

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/21  
Writing

## Key messages

Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. More successful candidates also tend to allocate a set amount of time to each of the following, for both sections of the paper: identifying key instructions in each question they choose; planning their writing; writing; checking and correcting their work.

When reading the questions, candidates should concentrate on the instructions and should carefully interpret and deconstruct the question. They should look at the key instructions in the questions they choose. For example, in **Question 3** the key instruction is to 'write a descriptive piece' and the key areas of focus are 'colours, sound and movement'. In **Question 5** the key instruction is to 'write two contrasting reviews', one positive and one more negative. To ensure that candidates do fully understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question.

Though it is not directly assessed, planning is key to a successful composition; candidates should plan for the prescribed form, purpose, audience, voice, mood and tone of the piece. Effective planning, following on from successful interpretation of the question (as above), leads to better-crafted and more effectively shaped responses, therefore minimising irrelevant detail and generic content. Candidates should give careful consideration to the particular effects they need to create, the most appropriate persona to adopt, the content to include, and the structure to employ.

Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation. Many scripts that had good content were let down by weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar. While stronger and more confident candidates may well achieve a good level of control over complex constructions, others would benefit from choosing clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety instead of long, rambling sentences that do not flow easily. Often, weaker responses lose control of grammar when candidates attempt to write in long complex sentences. They must also be aware of the need for paragraphing in their responses.

Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.

In preparing for **Section A: Imaginative writing**, candidates should develop skills in differentiating between 'showing' versus 'telling', to improve both descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work. The key aspect of the most successful and effective writing in **Section A** is a convincing and credible narrator/persona.

When preparing for **Section B: Writing for an audience**, candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of newspaper and magazine articles, both print and online, as background preparation. Candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles, newspaper correspondence, speeches and voiceover scripts. The key aspects of the most successful and effective writing in **Section B** are an authentic sense of voice and a clearly developed, logically sequenced structure.

## General comments

Candidates need to be aware of the importance of time management and should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length. Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric

infringement: some essays were appreciably short of the minimum word limit, while other candidates apparently ran out of time.

More responses were paragraphed effectively than in previous series. Technical accuracy tended to be more secure in **Section B** than in **Section A**, where tense errors and confusions often caused problems. **Section B** responses were also often structured more effectively than in **Section A**.

In **Section A**, **Question 1** was the most popular, followed by **Question 3**. There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required, but fewer candidates made this error than in previous series. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to relate to the sense of drama and excitement in **Question 1**; describe the contrasting scene and atmosphere in **Question 2**; or appreciate the beauty or power of the river through descriptions of colours, sound and movement in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create a feeling of excitement or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 4** was easily the most popular, followed by **Questions 5** and **6**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms; establish a mature, credible voice; or develop a well-thought-out, logically organised line of argument.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Section A: Imaginative writing**

##### **Question 1 – And The Winner Is ...**

Candidates were asked to write the end to a story called *And The Winner Is ...*, about a competition which has a surprising outcome. They were asked to create a sense of drama and excitement.

Form was an issue for a number of candidates on this question, with some producing at least half a side of writing recapping on events, rather than producing a more natural ending. In some cases, the candidate recapped for the entire response. Many candidates opted to write about a traditional race and had the start of the race as the starting point of their writing. Better answers seemed to have planned well so that the plot leading up to the finale had been clearly thought through. This was also evident in the use of clear paragraphing, which often supported an appropriate structure to the narrative.

Stronger responses created a sense of drama and excitement through sensory description and imagery: for example, 'The deafening sound of the oven alarms, the ticking of the mighty clock ...' was written in the climax to a cookery competition. Drama was also achieved by some candidates through the introduction of an unexpected twist in the story. They crafted characters with unusual backstories rather than simply providing a predictable outcome: for example, for one character, 'The ceremony was over but my torment wasn't'. One effective piece of writing explored the lead drivers in a Grand Prix race, giving the feel of a quest as, 'a titanic three way battle for the lead ensued,' yet, 'a pathetically inferior car prevailed over the two Goliaths'.

Weaker responses tended to consist of a linear story of a race from start to finish as a running commentary along the lines of, 'Number 4 passed number 6 and then number 3 came up on the outside', while a number of responses were hampered by inconsistent use of tenses.

##### **Question 2 – Contrasting pieces about a music venue**

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, about a music venue; the first before the audience arrived and the second during the performance. They were asked to focus on the sound, colour and atmosphere in the venue.

Achieving a sense of contrast in atmosphere was an issue for some candidates on this question. Content was sometimes repeated, with little sense of a difference in mood. The descriptive focus was best achieved and sustained where candidates adopted a first-person voice. Some candidates adopted the persona of a

participant in the concert or of the concert director, which gave the piece a sense of immediacy, and a convincing tone.

Stronger responses effectively linked the pieces, lending a sense of cohesion, and provided a clear contrast between the two sections while keeping focus on the 'sound, colour and movement' element of the question. Effective verb choices were also notable in some of the stronger responses, and contributed to achieving atmosphere: 'People began to *flood* into the venue' and 'The curtains *peeled* away from each other...'.

Weaker responses were too generalised, offering description of the stage, the people and the weather without providing a clear focus on the question; in such responses, ideas were presented quite simply, such as in the description of the setting as 'filled with joy and colourful music that gave a good looking image to the place'. There were a number of candidates who did not effectively differentiate between the two pieces, sometimes apparently writing just one piece rather than the required two. This approach was generally self-penalising.

### **Question 3 – The River**

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece called *The River*, focusing on colours, sound and movement to help the reader imagine the scene.

This was generally answered well, and a number of unusual approaches were seen.

Stronger responses conceptualised the piece as a cohesive whole: for example, one candidate described the changes of the river from its source to its journey to the sea, while another effective piece of writing was purportedly reporting on an ancient mythological river with changing moods, where the blue water reflected this, becoming 'black and malign'. One candidate wrote impressively in the voice of the River, while other strong responses included engaging descriptions such as 'its body curving and conforming to the landscape' and 'similar to movements in a tango as it battled to synchronize'. Other ideas included the description of a journey, as in the case of one candidate who revisited many memories on a special journey and showed evidence of carefully selected vocabulary choices: 'A flickering sensation travelled through my whole body as I noticed that everything remained the same. My river, my river, our river would welcome me with its inviting arms.'

Weaker responses tended towards mere lists of description of colours and sounds, without much sense of cohesion: 'The water was brown and rushed along'; 'the sun's rays causing a rainbow on the surface of the water'; and 'the birds chirping in the trees by the sides of the river'.

### **Section B: Writing for an audience**

#### **Question 4 – Article about sports lessons at school**

Candidates were asked to write an article for their school magazine, giving their opinion about whether children should have sports lessons at school, or if this is something they should only do in their free time.

This question was not especially popular but most candidates who answered it clearly understood how to write an article. Candidates of all abilities had something to say about sports lessons, with many arguing the need for exercise given the current levels of obesity. Overall, the question was usually answered in a balanced way and the magazine article register was adhered to.

