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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8695/02

Composition

General comments

Candidates continue to perform well on this component, writing imaginative and reasoned answers on the whole. Time management is usually well handled and there are few rubric infringements. Perhaps it would help some candidates if they checked the technical accuracy of their work more, especially in areas such as confusion of past and present tenses and agreement between singular/plural verbs. Candidates should also be reminded of the need for clear paragraphing and ensuring that they write the minimum number of words required (at least 600 words per essay). Examiners continue to note with pleasure how much rewarding material they come across on this paper and it is clear that Centres, in general, prepare their candidates through practice of a good range of both generic and discursive writing skills. Occasionally, some candidates offer derivative materials in their imaginative responses: for example, they 'borrow' names and storylines from films they have seen. This is a trend they should guard against.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was a popular choice and candidates produced some very effective responses covering gothic, horror, crime and romantic genres. Answers fared well where they were not simply plot-driven but instead focused on a particular, sometimes unexplained, moment and gradually built up atmosphere and mood through describing the details of the place or environment, without necessarily revealing the exact motivation or rationale of the protagonists.

Question 2

This was handled competently in the main but responses were sometimes hampered by the lack of an imaginative storyline. A sense of personal failure often relied on matters such as a broken heart or a series of examinations which were not completed successfully; whilst these were reasonable in conception, their execution was sometimes limited by a lack of emotional engagement on the narrator's part.

Question 3

There were some very pleasing and thoughtful responses here where the candidate had thought through the rubric demand for a complete storyline: sometimes the end of the narrative just faded into oblivion. Issues covered focused on areas such as eccentric characters not being welcomed by a strange community, to matters of prejudice and discrimination. Sometimes, this was an example of a question where answers at the lower end of the range relied on derivation: there were quite a number of responses which relied on the Western genre and tended to lack real originality or spin on the usual conventions.

Question 4

There were many proficient and measured answers here and generally candidates brought out the request for clear contrasts in mood and atmosphere with skill and insight. Answers which were less secure tended to lose focus on the descriptive nature of the task and relied on narrative at its expense. Occasionally very able candidates feel that this is an opportunity to reveal their extensive vocabulary at the expense of the contexts they have established and this can lead to some of the lexis being inappropriate for the situation, in a hyperbolic and less controlled approach to the question.

Section B**Question 5**

This was a popular choice and allowed candidates to show that they could direct their specialised knowledge to a different kind of audience. On the whole, this was done successfully, although some candidates tended to patronise older readers or rely on a hectoring approach which may have lost a few of them. There was a pleasing sense of structure and planning to most of the articles, supported by a good use of examples and possible scenarios.

Question 6

This was answered with a great deal of gusto and panache at the top end of the range. Responses drew on both philosophical material as well as relevant past and present examples. Some candidates referred heavily to current world issues and argued their case from generally informed and balanced perspectives. Answers which took a particular slant and argued from that viewpoint tended to stand out from those which tended to simply sit on the fence and offer no real commitment or personal engagement with the issue.

Question 7

This was a popular choice too and elicited some strong personal responses. In general, answers adopted the appropriate register but some tended to offer an exhaustive curriculum vitae rather than selecting the most relevant parts of it. Some answers only addressed the first part of the question and did not always offer creative ideas for the show itself, thereby creating an imbalance in the response.

Question 8

This question also produced a lot of strongly argued, proficient responses with a good sense of past and present contexts. Again, answers which tended to offer a personal viewpoint seemed to engage the reader more than those which took too much of a detached, objective view: this is not to say that candidates should not look at both sides of the issue (indeed it is imperative that they do) but that they can afford to take a stance.

Paper 8695/09

Poetry, Prose and Drama

General comments

This examination session demonstrated that Centres and candidates are becoming better prepared for the demands of the paper. Most candidates wrote with some confidence about the content of their set texts and increasing numbers were able to comment on the style in which their texts are written. At the upper end of the mark range, Examiners saw some highly accomplished, sensitive and sophisticated writing. Blake again proved very popular, while Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, replacing Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* on the syllabus, promises to be studied just as widely. There were, however, very few answers on the poetry of Stevie Smith and on Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money*.

This report has, on a number of occasions, commented on the techniques of approaching the passage-based questions and in general candidates now seem better equipped to answer these appropriately, looking closely at the extract printed on the page and commenting in detail about the writer's techniques which are exemplified there. However, some candidates stuck to a chronological account of the given passage, which resulted in narrative summary; candidates should be reminded to select from the extract and comment on the writer's use of language and its effects. Equally, candidates tend to be much more successful in the open essay questions if they can support their answer with detailed reference and quotation.

