

LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/01
Prose and Poetry

KEY MESSAGES:

- Detailed knowledge of the *whole* text is essential.
- Responses must answer the specific question set.
- Focus should be on the whole extract in passage-based questions.
- For higher marks, there needs to be effective analysis of language.
- Detailed support from the text, either by quotations or by well-chosen references, is essential in all questions.
- Candidates need to present a developed and well-structured argument.

General Comments:

This year there were significant changes to the examination paper. Firstly, the drama question was separated off, leaving the poetry and prose questions to be answered on this paper. Secondly, all poetry questions had the poems printed on the paper. Thirdly, the empathic questions are no longer on the syllabus so there was only a choice of an extract question or an essay question for the prose texts.

A number of candidates infringed the rubric by answering one question on every text, invariably the extract question, writing just one paragraph (or sentence) for each. These answers were so brief that very few or zero, marks could be awarded. Candidates should answer on ONE text from each section.

Candidates seemed to readily engage with the two poems and personal response was particularly strong for these. It should be noted that personal response needs to be 'informed', meaning that it must be supported by evidence from the text. Some assertions, while clearly strongly felt, were not backed up by textual reference and tended to lose focus on the question and poem.

Focus on language was weaker. For high marks, answers need to look at specific words and phrases -this means picking out relevant and pertinent short quotations rather than long ones which often spread over several lines. The mark scheme differentiates between 'reference to the text', which would be covered by the longer quotations, and 'reference / response to the language of the text / the way the writer achieves effects', which requires more precise identification of words. Answers can only achieve marks in the middle and higher bands by the latter i.e. response to language rather than the more general reference to the text.

High marks are achieved by presenting a detailed and developed response which answers the question. Perhaps the most common weakness was brevity. Many candidates made two or three relevant points with a little supporting reference; this was a promising start but responses needed to cover more of the text and points needed to be developed for more marks to be awarded.

Comments on specific questions:

POETRY:

Billy Collins: from Sailing Alone Around the Room

Question 1

Almost all candidates found several points which answered the question and answers were well-supported from the text. Many picked out how we read '*ourselves away from ourselves*' like '*a man in two worlds*' as something they had experienced; this escape from reality when we can use our imagination to become someone else for a while was clearly a precious and familiar feeling. Most also picked out '*the voice of my*

mother reading to me as another treasured memory linked to a feeling of comfort, though they were less secure on how the *'horrors of a stable ablaze'* fitted into this. There were also some sensitive and perceptive comments on *'the library humming'* and the *'choir of authors'* with their *'chord of language'*, which highlighted the idea that books can speak to us as well as being read. Stronger answers picked up that this sense of hearing was unexpectedly referred to throughout the poem and understood the idea that we should listen to the voices inside books. Many commented on the references to Romeo and Juliet and to Hansel and Gretel but fewer were able to use these to any effect, though discussion of the *'trail of crumbs'* across *'a page of fresh snow'* brought some interesting analysis. The best responses commented on the use of the word *'saturates'* to describe the suicide of the lovers. Almost all candidates professed a love for books which had been reawakened by Collins's poem; clearly the poem had made some of them reassess their attitudes.

Question 2

There were too few responses to this question to make general comment appropriate.

Songs of Ourselves:

Question 3

Better answers were able to articulate the idea that life carries on despite all the horrors and difficulties and that we are / should be optimistic despite our experiences. Few commented on the references to God or the archaic language or, more surprisingly, on the repetition of *'Away, melancholy'*.

Question 4

Harrison's poem *'from Long Distance'* produced some good responses. All candidates were able to engage with the feeling of loss and the sadness that this would cause; personal response was particularly strong and, mainly, rooted in the poem. There was a firm focus on the question which resulted in some good answers. The main focus was on the father and his denial of his wife's death; weaker answers tended just to describe or list the things he did which suggested this, while stronger ones looked at language, for example analysis of the significance of words such as *'raw'*, *'crime'* and *'knew'*. Others made some very perceptive comments about the *'hot water bottles her side of the bed'* which provided him with the warmth which was now missing. There was some confusion about the father and son; some thought that the narrator was still a child and became diverted into a discussion of how traumatic it must be for a young person to lose his mother and have no help from the father. Of those who realised that the narrator must be an adult (mainly because of the phone book) few picked up on the word *'both'* to suggest that by the last stanza both parents have died. Many candidates were able to contrast the attitude of the son and father towards death earlier in the stanza – the father's denial against the son's *'life ends with death'*, but the subtlety at the end of the poem was missed by all but a few. Some were able to articulate the irony that the son calls the disconnected number despite his earlier strong statement and relate this to the question, and the strongest answers commented on the use of the words *'disconnected'* and *'still'*. It is this precise focus on language which is needed for higher bands.