Stronger responses managed to engage the reader's attention immediately, sometimes through an anecdote, before presenting a variety of well-structured arguments. For example, one candidate began the article like this: 'A couple of nights ago I was finishing a bag of Pringles potato crisps and sipping on my Coca-Cola when I stumbled upon a heated discussion on the radio.' Stronger responses tended to demonstrate in-depth reasoning and gave examples to back up points, along with anecdotes to add weight to the piece. Awareness of counterarguments was also a feature of stronger responses, which generally led to an evaluation of these arguments and a reasoned conclusion.

Many of the weaker responses were undeveloped and lacked detail, often presenting points in a list-like fashion, with little development of each point.

#### **Question 5 – Contrasting reviews of a television comedy programme**

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting reviews, of 300–450 words each, of a new television comedy programme. They were asked to write one very positive review and one more negative review, both to be published on an international media website.

Stronger responses generated a strong critical voice, often through the use of humour or exaggeration: ‘I’d rather stare at a concrete wall for five hours than watch this guy tell “jokes” for five minutes.’ One humorous piece was written using a good range of vocabulary to satirise the genre of TV sitcoms, claiming in the opening that, ‘This putrid shell of a show is the embodiment of quintessentially vulgar comedy’. Another particularly strong response took the format of ‘Saturday Night Live’ as its subject, with the two contrasting voices representing a supporter and a critic of President Trump. It succinctly and intelligently captured the opposing views about fake news, as well creating a clever commentary on the state of US politics.

Some weaker responses tended towards description rather than review, while others resorted to ranting, containing little in the way of constructive criticism and at times conveying no more than a very personal and rather simplistic set of ideas: ‘I could not be happier than I am now. Literally I can’t stop laughing while watching that programme. That joke about a cell phone app.’

### **Question 6 – Script for a talk to school about volunteering**

Candidates were asked to write the script of a talk, to be given to their school, about the experience they had when volunteering for a local organisation over the past year. They were asked to describe the good work that the organisation does and how they have gained from volunteering.

Generally, candidates responded very well to the requirements of writing a speech. Many incorporated a range of rhetorical and persuasive features into their writing. The audience was generally clearly considered, as in this simple but effective address: ‘Hi. My name is Alan Evans and I have been part of this local organisation since last year. For those of you who don’t know, we are a local organisation called, “For a better change”.’

Stronger responses often had a specific organisation in mind and gave clear examples of the work carried out, together with a developed description of how the individual had gained from volunteering. For example, one candidate wrote about the organisation ‘Chasing Coral’ and how they document the disappearance of coral off the Florida coast and demand action from government, such as new boating restrictions to limit pollution. Such an approach enabled the candidate to engage in a meaningful way, saying, ‘If not us, who? If not now, when? I challenge you to go diving this weekend and see the beauty of it for yourself.’

Weaker responses tended to consist of a monologue of feelings and emotions and a list-like description of work done.

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Though it is not directly assessed, planning is key to a successful composition; candidates should plan for the prescribed form, purpose, audience, voice, mood and tone of the piece. Effective planning, following on from successful interpretation of the question (as above), leads to better-crafted and more effectively shaped responses, therefore minimising irrelevant detail and generic content. Candidates should give careful consideration to the particular effects they need to create, the most appropriate persona to adopt, the content to include, and the structure to employ.

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## General comments

Candidates need to be aware of the importance of time management and should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length. Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric



infringement: some essays were appreciably short of the minimum word limit, while other candidates apparently ran out of time.

More responses were paragraphed effectively than in previous series. Technical accuracy tended to be more secure in **Section B** than in **Section A**, where tense errors and confusions often caused problems. **Section B** responses were also often structured more effectively than in **Section A**.

In **Section A**, **Question 1** was the most popular, followed by **Question 3**. There was sometimes a tendency to write stories in **Question 3**, when descriptive writing was required, but fewer candidates made this error than in previous series. For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to relate to the sense of urgency and anticipation in **Question 1**; explore the contrasting outlook and mood provided by the two characters in **Question 2**; or appreciate the excitement of the circus through descriptions of sound, movement and colour in **Question 3**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a complete response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create a feeling of urgency or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

In **Section B**, **Question 4** was easily the most popular, followed by **Questions 5** and **6**. The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice or develop a well-thought-out, logically organised line of argument.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Section A: Imaginative writing**

##### **Question 1 – David woke up and realised he had forgotten to set his alarm**

Candidates were asked to write a story which began with the sentence: *David woke up and realised he had forgotten to set his alarm*. They were asked to create a sense of urgency and anticipation.

This was the most popular choice. A large number of candidates focused their writing on the idea of being late for work, an interview or an exam. However, some took more original routes, with differing levels of success. One candidate was saved from a shooting at his school because of missing the alarm, whereas another used the prompt to launch into an unrelated adventure. Rather too many had David rushing only to find he had got his days or times confused. Many did not write a full short story, and ended their writing on a cliffhanger or part way through the narrative.

Stronger responses contained engaging and original content that was focused on the opening line and continued to refer back to this throughout, thus giving the piece a clear internal coherence. They typically focused on creating the mood of the protagonist, David, often setting him up for our sympathy or empathy as readers, before involving him in a dramatic situation. Some created original and clear motivations for David's determination to reach his destination, despite the hardships endured. For example, in one response David was looking forward to leaving home and 'pushed on, mindful of his impending eviction and the unnerving thought of his mother saying to him, "You'll have to live again with me!"'

Weaker responses had little or no focus on the opening line of the story, or dwelled too long on David's struggles to prepare to leave his house, describing his long, and often tedious, morning routines. They wrote about rather ordinary, mundane events in a school or college setting, often with a murder or some other shocking incident occurring in an attempt to create drama. Others focused on a character who did not know what to do with his day. Frequent references to time or waiting for time to pass were a common feature of these responses.

##### **Question 2 – Contrasting pieces about selling a valuable item**

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces, of 300–450 words each, the first from the perspective of a shop assistant selling a valuable item, and the second from the perspective of the customer. They were asked to create a sense of outlook and mood.

Many were set in mobile phone, jewellery or antique stores and there was sometimes a tendency to produce contrasting voices by merely having the voices say the opposite to each other.

Stronger responses utilised clever parallel structures to suit assistant and customer personas in direct contact during their exchanges in the shop. One particularly inventive piece imagined a grandchild searching antique shops for her grandmother's collection of individually crafted globes. The value was more sentimental than monetary and produced a sharp contrast in perspectives. There were also some very effective descriptions, for example of a beautifully made cuckoo clock, with some very convincing details about craftsmanship. Some bitter-sweet plots were livened up with effective introspection: 'Styling myself as a traditional gentleman, I loathe how I am seeking to take advantage of such a naive, sweet young woman'.

Weaker responses often constituted narrative pieces purely based on the candidate's opinion of what makes a valuable item, which limited their ability to create differing voices and outlooks. Alternatively, the two voices expressed mainly disparaging views about each other. In some pieces there was little or no evidence of contrast across the pieces with candidates writing two very separate pieces that did not link.

