on the perceived humiliation and bullying by the (obviously few) winners to the losers. There were many ironic allusions to beauties mouthing pieties about charities and 'world peace'. It was not all anti-pageant though; many of the more successful candidates balanced their arguments by citing examples of those women who had profited by their involvement, thereby fast-forwarding their careers in modelling, and in general, boosting their self-confidence.

### Question 8

There were some steady and informed responses to this title and candidates produced solid and, in the main, edifying material which offered practical advice and guidance with a clear sense of balance and direction. Stronger answers got their audience right, by addressing their peers directly and in an organised way. 'Saving' was an obvious piece of good advice, but the better responses weaved this notion in with the perceived attitudes of the 'typical' teenager/parent relationship, often using a manipulative tone to convince the audience of the implicit guilt in splurging their allowance on luxury goods and spending their parents' hard-earned cash in frivolities. This was often successfully tempered with the good sense of keeping a rough account of what goes out and what comes in. Less successful answers drifted away from the topic at hand.

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/23

Composition

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Other scripts exhibited greater security in one section than the other, producing rather uneven whole scripts as a result. At the lower end of the range, some responses were rather naive in terms of their subject, construction or exemplification. In the first section, candidates need to steer away from simple derivation of other sources – especially television and film narratives and characterisation. Technical errors relating to expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation were a matter of concern for some candidates.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

There was a good number of very engaging answers in response to this title. Some answers traced a relatively short career, for example recruitment, short war, demob. Such answers often provided sharp and clinical focus because the time span was foreshortened; hence the intensity of the experience was greater. Contrasts in motivation and outlook were covered well by most answers. Less successful answers neglected to contrast the two pieces, or did not really create a sense of character or motivation as the question asked.

### **Question 2**

This was not a particularly popular question. Candidates who attempted this understood the genre of autobiography and were generally successful when they wrote about a short span of time (opening chapter) rather than a long list of life events.

### **Question 3**

A number of answers were seen and they were proficient at one end and uneven at the other. The best material noted the need for descriptive elements rather than narrative and this insight helped to create some effective and atmospheric pieces. One particularly engaging answer described an atmospheric night-time

game of hide-and-seek on a beach full of holiday-makers, with the light being a torchlight belonging to the 'seeker', which inspired tension and suspense for the hidden narrator.

#### **Question 4**

This seemed to encourage some steadily effective adventure or spy-type stories on the **one** hand: on the other, it also produced some carefully constructed answers which offered a twist in the tale. Careful planning was the key in addressing this question. Some less secure answers seemed to tag on the quotation without enough sense of direction.

#### **Question 5**

A number of answers were seen and they were sensible and informed responses on the whole. Some argued that such activities took candidates away from studying or deprived them of the right to enjoy their teenage years: other responses believed that such voluntary work established good practice, compassion or at least civic-mindedness, and prepared people for life's challenges and future scenarios. Some answers had a tendency to be too discursive, lacking a clear argument. However, many candidates had clear opinions about these subjects which they expressed knowledgeably and persuasively.

#### **Question 6**

A few sensible and carefully structured answers were seen, with good contrasting perspectives regarding the voting age being lowered. Issues of maturity of today's youth, with their exposure to greater media information and education about politics were brought up rather persuasively, together with the fact that political decisions affect everybody, not just 'adults'.

#### **Question 7**

This was answered with sincerity and passion by a number of candidates and provoked strong and emotive arguments supported by a clear rationale. There were many candidates who saw such programmes as fodder creating robotic and uncritical vestiges of thought; there were those who argued such shows diminished the nature of the medium itself and took valuable time away from slots where genuine 'real' material could be covered. Others considered the effects not just on viewers but on the contestants themselves.

#### **Question 8**

There was a small variety of lively and engaging responses to this question. The answer was done well when focused appropriately on the teenage audience and the second person tense was used.

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/91

Poetry, Prose and Drama

## Key Messages

- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding; answers which focus on the biography of writers rather than the texts will not do well.
- For high marks, candidates need to know their texts in sufficient detail to make secure references and use quotations to support points.
- Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must offer detailed analysis, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. When the passage is a poem, answers should focus on the set poem.

## General Comments

Examiners saw a wide range of responses in this session, with quite a full coverage of the texts, though Thomas Hardy, *Songs of Ourselves*, *Nervous Conditions* and *A Passage to India* were clear favourites. Each text produced strong answers, though many answers on Thomas Hardy were dominated by biographical discussion, often with limited attention to the poetry, which restricted the marks which could be awarded. However, there were some excellent, sophisticated answers on every text. The strongest combined an astute understanding of the concerns of the texts with a detailed, analytical appreciation of the way they are written, supported by quotations. Candidates who can quote to support points they make have a clear advantage in the examination room, as the quotations both indicate the level of their knowledge and create opportunities for focus on the language, imagery and form used by the writer.

