

FRENCH LITERATURE

Paper 8670/42

Texts

Key Messages

- Focus on the key words in the question. Candidates should think carefully about what the question is asking of them before they start to write.
- The Examiner already knows the author and text, so leave out biographical and historical details, storytelling and narrative, and focus on the points to be made to answer the question, with brief illustration as necessary. Writing a full paragraph about the author before addressing the question adds nothing to the essay and should be avoided.
- The question does not have to be 'proven' true. 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.
- Points should be developed but not repeated. Careful planning should help to achieve this.
- Do not try to argue that the question has summarised the 'essence' of the text. It is far more likely that the question focuses on one aspect of the text, so candidates will have to leave out some of what they know, and only use the most relevant material.
- Ideally the first paragraph of the essay will introduce the topic in the question and the discussion will close with a conclusion that sums up the arguments used and provides a final answer to the question.
- Follow the rubric: answer three questions, one or two from **Section 1/Questions 1-4** (in **(a)**, all three parts **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)**, but then not **(b)**), and one or two from **Section 2/Questions 5-8**, either **(a)** or **(b)**, but not both on the same text. Candidates should be told that 'soit' means 'either' and need not be copied with the question number.
- Divide the time equally between questions, allowing sufficient time to complete all three essays.

General Comments

The most popular texts were those of Molière, Maupassant, Colette and Lainé and the most frequently selected questions were **1(a)** and **(b)**, **3(a)**, **6(b)** and **7(a)** and **(b)**. On the whole, candidates had prepared well, and some appeared to have practised the essays in past papers. Candidates should still pay careful attention to the current question being asked.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Maupassant: *Boule de Suif et autres contes de la guerre*

- (a) The majority of candidates had a good general knowledge of the text and had clearly appreciated the collection of stories. Most candidates understood the significance of *la graine semée la veille* in (i) and could explain that it was a reference to the arguments put across to Boule de Suif to apply pressure and persuade her to give in, although sometimes they thought that the Prussian officer rather than the coach passengers were involved. The weakest answers failed to recognise the context and thus were unable to provide the detail of the main conspirators' various attempts to 'brainwash' Boule de Suif.

In (ii), some candidates merely paraphrased the *comte's* intervention without giving a *reaction* to his behaviour. Occasionally, weak answers showed no recognition of the irony, thus describing the Count's approach as 'sincere, kind and fatherly'. Most were able to identify that Maupassant was seeking a negative reaction from readers, identifying many words in the passage that were worthy of comment. The quality of the response depended on the candidate's ability to analyse the way in which the Count sought to manipulate Boule de Suif, and the answer was fairly successful overall.

Part (iii) was usually understood and developed with greater or lesser detail, according to the candidate's knowledge of what happened to Boule de Suif afterwards in the coach and of her final rejection and humiliation.

- (b) 'Désespoir' proved easier to apply correctly than 'farce'. For candidates who realised that 'farce au désespoir' indicated the full gamut of character reactions to crisis situations, the task was a straightforward one and some good marks were achieved. In the strongest responses seen, candidates recalled that Saint Antoine is described as a *farceur* in the first few lines of the story of that name, and reference was also made to Epivent in *Le Lit 29* and to *Mademoiselle Fifi*. Weaker candidates tried to find farce in all of the short stories, or neglected to mention farce at all, choosing to focus exclusively on despair. Credit was given to candidates who tried to express their view of the change of tone and mood in the stories and to deal with the use of humour. The *Boule de Suif* story did not provide such good illustration.

Question 2

Anouilh: *Antigone*

- (a) Most candidates could cope successfully with aspects of Hémon's disappointment in part (i). Not enough was made of the significance of his disillusionment with his father in the first two lines of the extract, and there was too much of Créon's decision about Antigone. Few candidates were able to provide a really convincing account of Hémon's struggle to reconcile his image of his father with Créon's actions.

Again, (ii) was fairly well answered by many. Candidates needed to appreciate that Créon was making a general statement that growing up is about coming to terms with the ugly nature of reality and the isolation of the individual.

In (iii), quite a few candidates saw only that 'we must all die one day' rather than acknowledging that Antigone's death was going to have an impact on all the characters in the play. More could have been made of Créon's claim to be just as sorrowful as Hémon over the whole affair.

- (b) Many candidates could only see negative conclusions in the play, but there were a few perceptive responses which recognised the positivity of Antigone, resolutely upholding her integrity to the end, and also suggesting that Créon made the right decision, and that Antigone's attempts to be reconciled with Hémon and Ismène before her death could be seen in a positive light. Development of the love theme was also popular. The most successful candidates made the point that Antigone's stand on moral principles could be seen as a noble resistance to political power.

Question 3

Molière: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*

- (a) This was a very popular choice of text and most candidates showed that they had studied the text and had appreciated it.

The general comedy of the situation was more frequently identified in (i) than Monsieur Jourdain's inappropriate request that Dorimène step back. Most were not able to identify that the situation was amusing because Monsieur Jourdain spoke inappropriately to Dorimène in order to allow him to complete his act of excessive deference.

Virtually all candidates could explain Dorante's words at the end of the extract, and there were some excellent analyses of his situation and motives. Some candidates probably understood the diamond detail but a number got into difficulty when it came to explaining it clearly – imprecision with il/elle/le/la/lui was often the cause of confusion.