### **Question 3 – The Circus**

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece called *The Circus*, focusing on sound, movement and colour to help the reader imagine the scene.

Some candidates wrote about what seemed more like a funfair or carnival with lots of stalls and rollercoaster rides, whereas others wrote about the more conventional 'big-top' circus in a tent, while some combined the two.

Stronger responses consistently focused on the descriptive element, using language to create descriptive effects: 'La Cirque Berserk was like dipping your head into a pool of moonlight.' The subject offered plenty of opportunities to focus effectively on colour, sound and movement: 'A joyous fanfare sounded, excited notes tumbling out of unseen trumpets' and 'He was clad in a crimson cloak of crushed velvet that whispered tales of royalty.' One imaginative and very descriptive piece was about the 'ringmaster' controlling 'the circus' that was the school playground, a metaphor that was sustained well throughout.

Weaker responses often merely listed colours, sounds and movements, or became distracted by adjectives and spent rather too much time, for example, detailing the 'gigantic, welcoming, red and white striped tent'. There seemed to be a number of candidates who felt that fragmented sentences enhanced the descriptive quality of their writing when, in fact, the lack of appropriate sentence demarcation detracted from the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. Other weak responses often lapsed into narrative, rather than descriptive, writing.

The weakest responses did not focus on the idea of a 'circus', but used the phrase in the first line and then wrote a wholly narrative response that did not focus on the task: for example, one candidate wrote a narrative entitled 'Circus of Love', about a relationship, the only descriptive element being about the blue eyes of the object of her affection. Other responses lacked any paragraphs or any form of structure. A number of responses were shorter than is required within the rubric, and hence were self-penalising.

## **Section B: Writing for an audience**

### **Question 4 – Music review**

Candidates were asked to write a review for their school magazine of the latest music produced by their favourite band or singer. They were asked to give their opinion of the music and of how it compares with the band or singer's previous work.

This question was very popular and generally answered well. Most candidates engaged well with the topic and managed to write in detail, with an appropriate sense of audience.

Stronger responses fulfilled both elements of the question – opinion and comparison – while also creating a strong sense of voice that was appropriate to the audience and engaged them in the topic. Such responses showed familiarity with the genre and an ability to use the language of the music press: 'An appalling defeat to the onslaught of consumerism' and 'Magnum is easily the best album release of the year – perhaps the band's magnum opus.' They also made strategic use of teen jargon to convincingly convey the reviewer's opinion in relatable terms, for example the use of hashtag phrases catering for a social-media savvy audience, such as '#sodeep #tothecore'. The audience was sometimes suggested very subtly, in phrases

such as, 'So I would like to believe we have all heard Ariana Grande's new album ...' or 'This has been our 6th form tune of the summer so far...'

Weaker responses mainly exhibited less ability to produce clear explanations and arguments, although the level of engagement was frequently just as good as that exhibited by stronger responses. They often only focused on describing why the candidate (or the persona they were assuming) liked the artist, without fully exploring the task. Such responses sometimes developed a voice intended to be appropriate to their audience merely by using slang or textspeak. The weakest responses merely gave potted, autobiographical histories of groups, while some had no specific artist to comment on and so produced very generalised material about how music has affected them.

### **Question 5 – Contrasting letters about space exploration**

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting letters to a newspaper, of 300–450 words each, about whether countries should spend money on space exploration; the first in favour of spending money and the second against it.

The requirement to present two contrasting viewpoints was achieved by candidates across the ability range, but some seemed to overlook the fact that the question specified that candidates should write letters. A number of candidates needed to use a more recognisable letter format and, if they did write a letter, might have more clearly distinguished between the article's author and the newspaper's editor in selecting to whom the letter should be addressed.

Stronger responses consisted of some highly convincing letters that were sufficiently credible for publication in a newspaper. The candidates in such cases created a strong sense of voice through the use of language and ensured their writing was appropriate to the form and audience. They focused clearly on the task and developed ideas about specific reasons for each side of the debate, often managing to bring about a subtle contrast of voices. This was sometimes done by having one letter-writer focussing on the longer-term needs of humanity in respect of the necessity of finding a planet that was habitable or one which would help to replace Earth's dwindling resources, while the other correspondent wrote about the more immediate needs of some of the human population living in poverty now.

Weaker responses did not focus on the task and often comprised a description of the candidate's apparent opinions on the topic, giving the pros and cons of space without developing these ideas.

### **Question 6 – Speech about a local environmental project**

Candidates were asked to write the text of a speech, to be given by the director of a local environmental project to college students, to thank them for taking part in the project and to talk about the importance of this work. They were asked to create a sense of gratitude and encouragement.

The conventions of a speech were deployed on most occasions, and most candidates were able to establish a voice and to use rhetorical devices, creating a sense of gratitude and encouragement quite successfully. The subject matter gave scope for realistic details of what the students had accomplished.

Stronger responses fully achieved the purpose of the task, drawing on the candidates' knowledge and sometimes strongly-held views on ecological issues. The persona of the project's director was often addressed in an autobiographical section that explained how the speaker developed his or her own environmental awareness. Stronger responses developed a clear idea of a specific environmental project, what the students had done, and what the results would be. In such cases, the candidates also made sure that the 'local' project was feasible for a group of students, for example a neighbourhood litter pick.

Weaker responses sometimes placed too much emphasis on what the audience would already know, especially the details of the project they would have already worked on by the time the speech was delivered. They sometimes lacked focus on exactly what the project had involved, often just referring to it through the wording in the question: 'a local environmental project'. These candidates tended to slip into colloquial language and became repetitive and non-specific in their effusive thanks. Others forgot the audience and form and, being rather caught up in demonstrating their ecological knowledge, produced texts that seemed more like lectures. Such answers missed the 'encouragement' and 'gratitude' prompts in the question.



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### Comments on specific questions

#### **Section A: Imaginative writing**

##### **Question 1 – The Secret**

Candidates were asked to write a story called *The Secret*. They were asked to create a sense of drama and anticipation.

This was the most popular choice and the title offered ample scope for a story strong in drama and anticipation; many candidates wrote in the horror genre.

Stronger responses involved engaging and original content that was focused on the revelation of a secret. They focused on creating the mood of the narrator or character, setting him or her up for our sympathy or empathy as readers, before involving him or her in a dramatic revelation. One candidate described a father's disappearance and his secret behind a door to which his son had a rusty key. Other candidates wrote about a variety of secrets and themes, such as sexuality, mental health issues, and personal loss.

Weaker responses either constituted incomplete stories or overly complex storylines that showed a lack of narrative control and a lack of any sense of drama or anticipation. One story involved a long-lost twin sister, blackmail, an anonymous murderer and an affair with an English teacher, all within 600 words. Quite a number of responses were not complete stories, with too many ending on what the candidate felt was an acceptable cliffhanger, but failing to reveal what the secret was, leaving the reader unsatisfied.

##### **Question 2 – Contrasting diary entries about participating in an activity**

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting diary entries, of 300–450 words each, the first by a young person who has just tried a new activity for the first time, and the second by the same person, now older, who has just won a major prize for this activity. They were asked to create a sense of the person's outlook and mood.