One of the interests of an international examination is the range of world perspectives on the set texts and again many candidates were able to argue their personal interpretations of texts, often based on a helpful knowledge of historical, geographical or political contexts.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) All candidates who attempted this question chose appropriate poems to illustrate their view. The approaches varied between those candidates who made shorter references to a wide range of poems and those who based their arguments on a close reading of two specific poems. Both approaches could produce high marks. The range of knowledge demonstrated by the more confident candidates who drew a number of different poems into their discussion was often impressive, while the care taken by other candidates over a detailed discussion of two poems, extracting nuances and subtleties, was equally successful. In the best answers, candidates were able to illustrate that while it might be tempting to equate *Innocence* with childhood and *Experience* with adulthood, the poems themselves are too subtle to be so easily compartmentalised. Such answers pointed out that while the adult world is undoubtedly more experienced than the child's world, innocence is not necessarily the preserve of children in the poems, and Blake often shows children's lives to be blighted by the world of experience. Simpler answers illustrated children in *Innocence* poems and a life of hardship and corruption in the *Experience* poems.
- (b) Many candidates seemed to relish the opportunity to compare two poems in this question, rather than write only on one. A number of less successful answers referred only to the two set poems, when the question of how far they characterise the worlds of *Innocence* and *Experience* needs some reference to other poems. Conversely, there were also a number of answers which discussed *Innocence* and *Experience* rather generally, without looking in detail at the two poems on the question paper. The most successful answers looked in detail at *Infant Joy* and *Infant Sorrow*, examining their language and structure, and put them into the appropriate contexts. Many candidates found it much easier to discuss *Infant Sorrow*, and missed opportunities to explore the language and patterning in *Infant Joy*, and overlooked the sense of dialogue in the poem. Some took a very literal reading, commenting on the difficulty a two day old child would find in speaking.

Question 2

Touched with Fire: ed. Hydes

- (a) This was the less popular of the two options, but often elicited interesting writing from candidates. Successful answers referred to such poems as 'Corpus Christi Carol', 'Church Going', 'Easter Morning' and 'In Westminster Abbey'. Candidates compared the approach of the narrators towards religion or religious observance and made interesting points of contrast between doubting or hesitant faith and more committed belief. Overall, candidates were less confident in comparing the styles of the poems, discussing language and structure less than content.
- (b) 'The Voice' proved a popular question, answers ranging from those which included biographical information about Thomas Hardy to those who dealt with the poem entirely on its own merits. Many candidates responded sensitively to the language and patterns within the poem and noted the change in structure in the last stanza. Some candidates showed an alertness to the contrast between the insubstantiality of memory and a voice, compared with the clarity of the remembered image in 'the original air-blue gown'. Rhyme, particularly in stanza three, was often commented upon effectively. Some weaker answers gave an account of the content of the poem, explaining the actions of the narrator, but missed the question's focus on the 'sense of loss.'

Question 3

Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a)(b) There were very few answers on Stevie Smith, though among those answers seen, it was notable that candidates seemed not to appreciate fully Smith's humour.

Question 4

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) *North and South* has become a widely-studied text and answers were quite evenly divided between the two options. The difference Gaskell portrays in Margaret's attitudes in the final chapters compared with those she expresses at the beginning of the novel are crucial to the effect of the text, and this was appreciated by many candidates answering this question. Some reference to the opening of the novel is therefore important for this question, though some less successful answers took a narrative approach, charting Margaret's progress chronologically through the entire novel. More confident answers made specific connections between the descriptions of Margaret and her behaviour in the final chapters and the early chapters, focusing in particular on her recognition of London society's triviality and careless ease after her experiences in the North.
- (b) Gaskell's writing can be rather dense and many candidates find it difficult to deal with passage-based questions on *North and South* effectively. Many answers to this question referred to the extract only generally as an indicator of Thornton's and Margaret's attitude towards workers and their relationship with their employers. More confident candidates dealt in some detail with Margaret's parallel of the Nuremberg child and Thornton's careful explanation of his views of independence, showing how a polite formality characterises the language of the discussion, while the views expressed are deeply felt.

