

FRENCH LITERATURE

Paper 8670/42

Texts

Key Messages

To do well in the Texts paper, candidates should do two things in particular:

1. Read, study and know the texts very well, including whether they are plays, watched by *spectateurs*, novels, read by *lecteurs*, etc.
2. Practise giving detailed answers and full explanations to examination-type questions. It is not always necessary to agree with the question. Candidates should think carefully about what the question is asking of them before they launch into writing and should structure their essays well, with an introduction, points for and against, including illustration and development, and finally a conclusion. Familiarity with the principles and the standards of the Mark Scheme will help them; stronger candidates are distinguished by their ability to answer the questions fully and to draw comparisons and contrasts.

General Comments

Candidates should give the question number and **(a)** (as well as **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)** in **Section 1**) or **(b)** and need to answer the question set. Those who provide an answer for a question they had prepared for, rather than for the question on the paper, or who simply give a summary of the text, are limited to lower band marks. Attempting to memorise essays done in practice is not recommended. Of course varying vocabulary and avoiding repetition make a good impression, but using key words from the question is likely to help candidates to focus and produce a relevant response. It is perfectly legitimate to teach the social, historical and/or literary background to the work in question, but teachers of this examination should stress to candidates that **ONLY** textual knowledge and understanding are being assessed. Teachers are advised to choose texts commensurate with the ability and interests of their candidates.

'*Soit ... soit*' means 'either ... or' and should not be copied before **Questions (a) or (b)**, which should **not both** be answered. In **Section 1** passage based questions, all three parts of the question, **(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)**, should be answered and divided into these numbered parts to ensure clarity, and candidates should try to steer an intelligent course between answering the questions specifically and showing knowledge of the text beyond the extract, remembering that relevance to the question rather than knowledge of the plot is the aim.

Candidates need not quote from the text except briefly, to illustrate or support what they write. Too many juxtaposed quotations do not constitute appropriate illustration or relevance.

The use of rhetorical questions is certainly acceptable, but questions should not be left unanswered. It would therefore be desirable for any questions posed to be answered, before the end of the paragraph, to avoid any doubt.

Familiar and colloquial use of French is not appropriate for a French literature essay. Language errors sometimes impede communication; in particular, there is often confusion when candidates write 'il' or 'lui' instead of 'elle' and vice versa.

Centres are reminded that:

The Mark Scheme states, 'Candidates are expected to write 500-600 words for each of their answers. Candidates who write more than 600 words cannot be placed higher than the 16-17 category'. Spending too

much time on the first answer can mean that the last answer is not fully dealt with. Candidates who write too much usually disadvantage themselves because the additional writing comes at the expense of clarity and organisation.

The general level of performance and overall standard was similar to that encountered in previous years, perhaps better in essay questions, but possibly slightly below in passage based questions, with more candidates using the extract to fashion an answer when they either knew little about the literary text or did not show their knowledge of the text as a whole.

The majority of candidates chose to study the texts by Anouilh, Molière and Colette. A significant number selected Lainé, closely followed by Devi. The questions on Duras, Ionesco and Camus were not so frequently answered this session.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Duras: *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*

- (a) Candidates could often identify in (i) that the words were addressed to 'Monsieur l'Agent cadastral' (on the last page of Part 2 chapter 14). They could not so often explain that 'la mère' wanted to lease an additional five hectares of land adjacent to her property, giving details about complaints and general dissatisfaction (about miserable living conditions, being refused further credit by banks, having had previous letters ignored, etc.) instead. In (ii), many candidates could recall, though not with precise reference to the text, Part 1, chapter 1, and that *la mère* had put all her savings into securing a concession so had lost everything on land regularly flooded and which had proved to be uncultivable. The threat made in (iii) was mentioned in various ways.
- (b) The quotation came from the last page of Part 2 chapter 3, although it was very unusual for candidates to show that they knew this. They could relatively easily cite the mother's harsh treatment of her children, especially Suzanne, to explain 'monstre', but found it more difficult to explain how charm could be attributed to *la mère*. These were Carmen's words, however, and she seemed to have a certain fondness for *la mère* and a sympathy for her desire to tame the coastal land. She was also sensitive to Suzanne's (to whom she had been speaking) loyalty to her mother, and this also caused her to speak gently about the lady. Some focused on her determination and ability to persuade others to do what she wanted as an explanation of 'charme'; others limited themselves to her courage and care for her children. But overall, many answers lacked focus and detail and few contrasted the mother's attitude in the early years from what she had become in her later, embittered years.