This was not a very popular choice of question, although it did produce some good responses. Most candidates attempted to create two different voices, with varying degrees of success. There was evidence that many candidates wrote about activities that they knew well, for example sailing, piano-playing, athletics, football and even knitting in one case. Such an approach enabled candidates to write with some authenticity.

Stronger responses were successful in communicating clearly different voices, sometimes evoking a child's voice in the first piece by using colloquial language and tone. They subsequently wrote with a more mature voice in the second piece and made subtle reference to the aging process, for example mentioning 'grey strands' and 'a few creases'. One candidate wrote quite perceptively about working in a home for the elderly

with initial negative expectations, in contrast to how it actually turned out and the positive impact the experience had on her future career.

Weaker responses tended to include a less convincing second piece, often simply describing an award ceremony without offering any reflection on the time that had passed between the writing of the two pieces. In such cases, the differences in outlook and mood were often not very apparent.

### Question 3 – The Playground

Candidates were asked to write a descriptive piece called *The Playground*. They were asked to focus on colour, sound and movement to help the reader imagine the scene.

Stronger responses picked out ideas about ways in which playgrounds invite ‘pretend play’ which were successfully linked to imagery, for example describing how ‘mangled sticks become shining swords’ while ‘sand became deadly lava’. Some covered a whole day in the playground and one more inventive response explored the playground at night. Other, more creative, interpretations of the title included a coral reef which became a playground for a variety of sea life.

Weaker responses often merely listed colours, sounds and movements or became distracted by adjectives and spent rather too much time, for example, detailing the ‘big, red, frightening roundabout’. They often resorted to listing items and produced less original imagery, such as children ‘running around like ants’ and ‘the birds were chirping’. Many responses lacked any paragraphs or any form of structure.

### Section B: Writing for an audience

#### Question 4 – Magazine article about studying history

Candidates were asked to write an article for their school magazine describing the benefits of studying history. In the article they were asked to create a sense of the importance of history and an enthusiasm for learning about the past.

Candidates were generally able to state the importance of learning history, but the extent to which they were able to craft these thoughts into an engaging magazine article varied widely.

Stronger responses often included suggested that the candidates felt strongly about the benefits of studying history. Some were very focused on their own country’s history, expressing strong sentiments; for example, one candidate wrote, ‘The very foundation of our nation was the destruction of hope, family and human life ... embrace your Kiwi heritage, its beauty and lightness, its wars and diplomacy, oppression and freedom.’ Other candidates wrote with graphic imagery, for example about ‘how much blood Caesar’s body left on the tiles’. Another account expressed gratitude, ‘People from the past have done so much for us.’

Weaker responses tended to describe events from the past and write about professions in which a knowledge of history might be an asset. However, many of these responses failed to create either a sense of the importance of learning history or any enthusiasm for learning about the past.

#### Question 5 – Contrasting speeches about computer games

Candidates were asked to write the text of two students’ speeches, of 300–450 words each, for a debate on computer games. One of the students believes that playing computer games is good for you and the other student feels they are harmful.

This was easily the most popular choice of question in **Section B** and the requirement to write two contrasting speeches was achieved by candidates across the ability range. It produced some interesting arguments for and against computer games, with some mature and well-thought-out answers, with developed arguments. Candidates usually argued that computer games improved co-ordination and cognitive skills, enabled players to connect with others throughout the world and kept players away from harmful activities. On the other side of the debate, they argued that computer games could be addictive, contributing to the deterioration of students’ mental health and could lead to isolation and spending very little time with family and friends.

Stronger responses assumed an authoritative stance and maintained the appropriate form. They used a range of rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions, statistics, different sentence structures, direct address and powerful vocabulary, including such figurative language as ‘ensnared and enslaved’ and ‘a

wave of anger takes over.' The best responses were formal in tone and convincing, challenging others' opinions in an incisive, yet polite, manner.

Weaker responses were often in the form of essays, which resulted in the loss of immediacy that the speeches required. They also repeated ideas and even whole sentences in both parts of the task, the only difference being the stance, either for or against computer games. Many weaker responses also neglected to use paragraphs, which affected the organisation of ideas and arguments.

### **Question 6 – Voiceover for environmental video**

Candidates were asked to write the voiceover script for a short video to raise awareness of the need to protect the environment. They were asked to create a sense of the importance of being environmentally friendly.

Stronger responses suggested that candidates had a good grasp of what a voiceover should sound like, skilfully combining an appropriate level of description of each of the video shots with the voiceover that accompanied it. They focused closely on certain aspects of the environment and avoided the potential trap of being too general in their approach. They presented a relatively detailed visual illustration of the footage – limited to the amount that would be needed by the voiceover artist – which was then well supported by the verbal component of the voiceover text.

Weaker responses showed little discernible understanding of the format and purpose of a voiceover script and appropriate form and content was not always clear; for example, some candidates simply wrote an article about protecting the environment.



# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 8695/91  
Poetry, Prose and Drama

## Key messages

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- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the content is presented to the reader.
- Successful responses use specific references and quotations to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question.
- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

## General comments

There was much thoughtful work on Frost and Lahiri in particular, although the two Cambridge anthologies also remain popular options. Most candidates showed a reasonable grasp of the content and meaning of their chosen texts, while those who actively engaged with the ways in which they are written, looking closely at the effects of the writers' choices of language, imagery, form and structure, were notably more successful. At the upper end of the mark range, examiners read some coherent and persuasive arguments, supported by detailed and deft analysis of the writers' methods, evaluating the ways their works communicate to readers and audiences. Some less successful essays looked at textual detail abstracted from meaning; focusing on words, phrases or images taken out of their context has little value.

## Comments on specific questions

### 1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** There were not many responses to this question, but 'Home Burial' was the most frequently used poem, paired with others such as 'The Death of the Hired Man' and 'Mending Wall.' The most successful responses concentrated clearly on interactions of dialogue and exchanges of views where the tension is clear, with the lines of dialogue clearly indicating opposing perspectives. Here the strength of emotions indicated in the dialogue between husband and wife in 'Home Burial' provided particularly useful material. Some candidates interpreted 'speech' as the speaker or persona of the poem, which was usually a less successful approach to the question.
- (b)** Many responses featured comments on Frost's rural background and the focus on work in a number of his poems. The act of mowing was linked with this and a number of candidates found little further to say. However, for those who examined the poem really closely it proved a rewarding question and discussion often began with the sounds of the poem, focusing on the personification of the scythe, the 'whispering' created through language and sibilance and the dreamlike state created through the sound and the 'heat of the sun'. There were also comments about communication, with the reference to whispering and not speaking in the poem, combined with the casual, meditative and conversational tone of the poem created through questions, phrasing and caesuras. Several essays did not focus on the closing lines and therefore missed the key in l. 13, which equates the reality of physical labour with 'the sweetest dream'.