PROSE:

To Kill a Mockingbird:

Question 5

This passage was enthusiastically answered. The question asked candidates to explore how tension and drama were created; there was a good focus on the question and an understanding of how the passage builds up to a climax. The passage provides an abundance of material and all but the weakest responses chose wisely and were able to develop their answers. Most identified the *'slow'* start though some had problems articulating this, saying there was lots of *'unnecessary detail'*, which did not quite explain the writing convincingly. However, stronger responses talked about *'the stillness before a thunderstorm'* as foreboding something unpleasant. Many discussed the fact that much of the detail is given through the things Scout can hear rather than see and why this adds to the tension. Weaker answers tended to lapse into narrative at this point, describing how the children thought it was Cecil following them and then realised that it was not. Although this could have been made relevant to the question, weaker answers did not take the further step of looking at the writing and language instead of just *'what happened next'*. An example of a better response would be to look at the echo effect which the children heard instead of Cecil's reply and Scout's description of their hopes as *'the Cecil myth'*.

Strong answers considered the children's conversation and how they were trying to reassure each other and hide their fears. Many commented on Jem's *'unhurried, flat toneless voice'* as a sure sign that he was in fact anything but calm. Scout's description of what she can hear of their pursuer and her assumptions about what he was wearing were a popular focus. The sudden change of pace as the man changed from *'softly and steadily'* to *'running, running'* is a good example of how to comment on language rather than just events. Many quoted Jem's screamed *'Run! Run!'* as the start of the climax and there was real engagement with their frightening struggle with Bob Ewell. Again, sounds rather than sights were seen as very important in conveying drama, particularly the *'dull, crunching sound'* accompanied by Jem's scream. Many chose to comment on how the attacker *'squeezed the breath'* out of Scout and seemed genuinely concerned that she was on the verge of death. This part of the novel had plainly had a deep effect on the candidates who showed their real engagement with the text.

Some less successful answers went beyond the extract to talk about Boo Radley and what happened next in too much detail; others confused Boo with Bob Ewell and showed a lack of knowledge of the text. The main weakness was a failure to consider the whole passage. Candidates sometimes only considered either the opening section with the build-up to the attack or the latter part after Bob Ewell catches up with them. Good answers 'paced' themselves and ensured that their response ranged across the extract. No answer ever needs to be completely exhaustive but there should be a consideration of the whole passage for higher marks.

Question 6

Some weaker answers started out by appearing to focus on the question but then moved on to discuss the **Question 5** extract, with some confusion both about which question was being answered and about Boo's part in the 'fight'. Those who did respond correctly were generally able to list the salient parts of the novel where Boo and the children interacted but often this was just superficial narrative without attempting to explore how these interactions were 'moving'. Some answers concentrated on the end of the novel, arguably the most moving part, where Scout takes Boo to see Jem and then home; these tended to make sweeping and incorrect generalisations that they would now be very good friends and really loved each other, forgetting the crucial line *'I never saw him again'*. There was little realisation of Jem and Scout's growing maturity and understanding, which encompassed their attitude to Boo. Some did attempt to analyse Boo's life and how he watched the children through the window and thus became a part of their lives. A few suggested that he was living his childhood through them as his own life had been effectively brought to a halt. Everyone was able to talk about Boo saving their lives and many also included the 'sewn pants' episode and the gifts in the tree. Some good answers were able to remember the blanket placed over Scout at the time of the fire. All of these examples were relevant but weaker responses did not often relate them explicitly to the question and they were not supported by any response to language. In order to reach the higher bands, answers needed to quote suitable words and phrases from the text to support their answers in the essay questions.

The Member of the Wedding

Questions 7 and 8

There were too few responses to this question to make general comment appropriate

Stories of Ourselves

Question 9

Responses tended to be superficial and brief with a few relevant comments, mainly about the son. There was little detail from the passage or on language and, as such, marks were in the lower bands.

Question 10

There were too few responses to this question to make general comment appropriate.