It sometimes appears that some candidates attempt **(b)** questions as unseen poems and extracts. There are responses where the candidates are clearly unfamiliar with the selected poem, demonstrated through misunderstandings and misreadings. At other times, it seems that some candidates choose to answer a **(b)** question on a text they have not studied – sometimes a single candidate in a Centre might answer a **(b)** question on a different text from the rest of the cohort and make simple errors of interpretation. Needless to say, such answers are invariably unsuccessful on this paper, and candidates should be discouraged from attempting this tactic.

## Question Specific Comments 9695/31

### **Question 1** Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** There were only a few answers to this question. Successful approaches considered the role of time and the recall of past events in Hardy's poetry, considering the imagery, language and techniques he uses to evoke those memories. Less confident responses relied heavily on Hardy's life rather than his poetry.
- (b)** The general thrust of this poem was grasped by most candidates who answered on it, though few engaged closely with its development of ideas and the means by which they are communicated. Most recognised the shift in tone from 'bleak' to 'joy' with the singing of the thrush, but fewer linked that with the evocation of the winter season or considered the temporal setting at the turn of the 'Century'.



**Question 2** Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question. Candidates who attempted to answer on the poem were not always confident in their understanding of it, usually thinking that it refers to the first experience of cigarette smoking, rather than tobacco chewing, which led to confusion in the second and third stanzas.

**Question 3** *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The overwhelming majority of candidates answering on *Songs of Ourselves* responded to this question. Most candidates found plenty to discuss, looking at the imagery of ageing and language concerned with decay, such as 'worn' 'peeled' and 'rusty'. The significance of 'Pinus' was much discussed. Most understood how the tree had grown 'in less than the life of a man', suggesting that nature ages at a different rate from humankind and that the girls in School were now 'small' from the narrator's perspective. More able candidates picked up on the final stanza's shift in tone with the sad irony of 'the terrible doors' and a feeling of lost youth. A number of candidates discussed Curnow's use of second person perspective, usually suggesting that the narrator is addressing an old School friend, but there was also the idea that the speaker could be addressing a younger self.

**Question 4** Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) There were not many responses to this question, but it was often done well, as candidates correctly focused on method. Candidates felt that Tambu's narration enabled Dangarembga to present some unsympathetic attitudes through a persona, for example her lack of empathy for her brother's death. Some sophisticated answers explored a duality in the narration, where Tambu's development is presented simultaneously as positive and with ironic criticism. Other candidates argued that a female voice was important in a novel with feminist concerns.
- (b) The passage question proved popular, candidates recognising the episode's importance in establishing Tambu's yearning for education while illustrating the preference given to boys' education. There was also fruitful exploration of the different kind of life promised by living with Babamukuru. Candidates often linked this with the changes brought about by 'Englishness'. The strongest answers linked these points specifically with details from the passage, looking at the tension generated through the aggressive dialogue, with exclamations, challenging questions and verbs such as 'jeered', 'retorted', 'attached' and 'retaliated'. Some looked perceptively at Tambu's listing of the relationships in ll.29-31, commenting on how those family ties are stretched with Tambu's own education later in the novel.

**Question 5** EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were not many responses to this question. The majority of these described an unsympathetic portrait of Ronny as he thinks through events with his mother and Adela. Candidates discussed his approach to religion and his abandonment of his marriage plans. These ideas were all relevant, but candidates often found it difficult to look closely and analytically at the language Forster uses to narrate these issues. More successful answers noted how his attitudes are defined by his Schooldays, with the reference to the 'Fifth Form' and 'sterilized public-School', which suggest immaturity, and Forster's use of restrained language, such as 'tiresome', 'behaved badly' and 'unsuitable', showing the character's difficulty with emotions. A few candidates' responses suggested limited knowledge of the novel, as they read the second line of the passage as fact, indicating that Ronny had in fact killed his mother.

**Question 6** *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) This was a popular question, with a number of developed, interesting answers. The most commonly featured stories were 'Sandpiper' and 'To Da-Duh in Memoriam', 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and 'A Horse and Two Goats'. On the Poe, candidates saw the way the setting suggests a connection with the Usher family, with the fissure opening as the family falls, often relating the story to the gothic genre. The narrator's difficulty in adapting to Egypt was the focus on Soueif's story, while the contrast between the Caribbean and New York was developed in discussion of Marshall's. There were some interesting comments on the cinematic opening of Narayan's story, by which he establishes the location. Candidates also discussed 'The People Before' and 'Journey' effectively.
- (b) Answers on the passage from 'Of White Hairs and Cricket' were often done well, with candidates discussing the effects of the first person narrative and its internal nature, observing the behaviour and comments of the other characters. Candidates explored effectively the presentation of the narrator's feelings towards his father and grandmother. Many candidates saw the metaphors of the spinning of thread and the spinning records. Strong answers used the context of the rest of the story to comment on the irony of the father's optimism and the boy's development from the 'cosy and comforting' youth of the passage to his later acknowledgement of mortality.