### 2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) A relatively low number of candidates answered on Jennings and the vast majority of them responded to the question on 'One Flesh.' Many readings of the poem, though, were unsubtle, focusing on 'Strangely apart' and ignoring the parallel 'yet strangely close together'. Some actually referred to the parents as 'hating' each other and resisting separation only for the sake of the child. More successful answers looked carefully at the language of separation through the poem – 'apart', 'separate', 'He', 'She' – and wrote sensitively about ways in which the poem depicts an elderly couple who have been through 'passion' and 'fire', but now face 'Chastity'. Perceptive candidates noted the tone of sympathy in the poem, as the couple hold 'Silence between them like a thread' while time's 'feather/Touch[es] them lightly'. These responses noted that the poem is the speaker's imagination and guesswork, full of musing and questions in the observation of the parents. This allowed some thoughtful focus on structure, noting the effects of the balanced phrases, the corrections and caesuras.

### 3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) This question offered candidates a good range of poems to choose from, and they usually chose well, with some pursuing disappointment in love while others considered disillusionment with society and the world we live in. Popular and successful choices were 'The Forsaken Wife', 'These Are The Times We Live In', 'The White House' and 'The Migrant'. On the whole, essays demonstrated an ability to select relevant material from the poems, with stronger responses moving beyond content and mood to include some effective exploration of language choices and poetic techniques. Candidates need to be wary of the temptation to write about structure and rhyme scheme, however, without a clear link to the question and the specific meaning of the poem; there were some very speculative assertions.
- (b) Successful answers to this question clearly engaged with the central theatrical metaphor and charted its development through the sonnet, noting the shift from octave to sestet with 'Then...'. Such work explored the use of measurements ('mile', 'span', 'inch', 'minute'), the personification of death and the ideas exploring the separation of body and soul. Less accomplished responses did not note the reference to 'language and form... develop ideas' in the question and were restricted to general summary and references to biographical, religious and historical context, which were not always accurate. It is very important for candidates to respond to the question set, and be able to develop a coherent reading of the selected poem.

### 4 *Jhumpa Lahiri: The Namesake*

- (a) Despite the popularity of this text, there were not many responses to this question. While there were some knowledgeable responses, examiners noted a paucity of direct reference and quotations to support points, which weakened otherwise strong answers. Some essays compared different homes in the novel, looking at, for example, the Gangulis' home, the house of Maxine's parents and Gogol and Moushumi's apartment, reflecting on ways in which décor and style reflects the occupants and their values. Others considered a more philosophical idea of home, considering where different characters feel at home, which of course is not always within their actual homes. Such answers often finally centred on Ashima and ways in which Lahiri demonstrates her growing ease with home being America and ends the novel balanced between her two homes, India and the USA.
- (b) Far more candidates opted for the key passage where Ashoke presents Gogol with the copy of his namesake's stories, and nearly all candidates recognised the significance of this moment in the novel. While a number of essays discussed this significance and the relationship between father and son in a general way, successful responses carefully considered Lahiri's writing in the passage and the effects of her presentation of this moment. Strong answers looked carefully at the way the writing describes Gogol's careless dismissal of his father's gift and Lahiri's use of details which illustrate his increasingly American identity. Strong responses were also attentive to the description of Ashoke and his clumsy personalisation of the gift, which highlights the significance of the moment. Candidates were often critical of Gogol for his ingratitude, but many would have benefited from greater attention to the description of Nikolai Gogol. Some, though, picked up on details such as the word 'supercilious' and suggested that Gogol is wrong to say there is 'no' link to his namesake, as that quality is clearly a feature of his own behaviour to his parents. This is an

example of where a really detailed reading brings greater rewards of understanding and appreciation.

## 5 Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) There were very few responses to *The House of Mirth*. In the small number of answers to this question, candidates were able to discuss Lily's character and offer views of how far they sympathised with her, but found it more challenging to answer the question of how Wharton's presentation of Lily shapes the reader's response.
- (b) Unusually with a novel, there were fewer responses to the passage question, with too few to make a general comment appropriate.

## 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) It should be stated at the outset that there were examples of misinterpretation or misunderstanding of this question, as a number of candidates took 'old age' not to refer to the state of being elderly, but as 'old ages' – times gone by. This led to some unusual choices of stories, but Examiners gave what credit they could according to how the question seemed to have been understood. Among the more successful responses, the favoured stories tended to be 'Secrets', Grace's 'Journey', 'Five-Twenty' and 'The Stoa', which clearly feature older characters. There was interesting discussion of how the letters reveal that Great Aunt Mary is defined by the loss of love in her youthful past in 'Secrets', while the old man's dissatisfaction with the contemporary world around him is expressed in Grace's use of focalised narration. Many candidates expressed their sympathy for Ella's position in 'Five-Twenty', while others sympathised with the son's jaundiced view of his father and Miss McCabe in 'The Stoa', assisted by the point of view of the narration and the metaphor in the story's title.
- (b) Responses to this question usually dealt well with the question of Ravi and his situation, and there was some genuinely personal engagement with his emotions at the end of the passage, as well as the way the other children treat him. There was some evident appreciation of Desai's presentation of Ravi's anguish, with her use of detail in the twilight and the melancholy chant. Candidates generally dealt well with the end of the passage, exploring the significance of the final game, and the description of Ravi lying on the ground. Although the selections from the passage were usually relevant, less confident candidates did not address the language choices and literary techniques as much as they might have done – content was clearly understood and used appropriately, but there was less on the literary features, such as the effect of specific choices of diction or Desai's powerful imagery in the passage.

## 7 Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

## 8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

- (a) There were few responses to this question, but most candidates attempting it showed awareness of the role of the Lord Chief Justice and his opposition to Prince Hal and Falstaff's behaviour through the play, before he is accepted by the Prince on his accession to the throne. A few answers were able to move beyond summary of his role to consider Shakespeare's presentation of him as a foil to Falstaff and another version of a father figure to Prince Hal in the play.
- (b) There were no responses to this question.

## 9 Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) This question created opportunities for candidates to write about Private and Public Gar, which they clearly relished, though the question also pointed to Friel's use of flashbacks, which were more seldom considered. Responses which focused on Friel's methods as a playwright, his manipulation of character and dramatic narrative, did well, while those who recounted plot were much less successful.

- (b) Candidates wrote well about the content of this passage, considering Lizzy's enumeration of what America has to offer, as well as the actions, such as Lizzy sobbing, her embracing of Gar and Private's response to that, showing first his rejection and then his happiness. This was appropriately linked to his feelings about his mother. Some were able to comment on America offering material wealth while emotional poverty remained, and noted the tension between Public and Private Gar. Few candidates considered successfully the structure of the passage, with Lizzy's very long sentence running over a number of separate speeches, interrupted by other characters.