Question 2

Anouilh: *Antigone*

- (a) Some candidates seemed to interpret the word 'Expliquez' in **Question (i)** as a request to highlight *how* Antigone could be said to have reacted violently at the beginning of the extract. This led to simple and superficial assertions. Better responses sought to explain *why* Antigone reacted in this manner. Even then, many candidates focused on Ismène's refusal to bury her brother and Antigone's opposition to this. The question was looking for explanations of Antigone's rejection of Ismène's pity, in order not to weaken her defences as she anticipated going back to finish burying

her brother and facing death as Créon's punishment for it. Sometimes candidates did not realise that this passage came between her two visits to her brother's remains.

Question (ii) guided candidates to think in terms of *the contrast between the two sisters*, but those who simply wrote a paragraph on Ismène and one on Antigone often ended up *describing the sisters* rather than *analysing the contrast between them*. Stronger candidates focused on 'issues' (such as attitudes to authority, filial duty, ideals or death) rather than on the characters, and then discussed both sisters in relation to the topic, devoting a single paragraph to each issue, leaving the reader in no doubt that contrasts were being analysed. 'Dans cet extrait' were also key words in the question, and candidates often generalised about the young women throughout the play, limiting the marks that could be awarded. Consideration of beauty was not irrelevant, but tended to be superficial. Finally in **(iii)**, candidates could usually make some relevant comments about the 'impersonal' way in which Antigone referred to her fiancé as 'une affaire (réglée)', although some dwelt too much on the conversation that she went on to have with Hémon or on their relationship in general rather than on what she meant by the comment at the end of the extract.

- (b)** This was the less popular of the two questions and, again, there tended to be an emphasis on *what* Anouilh tells us at the beginning and on *how* he does so through the *Prologue* rather than on *why*. Candidates also seemed more willing to point out that the playwright later also divulges the story through the Chorus, than to give reasons for which he chose to recount it at all. Only a few went into the theme of 'fatalité' in tragedy or mentioned that the dramatist did not create suspense, but liberated the reader/spectator by foreknowledge, making them more 'critical' and thoughtful about the characters' responses to authority.

Question 3

Molière: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*

- (a)** It was pleasing to see that this text was enjoyed by candidates of a wide range of ability. All three questions demanded clear explanation of a number of points in the intrigue. Again, candidates tended to write about *how* M. Jourdain's father in **(i)** or *le fils du Grand Turc* in **(ii)** were referred to, and to *what* was said about them, rather than *why*. Even when they did attempt to give a reason in **(i)**, many 'jumped ahead' to Covielle's need to get M. Jourdain on side in order to secure Cléonte's marriage to Lucile, rather than giving time to the importance in the play of being noble by birth. If M. Jourdain's father had been a 'gentilhomme', M. Jourdain would be, too. M. Jourdain's reaction(s) were more creditably commented upon, however some thought that the protagonist aspired to be a 'Bourgeois gentilhomme' without seeming to understand the ironic contradiction in terms of this title. Others ridiculed M. Jourdain for generally falling for appearances without realising that Covielle was in disguise (or that *le fils du Grand Turc* was Cléonte in disguise, because he had already been refused as a suitor) and without realising that Covielle's claim that M. Jourdain's father was noble was not true. Occasionally the irony was highlighted of his description of a *merchant's* duties in lines 12-14, even as Covielle claimed that they were performed by a gentleman and *denied* that they were carried out by a merchant in the case of M. Jourdain's father. A significant number of candidates had problems with identifying characters and their names, wrongly assuming that 'Covielle' was a girl's name and struggling to recall Cléonte's name, or that Covielle was his valet.

