

FRENCH

Paper 8670/41

Texts

Key Messages

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- In their essays, candidates should not avoid parts of questions, but will do well by taking all parts of the question into account in their answers.
- Candidates should restrict their comments to the text rather than digressing about generalities.
- The Examiner already knows the author and text, so biographical and historical details, storytelling and narrative should be left out, and the focus should be on answering the question, with illustration as necessary.
- The question does not have to be 'agreed' with. Some illustrations from the text will confirm statements made in the questions and some will not support them. Discussion of all of these points will form a good essay.

General Comments

The most popular texts were those of Anouilh, Molière and Colette. The most frequently selected questions were **2(a)**, **3(a)** and **6(b)**.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Duras: *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*

- (a)** Most candidates knew that the extract was from a few pages in to the 'Deuxième Partie' and that it featured Carmen, the daughter of Mme Marthe, 'une vieille coloniale' who saved for twenty years to gain control of the 'Hôtel Central' where Joseph, Suzanne and their mother go to stay. They know her as well as 'les habitués qui l'appelaient par son prénom tout court' (rather than calling her 'Mlle Carmen'). The paragraphs a couple of pages in to the 'Deuxième Partie', beginning with 'Carmen avait maintenant trente-cinq ans', give a detailed description of Carmen. Those with the highest level of knowledge of the text were able to draw on this material in their answer.

Good answers to **(i)** pointed out that when Suzanne suffers from her mother's frustration, Carmen takes it upon herself to provide comfort, distraction ('Dès le jour où Suzanne trouva superflu de se faire engueuler à la sortie de chaque bijouterie elle fut naturellement la proie des soins de Carmen ...') and distance (Suzanne moves to sleep in Carmen's room, 'Ainsi ... Carmen découvrit Suzanne et pendant ce séjour-là ce fut surtout Suzanne, qu'elle essaya, comme elle le disait, d'« éclairer »).

In **(ii)**, it was equally acceptable to agree or disagree with the idea expressed. In either case, Examiners were looking for thorough illustration and development of points made. For the most part, candidates focused on Joseph and Suzanne and on their relationship with their mother, but tended not to comment on Carmen and her offer of this advice. There was an opportunity here to compare, analyse and evaluate, as the reader is told that 'Carmen avait de l'amitié pour la mère et

aussi du respect' and that she is said to be a 'fille, pleine de respect pour sa (propre) mère qu'elle déchargeait maintenant ... de la délicate gérance de l'Hôtel Central'.

In general, (iii) was less well answered. The best answers recognised that Suzanne has so far had the opportunity to marry M. Jo, and immediately before this extract begins, Carmen has told her that she considers him 'un mari du type idéal' as he is rich, and silly enough to make her rich, even if she were to cheat on him, whereas 'Les mariages d'amour, à dix-sept ans, étant exclus de toute façon. Le mariage d'amour avec le douanier du coin qui te fera tes trois gosses en trois ans...' This earlier part of the conversation was only mentioned in a few responses.

Good answers to (iii) pointed out that here, Suzanne agrees that marrying for love and having children while still so young is not the way forward for her, but, in contrast to Carmen's view, cheating on a rich husband like M. Jo is not the answer either. Some mentioned that Suzanne was genuinely fond of Agosti but not of M. Jo; otherwise, in this part of the answer, the chance to compare was often not exploited.

- (b) This was a popular choice of question. The question mentions three objects, but other objects could also be said to have a particular meaning in the novel (for example, in one response it was suggested that the cinema was another significant feature for the luxury and escapism it offered). There are also more than one of each of these objects, except for the vehicle. However, the three objects specified in the question are closely associated with M. Jo: 'La Léon Bollée', his car; 'le phonographe', '[l]a première chose d'importance' given by him to Suzanne; and 'le diamant', also given by him to Suzanne.

In general, when considering 'le phonographe', more could have been made of the fact that by this time M. Jo knew that Suzanne was not interested in him and this gift was something of an experiment, 'd'ouvrir dans leur monde prisonnier la brèche sonore, libératrice, d'un phonographe neuf. Ce jour-là M. Jo fit son deuil de l'amour de Suzanne. Et, à part le choix qu'il fit plus tard, du diamant, ce fut là le seul éclair de lucidité qui traversa sa pâle figure durant le temps qu'il la connut'.

In less strong answers, the diamond tended to be neglected. In one careful answer, what the diamond meant for each family member was considered in turn.

Question 2

Anouilh: *Antigone*

- (a) In general, responses to this question showed a pleasing level of understanding of the text. There were a few very detailed answers. Weaker responses were mainly narrative in their approach and tended to dwell on details of family history before tackling the question, which could not be given credit.

The dispute at the beginning of the extract centres on the fact that Créon has refused a burial for Polynice, but Antigone has rebelled and buried her brother against his orders. In answers to (i), candidates sometimes seemed to be unsure about which meeting between Créon and Antigone this was, so answers were distinguished by mention of Créon's offer to conceal Antigone's action and spare her life, and Antigone's refusal of this, which was part of the dispute.

Good answers to (ii) pointed out that Antigone's reaction to Créon's remark is to express a contradiction: 'Vous êtes le roi, vous pouvez tout, mais cela, vous ne le pouvez pas', and stubbornly to repeat her refusal to hide the truth about her action, which would mean compromising her principles to submit to Créon's negotiation: 'Ni me sauver, ni me contraindre ... Vous pouvez seulement me faire mourir.' She remains steadfast in the face of death.

