

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J360**

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

J360/R/11

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

General Comments

This early entry was very encouraging as the quality of the responses adequately met the assessment criteria and the consistency of marking indicated that centres had been able to make the transition from the Legacy specification with few difficulties. Teachers are to be complimented for their hard work in delivering this component, and their conscientious approach and consistency of standards bodes well for the future.

General Admin

This was excellent overall. Generally there was clear evidence that internal moderation had taken place. Folders were submitted on time and were all well presented with detailed annotated comments making the moderation process much easier. In many cases the annotated comments helpfully referred to the assessment criteria.

However, Centres are urged in the future to make sure that a folder cover sheet is clearly filled in for each candidate selected in the sample, and that the overall mark on the folder is the same as the one submitted on the final mark sheets.

Some submissions were over bulky and the individual assignments were not fastened securely, which meant that the whole centre's work had to be collated before the moderation process could begin. Centres are also urged not to put individual assignments in plastic wallets – this again is time consuming as they all have to be removed before the moderation process can begin. One staple or treasury tag in the top corner of the completed folio is the most advisable form of collation.

Response to Shakespeare

Most centres responded to the tasks on *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but there were also responses to *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*. There was clear evidence that the use of film had enhanced interpretation of the plays, and centres had clearly used film to stimulate a general interest in the text.

Most candidates showed clear and critical engagement with the chosen play and were able to refer to the text to support their observations. Centres had also clearly encouraged their students to look at the set scene in the context of the whole play and this enhanced the final response as a result.

Response to poetry

The majority of centres responded to the poems by Wilfred Owen, but there were some responses to the Browning poems and also to Chaucer.

Responses were generally of a very high standard and centres had applied the assessment criteria consistently. Some centres had penalised candidates for not recognising points of connection, but generally there was clear evidence of adequate comparison of the selected poems.

Centres are reminded that the poetry task is more heavily weighted (at 15%) of the two – this was not always reflected in the final mark given. The final mark should reflect this weighting of the poetry response; thus, if (for example) if the Shakespeare has been awarded a high Band 3 mark and the poetry a low Band 3 mark, the final mark should be a low Band 3. In essence it will mean that the response to the poetry will determine the final Band that is awarded.

A662 Modern Drama

General Comments

Centres had clearly made careful, and largely justified tiering decisions, although a small minority of Higher Tier candidates may well have benefitted from answering the more structured Foundation Tier questions and a similar number of Foundation Tier candidates could conceivably have scored marks in excess of the permitted maximum for the lower tier. The overall quality of the work produced was often extremely impressive, allowing for the fact that many of the candidates were, presumably, in the final term of Year 10. Generally, examiners' reports suggested that the great majority of candidates, regardless of tier of entry, had studied their texts closely and engaged effectively with the process, though some also commented on the tendency evident in a minority of centres for candidates to provide lengthy background details as an introduction to an answer at the expense of meaningful engagement with the dramatic context.

There was plenty of evidence of thorough and imaginative teaching in the way that candidates were able to support sound textual knowledge with judiciously selected references and focus clearly on the demands of the question. Many candidates were able to see themselves as not merely readers of a text, but as members of an audience and engage with the ways in which an audience's reactions are influenced by sound, movement, gesture and tone as well as the crucial effects of dialogue, characterisation and plot development. A number of examiners observed an increasing propensity in some centres to adopt an approach to passage-based questions that leaned heavily upon logging linguistic features, and even features of punctuation, which tended to lead candidates away from the dramatic core of the extract. It was pleasing to see that the responses of many candidates had been effectively enhanced by the experience of seeing a stage or film version of their chosen text, though it should be noted that some film versions are not entirely faithful to the original text.

There were some examples of candidates answering more than one question, though such rubric infringements were comparatively rare. There were, however, a small, but significant number of often able candidates who ran out of time and failed to complete their answers, suggesting that the planning and organisation of a 45 minute answer may be an issue for some centres. Foundation Tier candidates, generally, seemed to use the bullet pointed guidance productively to structure their responses, though there were answers at both tiers that chose to focus on the social and historical context and largely ignored the question. Whilst examiners are instructed to credit sound knowledge of the social/historical context, it should be noted that AO4 is not assessed in this Unit and that too heavy a reliance on such contextual features at the expense of the question is likely to be self-penalising.

The great majority of candidates seemed to have been successfully prepared for the demanding task of producing a well-structured response in only 45 minutes and many examiners were struck by the impressive knowledge of the texts demonstrated by candidates at both tiers. It should be noted, however, that the single most significant reason for underachievement tends to be the inability to move beyond an analysis of words on a page and see these plays as scripts for performance. It seemed that even some able students had difficulty in seeing themselves as anything other than "readers" and, indeed, some made the telling slip of referring to their chosen play as a "novel", occasionally even attributing authorship to Steinbeck or Lee, which suggests a lack of awareness that plays and novels require a different approach. An answer that begins by citing, for example, Miller's use of stage directions as a key to an extract's dramatic impact and proceeds to subject them to a thorough linguistic analysis without considering the visual impact of what is actually happening on stage, the subtleties of the dialogue, the development of plot and relationships between the characters, is unlikely to enable the candidate to maximise his/her potential. At its worst this approach has led to the misapprehension that a Higher Tier question

that refers to “the ways” or “how” a writer is working applies specifically to technical features of the writing, leading to protracted discussion of the use of dashes, question marks, exclamation marks, semantic fields and even the effects of sibilance and onomatopoeia in stage directions which, of course, will never be heard by an audience. The answer that quickly establishes the dramatic context of an extract and moves on to consider what has led to this moment, what happens as a result of it, who is onstage, what do they know, what does the audience know about them and their situation and then clearly explores the dramatic build up of the extract and its wider implications within the play will be welcomed and appropriately rewarded.

