

**English Literature**

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J360**

**OCR Report to Centres**

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**January 2013**

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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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### English Literature (J360)

### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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## A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

### General Comments

This year there were 16 centres that entered their candidates for the Controlled assessment units. The entry was very encouraging as the quality of the responses adequately met the assessment criteria and the marking indicated that centres had applied the assessment criteria consistently.

### General Administration

This was excellent overall. 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.

Centres are urged in the future to make sure that the cover sheets for each folder are clearly filled in for all candidates that have been selected in the sample, and that the overall mark on the folder is the same as the one submitted on the final mark sheets.

Centres are also asked not to put individual assignments in plastic wallets. One staple in the top corner of the completed folio is the most advisable form of collation for the future.

Generally there was clear evidence that internal moderation had taken place and on this entry there were no adjustments to any marks, which was a clear indication that marking was consistent and in line with the assessment criteria.

### Response to Shakespeare

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

Most candidates showed clear and critical engagement with the 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 Christina Rossetti

The responses were generally of a very high standard and centres had applied the assessment criteria consistently. There was clear evidence of adequate comparison of the selected poems.

Centres are reminded that the balance of marking for the poetry is 15% of the total mark, and this was not always reflected in the final mark. The final mark should reflect the quality of the poetry response and therefore 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 be the primary determinant for the final Band that is awarded.

## **Summary**

Generally centres demonstrated a clear understanding of the set tasks and responded appropriately. Teachers are to be complimented for their hard work in delivering this component, and their conscientious approach and consistency of standards is reflected in the responses of the candidates.

## A662 Modern Drama

### General Comments

In this assessment period of the English Literature J360 specification around 8,000 candidates, took advantage of the final opportunity to enter for the January Modern Drama units. Foundation Tier candidates again accounted for about 20% of the total entry, suggesting that centres continue to make careful and largely justified tiering decisions, with some examiners commenting that only a small minority of Higher Tier candidates may well have been better suited to answering the more structured Foundation Tier questions and that a similarly small number of Foundation Tier candidates could conceivably have gained marks in excess of the permitted maximum for the lower tier.

The overall quality of the work submitted was generally perceived as of a praiseworthy standard, with what one examiner described as “some breathtakingly outstanding work”. It was particularly encouraging to note some pleasing traits that may well have reflected a tendency for centres to take on board the messages of previous Principal Examiner’s Reports. There seemed, generally, to be stronger evidence of candidates at both tiers of entry having absorbed the advice to contextualise extract questions succinctly and it was good to see candidates really thinking about what characters are onstage, what they know, what has led up to the extract and what happens as a result of it. There were far fewer references to “readers” in proportion to “audience”, which may indicate that some centres are now adapting their approaches to the teaching of the play as a performance, seen from an audience perspective, rather than merely as a text on the page. There remain references to “the book” and “the novel” or the “novella” (a likely slip, perhaps, if candidates are also taking A663 in the same sitting). Having said that, the general consensus was that there was a significant amount of very sophisticated and insightfully analytical work, showing very sound knowledge of texts, evidence of thorough and imaginative teaching and an encouragingly increasing amount of comment directed at the play in performance. The work of candidates in a growing number of centres displayed clear evidence of classroom-based Drama activities and reference to specific productions/theatre visits. Many candidates were, therefore, able to see themselves not merely as readers of a text, but as members of an audience and to 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.

The passage-based question remains the preferred option of the great majority of candidates, though there seemed to be a significant increase in the number of candidates choosing to attempt the discursive questions, particularly **6(b)**, **4(b)** and **3(b)**, and those examiners who saw answers to **1(b)** were often very impressed by the quality of the responses. Whilst the organisational skills required to address these questions are clearly of a different order to the extract-based option, it seems to be the case that some candidates of all abilities, and particularly the more able, are often better served by selecting a discursive task. Although many examiners expressed satisfaction that candidates had been thoroughly prepared for the extract question and were able to get the balance right between dealing with the extract and with its wider significance within the play, it is always difficult to achieve a balance between close analysis of the dramatic detail of the extract and a demonstration of an awareness of the play as a whole. Some examiners still expressed concern that context dominated a significant minority of answers, with much time given to background detail and far too little focus on the extract itself. It was noted by some examiners that there is still a tendency to include partially assimilated social and historical material, particularly in an attention to Priestley’s supposed Communist leanings and Sherriff’s war experiences for example. To some extent this may be a knock-on effect of the AO4 focus on the A663 paper and centres should be reminded of the different demands of these units. With this in mind, Centres are again urged to consider the features of successful and less successful answers that are offered later in this report.