The Joy Luck Club

Question 11

Answers tended to focus on Rose and her guilt at seeing Bing walking towards danger but not acting quickly enough. Responses which went beyond this mentioned the other members of the family but tended to narrate what each of them had been doing at the time of his drowning without developing this into how their guilt might affect them. Good answers went on to look at their immediate reactions – hopelessly calling for him, calculating sea temperature or reading comic books. Weak answers neglected to look at the language used, for example the repetition of ‘Why..?’ by Luke and the fact that they were ‘*whispering their regrets*’. These could have lifted the response considerably. Most candidates did not mention or comment on the important point that Rose’s mother is determined to go into the sea and find Bing despite not being able to swim. The description of her with her ‘*nengkan intact*’ and ‘*calm and regal as a mermaid queen*’, despite having just lost her son, could have formed the basis for a very good answer.

Question 12

There were too few responses to this question to make general comment appropriate.

The Color Purple

Question 13

There were some weak responses which were rather superficial, brief and undeveloped. All candidates made some comment on how Celie must be feeling to see the child who she is sure is her own daughter. Comment on her very moving thoughts such as ‘*Like everything I seen, she seen, and she pondering it*’, which emphasises Celie’s feeling of the strongest link between them, would have strengthened the responses. Some did also mention Celie’s obvious indifference to her husband when she thinks to herself that ‘*most times mens look pretty much alike to me.*’ However, few went beyond the idea of Celie missing her daughter and being pleased to recognise her. There was some good personal response to how she must be feeling to see the child who was taken away from her but this could not be a substitute for close focus on the passage and on language.

Question 14

There were too few responses to this question to make general comment appropriate.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/02

Drama

Key Messages

Good answers respond to features of the genre such as: stage directions, action on stage, dialogue and audience reaction.

Answers to the passage-based questions need to address the whole question, consider the whole passage, support their views with quotations from the passage and make a response to the writing and to the staging.

Answers to discursive-based questions need to address the whole question, develop arguments and support the answer by quotations or well-selected references to the text.

General Comments

The most popular text was *A Raisin in the Sun*, with fewer answers on *Macbeth* and *Our Town*. Many answers at all levels showed evidence of a genuine interest in and engagement with the text. This often showed in a response to a character's situation; for example, Ruth's pregnancy in the passage question to *A Raisin in the Sun*; or to a particularly evocative image; for example, Macbeth saying his mind is 'full of scorpions', which implies danger and death. Such personal response scored highly when it was supported by evidence from the text. Weaker answers tended to make assertions without this support.

There were many very good responses to the passage-based questions. Learners answering on *A Raisin in the Sun* usually demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the whole text, and were able to place the passage into its context within the play. Answers which went beyond surface meaning to explore the writer's intentions and the audience's responses achieved higher marks. Answers which gained the highest marks were able to analyse in detail how language is used to achieve particular effects, particularly in the choice of specific words and phrases, or in the interplay of dialogue between characters. Whole-text knowledge of *Macbeth* and *Our Town* was less secure, with some unsure at what point in the play the passages occurred. This affected the quality of their answers: for example, in answering the question on the *Macbeth* passage, some learners thought that Banquo was already dead, which affected their judgement of what Macbeth's state of mind was in the passage as he prepares to kill Banquo.

Answers to the discursive-based questions often contained detailed and developed argument, supported by evidence gathered from throughout the play. Weaker answers made just one or two relevant points with only a little reference to the text, and completed their answers briefly in one or two paragraphs. A sound overview of the text is needed in order to select the most suitable textual material to answer the particular question asked. This material then needs to be analysed in detail to explore the writer's intentions and the audience's responses. Some answers made assertions which were not backed up by textual reference, and which sometimes were not very convincing or not related to the question.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

Most answers were able to comment that Ruth was upset, and to find suitable textual support for this. Stronger answers went through the passage in detail, analysing Ruth's feelings as they are suggested by stage directions and her responses to the other characters. Thus, Ruth enters the apartment '*forlornly*', indicating how sad she feels, and her first speech is sarcastic when she refers to the others' '*happy faces*'. Strong answers identified Ruth's weary and dull reactions in the early part of the extract and developed their responses to show how this part of the passage conveys Ruth's sad feelings about her pregnancy and thoughts of having an abortion. Some were able to evaluate the whole passage so that they could show that, increasingly as the passage goes on, Ruth is unable to contain her emotions, until she collapses at the end. Some answers usefully considered the other characters' responses to Ruth: Beneatha hides her own worries, Mama tries massaging Ruth's shoulders to relax her and Travis strains to see what is wrong with her. Stronger answers considered Hansberry's writing and how she dramatically conveys Ruth's feelings: this was most strongly seen in the detailed stage directions, but some also commented that Hansberry used the contrast of Mama's enthusiasm to emphasise Ruth's despair. Most thought that Travis's violent game in the street of killing the rat was too much for Ruth to cope with. Not all answers got to the end of the passage, thus missing out on the climax of Ruth sobbing. Some learners vaguely said that Ruth was emotional in the passage; this needed to be more precise, since she could have been happy or sad.