It is pleasing to report that all six of the prescribed texts were covered in this examination session. “An Inspector Calls”, “Educating Rita” and “Journey’s End” remain the most popular texts, though it was pleasing to see a growing number of takers for “A View from the Bridge”, a text which elicited some excellent responses that were described by one examiner as “astonishingly mature”. “The History Boys” and “Hobson’s Choice” were studied by a smaller number of centres, but produced some very interesting and well-informed responses. It may be useful to offer some general guidelines about the strengths and weaknesses that have typified responses in this session to enable centres to consider these in their planning and teaching of this Unit for future assessment opportunities:

Successful candidates:

- see the texts as **plays in performance** and themselves as **members of an audience**
- see the stage directions as **part of the dramatic action** of the scene and visualise the onstage action
- pay explicit attention to the **wording of the question** and balance attention on **each strand of the question**
- construct succinct and **purposeful opening paragraphs**, focusing specifically on the given question
- select and **integrate brief quotations** to explore the dialogue and to support and amplify their ideas
- **avoid pre-conceived model answers and formulaic approaches** and trust their own direct personal response.

Less successful candidates:

- see the **texts as pieces of writing only** and themselves as readers
- see the **stage directions merely as pieces of bolted-on written communication** and ignore their significance to the onstage action
- start with a **pre-conceived introductory paragraph**, which is **unhelpfully generalised, biographical, focused on social/historical background or list-like** and says nothing specific about the play or question
- **lose the focus of the question** and use pre-prepared material which has little direct relevance to the question
- **misread the question** and write about the wrong character or moment
- **become detached from the dramatic action** and resort to listing features.

Extract-based questions

Successful candidates:

- devote at least two thirds of their answers to **discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself**, but still convey understanding of the whole play context
- begin their response by **locating the extract in the context of the whole play**
- succinctly **establish the dramatic context for the characters and audience** in the opening paragraph
- ground their **reflections on the whole play** firmly in the **detail of the extract**
- pay close attention to the **build-up of dramatic detail** throughout the extract.

Less successful candidates:

- produce **generalised answers with attention to the given extract**, or approach the extract as if it is an “unseen” exercise and **give little sense of the rest of the play**
- produce a **sweeping opening paragraph** and largely ignore the question
- **rarely offer quoted material** from the extract or, conversely, **copy out large chunks** without any attempt at commentary
- **miss the reference to the given moment** in the question and, as a result, **answer on the play as a whole** with little or little or no reference to the printed extract.

Discursive Questions

Successful candidates:

- **focus rigorously on** (and sometimes challenge) the terms of the question, **maintaining relevance throughout** their response
- **select judiciously** across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments
- **balance their answers** thoughtfully when answering double-stranded questions
- show a **sharp awareness of audience response**
- quote **shrewdly and economically**
- arrive at a **relevant and well-reasoned conclusion**.

Less successful candidates:

- become bogged down in one moment in the play so that the **range of reference becomes too narrow**
- **rely, mistakenly, on the printed extract for the previous question** for their ideas and quotations
- spend too much of their time on **one strand of a two-stranded question**
- completely **lose focus on the question** and write pre-prepared material with limited relevance.

Comments on Individual Questions

The History Boys

Many answers to the extract question (1a) found plenty of scope for an engaged response, clearly relished the text and got to grips with the complexities of Bennett’s dialogue and subtext. With only one strand to the question, most responses were able to focus productively on the “moving” aspects of Hector’s situation, the relationships, attitudes and values surfacing or remaining just below the surface. Most candidates effectively engaged with the dramatic build up of the extract, the humour of the boys’ initial lack of awareness of Hector’s plight, Hector’s anguished outburst and Posner’s awkward, but moving attempt to comfort him. The best were able to make meaningful links with the rest of the play and some impressively cited Mrs. Lintott’s observation that “one of the hardest things for a teacher to learn is to try not to tell them” (that teachers are human) and Lockwood’s reference to this scene (“It was the first time I realised that a teacher was a human being”), relating them to this moment when Hector’s humanity is all too visibly displayed.

Question 1b seemed equally yielding of full and well-informed responses. Many candidates were able to range widely throughout the text to find relevant evidence that Rudge is both memorable and significant in terms of the way his attitudes contrast with those of the other boys and his contribution to the humour of the play, but only the best responses pointed out the way he appears to buy into Irwin’s approach as a means to achieving his own goals, the irony of Rudge’s comparative success in later years and the significance of his comments on popular culture and its contemporary relevance. There were the occasional misapprehensions about

Rudge's work ethic and his acceptance at Oxford, but generally the question was successfully addressed and candidates were able to offer thoughtful and searching answers.

Hobson's Choice

The extract question, (2a), allowed for a variety of answers and most were able to respond to Willie Mossop's timid and cowed behaviour, Mrs. Hepworth's haughtiness and Hobson's two-faced sycophancy. The "significant" or "important" strand of the question was handled well by candidates at both tiers and many clearly understood and explained the contrast between the Willie Mossop seen at this point in the play and the man revealed to the audience at the end, though fewer candidates were able to comment on what was revealed about Hobson. The second "entertaining" strand proved, as anticipated, a key discriminator and some candidates struggled to engage the humour of the passage, though the best capably explored Hobson's toadying to Mrs. Hepworth, as opposed what he says behind her back, as a source of humour. Question 2b was, arguably, a challenging option because of the sheer amount of material at candidates' disposal. The major demand was perhaps to find a structure for the essay and to organise a range of ideas, rather than adopt a "scatter-gun" approach or, alternatively, limit the scope of the answer by restricting comment to one area, such as Maggie's "making" of Willie, important though this may be. Generally though, the question was well-addressed, with many students having a thorough knowledge of text, selecting an appropriate mix of material and quoting effectively in support. Such candidates offered wide-ranging and detailed responses, often displaying a thoughtful critical awareness of the way Maggie embodies some of the play's major themes, such as Equality and Self-Improvement. A minority of answers tended to be distracted by extraneous social/historical details and lost focus on the thrust of the question, Maggie's admirable qualities, and some interpreted "admirable" as "strong", missing her caring side completely.