It is worth mentioning again that a significant, though appreciably decreasing number of examiners observed that some centres have adopted an approach to passage-based questions that relies heavily on logging linguistic or literary features, and even punctuation, which inevitably leads candidates away from the dramatic action of the extract. More able candidates are often able to assimilate such features with a degree of coherence and relevance, but, for the less able, appreciation of the dramatic/emotional content tends to be lost. An answer that begins, for example, by citing Sherriff's use of stage directions as the key to an extract's dramatic impact and proceeds to subject them to a rigorous linguistic analysis, when they cannot, after all, be seen by an audience, without relating them to the visual impact of what is happening on stage is unlikely to allow a candidate to maximise his/her potential. In extreme cases, this approach led to an assumption that a question that refers to "the ways" or "how" a writer is working applies to technical features of the writing, giving rise to lengthy discussions of the use of dashes, exclamation marks, question marks and even commas for dramatic effect.

An encouraging aspect of this session was the apparent lack of rubric infringements, with relatively few multiple answers and few reported instances of candidates failing to complete answers through poor time management. One examiner also noted that there seemed to be fewer responses that attempted to conflate (a) and (b) questions, answering a (b) question using only material from the given passage for the (a) question; a significantly limiting factor.

Whilst the great majority of candidates at both tiers seemed to have been successfully prepared for the demanding task of producing a well-structured response in only 45 minutes, deploying a sound, often impressive knowledge of text, some of the perennial reasons for underachievement still seem to persist. Examination inexperience, evidenced by features such as over long and elaborate plans, brief and undeveloped answers, losing the focus on the question or extract and insufficient textual support, remains the main cause of underachievement. The best extract-based responses still managed to achieve a balance, spending the bulk of their time on the extract itself and moving out from it and returning to integrate comment on its wider importance within the play. The best discursive responses made a judicious selection of material and kept the given question in sight at all times, pursuing the dramatic function of the character/relationship rather than simply tracing their involvement through the play. Redundant, lengthy general introductions were, regrettably, still a feature in some centres and clearly a disadvantaging factor in such a brief examination. A succinct and focused introduction often made a massive difference to the quality and structure of an answer, regardless of whether an extract-based or discursive response. Reader-based thematic approaches to plays that focus on the social and historical contexts at the expense of engaging with the dramatic detail, dialogue, characters, the relationships and the candidate's own feelings and viewpoints seem to be encouraged in some centres. It should again be noted that AO4 is not assessed in this Unit and, whilst examiners are instructed to credit sound and relevant knowledge of the social/historical context, too heavy a reliance on such features is likely to be self-penalising. In the Priestley, Sherriff and, to a lesser extent, Miller extract-based responses in particular this was a problem for some candidates, with some examiners commenting that candidates pursued the political standpoint of Priestley and the idea of Socialism versus Capitalism or the war experiences of R. C. Sherriff and, indeed, his audience at the expense of close analysis of the actual text as a work of drama.

Once again, it is pleasing to report that all six texts were covered in this examination session. *An Inspector Calls* remains by some distance the most popular choice and it was generally felt to be handled well by the majority of candidates. *Journey's End* also attracted a large number of centres and *A View from the Bridge* appears to be growing in popularity, eliciting some particularly sophisticated responses. *Educating Rita* continues to be studied by a significant number of centres, whilst *The History Boys* remains a minority choice, though growing in popularity and, as one examiner remarked, "clearly working – in the right hands". *Hobson's Choice* had been offered by relatively few centres at the time of writing.

It may be useful to offer, indeed to reiterate 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, always** writing about **what the audience can see and hear**
- 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
- **never** write about the dramatic effects of punctuation.

**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, such as decontextualised stage directions.

**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 little 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**
- **write lengthy analyses of the linguistic features (and even punctuation) of stage directions**, which are, of course, never seen by an audience.

### 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*

A relatively small, but increasing number of centres selected this text and the majority of candidates were entered for the Higher Tier. The passage-based question **1(a)** was the preferred option of most candidates and it often elicited extremely thoughtful and perceptive responses. The extract is a packed and highly-charged moment in the play and most candidates seized the opportunity to respond to the two teaching philosophies at work, showed the interplay between the boys and the staff and their obvious discomfort at the situation of Irwin and Hector sharing their lesson. The best answers were able to respond sensitively to and explore the two sides of the Holocaust debate and its appropriateness as an exam topic, and saw the boys moving towards Irwin's technique, especially in the weight of Dakin's final rejection of Hector's methods and the audience's knowledge that he is on borrowed time.

Question **1(b)** was a less popular choice, but attempted, nonetheless, very successfully by a reasonable number of candidates. The question demanded relevant selection, thought and development if a coherent overview was to be reached, but those candidates that opted for **1(b)** seemed really to engage sympathetically with Posner's sense of dislocation and unhappiness. The key to this question seemed to be a shrewd selection of "moments", with the poignant "Drummer Hodge" scene prompting some sophisticated exploration of Posner's and Hector's shared sense of separateness, and Mrs. Lintott's comments in the Epilogue eliciting fruitful discussion. A few responses selected moments in the play where Posner's unrequited love for Dakin makes us sympathise and these were often particularly well argued and developed.