Many could say that the result was a success in **(iii)** and some could even give details of the entertainment planned with the *maîtres* which materialised as a triple wedding feast at the end of the play, but a number of the answers were merely summaries of **(i)** and **(ii)**. At the top of the range, candidates knew enough of the historical background to be able to explain why the Turkish

element was introduced by Molière for comic effect. There were some excellent pieces of perceptive and thorough work. Weaker but conscientious candidates approached the question with confidence, although some thought that Covielle wanted M. Jourdain's money. Many candidates wrote briefly and did not explain the full extent of Covielle's success in the masquerade, the satisfaction of it all, the delight of M. Jourdain in being a 'Mamamouchi' and the three weddings amidst the 'comédie-ballet', but limited themselves to writing that Covielle succeeded in fooling M. Jourdain into agreeing to the marriage of his daughter. Candidates should realise that questions beginning 'Commentez' are looking for a deeper and more detailed explanation and that there is a need to discuss and evaluate in order to obtain higher marks.

- (b) It was not uncommon for candidates to confuse characters' names and to use 'noble' and 'rich' of people interchangeably in both parts of **Question 3**. Dorante was, of course, a *poor* noble. Able candidates could show a good knowledge of the seventeenth-century social background and the emergence of a prosperous merchant class able to lend money to the impoverished nobility in the hope of acquiring social status. In some cases, Dorante was confused with other characters, most often Nicole or Cléonte, but some good answers brought out thoughtful contrasts. Some essays were outstanding while others described Dorante's character but ignored his role, did not attempt to discuss his function in the action of the play, or did not provide illustration for the assertions. It was interesting to note how much enjoyment was derived from a seventeenth-century text.

Question 4

Devi: *Le Voile de Draupadi*

- (a) Candidates choosing to write on this text showed widely differing degrees of understanding and knowledge, but were able to explain Anjali's position in Dev's family in (i), most mentioning that she did not share their religious convictions and some explaining why. Only a few were able to support their judgements by reference to the text. In (ii) some candidates continued to focus on Dev's mother and to repeat information and very few managed to show knowledge of Anjali's attitude to her family. Anjali's conclusion at the end in (iii) was usually seen as not entirely negative because she had overcome and succeeded in completing the fire-walk unharmed (line 13), but some candidates answered differently, based on 'rien' twice in lines 15-16. Overall, though, they seemed to feel that they needed to keep a balance of positive and negative.
- (b) This question was answered less frequently than (a) but most who tackled it were able to trace Anjali's troubled destiny back through Vasanti to her grandfather. Some limited themselves to Anjali when discussing the theme and did not give an overall view of how it permeated the lives of other characters. The strongest candidates began by clarifying what they understood by the terms 'destin' and 'fatalité', and the best essays showed the hopelessness of human effort against fate with supporting illustration.

Section 2

Question 5

Ionesco: *Le Roi se meurt*

- (a) There was a wide range in the understanding and knowledge shown of the text. More successful candidates defined what they understood by the question set. Bérenger was not primarily interested in 'dying well' in that throughout much of the play he was in denial of his decline and refused to give up power. Ionesco said that the play was composed when he was ill and frightened of death, and that he told himself that one could learn to die and help other people come to terms with death. The remark in the question could thus be said to describe Ionesco's intention.

- (b) Some essays defined the types of humour very well and gave examples, but analysing the *effect* of humour in the play proved more challenging. Fewer responses to this question than to (a) were encountered.

Question 6

Colette: *Le Blé en herbe*

- (a) It was expected that candidates would interpret 'milieu social' in a broad sense, to include the family context, the generation gap and gender issues as well as social class in the novel. There was sometimes a tendency to focus on the latter, but overall the topic was dealt with quite perceptively. 'Milieu' in the question was sometimes misinterpreted to mean 'nature and the environment', and some candidates concentrated just on the word 'social' or misunderstood 'milieu social' to be 'social life', while others gave too much prominence to the evolution of characters. Candidates sometimes seemed to forget that the question asked them to focus on the *importance* of the 'milieu social', and they just described it without any analysis. For candidates with a good grasp of the detail of the text, though, the question presented no particular difficulty, and some reasonable points were made.
- (b) This was a popular text and a frequently answered question, and some very good points were made, illustrated with a lot of examples from the text. Many candidates showed excellent knowledge and lively appreciation. The question was accessible to all abilities, yet was interpreted in different ways. Most candidates seemed to sense an emphasis on the words 'à la fin' and sought to determine whether Phil and Vinca were happier or more anxious at this point than they had been at the beginning. Occasionally either 'plus heureux' or 'plus angoissés' was selected exclusively, and candidates decided whether it applied more at the start or at the conclusion of the novel. The principal problem for most candidates was a cavalier attitude to what constituted the start and the end of the novel. Many referred to idyllic childhood holidays by the sea when this was clearly an evocation of previous years as Phil and Vinca were already stressed by the awkwardness of adolescence at the start of the novel.