A View from the Bridge

The extract question (3a) was deemed by examiners to provide ample scope for engaged, wide-ranging responses at both tiers of entry, enabling the weaker candidates to say what they could, whilst the most capable could excel by responding in some detail to the drama and underlying tensions of this scene. Many candidates wrote well on Miller's intentions as outlined in the stage directions and were sometimes keenly aware of the play in performance, though there were still many references to "readers". Answers were frequently successful in making relevant links with the rest of the play, but some lost contact with the question in attempting to do this. Most were able to point out Eddie's feelings towards Catherine and Rodolpho, Beatrice's feelings and suspicions and, in the case of stronger answers, how these are precursors of the tragic ending. The best responses to this question were extremely good and there was a great deal of intelligent exploration of the rich sub-text to this conversation and sophisticated wrestling with the levels of awareness or conscious realisation of both Eddie and Beatrice of the cause of Eddie's distracted behaviour. Such answers often showed an appreciation of the stage directions as part of the onstage movement and related to the complex interplay of emotion between Eddie and Beatrice, demonstrating a willingness to explore the significance of Beatrice's final question to Eddie, seeing the irony of Eddie's apparent impotence in relation to his macho posturing and locating the source in his suppressed feelings for Catherine. On the other hand, there were some less confident answers that treated Beatrice's comment as a typical marital complaint and some tendency to perceive Eddie's feelings for Catherine as conscious ones, of which he is fully aware.

Question 3b elicited fewer responses and there was some suspicion that a number of centres had worked on the relationship between Catherine and Eddie in some detail, leading to a great deal of discussion on the impact of Eddie on the relationship and less about why Rodolpho appeals to Catherine and how the relationship grows until it is increasingly impacting on Eddie.

The vast majority of candidates that attempted this question seemed to know their text well though and selected appropriate material and supporting references. Stronger responses were able to see the relationship in terms of its effect on Eddie and many rightly pointed out its dramatic function as a catalyst, observing that without this relationship the events leading to Eddie's death simply would not have happened. A significant minority of candidates drifted from the thrust of the question, the dramatic impact of the relationship, and wrote lengthy sections of their answers about the social contexts of Eddie's behaviour, masculinity, the code of honour and betrayal.

An Inspector Calls

The majority of candidates chose to answer the passage-based question, (4a), which stimulated a range of responses at both tiers. The majority of answers demonstrated a clear understanding of character, plot and themes, particularly in relation to the generation gap and social class. The best displayed a secure grasp of the dramatic contexts of the extract and saw it as a moment of revelation for Eric, rather than the audience, which has already been fully acquainted with his mother's involvement, and fully explored the irony, gradually revealed to Eric, that Mrs. Birling's snobbish and malicious attitude has brought about the death of her own grandchild. Some of the strongest responses addressed both strands of the question to engage with the dialogue and the dramatic build-up of the scene as emotions run high and violence almost breaks out, with Eric rounding on both his parents and the Inspector making their responsibility for the death of mother and child absolutely clear. Such answers were also able to link the extract effectively to the play's wider concerns as they are revealed in the Inspector's final speech, though generally most candidates were more confident in addressing this second strand of the question than in engaging the climactic power of the scene's dramatic build-up. Some less confident responses imported prepared material about the mysterious nature of the Inspector, his style of interrogation (despite the fact that he only asks one question in the given extract) and Priestley's "socialist" (sometimes "communist") message without really grounding this in the extract itself. Of those candidates that chose to tackle Question 4b, a number tended to focus on Gerald's class, not necessarily in relation to the question, perhaps because the character of Gerald does not clearly illustrate Priestley's central message. There were some simple character analyses of Gerald and often candidates plumped for **either** sympathetic **or** unsympathetic interpretations of his character, which therefore lacked sophistication. Having said this, Gerald's sexism and his class were often considered in both his attitude towards Sheila and his treatment of Daisy Renton. Most responses focused, relevantly, on his affair, but only the best answers moved beyond Act 2 to consider Gerald's change of attitude and apparent lack of remorse when the Inspector is exposed as a "fake" or his dramatic function in bringing about this revelation to set up the powerful and thought-provoking ending of the play.

Educating Rita

The extract question (5a) provided a wealth of material for candidates to work with and elicited some strong answers. The second "significant" strand was often addressed more confidently than was the "moving" nature of this exchange between Frank and Rita, perhaps because many candidates were keen to write about the politics of the play and its contextual background. Most answers were able to identify this as a transitional moment in Rita's development where she makes the difficult decision to pursue her studies and change herself, though many were also able to explore Rita's lack of confidence, her sense of dislocation and her determination to change, alongside wider concerns, such as the debasement of working-class culture and the differences between Frank's and Rita's social backgrounds, with an impressive degree of sophistication. The best answers often found a balance and focused effectively on the "moving" strand of the question to consider Frank's growing affection for Rita, Rita's sense of social inferiority and the symbolism of the song as a recurring motif throughout the play. Weaker candidates tended to romanticise Frank's feelings about Rita and found it difficult to comment on

why Rita refers to herself as a “freak” and a “half-caste” and on the significance of the song and of her mother’s tears.

Question 5b also offered a great deal of scope and a huge amount of relevant material with which to work, so that the organisational task of selecting appropriate material was a challenging one. That said, there were a great many engaged and responsive answers, explicitly addressing the “How” of the question and demonstrating an impressive ability to move within the text. The best answers were able to show how Russell presents the gradual development of the relationship and comment on the subtle reversal of roles and the state of the relationship at the ending of the play. Some candidates tended to reinterpret the question as “How has Rita changed?” and these were often tempted into narrative-driven responses, others tended to limit themselves to two or three moments, often the beginning and end of the play.