**Question 7** Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (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 8** William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part I*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Most candidates chose this question. Many were able to identify the context of the passage and to make the observation that this is important because it marks the redemption of Prince Hal, but few developed a close commentary or showed clear understanding of dramatic presentation. Many candidates stated that 'Douglas has killed several men dressed as the king because that's what soldiers did to protect the king', but few took the next step to comment on the dramatic effectiveness of this encounter with the real King. Some candidates recognised and commented on the fact that this is the first time in the play that Shakespeare shows genuine affection between Prince Hal and King Henry.

**Question 9** Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- (a) Candidates had plenty to say in response to this question. Most saw Stanley as the most guilty, criticising him for his deliberate cruelty towards Blanche, culminating in the rape, and also his ruining his friend's chance at happiness. However, many candidates were able to see balance in Williams's portrayal of his characters; Blanche was criticised for her selfish behaviour, her flirtatiousness, her drinking and her dishonesty, while a few candidates discussed her account of her treatment of Alan. Mitch was seen as guilty for rejecting Blanche, while Stella was criticised for choosing to disbelieve Blanche about the rape and allowing Stanley to arrange for her to be taken away. The strongest answers responded clearly to the range of characters and guilts which Williams creates in the play, showing how he makes an audience's judgement a complex matter.
- (b) This was a popular question, and candidates gave full responses. Strong answers visualised the way the scene would be played on stage, picking up the clues in the dialogue as Blanche asks for help dressing and lights her cigarette, as well as the stage directions, which show her smile 'radiantly' at Stanley. Much was made of 'Lay... her cards on the table' and the intervention of Stella at the end which was seen to reinforce the inappropriateness of Blanche's behaviour with her sister's husband. Candidates often wrote well about ways in which Williams develops the tension, recognising a subtle verbal duel within the context of Blanche's distaste for Stanley, and the unpacked trunk as evidence of Stanley's invasion of Blanche's privacy. Subtle analysis contrasted Stanley's blunt vocabulary and lack of conventional grammar with Blanche's more educated diction and structures. Many candidates recognised that the elements of challenge and flirtation in the scene foreshadow the later rape.

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## **Question Specific Comments 9695/32**

### **Question 1** Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Candidates chose appropriate poems from the wealth available but a consistent weakness in answers was a tendency to write substantially about Hardy's biography and his relationship with his wife Emma, rather than about the poetry. Often, titles of poems were mentioned, with a brief glance at the content, without exploring poetic language or technique at all. Contextual material should be used sparingly, only where relevant, and it should inform the evaluation of the text; too often, candidates reversed this relationship, with the text, only briefly informing a lengthy discussion of biography. Successful answers looked at poems as expressions of universal ideas about love and relationships, rather than specifically Thomas Hardy's particular circumstances, and were therefore more able to look at language, imagery and poetic structure. Some interesting responses challenged the question's premise by comparing a 'difficulties of love' poem, such as 'The Going' or 'The Voice', with a more optimistic one, such as 'A Church Romance'.
- (b)** Answers to this question too were often dominated by discussion of biography, despite the question asking about the presentation of location. Stronger responses answered this question

directly, looking at ways in which Hardy presents the poem's setting, with the references to the sea, sky, gulls and beauty, before moving on to its importance through the cliff's permanence compared with the transience of human life and relationships. This allowed comparison of key phrases in the final stanza, between 'still in chasmal beauty' and 'The woman now is – elsewhere'. The final line of the poem confirms the importance of the location as one of former happiness and of personal significance which has now passed with the passing of the narrator's lover. Many less successful responses ignored the question about the presentation of the location and wrote only of Hardy's relationship with Emma, thus misdirecting the essays.

**Question 2** Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were a very few responses to this question and most seemed to be approaching the poem as an unseen text. The helicopter in particular caused confusion, with some suggesting it formed a guard of honour while others suggested the deceased was so important that her coffin arrived in the helicopter. More careful answers looked at the noise of the helicopter momentarily disturbing the otherwise peaceful funeral cortege, which shows a quiet and respectful community walking the coffin to the grave. Some looked at the language of the woman's final decline – 'Foetal, shaking, sweating', while others looked at her many relationships now at an end – 'Favourite aunt, good sister, faithful daughter'. Her simple life was commented on, noting her enjoyment of 'Her birdtable'. Sensitive candidates saw the moment of celebration of her life in the poem's title and the final lines of the poem.