The majority of candidates seemed to assume that Vinca and Phil were *both, equally* either 'plus heureux' or 'plus angoissés' at any given part of the novel, and many oversimplified the complexity of the situation at the start, such as Phil's initial bewilderment at the changes in Vinca, or her malaise early in the text. Better answers made a clear distinction between the stages of emotional and psychological development of Phil and Vinca. The most common error was to introduce Madame Dalleray as an 'élément perturbateur' before having demonstrated the already troubled relationship and hence, Phil and Vinca's vulnerability to her, notably in the case of Phil. There was also a tendency for some candidates to comment on the end of the novel by speculating on what the characters 'should' feel rather than thinking about what is actually stated in the text. For example, many thought Phil was happy because he had achieved what he originally wanted. Very few referred to the final pages, full of ambiguities and uncertainties, and the significant detail of the mixed and contrasting emotions and reactions of the pair. Usually such essays ended with a very tidy but completely erroneous 'happy ever after' scenario. There were, however, a number of answers which 'discussed and evaluated' at each stage, thus ensuring a mark of in the higher range. There was evidence that most candidates knew the text well and could relate to it, identifying with the adolescents' difficulties.

Question 7

Lainé: *La Dentellière*

- (a) As mentioned above and in previous reports, it is **not** necessary to agree with statements made in essay questions. In the case of this question, some candidates contradicted themselves or even concluded, as they grappled with the evidence, that Pomme and her parents 'must have been from different social classes' because of their lack of communication with each other. Some candidates bypassed these difficulties by saying that social differences might have caused problems of communication because of different levels of education, or by only discussing 'classes sociales' in isolation, or by focusing on 'manque de communication' and omitting reference to the end of the question, which was, after all, to *analyse the importance* of this theme. Ultimately, the theme of lack of communication between different social classes could be said to be very important because it contributed to the rupture in Pomme's relationship with Aimery, followed by her struggle with anorexia.
- (b) Candidates seemed to find this question more demanding than **Question (a)** and fewer candidates chose it. Candidates described why Aimery was unlikable, without explaining the role of the narrator in the novel. This resulted in narration of the plot rather than analysis. Very few candidates referred to the last chapter of the text or picked up on the author's intervention. There was little reference to the highly significant final meeting between the hospitalised Pomme and Aimery, or to the narrator's mocking ironic attitude to Aimery.

Question 8

Camus: *Caligula*

- (a) Most answers seen managed to appreciate the backdrop of death and talked of Caligula's 'reign of terror', but did not really consider the 'meaning' of death, just talked about all the deaths in the play. Many lost sight of the question in descriptions of Caligula's crimes, which were given little explanation. Several went as far as suggesting that everything hinged on the quotation, 'men die but are not happy', but did not attempt to explain why (i.e. no mention of lack of fulfilment, a materialistic world, robotic routine, etc.) and were unable to find a connection with his search for 'the impossible'.
- (b) This quotation from Camus first appeared on page 4 of *Le Figaro*, numéro 346, on 25th September 1945. Candidates' essays were equally divided between **Questions (a)** and **(b)**. Some candidates fared better when dealing with **(b)**, since they were able to choose examples to show why 'nier les dieux' could be contrasted with 'nier les hommes'. Candidates were generally able to relate elements of the events of the play, however none really came to grips with the philosophy or with expressing the idea that Caligula's freedom was not 'good' since it was bought at the cost of the lives and liberty of his people.