Journey’s End

6(a) was a very popular question, although the extract represents rather a subtle and low-key moment in the play. Nonetheless, candidates have generally shown real engagement and sensitivity when responding to this play and there were a great many detailed and productive answers. Most candidates were able to see the moving nature of the extract and say something about homesickness, Trotter and Osborne’s shared love of gardening, displacement dialogue and coping strategies. Better answers, and there were a good many of these, gave due consideration to the way Sherriff uses this parenthetical interlude in the main storyline to remind his audience that these soldiers are ordinary men with lives and families at home. Such responses often sought to explore the breaking down of class divisions in the trenches, Raleigh’s relative silence and discomfiture, the poignant humour of Trotter’s anecdote about the may tree and the underlying sadness of the moment when linking it to the tragic end of the play. A minority of candidates chose to give detailed accounts of Sherriff’s own background experience of the war at the expense of analysing the extract itself.

Question 6b was probably the most attempted of the non-extract questions and, although there was, in common with question 5a, a wealth of material at candidates’ disposal, it seemed better-handled in terms of selection. Despite the fact that there were some narrative-driven responses, giving an account of the relationship and often limiting their comments to the characters’ shared “history” and the closing moments of the play, the question also triggered a pleasing number of outstanding answers, selecting crucial moments in the relationship and dealing thoroughly with both strands of the question. One examiner commented on the impressive ability of candidates to “select well, to be concise and to focus on the issue of that which is “memorable”, as directly asked in the question.”

A663 Prose from Different Cultures

General Comments

It was pleasing to see responses to all six texts this time, even though the numbers for *The Joy Luck Club* and *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* were very small. Generally, the overall standard was higher than in January: answers tended to be longer, more carefully considered, and more aware of the need to provide appropriate comment on context. Candidates showed themselves to be more skilful in addressing AO4, adding an extra dimension to a point being made without being side-tracked into lengthy historical scene-setting.

Examiners were impressed by the level of personal response displayed, especially in relation to *Of Mice and Men* and *Tsotsi*. Candidates demonstrated engagement with the characters – George, Lennie, Candy, and Miriam – and insight into their lives. They had informed opinions to express on the discrimination inflicted on these disadvantaged individuals, and could approach the events of the novels both from the perspective of there and then, and of here and now. Once again *Of Mice and Men* was overwhelmingly the most popular choice of text, and the passage-based question was overwhelmingly the most popular choice of question. This popularity of the (a) alternative is in some ways more surprising than the ubiquity of Steinbeck: 'Of Mice and Men' has many attractions – brevity, powerful narrative, sharp delineation of character, accessible themes – but in choice of question there are issues relating to both options that perhaps need to be weighed up more carefully by candidates at the start of the exam. (This is discussed further in the comments about question 1a below and in the conclusion.) Most Centres made appropriate tiering choices. It is worth noting that in some cases, candidates who may well have benefited from the structural support of the bullet points at Foundation Tier were entered for Higher Tier papers. More rarely, stronger candidates writing at a level commensurate with grade B were entered for the Foundation Tier.

Comments on individual questions

Where questions are not mentioned, there were too few responses for any useful comment to be made.

Of Mice and Men

Question 1a

This was again by far the most popular choice, answered by more than 75% of the candidates. Students at all levels understood the supervisory, quasi-parental role that George adopts, citing his admonitory instructions about the mouse. Lennie's childishness was also well understood: his fascination with soft things, his clumsy efforts to disguise his actions from George, his irresponsibility. Better answers used the animal imagery in 'like a terrier' and 'backed away, looking wildly at the brush line as though he contemplated running for his freedom,' to support these observations. The expression 'elaborate pantomime of innocence' was often quoted and the strongest candidates made effective comments about Steinbeck's choice of language here, for example analysing the word 'pantomime' in terms of Lennie's naïve play-acting, his ridiculously transparent attempt to pull the wool over George's eyes.

Comments about George's behaviour differentiated effectively between candidates. Weaker responses recognised that George scolds Lennie here, shouts at him like an angry parent. All but the most basic also recognised that he is nicer to him later. However, candidates often saw George's frustration and subsequent sympathy as contradictory and occasionally accused

Steinbeck of writing in a confusing way by making George seem nasty and then nice. This indicates too straightforward an approach to the characters, who are more complex and ambiguous than was sometimes grasped. Better answers did see that phrases like 'poor bastard' indicate both George's fondness for Lennie and something of the frustration he feels. This frustration flares up towards the end of the extract, closely followed by guilt and a measure of tenderness towards Lennie that was often missed by middling as well as weaker responses. In addressing AO4, many found the key point that, in the straitened economic times in which the novel is set, George's commitment to Lennie is unusual, highly laudable and crucial for Lennie, whose future without George as his minder would have been grim. In connection with this point, good responses sometimes compared George's approach to Lennie with the treatment of other disadvantaged characters like Candy and Crooks by those around them. It was pleasing to see the way candidates were able to weave contextual comment into their answers without allowing the focus of the response to shift away from the passage.

More successful responses in the top two bands generally made a sustained effort to look at language: 'elaborate pantomime'; 'coldly'; 'imperiously'; 'crashing'; 'like a terrier' (though the fact that terriers are not generally large dogs knocked some candidates a bit off balance); 'snapped his fingers sharply'; and various imprecations from the last paragraph were among examples of Steinbeck's use of language discussed with varying degrees of insight by candidates looking to fulfil the higher bands for AO2.

Less successful candidates found it difficult to concentrate predominantly on the passage; comments on earlier or later events and on the historical context need to be fairly brief and carefully linked to the question; such references may be well rewarded, but must illuminate an observation rooted in the passage. Some candidates had a tendency to move outside the extract, discussing George and Lennie's relationship more widely, and whilst this is a valid way of situating a response to the passage, many ended up writing a generic answer about their relationship or making the point that the mouse business here foreshadows later events and then carefully recounting these later incidents throughout most of the rest of the answer. It is important to be aware that the extract is not provided simply as a jumping off point to write about George and Lennie's relationship generally in the novel; 'wider' material must be selected and deployed to illuminate George and Lennie's relationship here.