**Question 3** *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) This was a very popular question, with candidates exploring a wide range of emotions. This meant that Examiners saw nearly all the poems in the collection in answers to this question. There were some very interesting pairings, with candidates coupling war poems, poems about loss and grief and poems about family relationships, to pick just three examples. The strongest answers were often where candidates were able to find some significant differences between their poems as well as some common ground, as this helped them structure their responses. These answers were also based on detailed knowledge which allowed the candidates to quote in support of their points and to comment on 'ways' – looking at diction, imagery and structure. Weaker answers were restricted to accounts of the subject matter or contents of the poems, without considering matters of writing and verse.
- (b) The Housman poem was a very popular choice, producing some excellent work showing that a short poem can energise strong candidates. Although they often read the first line on its own, without linking it to l.2, less confident candidates were usually at ease with stanzas one and two but lost a clear grasp of stanzas three and four, often assuming that the narrator's loved one had died. This led to considerable confusion and misreading of the closing stages of the poem. Successful answers explored the restrained nature of the poem's language, such as 'liked' and 'irked', often noting the change to 'loved' at the end of the poem. They commented sensitively on how this achieves the effect of an abrupt, emotionless and stoical acceptance of rejection and subsequent farewell. Such answers also noted the poem's central irony, that the poem itself is testament to the fact that the narrator does not keep his 'word' to 'forget me'.

**Question 4** Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) This question attracted a very large number of responses, many of them developed and thoughtful, showing a detailed knowledge of the novel. The strongest answers demonstrated an understanding of the ambiguities of the issue, recognising the 'Englishness' is favoured for chances of education and economic advancement, but resented for the threat to indigenous culture and tradition. Most candidates engaged positively with the question, balancing both sides of this debate by exploring Dangarembga's presentation of the effects of Englishness on the main characters in the novel. There was relevant discussion of Ma'Shingayi's view of Englishness as dangerous, corrupting and eroding, as she blames it for her son's death and remains anxious about its potential damage to her daughter. Some candidates noted that even Nyasha's classmates perceive Englishness as corrupting and immoral, while the characterisation of Chido, Nhamo and Nyasha was cited to show these characters' complete assimilation, though there was generally a sympathetic view of Nyasha's position as she pays a high price for it. Jeremiah was judged to be too self-centred as he approves of Englishness only when it suits him. Most candidates also noted

the more complex and often contradictory views held by Babamukuru and Maiguru, both educated and successful role models but shown to be flawed, as Babamukuru is not totally enlightened, nor is Maiguru totally emancipated. On Tambu there was often perceptive analysis of her shifting perceptions on Englishness throughout the novel, for while she sees Englishness as an opportunity for female emancipation and self-improvement, she is also critical of what succumbing to it does to other characters. Some candidates argued, however, that Dangarembga shows Tambu making the same mistakes she once saw Nyasha making.

- (b) The passage from Chapter 5 stimulated some interesting responses from those candidates who read the question carefully and looked closely at the writing of the extract. Most candidates were able to comment that this is a defining moment in Tambu's development, but more focused responses explored how Dangarembga's writing shows Tambu's self-centredness and demonstrates, through her own narration, just how naïve she is at this point in the novel. Such answers noted such vocabulary as 'reincarnation', 'egotistical' and 'fantasies'. Some remarked on the indiscriminating nature of her reading, compared with Nyasha's political awareness, and strong answers noted that the passage does not just focus on Tambu's formal academic education, but also marks the beginning of her personal journey of self-awareness, self-confidence and life-style changes under the influence of Nyasha. Part of this wider growing awareness is contained in the final paragraph of the extract, which a number of candidates ignored.

#### Question 5 EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) Many candidates responded well to this question on Aziz, recognising that in the two statements provided, he demonstrates his religious spirituality and his interest in women. Aziz is a devout believer in Islam, but he likes to talk about women – his favourite themes are 'the decay of Islam and the brevity of Love'. This combination of the religious and the secular is a key part of Forster's rounded characterisation of Aziz, and it is a complexity which Fielding appreciates but most of the British cannot recognise. Many candidates wrote about the meeting with Mrs Moore in the mosque and some referred to his belief in the superiority of Islam over Hinduism, while a few mentioned his religious poetry. On the physical side, candidates noted his continuing love for his wife, whose photograph he still treasures, but his willingness to seek physical solace in brothels and his unflattering comments about Adela's figure. For these attributes, some candidates condemned him, while others saw the layered, complex characterisation. One or two candidates also noted that Aziz is a doctor, whose job is to administer to weaknesses of the physical body.
- (b) Well-constructed answers to this question focused on its wording carefully, looking at Adela's response to the punkah-wallah, and therefore also looking at what it is to which she responds. The early description of the punkah-wallah is in the narrative voice, not Adela's, a distinction that many candidates failed to make, but the implication is that she noticed these aspects of the man. His role as 'apart from human destinies... a winner of souls' and his separation from events he is witnessing was linked in strong answers with Adela's mental absence from the court – she is more 'impressed' by his 'aloofness' than she is by the legal events taking place which directly concern her, and it is this sense of her own, and the court's, lack of importance which lead to her retraction of her charge against Aziz. Some candidates noted the irony of her place as a plaintiff in a charge of sexual assault when she seems to be aware of the sexual attractiveness which the narrator notes in the punkah-wallah's 'strength and beauty' and 'physical perfection' as he is 'Almost naked, and splendidly formed'.