Question 5

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) An impressive number of answers to this question were able to make specific reference to particular episodes in the novel which demonstrate Lessing's depiction of the Sports Club set. Some answers put the behaviour of the young people firmly within the colonial context, using, for example, the demands for the waiter to dance as an indicative section. Some of these answers were knowledgeable and firmly structured, with references and quotations selected deftly to inform the argument. Candidates also often noted Martha's ambivalent relationship with the Sports Club set. Less confident answers described the behaviour of the Sports Club set generally, without the selection of examples.
- (b) The passage was the favoured question among those candidates answering on *Martha Quest*. Less confident candidates worked through the extract summarising the narrative, but more successful answers were able to recognise the elements within the passage which are formative in the creation of Martha's character. Her distance and avowed dislike of the older women was usually noted, as was her reliance on her reading to provide her with a framework for her thought. Candidates usually commented on the role of the Cohen brothers in providing her with books and linked this relationship with other racial concerns within the novel. The most successful answers to this question concentrated on Lessing's narrative style, noting the indulgent humour the narrative voice displays towards Martha, her concerns and her insecurities.

Question 6

Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) Ngugi's novel was, by some margin, the most popular prose text on the paper and answers were quite evenly divided between the two options. Some candidates limited their answers to this question to a consideration of Mugo's betrayal of Kihika and his confession at the Uhuru celebration. While this event certainly contributes to the 'sense of inevitable doom', such answers missed a great deal because of the narrowness of focus. On the other hand, some candidates were unable fully to separate their learning about the history of Kenya's independence from Ngugi's fictional account of it in the novel. Fuller and more successful answers considered Ngugi's presentation of the historical context, including both the black and white perspectives of Kenya's independence and the corruption which Ngugi shows is already apparent in the new black government.

- (b) There was some strong and committed writing in response to this question, which was often informed by a historical knowledge as well as a recognition of the features of the selected text. The most successful answers were very observant of details within the passage, such as Thompson's position and actions within the room, his techniques for dealing with Mugo, the use of whipping and the eleven deaths. There were opportunities for comments on language, which indicates Thompson's dismissive attitude towards black people, and for comments on variations of style, which include Thompson's internal thoughts, the sharp interchange of dialogue in the interrogation and the detached journalistic information about the final beatings. Less confident candidates dealt with the narrative of the passage without comments on style; crucially, the words 'how effectively' in the question were sometimes ignored.

Question 7

Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

- (a)(b) There were very few answers on *Serious Money*, but those candidates who answered on the play showed an awareness of the political background and some appreciation of Churchill's handling of financial language and overlapping dialogue

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) While the passage attracted more answers, there were some good answers to this question. Confident candidates with a good knowledge of the text were able to make detailed references and quotations to illustrate the prevalence of language and imagery of light and darkness within the play. Candidates also commented on the number of scenes which take place at night (though some noted the limitations of the Elizabethan theatre in this respect). Even those candidates who were not able to make frequent and detailed references to the text recognised the importance of light and dark in the play and commented on the metaphor for moral darkness which pervades the play.
- (b) While some candidates paraphrased the dialogue of the extract with limited attention to the context, there were many detailed and thoughtful answers to this question. The best answers responded to the question's focus on the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, noting Macbeth's resolution in this scene and his desire to keep Lady Macbeth in ignorance of his plan for Banquo and Fleance. Candidates noted that the relationship has changed when compared with the murder of Duncan and saw in this a growing separation between the two which ends in Lady Macbeth's suicide. Candidates also noted a desperate edge to Macbeth's decisiveness and linked Lady Macbeth's advice to Macbeth with their relationship in the banquet scene.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) As usual, many candidates responded to this play with sensitivity. While there was certainly some general discussion of dreams and illusions in the play which lacked detail, many answers were able to show the illusions fostered by each of the characters within the play, how these dreams sustain the characters, but also how Williams demonstrates the dangers of ignoring reality. Most answers were restricted to a consideration of character, but some sophisticated and successful responses noted the question's injunction to discuss 'how the play presents' these ideas, and explored Williams' use of stage devices, such as setting, music and lighting as well as dialogue.
- (b) The extract for this question was quite a long one, as much of it was taken up with stage directions. Examiners were looking for candidates to consider these as much as the dialogue of the scene, and successful answers were those which did so. Less successful answers focused largely on Jim's dialogue and kissing of Laura before his explanation. More confident and successful answers showed how Williams constantly underpins these elements with the stage directions, indicating Laura's changes of mood, as she is largely silent, her clutching of the broken unicorn, Amanda's off-stage laughter to remind the audience of her hopes and the detailed instructions for the actor playing Jim. Such answers were much more aware of the pathos of the scene, and put it into the context of the family's aspirations for this meeting between Laura and Jim.