Question 1b

Those (relatively few; the ratio may have been as low as 1:10) who did choose this question generally wrote well, though (as with George in 1a) Candy's less attractive traits were often played down. Weaker responses tended to focus simply on the shooting of Candy's dog; stronger ones were able to discuss his gossipy nature, his eagerness to participate in George and Lennie's dream as an escape from his wretched existence on the ranch, and his reaction to Curley's wife's death, when he berates her corpse. The most able candidates often looked at this less sympathetic side of Candy, but managed to moderate their response to his harsh words by acknowledging his anguish and fear of an insecure old age in a harsh, uncaring society. They also recognised his courage in defending Crooks against Curley's wife and his subsequent hopelessness when cruelly taunted with his lack of power. In this way they recognised him as a rounded, three-dimensional character. Responses that extended a good deal of sympathy to Candy without ignoring his unattractive qualities tended to achieve highly.

Most candidates were able to place Candy's character clearly in context (AO4): referencing the hierarchical nature of society and Candy's place firmly at the lower end of the rankings; recognising that Candy's disability and old-age were crucial factors in his fear of the future; focusing on the treatment of old and useless workers, as well as the harsh shooting scene as examples of unforgiving times.

Candidates who scored well in relation to AO2 focused on Steinbeck's use of language in some of the following: Candy's scandal-mongering in chapter two; the description of him lying on his

bed, turning his face to the wall when he hears the shot; his boyish enthusiasm for the 'little place'; his momentary courage in standing up to Curley's wife, and abrupt submission; his shocking insults fired at the Curley's wife's body in the barn.

More successful candidates responding to the questions on *Of Mice and Men*:

- were knowledgeable about the text and responded personally to the characters and their situation
- focused closely on the terms of the question
- wove relevant contextual comments into their answer while maintaining a close focus on the question
- illustrated the points they made about language and character with appropriate quotation

Less successful candidates:

- began with overlong preambles, for example introducing the novel, the author, the 1930s.
- made over-elaborate notes (sometimes running out of time because they had spent too much of it in planning).
- tended to use pre-prepared material of, at best, only tangential relevance, like a focus on George and Lennie's dialect in Question 1a, or on sexism in Question 1b. In short, writing what they remember from their notes about a moment in the novel, rather than applying that knowledge to this particular question.
- focused too much on technical features of language and tried to spot techniques (use of dialect and slang; sentence length; punctuation; sound features such as alliteration, enjambment, caesura et al) before getting to grips with the writer's key intentions in the scene
- over-simplified or over-generalised the differences between the society of the novel and our own: 'nobody treated black people / women decently then; everyone does now'.
- tended, in Question 1a, to lose focus on the passage and dwell too much on other moments in George and Lennie's story, often with quotes from outside the passage, on the less than convincing basis that those later tragedies were foreshadowed by the death of the mouse.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 2a

Responses on *To Kill a Mockingbird* were generally of a high standard. The majority of candidates displayed understanding of the principal narrative technique used – withholding information from the reader in order to ratchet up the suspense; Scout cannot see and is able to drip feed her partial understanding of events to the reader derived only from what she can hear and feel. The mystery of the attacker and uncertainty of the saviour were also acknowledged as adding considerably to the tension in the scene.

In incorporating comment on context (AO4), some candidates tied the events of this scene firmly to the prejudice endemic in Maycomb society, and saw Bob Ewell as feeding off that prejudice, even as an embodiment of it, with Scout and Jem as victims, in a similar way to Tom Robinson, albeit with less tragic results. Others took Ewell's degeneracy and violence as representative of the worst excesses seen in the southern United States at the time, for instance in the actions of lynch mobs and the Ku Klux Klan.

The wording of this question lent itself to an appreciation of Lee's choice of language (AO2). The extract is both action-packed and rich in sensuous detail which enhances the impact. Able candidates made effective links to the question in commenting on phrases like, 'he coughed violently, a sobbing, bone-shaking cough', and 'floundering to escape my wire prison'.

Question 2b

This was a much less popular choice but generally very well answered. Candidates made some highly pertinent comments about the narrative structure of the novel and Scout and Jem's growing awareness of their father's qualities. Atticus's success as a role model was effectively conveyed – there was some impressive analysis, for example, of the shooting scene where the children learn, having disparaged their father for being old and boring, that he is a crack shot and the one called on to remove the threat of Tim Johnson. The fact that he has never thought to mention this accomplishment to them, teaches them a powerful lesson about dignity and self-respect.

The majority of candidates were highly aware of Atticus' unusual attitude to parenting and the influence of his lawyer's approach to life. Most candidates referred to the older Scout and Jem's lack of prejudice and non-judgemental attitudes to others as a direct consequence of Atticus' treatment of them. Jem's passion for truth and the Law, as seen in his distraught reaction to Tom Robinson's conviction, also clearly shows the influence of his father. Many cited Atticus' failure in not reacting to Ewell's threats, but tempered that with comment on his display of love and tenderness to Scout and Jem following the attack. References to 'standing in others' shoes' or 'crawling into their skin' were common, and candidates were able to illustrate this through Scout's actions at the end of the novel, escorting Arthur Radley back to his house and standing on his porch looking at the world from his perspective.

AO4 was well served here by most candidates: Atticus's fight for justice for Tom Robinson was linked to the prevailing attitude towards African Americans in contemporary society. His reason for taking the case – that he wouldn't be able to look his children in the eye if he refused it – demonstrates that underlying his ostensibly laissez faire approach to parenting there is a strong commitment to teaching by example.

Anita and Me

Question 3a

In dealing with context here, candidates made the contrast between the feral behaviour of Anita and Sally and Meena's family environment which lovingly protects her from the kind of viciousness displayed here, and no doubt influences her to try ineffectually to stop the violence. Some candidates who focused on the intensity of the fighting argued that the fact that it involved girls rather than boys and their parents' generation rather than their own, added to the disturbing quality of the description, thus finding an interesting AO4 angle on the question. Like question 2a, the passage here highlights a very dramatic, action-filled moment in the novel, and candidates were skilled in picking out a range of vivid descriptive words and phrases (AO2), mostly to do with the infliction of pain.