#### Question 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) 'Of White Hairs and Cricket', 'Journey' and 'A Horse and Two Goats' were the most favoured stories in answers to this question, though several other stories also featured, with varying levels of success. There were many successful answers which explored the issue of old-age with its associated insecurities, such as fear, denial, alienation, distrust and the inability to accept or adapt to change or new ideas, often resulting in a clash of old and new values. There was also some consideration of the inevitability and irreversibility of the process of ageing and what lessons the younger generation can learn. Candidates explored the perception of older characters and younger characters' views of them. There was discussion, for example, of the vitality but frustration of the old man in 'Journey', the father's desperation to ward off old age and the sight of Viraf's father in 'Of White Hairs and Cricket' and the humorous characterisation of Muni in 'A Horse and Two Goats'. The contrast between the young narrator's views with those of her grandmother in 'To Da-duh, In Memoriam' were also usefully explored. Some candidates also commented on the symbolic value of the titles of the stories they had chosen.

- (b) The passage from 'Sandpiper' was a very popular choice, most candidates combining close reading and insightful understanding. Many candidates noted the use of time shifts in the presentation of the two relationships, in the present and the past. Candidates recognised the parallel created with the image of the Pakistani woman protecting her small son with contentment and the narrator's own loving relationship with Lucy, many linking the woman's 'worldly treasure' with 'my treasure, my trap' later on in the narrative. Most noted the literal and the metaphor in the passage's opening line and noted that the narrator is reduced to the capacity of a maid, glad to be of 'use', as her roles within the house are restricted. Alert candidates also discussed the past mutuality of the lovers' obsessive physical and emotional passion, contrasted with the change in the dynamics of the relationship later on as cultural differences become apparent. Many answers were alert to the reflective, nostalgic, retrospective quality of the writing and of the ironic undertones of the passage. Less successful were those candidates who did not note the shifts to past tense and wrote of the loving relationship with the husband as if unaware of the rest of Soueif's story.

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**Question 7** Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) Candidates discussed a number of ways in which Dysart's searches for the truth behind Alan's actions are dramatised, including soliloquy, references to his marriage, his nightmare, Greek mythology and discussion with Hesther. Successful answers suggested that the value of this search is questioned by Shaffer's focus on what it is that psychiatric doctors do – 'a doctor can destroy a passion but he can never create one' – and made reference to Dysart's comparison of 'the innocent gleam in a child's eye and the dead stare in a million adults'.
- (b) This is a critical scene in that it clarifies for Dysart what Alan was actually saying earlier in the drama ('Ek...wus'). The worshipping actions evident in the stage directions and the versions of Biblical language and syntax were aspects of the scene to which candidates responded well, and alert responses picked up on Frank's elusive dialogue, indicating his embarrassment and awkwardness. Such answers demonstrated understanding of the nature of Alan's fixation and the part played in Alan's illness by authority figures such as his parents. The final stage direction is indicative of the staging method of the whole play.

**Question 8** William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part I*

- (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 9** Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- (a) There were few answers on this question, but those candidates who answered it were conscious of the elevated social background of the Dubois family, contrasted with the earthy working class of Stanley and his place of residence. Stronger answers noted how Williams makes this evident in setting, character attitudes and the manner of speech of different characters. They saw that the class differences are accentuated by Blanche's snobbish attitudes, and that they lead to both the tension and the tragic climax of the play.
- (b) The very few candidates who answered this question appreciated its significance as marking the collapse of Mitch's and Blanche's dreams of a relationship. Subtle answers noted how Williams manipulates audience sympathy, shifting between the two characters, recognising that the scene creates disillusionment and misery for both. Those who read the dialogue closely noted Blanche's growing frustration and anger, her speeches becoming more strident and histrionic before the gentle, lamenting end of the extract. Others, though, saw Blanche's continued deception in the final line.