FRENCH LITERATURE

Paper 8670/43

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To do well in the Texts paper, candidates should do two things in particular:

1. Read, study and know the texts very well, including whether they are plays, watched by *spectateurs*, novels, read by *lecteurs*, etc.
2. Practise giving detailed answers and full explanations to examination-type questions. It is not always necessary to agree with the question. Candidates should think carefully about what the question is asking of them before they launch into writing and should structure their essays well, with an introduction, points for and against, including illustration and development, and finally a conclusion. Familiarity with the principles and the standards of the Mark Scheme will help them; stronger candidates are distinguished by their ability to answer the questions fully and to draw comparisons and contrasts.

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The use of rhetorical questions is certainly acceptable, but questions should not be left unanswered. It would therefore be desirable for any questions posed to be answered, before the end of the paragraph, to avoid any doubt.

Familiar and colloquial use of French is not appropriate for a French literature essay. Language errors sometimes impede communication; in particular, there is often confusion when candidates write 'il' or 'lui' instead of 'elle' and vice versa.

Centres and candidates are reminded of the instructions on the Mark Scheme and the front page of the Question Papers, i.e. essays should be between 500 and 600 words long. Essays are often much shorter than this, and candidates disadvantage themselves by not making the most of the opportunity they have to give full and developed answers, backed up by illustration and example from the text. Spending too much time on one answer can mean that another question is not fully dealt with.

The general level of performance and overall standard was similar to that encountered in previous years, perhaps better in essay questions, but possibly slightly below in passage based questions, with more

candidates using the extract to fashion an answer when they either knew very little about the given literary work or did not show their knowledge of the text as a whole.

The majority of candidates chose to study the texts by Anouilh, Molière, Colette and Camus. A significant number selected Duras, closely followed by Ionesco. The questions on Devi and Lainé were not so frequently answered this session.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Duras: *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*

- (a) In (i), most candidates did not attempt to identify where in the novel the extract was taken from – about half way through Part 2 – but those who did tended to place it much earlier in the plot, and understandably so, given its familiar themes of preparing to go to the town, the mother's hopelessness, the *caporal's* services rendered and the desired purchase of the additional five hectares. Wherever candidates placed it, they tended to know that Joseph was keen to rejoin Lina.

A detailed description of the *caporal* was given a couple of chapters before the extract. Those who could not recall it tended to think that the man was French and emphasised a previous military career. Some, however, could give a detailed description in (ii) of the Malay who came begging one day and had worked for the family ever since. Answers to (iii) communicated Suzanne's fatigue at experiencing her mother's old age and madness yet again, only more extreme now than ever. Candidates felt as sure as the mother, and Suzanne, that Joseph would leave sooner or later and nothing could be done to prevent it, making words and reactions from Suzanne useless at this point.

- (b) There did not seem to be much consensus between candidates about whether Monsieur Jo made them laugh or cry. Each essay evolved differently and led to different conclusions accordingly.

Question 2

Anouilh: *Antigone*

- (a) In (i), candidates knew that Ismène decided in this extract to join Antigone in burying their brother, Polynice, which she had previously declined to do, and had attempted to dissuade Antigone from this action forbidden by Créon. In the second part of the question, candidates were willing to say why Ismène was proposing to do this, but generally did not look below the surface of the text. She was said to have found the courage to take this action, but other possible factors, such as (Antigone's own motivation) for her brother's honour, or to show unity with her sister, against the king's prohibition, or more immediately from the extract, that faced with Antigone's imminent death, she did not want to become the only surviving sibling, were also mentioned. The suggestions that Créon would surely not kill both girls, that this was a plot for Ismène to save Antigone, or that Ismène was proving to Antigone her commitment to fight against tyranny, were not made very convincingly.

Conversely, in (ii), responses tended to focus on tragedy and its underlying explanation for Antigone's insistence that it was her fate to die and hers alone. To some extent, candidates detected a note of selfishness, even self-righteousness, or determination to suffer alone: in Antigone's own words *c'est moi seule* (line 5). She seemed to want Ismène to live with the consequences of her decision and was not really portrayed as defending Ismène's safety or survival, or as acting on her behalf or that of the whole family, but of suffering alone like a martyr, deserted by Ismène who was closest to her, her own flesh and blood. Even if Ismène were to have made an identical final sacrifice, Antigone seemed to be arguing that it would still not match what she had given up.