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## Comments on specific questions

### 1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Some responses to this question demonstrated the necessity of choosing material carefully, as answers featuring poems with neither clear characters nor speech were not successful. 'Birches' and 'The Road Not Taken' appeared frequently, but were not helpful for this question. Candidates enjoyed far greater success with 'The Ax-Helve', exploring the voice and character of Baptiste, overcoming the suspicion of the narrator; the distrust, sorrow and incomprehension between the couple in 'Home Burial'; the balance of care and impatience in the dialogue in 'The Death of the Hired Man'; or the casual nature of the minister's descriptions and information in 'The Black Cottage.' Strong answers looked at the language and structure of the speech, considering how voice suggests character; while less confident responses tended to rely on the narrative of the poems.
- (b)** 'There Are Roughly Zones' was a popular choice and answers benefited from a careful reading of the poem. Some less successful responses missed the subtleties in the poem and offered a narrative view that the human beings had simply killed the peach tree, missing the language of 'roughly' zones and 'no fixed line,' instead focusing exclusively on what 'must be obeyed'. Most noted the initial separation between 'indoors' and 'outside', the human and natural worlds, while many thoughtfully focused on 'this limitless trait in the hearts of men', as well as the choice of the word 'betrayed', suggesting that man feels nature is at fault rather than him. Interesting discussion of human ambition, and how it affects the natural world, was successful when closely linked to the poem, which has plenty of detail to consider. There were some interesting responses which



examined Frost's use of rhetorical questions to consider the relationship between humanity and nature; the use of inner thoughts to show human arrogance when breaking nature's rules; the irregularity of the rhyme scheme to suggest broken rules; and the use of enjambment and short sentences within lines to explain actions. Confident responses identified three clear sections of the poem, with the middle section being Frost's meditative consideration of the arrogance of human beings in dealing with nature.

## 2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were a very few answers to this question, with candidates using poems such as 'Absence', 'Song For A Departure' and 'Father To Son'. Most tended to take a narrative approach, identifying the element of suffering in each poem, and missing opportunities to examine the presentation of suffering.
- (b) While there were some exceptional answers to this question, discussing the poem's philosophical ideas, its voice and the role of the priest, many candidates struggled with its meaning and complexity. Jennings can be a challenging poet and this poem was best tackled by candidates who were confident in their understanding of its handling of religious ideas. Stronger responses identified the central concern with the transubstantiation of Christ into bread and wine and its role in Christian communion. They were also able to make the clear link between harvest and communion as an on-going cycle, with the persona's exploration of the strength of their faith. Such discussion was successful when supported by detailed textual references, considering Jennings' choices of language and the structure of the poem.

## 3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) This was a popular question, and relevant poems were usually chosen, 'The Forsaken Wife', 'Song', 'Sons, Departing' and 'On My First Daughter' being the most popular. There was some secure knowledge of the poems, with more confident candidates exploring different types of absence and different ways of dealing with it, looking at the hope Jonson gleams from his faith, for example, in contrast to the defiant anger of the forsaken wife, or the ambivalence between loss and acceptance of the sons' new opportunities in 'Sons, Departing.' While less successful answers focused more on the nature of the absence in a descriptive way, confident responses looked closely at ways in which the feeling of absence is conveyed in the poems, well supported with direct references and quotations.
- (b) Blake's 'To the Evening Star' was a very popular option, though assumptions and errors were frequent – the evening star was sometimes taken for the moon, for example, and many asserted that it was God, some even forgoing reference to a 'star' at all. The contradiction between that assertion and the star being addressed as an 'angel' was not noted. Similarly, some candidates stated that the poem was both a sonnet and free verse simultaneously. Less confident answers worked through a narrative account of the poem, not always accurately, with the reference to the 'wolf' and 'lion' often proving problematic. More successful responses started with the personification of 'angel' and considered how Blake presents the star as a protector and guide, looking at the gentle beauty of the imagery of night, augmented by sibilance. The 'wolf' and the 'lion' were seen as symbolic of the dangers apparent when the star declines; the 'flocks' which might be their victims need its lasting protection. The strongest answers linked these ideas closely with Blake's choices of language and imagery, and the way the poem is structured.

## 4 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) Less successful responses tended to rely on narrative and focused almost exclusively on Gogol. Others selected a wider range of characters, but tended to list them and provide a summary of each. These were more successful, but competent answers used the question's instruction to consider 'ways in which' personal identity is explored and constructed an argument about Lahiri's narrative. Many answers focused on how personal identity is shaped by cultural identity and looked at the pairing of the characters of Gogol and Moushumi, often with reference to Maxine and Graham, who could not share nor fully understand Bengali culture. Others referred to the contrast Lahiri creates between Gogol and Sonia, with Gogol's sister much more at ease with her Americanness. There were also essays which looked at how places, and the travel between them, contributes to identity, and of course there was considerable discussion of Lahiri's focus on names in the novel. There was also some good work on Ashoke and Ashima, with Ashoke's identity

shaped by Ghosh and the train crash, while Ashima, initially apparently passive, is shown to develop a stronger sense of her own identity as the novel progresses.

- (b) The passage was very popular, and while some answers were restricted to narrative summary with a few assertions, many responded well to the suggestions of Lahiri's writing, looking at the nostalgia of Ashima's snack, while a number of details and word choices indicate the physical endurance of her pregnancy. Other features of the text which were noted included Ashima's embarrassment in wearing the cotton gown; the incompetence of the nurse in trying to fold the sari; and Ashoke's exclusion from the preparations for birth – all of which point to a lack of understanding of cultural differences. Several candidates noted Ashoke's use of Bengali to speak to Ashima to reassure her. The immediacy of the passage through the use of the present tense was sometimes noted and there were some effective comments on how the language changes the mood at the end of the passage as Ashima loses all control over events as she is 'seated', 'pushed', 'whisked' and 'assigned'.

## 5 Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) While Examiners saw quite a number of narrative essays listing female characters, many candidates responded well to the prompt quotation and discussed a range of the novel's women in terms of their relationship with Lily – her mother, her aunt, Judy Trenor, Gerty Farish, Carrie Fisher and Bertha Dorset. The latter character was considered by many to be the arch villain of the novel, mainly responsible for Lily's downfall. More thoughtful responses also considered female relationships which are not exploitative or characterised by jealousy. They discussed, for example, the importance of the genuine friendship Lily forms with Nettie Struther, while Gerty Farish is presented as a foil to other women throughout the novel and proves to be a good friend to the end. To avoid narrative, candidates should think about Wharton's use of pairings and contrasts between characters, her shaping of certain key events and the use of dialogue to indicate character.
- (b) Candidates who responded to this passage dealt with the relationship between Lily and Selden with some sensitivity. They were usually able to link it appropriately to the wider novel without losing sight of the passage, and there was some thoughtful consideration of some of the subtleties of Wharton's language: the folding away of the note as 'something made precious by the fact that she had held it'; the fact that 'he *had* loved her'; and the final sentence of the passage. Successful responses explored how Wharton presents Selden's dawning realisation of Lily's innocence and his self-recrimination which follows. In relating the extract to the whole novel, some candidates withdrew their sympathy for Selden, claiming that he remains a cynical observer of the society he frequents for too long and proves to be just as gullible in believing scandalous gossip as the rest. Some candidates commented on the amount of text in the passage focusing on bills, receipts and cheques, noting how this reflected the significance of money and the possession, or lack, of it in the novel as a whole.