Question 2

Most learners selected two suitable 'moments' in the play. Popular were: Walter and Ruth and the scrambled eggs, as they argue over money; Beneatha and Mama over the existence of God; Mama and Walter over her lack of trust of him and Walter and Lindner over buying back the house. Whichever moments were selected, to address the question the moments needed to create tensions between characters, and to be long enough for answers to explore how Hansberry powerfully presents the conflict. Less good answers identified arguments between characters and paraphrased what each said. This showed a basic understanding of surface meaning. Better answers developed their responses and used textual detail to show understanding of the characters and context of each conflict. For example, when Ruth and Walter argue, each is reacting to the poverty they live in. Walter dreams about using the cheque to start a business, thus giving himself status as the rich provider of the family, whereas Ruth lives firmly in the moment, accounting for every cent she has to spend, running the family, holding down a job and worrying over her unplanned pregnancy. The strongest answers made a clear response to Hansberry's writing. For example, in the argument between Beneatha and Mama over the existence of God, Hansberry heightens the drama of the moment by having Mama slap Beneatha. Hansberry then uses the following silence to convey Beneatha's shock and realisation that she has gone too far; and as the audience sees Mama on stage standing '*[tall]*' in front of Beneatha, they understand that she is submitting to her mother's authority.

Question 3

This passage-based question was more popular than Question 4. Some learners were able to place the passage in its context, just before Macbeth has Banquo killed, and thus were better able to consider Macbeth's state of mind as he plots the murder. Stronger answers commented on Macbeth's envy of the dead Duncan, who can now sleep in peace, while he himself has dreadful nightmares, as he shows in the opening speech to the passage. Macbeth reveals his fear of Banquo and Fleance, and hints he intends to attack them, but does not tell his wife his plans. Only a few answers held this overview of the passage, which would have helped to show a deeper understanding. Some successfully selected some words and phrases from the passage for comment. Popular were: '*We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it*' and '*O, full of scorpions is my mind*'. Stronger answers not only explained these images, but were able to say what the effect is of using the animal imagery, and then they developed their comments to consider what its use tells us about Macbeth's state of mind. For example, some learners wrote that '*full of scorpions*' suggests that Macbeth is considering plans to murder Banquo and Fleance, each plan ending in the evil sting of murder, like the venom in the scorpion's tail. Few commented on Lady Macbeth's role here of trying to cheer up her husband; nor did many seem to get as far as the ending to the passage, where Macbeth dramatically calls on night to blindfold day so that evil cannot be seen. Some candidates quoted lines out of their context and tried to make sense out of them. For example, the line '*Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison*' is incomplete on its own, without its ending two lines on: '*Can touch him further*'.

Question 4

Answers to this question tended to show good knowledge of Lady Macbeth's role in the play. Some simply retold this as narrative, without much reference to the question; this limited the marks available to the lower mark bands. More thoughtful answers traced Lady Macbeth's initial enthusiasm for murder as she supports her husband, but then considered how her guilt at her actions increases until she commits suicide, by which time they felt pity for her. The strongest answers considered to what extent Shakespeare made them pity Lady Macbeth by analysing how she is portrayed. These answers drew much textual material from towards the ending of the play, where Lady Macbeth is portrayed as so disturbed by her guilt that she walks in her sleep, trying to wash the blood off her hands. All successful answers used carefully selected quotations and textual references to support the arguments made.

Question 5

Many answers accurately commented that its significance is that it is Emily, the central character of the play, whose funeral it is: the best answers developed this to show that Wilder makes her appearance on stage very moving through his stage directions, describing her dressed in white with long hair *'like a little girl'*, which movingly emphasises to the audience that she has died young. There is much detail in the passage which learners might have found 'moving': the comments of the dead about those living, and about life; Emily's initial wonderment and the image of George on the farm without Emily. Some who used detail from the passage tended to tell what was happening, rather than use the textual material to support an answer to the question. These answers showed a basic understanding of surface meaning. Stronger answers quoted the last line of the passage: *'Live people don't understand'*, and considered how Wilder used Emily's realisation here to convey his purpose in presenting death as merely part of the big picture.