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/93

Poetry, Prose and Drama

## Key Messages

- All questions are a test of literary knowledge and understanding; answers which focus on the biography of writers rather than the texts will not do well.
- For high marks, candidates need to know their texts in sufficient detail to make secure references and use quotations to support points.
- Answers should always focus on the writing and the author's language and literary methods.
- Answers to **(b)** passage questions in particular must offer detailed analysis, commenting very closely on the writing of the extract. When the passage is a poem, answers should focus on the set poem.

## General Comments

Examiners saw a wide range of responses in this session, with quite a full coverage of the texts, though Thomas Hardy, *Songs of Ourselves*, *Nervous Conditions* and *A Passage to India* were clear favourites. Each text produced strong answers, though many answers on Thomas Hardy were dominated by biographical discussion, often with limited attention to the poetry, which restricted the marks which could be awarded. However, there were some excellent, sophisticated answers on every text. The strongest combined an astute understanding of the concerns of the texts with a detailed, analytical appreciation of the way they are written, supported by quotations. Candidates who can quote to support points they make have a clear advantage in the examination room, as the quotations both indicate the level of their knowledge and create opportunities for focus on the language, imagery and form used by the writer.

It sometimes appears that some candidates attempt **(b)** questions as unseen poems and extracts. There are responses where the candidates are clearly unfamiliar with the selected poem, demonstrated through misunderstandings and misreadings. At other times, it seems that some candidates choose to answer a **(b)** question on a text they have not studied – sometimes a single candidate in a Centre might answer a **(b)** question on a different text from the rest of the cohort and make simple errors of interpretation. Needless to say, such answers are invariably unsuccessful on this paper, and candidates should be discouraged from attempting this tactic.

## Question Specific Comments 9695/33

### **Question 1** Thomas Hardy: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** The most successful answers to this question looked at differing poems, comparing, for example, a poem of memories of a past relationship, like 'The Voice', with a poem celebrating new love, like 'A Church Romance'. This allowed candidates to explore different attitudes communicated through varied choices of vocabulary, imagery and structure and were able to demonstrate a range within Hardy's verse. Unfortunately, many answers chose to recount Hardy's biography, concentrating on his relationship with Emma Gifford, often with only passing reference to poetry. Some candidates maintained the focus on the verse, but in many responses, the biographical speculation was a distraction.
- (b)** Some candidates discussed Hardy's relationship with Emma even with a question on 'The Convergence of the Twain'. They were a minority, though, and in general candidates discussed this poem more successfully than other Hardy poems which have featured in **(b)** questions, as they focused on the content and the writing of the poem. Answers were often contextualised within a view of 'human vanity' receiving its comeuppance from the forces of nature, candidates noting

diction such as 'vaingloriousness' and the juxtaposition of 'mirrors meant/ To glass the opulent' with sea creatures which are 'grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.' The strongest candidates noted that the question asked about the development of the response and commented on the shift from these observations to the dominant idea of the 'sinister mate' and the 'Immanent Will' which governs the second half of the poem. Some suggested that Hardy's placing of the blame for the wreck on fate, with the image of a 'consummation' between ship and iceberg, combined with the poem's lack of sympathy for the victims, might have seemed a tactless response to the tragedy.

**Question 2** Seamus Heaney: *District and Circle*

- (a) A number of candidates included 'Follower' in their choice of poems – although featured in *Songs of Ourselves*, the poem is not included in *District and Circle*. More careful answers used a wide range of poems from the collection, some exploring a rural childhood, others memories which hint at the political divisions within Ireland. Candidates often suggested that the importance of these memories lay in the way they shaped the poet's sensibilities, sympathies and interests, while the strongest answers looked closely at the structure and language of the poems, recognising a directness in the physical language, but also subtle ways in which allusions are made to violence and politics.
- (b) Candidates tended to write very well on 'The Nod', appreciating ways in which the memory of queuing to buy the Sunday roast provokes more unsettling ideas. The significant colours were often noted and that despite being 'bow-tied neat and clean', the package is still 'seeping blood'. Sensitive candidates – and there were many – noted significant and suggestive diction, such as 'dead weight', 'sling' and 'shelled out'. These ideas were often linked with the second stanza, with its awkward juxtaposition of 'neighbours' and 'guns' and the tone of uneasy truce but constant threat. Only a few candidates, though, noted that the poem is a sonnet, a striking use of this traditional form.