With each exam session, examiners are seeing and, if their comments are to be given credence, enjoying increasing numbers of sharply analytical and sophisticated responses to this text.

### **Hobson's Choice**

There were very few centres attempting this text in this examination session, with what would seem the vast majority of candidates entered for the Foundation Tier. All responses seen have been to **2(a)**, with candidates mostly responding successfully to the dramatic nature of Hobson's intransigence in the face of Maggie's announcement of her intention to marry Willie Mossop and Willie's unexpected show of determination and resistance to Hobson's bullying tactics. Stronger answers were able to focus not only on the obvious conflicts of the extract, but showed a willingness to explore the wider implications of Maggie's recognition of Willie's potential, in direct contrast to her father's blindness to it. Some candidates found it a problem not to oversentimentalise Maggie and Will's relationship and tended to miss Willie's initial reluctance to Maggie's forthright and unconventional "courtship". Some answers on this text tended to narrate what was happening and there was a tendency of less successful answers to drift away from the passage into a general retelling of the story of Maggie and Willie, but most Foundation Tier candidates seemed to have found the bullet pointed guidance useful in developing a response.

At the time of writing, no responses to Question **2(b)** had been reported.

### **A View from the Bridge**

An increasingly popular text that clearly appears to have been both well taught by centres and greatly enjoyed by candidates.

The extract question (**3a**) was by far the most popular choice on this text. It was successfully answered by the majority of candidates, particularly so when the pivotal nature of the extract was understood in the context of the play as a whole. Candidates, perhaps understandably, sometimes tended to sympathise strongly with Catherine at the expense of Beatrice and a minority thought that Beatrice was bullying Catherine and that Catherine was deliberately leading Eddie on. In general, candidates showed a clear understanding of the situation between Beatrice and Catherine; the dramatic context was fully appreciated in terms of Eddie's obsessive protectiveness towards Catherine and of how the extract foreshadows developments later in the play. The best answers demonstrated an assured grasp of the extract's wider dramatic significance and saw the complexities of both Beatrice's motives here – her failing marriage, the increasing desperation of her urgings – and Catherine's naivety, the complex feelings she has unwittingly provoked in Eddie and her shattering realisation that she must hurt him and leave home. The implications for an audience of Miller's stage directions – the "strained smile", the "aroused alarm" and the "familiar world had shattered" were also considered and explored by some of the most perceptive responses. Examiners commented that Foundation Tier candidates seemed to benefit greatly from the directive bullet points in the question and that many Foundation Tier answers focused clearly as a result, consistently meeting Band 3 criteria.

Although the majority of candidates on this text went for the extract-based response, question **3(b)** seems to have been competently answered by those candidates that attempted it. Some answers adopted a "character-sketch" approach and recounted details of what Rodolpho does in the play, and a number drifted into an account of Eddie's behaviour towards him, and some seem to have been so influenced by Eddie's hostile views of Rodolpho that they failed to appreciate what a thoroughly decent and honourable young man he is. Most answers though were able to focus on Rodolpho's love for Catherine, his relationship with his brother and the effect these things have on the other characters and on the development of the plot. The strongest answers ranged widely across the text, exploring the contrasts between Rodolpho and both Eddie and Marco and standing back to consider his dramatic function as a catalyst in the inevitable tragedy.

### ***An Inspector Calls***

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most popular choice of text by some distance and answers to **4(a)**, the passage-based question, generated the full range of achievement at both tiers of entry, with candidates clearly appearing to have engaged with the play and to have understood the dramatic context and content of the extract. Its proximity to the beginning of the play may have helped in this respect, though, as some examiners have observed, there was sometimes a tendency to attribute more knowledge to the characters at this point in the play than they actually possess. Sometimes, for example, there was an assumption that Birling was already feeling guilty and that others were aware of their misdemeanours and trying to cover them up. As ever, there were candidates who drifted away from the extract in a quest to consider Priestley's wider concerns and there were some sweeping assertions about politics, capitalism/communism, social class and labour relations, but many examiners observed that there was some very good work at both tiers on the relationships that are working within the extract. Many fine explorations were cited of Mr. Birling's self-importance, his clear frustration and discomfiture at being challenged in his own home, Sheila's contrasting and more humane reaction towards the news of Eva's death and the impact of the final bombshell that the Inspector drops that he has by no means finished with the family yet. The best answers were able to focus not only on the differing reactions to Eva's death, the Inspector's apparent omniscience, the conflicts of the extract and the generational divide, but were also able to show a strong sense of the theatricality, the ironies and foreshadowing that Priestley's dramatic technique creates. Many candidates had clearly been well taught to gauge audience response and strong candidates were able to unpick the effects of the Inspector's language in his confidence, his blunt description of the suicide and what he is able to imply to the other characters. There was a tendency to ignore Gerald and Eric, whose contribution is perhaps less obvious, particularly in Eric's case, but despite some unhelpful digressions into thematic concerns, the best answers grounded these discussions in the detail of the scene and explored Sheila's emerging independence and compassion in relation to Gerald's unsympathetic response and Eric's brief conflict with his father.