Tsotsi

'Tsotsi' is a text where the setting – social, historical and cultural – impinges strongly on everything that happens, and the contrasts to our own society hit the reader forcefully from the outset. Candidates seem to have engaged strongly with the novel; contextual awareness was particularly good here and often contributed strongly to the quality of the responses.

Question 6a

Relatively few students answered this question but those who did made effective points about the violence and often also managed to broaden the scope of their responses in order to locate

the events in their social context: the vicious and degraded existence, shaped by apartheid, which these men led.

Some further remarks on passage-based questions

Perhaps it shouldn't come as any surprise that the (a) question is the overwhelming choice of candidates. Those who go for the (b) option have some preliminary decisions to take which those who opt for (a) do not: to sort out how much evidence to gather; where to find it; what priority to give it. Selecting (a) provides a short-cut by making all these sorts of decisions much easier for the candidate, a powerful incentive in a 45 minute exam. However, the (b) question is often fairly straightforward and can offer a wider range of material to engage with (a big bonus for weaker students). It is perhaps surprising that the question on Candy in *Of Mice and Men*, for example, was selected by so few candidates with its fairly obvious key points and easy links to a social context.

It is worth repeating here that in the (a) question candidates who lose focus on the passage do less well because of it. Links to context and to other moments in the novels should be established quickly, used to illuminate something in the extract. Candidates who ventured away from the extract often found it difficult to get back to it.

It is hoped that the following examples, drawn from the most popular text and responses to Question 1a, will help clarify some of the less successful strategies in answering passage-based questions. These included responses which:

- established that George is the boss, then went back to the start of the novel to quote George and Lennie walking in single file and included *detailed* comment about how that shows George is the leader.

The point is valid: but unnecessarily lengthy quotes from other parts of the novel tend to lose focus on the passage: a quick reference to the fact that their relationship was obvious right from the start where George walked in front is sufficient.

- established that Lennie killing the mouse foreshadows later killings, and then went on to document the killing of the puppy, Curley's wife and Lennie.

The point is only tangentially relevant to a consideration of their relationship here, and detailed comment on later killings is not addressing the passage or the question.

- established that their relationship is unusual at that time in that social context – many men in that situation lived a solitary, itinerant life, suspicious of others - but went on immediately to detail the historical events and the economic/social situation – Wall Street Crash, Dust Bowl, Segregation.

This offers initially an effective approach to AO4, but dissipates this as it generalises across a variety of very broad issues.

- established that their shared dream is a key element in their relationship and went on to illustrate that extensively from later in Chapter 1 or subsequently.

The point is worth making in passing, but there is no mention of the dream in the extract, so it cannot really play a major part in a discussion of their relationship *here*.

A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry

General Comments

A significant number of Centres are preparing their students quite early for this challenging Unit. The overall performance was perhaps a little mixed, but examiners reported on the good quality of some candidates' work, and reported that a not inconsiderable number had engaged closely with the texts they had studied.

Many entries were Year 10 candidates, and, indeed, some Year 9 candidates have also been entered for this unit. If candidates are successful in obtaining early in their course the grade 'a' which Centre might expect them to achieve by the end of it, then they will have done very well. If they do not achieve the expected grade, the result may be disappointing to the Centre, but even more painfully so to candidates, who may consider the efforts they have made have resulted in failure.

A664 is the most demanding of the English Literature units, in that it asks candidates to respond to two questions in an hour and a half. Some candidates seemed unable to cope with these time demands. Some appeared to rush their second answer, or simply ran out of energy; answers to the second question were sometimes rather brief, or simply lacking in textual support. It may be that early entry (June of Year 10) for A662 and A663 is preferable to early entry for A664, and that January of Year 11 might be considered the best time for early entry on this challenging unit.

Generally speaking, weaker responses tended to paraphrase the extract set for extract-based questions, not making a personal response at Foundation Tier, or not considering the writing and the effects of literary devices at Higher Tier.

Literary Heritage Prose

Animal Farm was comfortably the most popular of the prose texts. *Lord of the Flies* was popular, but few examiners caught any glimpse of *Silas Marner* and *The Withered Hand and other Wessex Tales*.

Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

A number of Centres chose this text, mainly, it appeared, for their Higher Tier candidates. The extract-based question was the more popular of the two, featuring Mr Collins's letter to Mr Bennet following Lydia's elopement with Wickham. Candidates often focused closely on the way in which Austen's writing reveals the character of Mr Collins, and identified his smug self-satisfaction, pomposity, unchristian advice to Mr Bennet that he should "throw off" this "unworthy child ... for ever", his patronising manner, his readiness to impart news of the family's disgrace to Lady Catherine and her daughter, and his obvious seizing of the opportunity to gloat over his avoidance in any part of the scandal by Elizabeth's refusal of his hand in marriage. There were some splendidly indignant responses to the letter and the character of its writer. Some candidates tempered their indignation with the reflection that Mr Collins is a comic figure at whom the reader is invited to laugh. Some candidates took Mr Collins at his own valuation and thought that his readiness to advise Mr Bennet at this low moment in the family's fortune was greatly to his credit. Given Austen's irony, this was not an easy case to argue.

A significant number of candidates responded to the question on the importance of money in *Pride and Prejudice*. Clearly, they could not in forty-five minutes be exhaustive in discussing a theme that runs through the novel so intimately. The best focused on an appropriate part of the novel, carefully selected material, and provided detailed textual support for their ideas. They also showed an awareness of the novel as a whole, and not simply of its opening chapter. Some responses never ventured beyond Chapter One, sometimes becoming assessments/character studies of Mrs Bennet and her views on eligible husbands for her daughters.