In (iii), nearly all candidates felt that it was necessary to pity Monsieur Jourdain as well as to laugh at him.

- (b) When well done, candidates were able to give reasons for which the comedy could stand alone and be appreciated for its farce, burlesque and fast-paced witty dialogue. Few candidates understood the universality of Molière's characterisation and comedies, and that jokes, tricks, obsessions and deceptions are always with us. The answers that tried to trace the benefits of studying the society for understanding the play tended to focus on the aspirations of certain bourgeois to become noble aristocrats and therefore to stray away from the comic elements. It was interesting to see how much enjoyment seemed to be derived from the study of a Seventeenth-Century text.

Question 4

Devi: *Le Voile de Draupadi*

- (a) There were some excellent pieces of work on this text. The novel had been enjoyed and usually well understood by candidates.

Not all candidates explained the *moment de heurt* correctly in (i), that Dev had just confronted Anjali, appealing to her, 'de faire un sacrifice ... la marche sur le feu'.

Part (ii) provided an opportunity to contrast the faith and happiness of Anjali's childhood with her situation of doubt and despair at this point in the text.

In (iii), candidates needed to comment on the importance of the trauma of Vasanti's death for Anjali's situation at this point, and the guilt that Anjali felt. Many provided the correct information but the difference lay in the amount of detail.

- (b) Responses to this question required some analysis of Fatmah's nature and way of thinking. Most answers to (b) were at least able to provide an adequate interpretation of Fatmah's character and influence on Anjali, but not all went on to explain the evolution of Anjali's thinking. Too many responses claimed that she persuaded Anjali to undertake the ordeal – which is, of course, not altogether correct without the precise detail of the counsel she gave. Only able candidates understood that Anjali was advised to become reconciled with herself in order to lose her constant feelings of guilt and lack of self-worth, that she should go through the ordeal only to be able to know that she had done all she possibly could for Wynn and that the hope was that she would find inner strength, peace and serenity.

Section 2

Question 5

Ionesco: *Le Roi se meurt*

- (a) There were fewer responses on this text than on some of the others. Some candidates who tackled this question found it difficult to write relevantly about ways in which Bérenger represented the human condition in general (such as in his fear of and struggle to come to terms with death, and in that he wanted to be remembered after his death) or did not represent it (for example, in carrying these sentiments to extremes with his words, 'Que toutes les fenêtres éclairées aient la couleur et la forme de mes yeux, que les fleuves dessinent dans les plaines le profil de mon visage!'). Others produced competent analyses showing knowledge of the text.
- (b) For candidates who had studied this text, **Question 5(b)** was less frequently chosen. Many found it difficult to analyse why Ionesco's play should be taken seriously (such as the fact that it tackles, albeit amusingly, the difficulty of coming to terms with death). Answers tended to consist simply of a reiteration of comic aspects, with little analysis.

Question 6

Colette: *Le Blé en herbe*

- (a) Fewer candidates chose **Question (a)** than **(b)**. Some appeared to have stopped reading the question part way through and answered, 'Les personnages masculins manquent, dans l'œuvre de Colette...', neglecting, 'd'épaisseur et de vraie consistance'. Most relevant responses explored Phil's shortcomings demonstrated by his actions in the book and drew appropriate conclusions. Able candidates were able to contrast the weakness and indecision of Phil, a teenager on the threshold of manhood, with the later strength of Vinca and the command and virility of Camille.
- (b) Candidates found this question very accessible. It allowed nearly all candidates to demonstrate appropriate knowledge of the text with good supporting detail and still enabled stronger candidates to distinguish themselves by showing real insight and fully analysing Madame Dalleray's impact on the young couple. Material about her interaction with Phil was readily alluded to, and more thoughtful answers also considered the older woman's impact on Vinca and on the relationship between the two young people, identifying her pivotal role as that of a catalyst. Candidates who performed less well had paid no attention to her role, just writing a character analysis.

Question 7

Lainé: *La Dentellière*

- (a) This question was the more popular of the two. Some candidates answered it well, explaining ways in which Pomme could be identified with *La Dentellière*: a humble girl who concentrated on her work, seeing the modest task in hand well done and showing little emotion. A few concentrated on the Vermeer painting rather than on what Pascal Lainé had written in the novel. A small proportion of candidates did not understand the link between the title and Pomme or know about the references to Pomme as *La Dentellière* in the book, just presenting a narrative of the text.
- (b) A popular choice which produced a number of good, sensitive answers. Many candidates did not realise that it was only necessary to refer to the parts of the text that were relevant. Good, concise answers began at the point of Aimery's appearance. Very few candidates made the distinction between narrator and author, pointed to his explanations of his motives, or mentioned the alteration in the structure of the novel as it changed into first person narration at the beginning of chapter IV. A number of answers did not refer to the final Pomme/Aimery scene, thus omitting the highly significant detail of both characters which it revealed.

Question 8

Camus: *Caligula*

- (a) Candidates showed knowledge of the text, but needed to refer to ‘intelligence’ as well as Caligula’s cruel follies.
- (b) Few candidates tackled this question and those who did found it difficult. Credit was given, if the judgements were justified by reference to the text, whether the candidate took the quotation to refer to the incidents recounted in the play or to the qualities which mean that the play endures and remains gripping.