## 6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) The question was a broad one and successful candidates focused it, usually on the presentation of unhappy or antagonistic human relationships. Using this angle, 'The Yellow Wall Paper', 'The Lemon Orchard', 'Secrets', 'The Stoa', 'Five-Twenty' and both 'Journey' stories were frequently used. Less successful answers relied on narration, describing events and the relationships, while more confident essays considered the shaping of stories and how relationships are developed or change, while others considered dialogue, structure or symbolism as appropriate to the choices of story. There was particularly strong work on Royal and Ella in 'Five-Twenty', looking at setting, clothing and dialogue, and the narrator and Great Aunt Mary in 'Secrets', looking at the structure, the device of the letters and the sense of desolation at the end.
- (b) Candidates who recognised and appreciated Waugh's satirical humour wrote with enthusiasm about this passage. They were, however, in the minority, as most essays took the extract at face value, condemning the oppression of the poor by the ruling class, commenting on people having to go 'to court' for building in Much Malcock, and taking Lady Peabury's 'sin' of 'reading a novel before luncheon' very seriously, seeing it as a sad reflection on her character. This naturally skewed the reading of the passage and limited appreciation of Waugh's writing and its effects. Stronger answers looked closely at ways in which Waugh presents the characters and their attitudes, identifying the satirical tone in the hyperbole in the opening paragraph, for example, with language such as 'hideous', 'obscene', 'horror' and 'plague.' Some precise answers noted that Metcalf's business-like language sets him apart from the other village residents socially, while

others noted the selfishness and hypocrisy exhibited by the apex of that society, Lady Peabury, belittled even by her name.

### 7 Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) There were some thoughtful responses to this question, which usually focused on Elesin and Olunde as examples of ultimately shirking the responsibilities of duty on the one hand, and accepting them on the other. There was less direct focus on how Soyinka dramatises this concern, but there was reference to the Praise Singer's role and the shock revelation of Olunde's unexpected death. Some were also able to refer in some detail to some of the discussions about duty between Olunde and Jane Pilkings, to show the contrasting English and Yoruban attitudes.
- (b) The passage was the more popular option and one which candidates tended to write well about. The character of Olunde is one in whom candidates are interested, with some thorough knowledge of his role in the play and the way in which he presents an interesting counterpoint to the white colonialists with his understanding of both British and Yoruban values. The character of Jane was not always as well understood, although stronger candidates were able to use their knowledge of the play as a whole to consider her not just in relation to Olunde but to her husband as well. There was some thoughtful attention to stage directions, with Jane's shock apparent in '*sits down open-mouthed*' and the visual image of British decadence in the dancing Prince. Some candidates picked up and commented on key moments in the language of the two characters, such as Jane's use of the words 'barbaric' and 'feudal', Olunde's separating 'you people' and his frank account of the realities of war, with 'murderous defeats' and 'Hordes of your wounded' compared with the English version of 'strategic victories'.

### 8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

### 9 Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) While there were some thin answers which described SB as an unsympathetic father from whom Gar wishes to escape, without close reference to the play, more thoughtful candidates considered ways in which Friel makes him present in the play even when not on stage. They looked at Gar's frequent references to him and showed how his dismissal of his father masks a longing for some parental emotion, centred on the memory of the blue boat. Some observant responses argued that Friel also suggests that SB longs for contact and emotion, suppressing his feelings, with the upside-down newspaper being a key clue. A number of responses also considered the comedy of his presentation, particularly when Gar is able to predict the lines of his conversation so accurately.
- (b) Candidates tend to understand the dramatic implications of Public and Private Gar very well, and this extract demonstrated this, with some thoughtful consideration of Private's singing and the significance of his dismissal of Boyle as 'a drunken aul schoolmaster'. There was less exploration than there might have been of the significance of Boyle and Madge in the passage in relation to the question, though the signs of suppressed emotion were recognised in the brief embrace and escape to the scullery, and Public and Private Gar constructing a reassuring image of his coming success in America through fantasy and song.

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### **1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems***

- (a)** Success in this question relied on the appropriate choice of poems, with candidates opting for examples which did not feature 'conversations between people' naturally struggling to organise a coherent response. More successful attempts referred to such poems as 'Home Burial', the most popular choice, 'The Death of the Hired Man' and 'The Ax-Helve'. Some of these answers relied on a narrative account of the poems and the conversations, while more confident responses paid attention to the question's focus on the 'effects' of the poems, and considered the subtextual pathos in 'Home Burial' and 'The Death of the Hired Man' and the ways in which the conversations manage conflict, while the nuances of the neighbourly relationship between the speaker of the poem and Baptiste were explored in 'The Ax-Helve'.
- (b)** There were a number of descriptive readings of this poem, typically seeing it as a work about meaningless drudgery which is dully resented by the speaker. Such essays missed the lightness of tone in the poem and the playfulness of some of the imagery. Candidates who were alert to Frost's imagery engaged well with the first stanza particularly, and tracked the progression of ideas through the poem to the conclusion that there is something of value in the mundane task after all. Such answers balanced the sense of childish delight in the 'balloons' and 'spoons' imagery with the sense of frustration and melancholy in the task's thanklessness, reflected in the repetition in the poem ('load and unload / Again and again', 'Next to nothing ... Next to nothing'). There was some good discussion of man's relationship with the natural world, about the nature of physical work and about the potential for the poem symbolising the process of creating poetry – here there was some very fine, perceptive and detailed writing.

**2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems***

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were few responses to this poem, and very few among these examined the significance of the Utrillo painting of the nun 'climbing up those steps', comparing the image with the difficulties faced by the patients on the way to full mental health – in many cases the reference to Utrillo was ignored and the nun taken to be a nurse in the hospital, despite the fact that she is said to be in 'Montmartre'. It was often the case that candidates seemed to be taking on a poem where they were not confident of their understanding. Some other answers were waylaid by Jennings' biography, rather than her poetry, but more confident responses considered the point of view in the poem, the extremity of the imagery, the idea of the shifting room and the view of the visitors. Some commented on the irony of it not being 'a time for lucid rhyming' despite the composition of the poem, noting the neat stanzas but also the half-rhymes in the attempt to control and organise the experience.

**3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2***

- (a) 'Verses Written on her Death-bed' was the most popular choice for this question, with some candidates contrasting it with a loving relationship gone sour in 'The Forsaken Wife' or a lamenting parental relationship in 'On My First Daughter' or 'Sons, Departing'. As is usually the case with these questions, candidates who relied on narrative, or even speculative accounts of the relationships, were not successful in answering the question, while confident responses paid close attention to 'ways in which' the relationships are presented, considering point of view, tone, language, imagery and structure.
- (b) Sidney's 'To Sleep' attracted more responses, which at their best demonstrated careful analysis of the personification of both Sleep and Despair, as well as some engagement with the release from cares that sleep offers, not to mention its role as an 'indifferent judge'. The question of tribute was often also well addressed, with most candidates also making sense of the important last line and the reference to Stella. Ideas and imagery in the poem were, therefore, often well addressed. Very strong responses also engaged with the structure of the sonnet and how it is used to develop the poem's ideas. Less confident essays were less able to follow the progression of ideas, sometimes taking the reference to 'civil wars' literally and showing bafflement as to whom Stella might be. This was also an example of a poem where a number of candidates discussed word choices and images out of context, abstracted from their place in the developing meaning of the poem, and therefore often made crucial errors of understanding.