Golding: *Lord of the Flies*

This was clearly quite a popular text, and responses showed considerable engagement with it. The more popular question of the two was the extract-based question. Candidates at Foundation Tier responded well to the drama of the moment: they commented on the fight between Ralph and Jack, Piggy's speech contrasting civilisation and savagery, Piggy's death, and the destruction of the conch, with all its associations. Higher Tier candidates often considered Golding's language with considerable care; words and phrases like "tribe", "talisman", "fragile shining beauty of the shell" and the description of the sea's "long, slow sigh" were brought into discussion of how Golding creates such power in the extract.

There were too few responses to the second Golding question for any useful comment to be made.

Orwell: *Animal Farm*

As earlier stated, *Animal Farm* was comfortably the most popular of the Literary Heritage Prose texts, and the extract-based question the most popular at both Tiers. Candidates usually responded well to the invitation to discuss what they found moving about the extract. There was considerable sympathy for Boxer: for his hard work, his hope of a peaceful retirement, his modest retirement ambitions, the love and respect his friends show him, and the fate to which he is consigned. Candidates also found moving Benjamin's uncharacteristic display of energy on behalf of his friend, Clover's attempt to stir her "stout limbs to a gallop" on behalf of her friend, the final appearance of Boxer's face "with the white stripe down his nose", and his final desperate attempt to kick his way out of captivity. Candidates often linked his failure to do so with the dwindling of his strength, expended for Animal Farm. Candidates at Higher Tier often looked carefully at the language; for example, at Orwell's use of repetition, short sentences (the powerful effect of the last sentence of the extract), the effect of adjectives like "sly-looking", the collection of Boxer when the animals are working, and the absence of pigs at the "send-off". Less convincing responses cited the pigs' donation of "a large bottle of pink medicine" as a sign of their genuine concern for Boxer's well-being. Sometimes candidates became side-tracked in over-zealous citing of historical parallels. Knowing that *Animal Farm* is an allegory, and a satire, is central in understanding Orwell's purposes. However, over-emphasis on Orwell's purposes can derail a response to a question seeking a reader's response to what is moving. Arguably, a response to what is happening personally to Boxer in this extract is more immediately moving than Stalin's ingratitude to numberless Stakhanovite workers in the Soviet Union.

There were comparatively few responses to the importance/significance of Squealer. Most connected him with being Napoleon's "voice", and the importance of propaganda in suppressing potential dissatisfaction leading to rebellion; and provided instances of Squealer turning black into white. Few noted his fall when re-painting the Commandments, Orwell's blatant revelation of his dishonesty.

Overall, there were many good responses at both Tiers, showing genuine engagement with the novel.

Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

Almost all of the responses seen to *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, at both Tiers, were to the extract-based question. Not all candidates noted that this was the first instance of Hyde becoming Jekyll without chemical inducement, and perhaps why, given Jekyll's puzzlement and confusion, the moment is fascinating and Jekyll's feelings so acute.

However, there were some excellent responses to Jekyll's initial confusion, and fear; about Stevenson's focus on the two hands, the contrast drawn between the hand "corded ... thickly with a swart growth of hair" and the "white and comely" hand of Jekyll. There were good responses to Stevenson's imagery (terror like "the crash of cymbals" and the "exquisitely thin and icy" blood).

Poetry

Candidates' responses to poetry were often engaged, benefiting greatly from being able to focus closely on just one poem, now that the comparison of two poems is undertaken as part of Controlled Assessment. The work of the six contemporary poets in *Reflections* seems to have proved very accessible. Indeed, at the time of writing this report, all the poets, apart from Wendy Cope, drew responses – but Cope's time will surely come.

A number of candidates answered the questions on the unseen poems, and, in the case of the Higher Tier poem, Stevenson's *From the Motorway*, often to very good effect. Some Centres have clearly chosen to prepare their students to appreciate, analyse, and offer a well-supported critical judgment of any poem they may come upon. The results were impressive. Many Centres, equally clearly, must have decided to focus their teaching on the work of a single poet, often with equally impressive results.

Examiners' reports made clear that the best poetry responses went far beyond simply identifying literary devices, and looked to illuminate the effects of the device. Less convincing responses hunted down devices without commenting on their effects. Tricolons, "the rule of three", caesuras, enjambement (variously spelled) . . . these (and more) were often spotted, as if their identification was the sole purpose of literary appreciation. Their contribution (if any) to the impact of a poem was too often ignored.

Examiners often noted that the most successful responses to poetry were those which engaged closely with the poem's language and discussed how it affected the reader's response. Less successful responses tended only to explain what the lines meant. It is possible for responses to reach the top of Band 4 at Foundation Tier by demonstrating understanding of what the poem is about, touching slightly upon its language. That is why at Foundation Tier the questions often begin with "What . . . ?". At Higher Tier they usually begin with, or include "How . . . ?", followed by a reference to the writing and/or the writer, a reminder to candidates that they are expected to engage both with what the poem is about and with how the writer expresses his/her ideas.

Armitage

Candidates who responded to the Armitage questions usually wrote about *The Convergence of the Twain*, though not always with great penetration. Some candidates referred to the Hardy poem of the same name, noting that Armitage's poem followed a similar pattern to Hardy's. However, very few candidates noted that Kipling said of the East and the West that "never the twain shall meet". The fusion/collision in both poems is, of course, disastrous. Most candidates, but not all, knew that the poem was about 9/11. There was insecure understanding of such words as "chosen, spared", where many thought that God permitted a number of survivors to walk from the ruins some considerable time after the fateful collision. "Beading" in line 21 was

usually not understood. Responses often tended to explain, or try to explain, what the poem was about. The best responses showed understanding, and focused their understanding on what was so powerful and moving about the poem. In some ways, this poem is not the most straightforward in the Armitage section of the Anthology. However, a number of candidates responded well to its subject matter and the way Armitage responds to an event that has shaped, in so many ways, how candidates see their world.