Candidates acknowledged in (iii) that, as the king, Créon needed to assert and uphold his authority. This tended to be expressed 'factually', respecting the power he wielded, and referring back to the tragic fate outlined in (ii). That he was portrayed as tired and resigned, and

descending into hopelessness, was more widely recognised than for candidates to sense a renewed angry insistence here after the brief exposition of his dilemma during which he appealed to Antigone to have pity on him, and to back down to spare him the need to carry out his threat and thus bring disaster to his son and others.

- (b) Essays were well structured, presenting evidence of Antigone's heroic attributes and illustrating aspects of her as a child incapable of growing up before coming to a conclusion. There must have been four votes for 'child...' for every nomination of 'heroine', but at least another four candidates in every ten concluded with 'both', 'neither' or some kind of 'spoiled ballot paper', perhaps not even considering one of the options given. Of those declining to hail Antigone as a heroine, some even suggested that Créon was the most heroic figure in the play.

Question 3

Molière: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*

- (a) It was not uncommon for candidates to use 'noble' and 'rich' of people interchangeably. Dorante was, of course, a *poor* noble. Able candidates could show a good knowledge in (i) of the seventeenth-century social background and the emergence of a prosperous merchant class able to lend money to the impoverished nobility in the hope of acquiring social status. The seven times that Dorante speaks in the passage seemed to give candidates plenty of material from which to draw a response to (ii). They generally had a good grasp of the Count's hypocrisy. Mme Jourdain only spoke three times in the extract, but candidates still had as much to say for (iii). The first time, she spoke about herself in the third person, and the third time her comment was directed, 'bas à Nicole', but her other words were also sensed to be on a 'parallel' level in the action to M. Jourdain and Dorante's dialogue, which would be more readily appreciated when seen on stage. It was interesting to note how much enjoyment was derived from a seventeenth-century text.
- (b) This question was marginally more frequently chosen than (a). Some thought that the protagonist aspired to be a 'Bourgeois gentilhomme' without seeming to understand the ironic contradiction in terms of this title. Others distinguished more clearly aspects in which M. Jourdain could be said to be a 'victime' deserving of our pity, while illustrating from the text the happiness such as his unbridled rapture at being pronounced a noble 'Mamamouchi' at the end of the play.

Question 4

Devi: *Le Voile de Draupadi*

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

Section 2

Question 5

Ionesco: *Le Roi se meurt*

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

Question 6

Colette: *Le Blé en herbe*

- (a) This was the less frequently answered of the two questions, yet there was hardly an answer to (b) that did not mention some examples that could have been made relevant to (a), such is the appreciation of nature in this novel. Responses lacked relevant development about the relative peace that Phil and Vinca found in the 'cadre naturel', and the contrast that the outdoors provided

to the young people who were struggling to adapt to adolescence and to the adult world mostly spent inside.

- (b) This was an accessible question, and candidates showed themselves able to describe the childhood friendship now evolving into a more complex love affair. Essays tended to be more descriptive than analytical, meaning that these tended not to be among the highest scoring responses in this paper.

Question 7

Lainé: *La Dentellière*

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

Question 8

Camus: *Caligula*

- (a) There were a range of answers, all of which reflected a good knowledge of the text. Those who quickly disagreed with the statement and spent the entirety of the essay illustrating what Caligula wanted to do instead, forewent relevance and denied themselves the higher marks. Of candidates scoring well, some admitted finding it difficult to agree or disagree, but developed thorough responses with evidence for and against.
- (b) This was a more specific question than (a), so was perhaps understandably avoided by the majority of candidates. Furthermore, there were, of course, two men by the name of Scipion in the play, and this one refers to the young one who only appears in the four consecutive scenes, Act 2 scene 12 to Act 3 scene 1, the poet whose father was murdered by Caligula. Unfortunately most attempts to answer this question mistakenly focused on the other Scipion so, even though good knowledge of the play was reflected, there was not much sense of understanding or ability to answer question.