**4 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake***

- (a) The prompt quotation proved a good starting point for many candidates and answers which referred to it tended to be more successful as it helped them shape a response to the question. Many responses focused solely on Gogol; essays which teased out the relationship between Gogol and Nikhil, and to what extent Gogol gains anything meaningful from his name change, structured a thoughtful response. A few considered the irony of his choosing the name which he refuses on his arrival at primary school, while others discussed the significance of Gogol as a name bestowed by his father. Others made useful references to Ashoke, Ashima, Sonia and Moushumi, while there was also relevant consideration of American and Indian attitudes to naming, with reference to the light-hearted discussion of names at Donald and Astrid's dinner party, as a contrast to the 'sacred' quality of Bengali names.
- (b) Many candidates who responded to this question demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the wider text as well as a sensitive understanding of the incident detailed in the passage. A number of candidates wrote effectively about the ways in which Lahiri shows Ashima and Maxine developing a bond, and the role Maxine plays in putting Gogol's parents at ease and winning them over. Some candidates saw some humour in Ashoke's hand gesture and evidence of his general anxiety and 'fear of disaster', an established character trait linked back to the train accident. There was also good discussion of the ways Lahiri presents the passage from Gogol's point of view, and therefore contrasts his unease and critical impatience with Maxine's ease and friendliness. Many commented on the elaborate dining arrangements and the excessive amount of food, which Gogol finds embarrassing, but which candidates saw as a desire to please, though some suggested relief in Ashima's boxing-up of the food and Ashoke's encouragement for the couple to drive away before dark. Again, those essays which merely described the scene and the characters' behaviour did not



do well; more successful answers depended on careful discussion of the effects of the ways in which Lahiri presents these aspects of the passage.

**5 Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth***

- (a) There were not many responses to this question and it was rare to see a balanced response that considered Lily and Selden equally within the relationship; most essays focused primarily on Lily. More successful essays picked up the cue quotation and looked at ways in which Wharton toys with the idea of love between Selden and Lily throughout the novel, from their first meeting at the railway station to the tragic ending. Such responses considered Selden's habitual detachment which holds him back and Lily's need for a wealthy husband; these recognised that Wharton sets the characters in the context of the restrictions put on them by their society. There were strong arguments about Selden and Lily being suited to love each other, but never being able to voice it, the cue quotation being the closest they get before the deathbed scene.
- (b) This extract elicited some strong responses from those who opted for it, with some careful observations of Wharton's indications of body language – Lily's sign to follow and Mrs Haffen's folded arms. There was also some well-aimed criticism of Lily, recognising that once away from the elite, her social graces no longer assure her of victory. There were also some suggestions of Wharton's own snobbery in the portrayal of Mrs Haffen, described as one 'of her kind', with ungrammatical speech and her 'dirty newspaper'. Narrative did not take candidates very far with this passage as the event within it is small, but the extract repaid careful and detailed examination of ways in which Wharton presents the two women and this moment of challenge. Strong answers were also able to bring in their wider knowledge of the novel, with references to Selden and Bertha Dorset and the role the letter plays later in the novel.

**6 *Stories of Ourselves***

- (a) The two 'Journey' stories were obvious choices for this question, but 'The Lemon Orchard' was also widely used, while some candidates interpreted the idea of a journey metaphorically and used 'Secrets' and 'Games at Twilight' with some success. Successful answers required a confident communication of what journey was being considered and a clear focus on that, so that discussions of Grace's story which only considered Maori land right were not successful as responses to the question. Confident responses looked at the journeys as ones which created change or realisations or had significant destinations, and all the stories listed above gave candidates ample opportunity for fruitful exploration.
- (b) There were some very thoughtful responses to this passage, which recognised how the letters are pivotal to an understanding of the whole story. They traced the ways the writer shows the gradual change in tone of the letters, the frequent expressions of love, tender observations and fond memories being replaced by a literal and metaphorical numbing of John's feelings, anger and the conviction that the writer 'will be a different person' after the war – Brother Benignus, of course, although unknown at that point. There was also some careful observation the indications of the young boy's growing fascination in the letters, the first one 'carefully' returned to its envelope, but later ones left while he 'opened another.' Some candidates examined the language of the letters and ways in which they graphically reveal the horrors of the First World War, while most recognised that the reading of the letters creates the rift between the boy and his Great Aunt Mary. Such essays considered how the very private nature of the letters, set against description of older Aunt Mary, explain why she is so absolutely enraged at the boy and so unforgiving. Some less confident responses did not recognise the significance of the letters to the story nor who the writer was and thus were unable to move much further than descriptive accounts of their content.

**7 Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman***

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) There were no responses to this question.

**8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV Part 2***

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Several candidates were able to identify comic characters and scenes, but fewer considered how Shakespeare uses comedy in the structure and effects of the play. Some were able to see parallels between the comic and court scenes and recognise that Shakespeare often uses the comedy to provide counterpoint to the main action; in this several candidates saw that Falstaff represents an alternative father figure for Prince Hal.
- (b) Most of the few responses to this question recognised the significance of this moment in the play and contrasted Falstaff's confidence at the opening of the extract with the new King's rejection of him. More successful essays looked carefully at the speech, noting the personal quality of Falstaff's prose, including the almost oxymoronic 'King Hal', and contrasting it with the formal stateliness of the King's verse. Some noted the King's relegation of Falstaff to a 'dream' and his own consciousness of 'the thing I was', as well as the frank way he describes Falstaff and the harshness of his banishment. Fewer answers looked at Falstaff's pretence of confidence before he is arrested and even fewer included discussion of Prince John's speeches at the end of the scene.

**9 Brian Friel: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!***

- (a) Candidates are well aware of the contrasts between reality and Gar's imagination and most were able to describe some of these quite accurately. Only evident in more successful answers, however, was appreciation of Friel's dramatic presentation of this contrast. More successful answers usually began with consideration of Friel's dramatic use of Private and Public Gar to offer different perspectives on the real and imaginary, and then moved on to write about Gar's frequent forays into fantasy role play and song. Others widened the net and wrote about Aunt Lizzy's exaggerated talk of successful materialism, which is shown eventually to be a mask covering emotional desolation, while some other subtle answers discussed the memory of the blue boat and the question the play leaves about its status as reality or fantasy.
- (b) Answers to this passage question were usually alert to Private's niggling questions which attempt to puncture Public's confidence in his trip to America, and Public's forthright responses. His whistling was usually recognised as a favoured avoidance tactic used throughout the play. The actions were also often noted, especially Public's forceful exit into the kitchen, with candidates noting a further attempted avoidance of the truths which Private is speaking. Many candidates ignored Madge's intervention at the end of the extract, but some sharp answers noted her comments about the loyalty of 'The Boys', with Private's approving line following, and some noted the significance of the reference to the alarm clock, signalling Gar's departure.