There were few responses to *About His Person or Poem*, but a reasonable number to *Gooseberry Season* and *Hitcher*. The latter two poems clearly captured candidates' interest. Good responses looked closely at the way the language makes the violence disturbing. Less analytical ones concentrated on the reasons why the narrative voice in the poem behaved as he did, usually concluding, quite reasonably, that the absence of a clear motive for violent actions, and the casual tone of the perpetrators of those actions, is what makes them so disturbing. Less convincing responses simply quoted lines of the poems, asserting, without support, that they were disturbing.

Clarke

There were comparatively few responses to the Gillian Clarke questions. These usually answered on *Baby-sitting* or *Miracle on St David's Day*. There were some very good responses to *Baby-sitting*, these covering all twenty lines of the poem and not simply the more accessible first ten. These also considered the language of the poem in detail, whereas some responses offered much speculation about why the baby-sitter considered her charge "the wrong baby". Candidates often came to the conclusion that the baby-sitter is afraid of the baby because she fears the horror the baby will feel when she discovers that the woman with her when she wakes is not her mother. There were sensitive responses to *Miracle on St David's Day*, candidates reacting well to the shocking revelation that the possible country house in fact houses "the insane", and that the "beautiful chestnut-haired boy" is a "schizophrenic on a good day". The moving description of the miracle itself, an event which strikes dumb the listening flowers, produced some powerful responses in candidates.

Duffy

The Duffy selection in the anthology looks to be a popular one, attracting a considerable number of candidates. Most chose to write on the way *In Mrs Tilscher's Class* conveys powerful impressions of life under Mrs Tilscher's benevolent sway. Many responded well to the impressions that life was fun for her pupils: the books were "enthralled": the classroom "glowed"; "Mrs Tilscher loved you", and showed how she valued you by leaving you an alliterative "good gold star". Most knew who Brady and Hindley were and emphasised that Mrs Tilscher's classroom represented safety from a world that threatened innocence. Not many recognised the shape of the bottles of milk distributed daily to children in Duffy's day, but a number did associate a skittle with play and thus with fun. Some candidates did very little with the changes in Mrs Tilscher's pupils in the second half of the poem. Others fastened upon Mrs Tilscher's turning away as an indication that she was an unsatisfactory teacher since her classroom blinded children to the real world beyond the gates through which you finally ran into the thunderstorm. Such criticism of Mrs Tilscher was often well argued, but seemed a little at odds with the mood of the first two verses. Perhaps teachers can do little right!

There were comparatively few responses to *Brothers*, *Nostalgia*, *Answer* and *Who Loves You*. However, *Answer* elicited powerful responses, candidates identifying Duffy's use of the four elements to convey feelings about the power of love and the importance of Duffy's passionate repetition of "yes, yes". Some candidates appeared to take issue with the question's assumption that *Who Loves You* is a love poem, a poem by a woman to a partner, and saw it as a mother's concern about a child who was travelling. Others viewed it as a war poem, the expression of a

mother's fears of what might befall a son in a theatre of war. These ideas were perfectly acceptable, provided, as ever, that textual support was provided and the poem's language carefully weighed.

Heaney

Heaney was, understandably, a popular choice and candidates often wrote well about his poems. The poems of choice were *Digging*, *Mid-Term Break* and *Blackberry-Picking*. Most candidates at both Tiers were able to comment about Heaney's feelings in *Digging*, identifying his admiration for the skill of his father and grandfather and his pride in following the family tradition in digging into his past, and that of his family with his pen, his equivalent of the ancestral spade. Some perhaps rather over-emphasised his feelings about not following this father onto the land, seeing the opening stanza as an admission of strong feelings of guilt that are resolved only in the last stanza. Some claimed, despite the admiring tone of the poem, that Heaney despised his father because he looked down on him in the second stanza. Some candidates tended to miss the focus of the question and paraphrased the poem, explaining what the father and the grandfather were doing, and the sounds Heaney describes as the men dig.

Mid-Term Break was well understood, but too few responses focused on "moving", often providing a business-like tour of the poem, explaining what was happening as if a mystery was being unfolded, beginning with why the boy was in the sick-bay and why the neighbours drove him home and concluding with the revelation of the identity of "him" in the four-foot box. Good responses focused on the boy's apparent detachment, his father's tears, his mother's "angry tearless sighs", the description of the brother's room, the brother's body and engaged with the poignant language and effect of the poem's last line.

Blackberry-Picking produced some careful discussions of the feelings of excitement in the first sixteen lines of the poem, with some responses noting signs of ill-omen within them. Candidates often compared these lines with the powerful description of the bath's stinking, rotted contents and the voice's disappointment in the last lines of the poem.

There were very few responses to *The Summer of Lost Rachel* or to *Wheels within Wheels*.

Zephaniah

There were few responses to these poems, and these were fairly equally divided between the three questions. There were some overviews of what the poems were about, but little real discussion of his style, his insistent repetition, and his jauntiness at times. There were too few responses for useful comment to be made.

Unseen Poems

A small number of Centres entered candidates for this option, though some candidates may have made their own choice, on the day, to write about the Unseen Poem.

Comparatively few at Foundation Tier wrote on *Your Dad Did What?* These followed the bullets, and most understood what the boy was failing to spell, or, if they did not, recognised that the boy's reluctance to write about his father was probably because his father was dead. Comment on the poem's language was well rewarded.

Occasionally, candidates appeared uncertain about what "moving" in the question actually meant. Centres will know that preparing candidates for OCR prose and poetry questions will involve rehearsing them in the standard terms that appear in questions, "moving" being one.

Consideration of the bullets in the question is important, since these try to steer candidates towards what they should be looking at in the poem.

Anne Stevenson's *From the Motorway* produced a number of very good responses, some examiners commenting that some were at least the equal of, or surpassed, responses to poems in *Reflections* that presumably had been subjected to lengthy classroom discussion. There was much to say about this poem but candidates understood the writer's feelings about the motorways and were able to select and comment on lines that conveyed her feelings about them. Responses were not expected to be exhaustive (impossible in such a short stretch of time) and it was encouraging to read such a number of responses that showed good understanding and were able to support that understanding with detail from the poem.

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