In (iii), candidates were free to evaluate Antigone's pride as significant or to emphasise her sense of dignity in wanting justice for her brother – an honourable pride in contrast to a selfish pride. Some candidates showed misunderstanding of the question, taking it to mean 'Do you agree that Créon treated Antigone as proud?' rather than 'Do you agree that Antigone was proud?' or 'Was Créon right to treat Antigone as proud?'

- (b) Good responses to this question referred to the guards' role in the dramatic action and showed understanding that the comedy they provided served both to contrast with and accentuate the tragic circumstances.

Question 3

Molière: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*

- (a) In (i), candidates were required to explain why these two Maîtres had been specifically summoned on this occasion. A number of weaker answers focused on describing M. Jourdain's aspirations and gave details of all the Maîtres employed to 'educate' him. In (ii), only a few responses recorded the 'showing off' or were able to explain the offence caused by M. Jourdain when he referred to the entertainment prepared as a 'petite drôlerie'.
- (b) In general, performance on this question was less strong, and in some answers there was a tendency to include irrelevant material. To respond more effectively to this question, candidates could have made more of, for example, the Maîtres' discussion at the beginning of the play, about M. Jourdain's willingness to pay to achieve his aspirations to be noble, which we can then predict throughout the rest of the play. More could also have been made of less predictable elements, such as M. Jourdain's initial opposition to his daughter's marriage to Cléonte, which he is persuaded to accept (admittedly because of his predictable response to an offer of becoming well connected) and to celebrate at the entertainment he had himself instigated.

Question 4

Devi: *Le Voile de Draupadi*

- (a) Overall, this question was answered fairly well. For (ii), however, only a few candidates were able to give precise comment on Anjali's relationship with her mother. A number of contrasts could be noted from the extract, for example:
- physical closeness (*Elle me serre contre elle*) versus emotional distance (*je voudrais ... mais je ne le peux pas*) and inability to express the words that seem to admit defeat and which betray being unable to stand on her own two feet in the face of adversity
 - temptation to lean on her mother (*j'ai besoin de toi*) while acknowledging the need for independence (*Je dois tenir seule*)
 - their manifestation of emotion: *effrayée/avec un petit sourire*
 - comfort in being known and understood (*je sais qu'elle comprend*) as against the fear of vulnerability and of being penetrated more than intended (*je fuis un peu son regard*)
 - desire to have reassurance from her mother (*je voudrais lui dire, j'ai besoin de toi*) yet wanting her mother to be reassured (*cela la soulage*)
 - initially Anjali feels weak but *puis j'ajoute, fermement ...*, meanwhile, for her mother, *Elle hésite, ne sachant plus comment prononcer les mots*
 - Anjali's mother invites her back to stay in their home, but Anjali declines, feeling that as a wife she cannot leave Dev alone.
- (b) Most candidates were easily able to depict the traditional submissive role of the woman in the novel. Although the question was an invitation to write about women in general, in the majority of responses candidates referred only to Anjali and her life and marriage. A few candidates made reference to Fatmah and, more rarely, to Vasanti, making their responses more thorough and varied.

Section 2

Question 5

Ionesco: *Le Roi se meurt*

- (a) In general, candidates answering this question defined the play as a tragedy; fewer answers showed appreciation of the comic touches in the play. Aspects of the question – '[e]rreur fatale' and 'le destin' – were not always mentioned in candidates' responses.

- (b) Candidates across the whole of the ability range seemed to find this question accessible and showed understanding of the symbolism. Rivalry lent itself to comparison and contrast, but some candidates gave only narrative or descriptive answers about how the king preferred one wife to the other.

Question 6

Colette: *Le Blé en herbe*

- (a) The most successful answers began by pointing out that the idea of the ‘Ombres’, or ‘parents fantômes’, was merely the perception of Vinca and Philippe. In some responses, there was a tendency to digress and make value judgments about the parents’ ‘lack of concern’ and ‘non-involvement’ in their children’s lives.
- (b) More sensitive answers to this question pointed out that, even at the end of the text, Philippe and Vinca were only just beginning to mature. Most candidates compared and contrasted the more and less mature reactions to the various situations and events.

Question 7

Lainé: *La Dentellière*

- (a) Marylène’s attitude and that of Aimery are similar in as much as both choose to be close to Pomme for a period during which she satisfies them more than anyone else, and then they reject her in preference for someone or something better. Prior to that, their attitudes are different in that Marylène tries to educate Pomme to conform to a mould more similar to her own, whereas Aimery wants her to meet the standard of his expectations. The word ‘Malheureusement’, included in the question, was only discussed in a few responses.
- (b) There were fewer responses to this question. There was a tendency to answer this question in general terms rather than with reference to the text; responses typically dealt more with individuals, attitudes and behaviour found in society than with the text. The characters in this novel could be said not to be ‘fully dimensional’ as individuals. We are not shown their thought processes, and the emphasis is on outward behaviour.

Question 8

Camus: *Caligula*

- (a) There were a few capable responses to this question in which candidates attempted to explain Camus’ ideology. In weaker responses, there was a tendency simply to categorise Caligula as mad and to list the various atrocities perpetrated.
- (b) Candidates encountered difficulty in identifying individual Patricians with precision, but there was generally familiarity with the actions of ‘le vieux Patricien’.

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