**Question 3** *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) While most candidates compared Sassoon's 'Attack' with Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' in response to this question, Fenton's 'Cambodia' featured frequently, as did Boey Kim Cheng's 'Reservist'. Some candidates made good use of contextual knowledge of the actual involvement of Owen and Sassoon in the First World War and went on to make intelligent comparisons of structure, diction and imagery. Several noted the contrasting focus of the two poems, with Sassoon concentrating on battlefield action and Owen considering the circumstances of the soldiers' deaths and the effect on others. Answers on 'Cambodia' made thoughtful comments on its simple structure, using numbers as a key stylistic device, emphasising anonymity. Responses using 'Reservist' often compared its gently satirical tone with the harsher mood of the more conventional military poems.
- (b) This was an enormously popular question and almost every candidate who chose it was able to show some engagement with the poem. Less confident answers dealt almost entirely with content, occasionally lapsing into sociologically dominated essays about the problems caused by over-protective parents and/or bullying. There was a good range, though, among the more literary answers. Some answers picked up on the immediately accessible imagery such as 'threw words like stones' and 'muscles like iron', while others went further, to make perceptive comments about the hurt conveyed in 'salt coarse pointing' and the symbolic nature of the children being 'behind hedges'. The most confident answers produced remarkably detailed analyses, showing appreciation of techniques such as the use of active verbs to portray the other children in contrast to the passive diction describing the speaker. Thoughtful points were also made about enjambment, conveying the hectic nature of the childhood experience, and caesura, allowing the speaker to pause and consider the children's treatment of him. A number considered the ambiguity of the final line (does 'them' refer to the bullies or the parents?), while some commented on the changing perspective, noting that the first stanza suggests the influence of the parents, whereas the final stanza suggests the voice of an adult looking back on an unhappy childhood. The absence of the parents from the poem after the first two words often drew thoughtful speculation.



**Question 4** Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) Candidates responding to this question usually demonstrated a high standard of knowledge and understanding of the novel. They showed detailed knowledge of the actions, and in some cases the words, of Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi and their influence on Tambu. They considered Tambu's parents as representatives of particular attitudes and behaviour, against which Tambu measures her own aspirations and conduct. Some effectively compared Jeremiah with Babamukuru and Ma'Shingayi with Maiguru. These comparisons highlighted Jeremiah's fecklessness and dependence and his wife's lack of education and her bitter view of first Nhamo's, then Tambu's, development under Babamukuru's influence. Dangarembga's presentation of their wedding was often highlighted and candidates also acknowledged that the parents provide impetus for Tambu to escape and gain an education and freedom.
- (b) In responses to this popular question, candidates often noted that the passage features a literal and a metaphorical journey, both of which will 'speedily lead (Tambu] to [her) destination.' Candidates showed their awareness of the importance of the episode as the beginning of Tambu's new life and noted the vocabulary and imagery of change and excitement, such as 'limitless horizons', 'new me' and 'my emancipation', while she acknowledges the difficulty of leaving the river, her 'childhood playground'. Some candidates criticised Tambu for her insensitive dismissal of her parents as 'insignificant' and a 'piece of surplus scenery', as well as her own physical self with 'broad-toed feet' and 'dull tufts of malnourished hair'. The most subtle and sensitive answers suggested that the reader's repulsion has been deliberately achieved, discussing Dangarembga's use of an ironic narrative voice which criticises the attitudes of the young Tambu simultaneously with conveying her youthful views with some sympathy.

**Question 5** EM Forster: *A Passage to India*

- (a) Many candidates responded to this question with enthusiasm, producing answers that showed detailed knowledge of the novel to achieve a clear focus on the question. Some answers used the tripartite structure of the novel to consider ways in which each section focuses on a different religion and the contrasts between them. Others considered how the three religions are presented through different characters, notably Aziz, Godbole and Mrs Moore. In answers which adopted this approach, some made perceptive observations about Mrs Moore, for example, commenting that officially she is a Christian but in some ways her beliefs are closer to those of Aziz. The British in general, however, claim to be Christian but show virtually no evidence of displaying Christian values in their behaviour towards others, while Fielding is open and compassionate, but not religious. Some responses made good use of specific incidents in the novel, for example the meeting at the mosque, the Marabar Caves visit and Mrs Moore's consequent loss of faith, and the Hindu festival at Mau, which serves to some extent to heal the religious divisions.
- (b) Many answers to this question struggled to rise above the level of paraphrase, without really attempting to respond to the question set. However, many were able to see McBryde and Fielding as representatives of two contrasting viewpoints towards Indians and some were able to dissect the extract carefully, exploring the nuances of the dialogue and the few snatches of narrative commentary. Such answers noted that Forster's narrative irony is used to steer readers' sympathies towards Fielding's view, while the McBryde's language successfully gently satirises his attitudes. Many candidates were alert to hypocrisy, Fielding openly confessing his youthful indiscretions whereas McBryde remains quiet. Some compared this with his affair with Miss Derek, demonstrating another level of sexual hypocrisy. There were some forensic examinations of the evidence presented against Aziz in the extract, noting that, despite being a professional policeman, McBryde cannot recognise that it all points to Aziz's innocence. This confirmed that, whereas Fielding's arguments are reasonable and logical, McBryde's are based on prejudice. Interestingly, very few candidates acknowledged that at this point in the novel the reader knows that Aziz is innocent and his picking up of the field glasses has already been described.