Question 6

Learners tended to relate what they knew about each character, using some textual details: such answers showed a basic understanding of surface meaning. To move higher up the mark bands, answers needed to develop comments on the characters to show an understanding of how Wilder portrays them and their role within the play. For example, Wilder first introduces Mr Webb as the editor of the town newspaper. One way in which this is memorable is that he gives the audience a *'political and social report'* on Grover's Corners, which makes him an authoritative figure.

LITERATURE (ENGLISH) (US)

Paper 0427/03
Coursework

Key messages

Successful essays discuss characters in plays and prose texts as literary constructs rather than real-life people.

Critical essay tasks should be framed in such a way that they require candidates to explore the ways in which writers achieve their effects. This will help to target the higher bands of the assessment criteria.

Guidance on task-setting can be found in the *Coursework Training Handbook for IGCSE Literature (English)*. This document provides examples of suitable and unsuitable tasks.

Teacher annotation of candidate work is an important part of the moderation process. It is through the focused ticking, marginal comments and summative comments by teachers that a Centre has the opportunity to offer a rationale for the marks awarded to coursework assignments.

General comments

Texts and Tasks

There was much evidence in candidate work of a sustained critical engagement with the texts that had been studied. Popular texts this session included *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Julius Caesar*, *A View from the Bridge*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *I'm the King of the Castle*. Those Centres which offered coursework tasks on poetry or short stories were in general careful to ensure that at least two poems or two stories had been written about in candidates' assignments. A number of candidates submitted comparisons of poems or stories. It should be remembered that comparison is not a requirement of this syllabus nor do the assessment criteria reward it. Indeed there was some evidence to suggest that less confident candidates struggled with this particular aspect of the assignments they worked on. There were fewer instances of candidates providing extraneous biographical or historical background material. Most candidates recognised the need to engage with the key terms of the tasks from the start of their essays.

In general, tasks had been set that allowed candidates to fulfil the assessment criteria. Occasionally tasks were set that did not invite an explicit consideration of the ways in which writers achieve their effects. A task such as 'Is Birling guiltier than the other characters?' is an example of such a task, where Birling is regarded almost as a real-life person rather than a character in a play intended for performance on the stage. The most successful assignments on drama texts showed an appreciation of the text as a 'play' rather than a 'book'.

For critical assignments, it is important that candidates include the task in full - not an abbreviation or approximation of it - so that other readers, including the external Moderator, can judge how successfully the task has been addressed as they read the assignment.

For empathic assignments, the candidate should state clearly both the character and the particular moment in the text. Empathic tasks enable candidates to engage creatively with key aspects such as theme, characterisation and use of language. Successful responses are rooted in the recognisable world of the text. The most successful empathic responses share these features:

- the character is central to the text
- the text is a significant one such as a novel or play
- the voice is a clearly recognisable one for both the character and chosen moment.

Less successful empathic responses tended to focus on characters in short stories (where there is less material on which to draw) or minor characters lacking a distinctive voice.

It is good practice for all IGCSE Literature teachers within a centre to check the validity of their coursework tasks towards the beginning of the course. There is no requirement to submit potential tasks to Cambridge for approval. All that is necessary is for teachers to follow the guidance on task-setting in the *Coursework Training Handbook* and judge their own tasks against the examples (suitable and unsuitable) given.

Internal Moderation and Annotation

For the majority of centres there was clear evidence of internal standardisation having taken place. In these centres, the assignments themselves and the candidate record forms bore evidence of debate among teachers about the appropriateness of particular marks. It was particularly helpful to see comments explaining why marks had been moderated either up or down. Most Centres took great care over the annotation of candidate work as they recognised the importance of its role in justifying the award of particular marks. As stated in previous reports, meaningful annotation makes the process of moderation accountable and transparent. Any Centre that submits clean copies of candidates' work, devoid of teacher annotation, has effectively misunderstood the purpose of moderation.

All Centres are encouraged to adopt the good practice present in many Centres by:

- making use of focused ticking to credit specific valid and thoughtful points made by the candidate
- adding brief comments in the margin about strengths and weaknesses of the response
- adding a summative comment either at the end of each assignment or on the individual record card.

Comments should, of course, relate to the relevant band descriptors.

Administration

It is important that the two pieces of work are attached securely (e.g. by means of a treasury tag) to the individual record card. These should not be submitted in plastic folders.