**Question 6** *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) Candidates responded well to this question, though there were cases where the openings of the stories were known in insufficient detail to construct a competent answer, and others where the definition of 'opening' was stretched to a considerable degree. With an unlimited choice of stories to refer to, answers covered virtually the full range of stories and there was, overall, plenty of evidence of good, accurate knowledge of the text. 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'Sandpiper', 'A Horse and Two Goats', 'The Open Boat' and 'Journey' were perhaps the most popular stories, with

candidates exploring setting, the establishing of character and attitudes and the use of metaphorical references which assume significance as the stories progress. The strongest responses used the context of the development of their chosen stories to show the effectiveness of the openings.

- (b) While there were a number of weak responses which were restricted to paraphrase, stronger candidates responded well to the wide range of interesting vocabulary, imagery and structural devices in this vivid passage of writing. There were some very engaging responses, commenting on techniques such as the effects of the alliteration in 'dull, dark, and soundless day'; the personification in 'the vacant and eye-like windows'; the sibilance in 'an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart'; and the rhetorical question, 'What was it...? More perceptive answers noted the use of long, complex sentences and dashes to reflect the seemingly interminable journey and mental exhaustion of the narrator. Some candidates unfortunately ignored the second paragraph, but others successfully linked the effect of the natural surroundings on the spirits of the narrator with the similar effect of the house on Roderick Usher and his sister, while others noted the effect of the final words, 'a very singular summons', in setting the reader up to expect a particularly strange story. Some candidates were aware of the gothic genre and wrote effectively about how Poe's story demonstrates some of the key features of the style.

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**Question 7** Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) There were too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The few candidates who answered on *Equus* tended to opt for the passage question. Several candidates focused on the staging of the scene and its interplay between Dysart's questioning of Alan in his room and the scene in the stables. Most answers commented that this scene is the play's crucial revelation and therefore needs to have dramatic impact. The essays featured discussion of the staging of the sexual content of the scene, with the initial tender nakedness compared with Dysart's almost aggressive questioning and Alan's explicit, crude responses. Alan's speech II.50-57 received a lot of attention, finally revealing Alan's confusion of the horses and his sexuality.

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

- (a) Candidates responding to this question were able to identify the rebels and what they did, but analysis of Shakespeare's presentation of them was often underdeveloped. Stronger answers looked at the legitimacy of the rebel claims, the relationships and tensions between them and those who are presented, like Hotspur, as valorous, even though a rebel.
- (b) Those few answers which confused the reference to 'Harry' in I.26 with Prince Hal created an awkward misreading, but most candidates showed sound awareness of the content and context of this scene. There was a discussion of the lack of openness between the rebels, with Worcester wanting to conceal the 'liberal and kind offer of the King', but also the distrust in political negotiations, with his disbelief that the 'King should keep his word'. Candidates who looked at Worcester's long speech closely found much to explore in his analysis of 'treason... trusted like the fox' and his fear that 'We... shall pay for all', which renders negotiation useless. Despite his logic and pragmatic realism, it renders deceptive his final speech in the extract.

**Question 9** Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- (a) There were some strong answers on Stella and Stanley, candidates showing themselves to be alert to the class difference that Williams makes clear. Candidates often commented that the relationship disgusts Blanche, even though this is a hypocritical view for her to take. Strong answers showed how Williams shows, through dialogue and stage action, the importance of sex to the relationship, and the two characters' mutual dependence. References were made to the account of their wedding night, Stella's baby and the shifts between violence and tenderness. Some candidates commented perceptively on Stella's final, possibly self-deceptive, fidelity to Stanley rather than Blanche.

- (b) The opening of the play, dominated by Williams's stage directions rather than dialogue, put the emphasis on this question onto setting and staging. While some candidates missed the opportunity and paraphrased the stage directions, most looked closely at his lyrical writing, sometimes suggesting that it might be more effective on the page than the stage, while others showed sensitivity in their imaginative recreation of the stage that the directions indicate. Strong answers noted both poverty and vitality, noting phrases such as '*raffish charm*' and '*atmosphere of decay*'. Candidates commented on the cosmopolitan nature of the area, contributing to that vitality, while others picked up a sexual theme with the suggestions that the sailor is looking for prostitutes, developed by Stanley's appearance with his '*red-stained package*' which is later thrown to Stella. Detailed responses noted too the importance of music in the scene and the intermittent cries of 'Red hot!'