Question **4(b)** was attempted by a smaller, though nonetheless significant number of candidates, but was probably less well done in general. Some candidates tended to adopt a character sketch approach, commenting on one character and then the other, often showing understanding of both, but not really focusing on the dramatic significance of the relationship to any great extent, which is perhaps surprising, allowing for the opportunity afforded by the breakdown of the relationship to consider Priestley's wider concerns in terms of the generational divide and social responsibility. The better answers managed to stay focused on the nature of the failed relationship, the reasons for its failure and the dramatic consequences. There was much productive concentration on the dramatic build up and recriminations of the painful revelation scene, though the chronology of Mrs. Birling's denunciation of the father of Eva's child before she realises it is, in fact, her own son was missed by some and some candidates confined their responses to just this one scene, narrowing the scope of their answers considerably. Stronger answers were able to range more widely across the text to show the earlier evidence of the generation gap and the mutual incomprehension of mother and son.

### ***Educating Rita***

*Educating Rita* was a reasonably widely-studied text in this session, with the majority of candidates opting to attempt Question **5(a)**; a particularly popular option for Foundation Tier candidates. The passage was generally well-handled and candidates at both tiers were able to pick up on both strands of the question to respond at least competently and often with some perception. Rita's determination was generally well understood by most candidates and many also appreciated Frank's genuine concern and ambivalent attitude towards Rita's ambitions, though not all were able to relate this to what follows in the play and some attributed it simply to a reluctance to teach her any more. Strong answers were generally based on a secure awareness of Rita's situation at this time, seen in the suitcase, Denny's ultimatum and Rita's

life-altering choice and often established a contrast between the sombre mood here and Rita's more upbeat and ebullient behaviour elsewhere, though weaker responses sometimes drifted into a discussion of her failed marriage and lost touch with the extract. Many candidates seemed genuinely moved by Rita's self-awareness and single-minded determination to persevere with her studies, despite her tears and the loss of all that had been familiar. Such answers were able to see this as a pivotal moment in the play, where Rita's life changes direction and were able to note the irony of the reversal, whereby Frank wants to forget the literary criticism and comfort Rita on a personal level, whereas Rita is completely focused on her *Macbeth* essay and demands an honest appraisal of it, to Frank's apparent discomfiture. The very best addressed and fully understood the notions of "change" and "uniqueness" that are so central to this moment in the play, showing insight into the deficiencies of Rita's essay in terms of formal literary criticism and Frank's reluctance to compromise what he sees as valuable in her by continuing her tuition.

Question **5(b)** was, predictably, the less popular option on this text and seemed generally to be less effectively handled. Those candidates who attempted it often tended to offer a selection of what they perceived as comic moments from the text, frequently centring on Rita's colloquial language and swearing as being representative of her culture. Most candidates seemed to understand their respective backgrounds, though there were some questionable assumptions about Frank's "upper class" origins and responses often began with a sense of the culture clash, chalk-and-cheese comedy of the opening scenes, but then lapsed into more sweeping generalisations about accent or colloquialisms or identified funny scenes without relating them to background. Having said this, many candidates were able to select relevantly and keep the focus of the question to provide what one examiner described as "earnest and deserving" work. Better answers developed a response to Rita's role in reawakening Frank's interest in teaching in a focused and selective way, acknowledging that her language, humorous retorts and unconventional attitudes were largely to be credited for "uplifting" his life in general.

### ***Journey's End***

After *An Inspector Calls*, this is the most popular text studied for this unit and one that seems to be enjoyed by the majority of candidates, with **6(a)** being the most frequently attempted question. The vast majority of candidates were able to focus on the conflicts and tensions of the extract and the best responses were informed by a clear and sensitive understanding of the dramatic contexts, though a significant minority ignored the reasons for Stanhope's anxiety and frustration, making little or no mention of Raleigh or Osborne and there was again some failure to distinguish between the raid and the attack as well as a tendency in some answers to assume that the orders are the Colonel's and not the Brigadier's. Answers that were grounded in the dramatic context that the daylight raid is "murder" and that Stanhope is in danger of losing his best friend and the boy for whom he feels responsible started from a secure basis to develop a response. The best answers understood the nature of rank and were aware that the Colonel agreed with Stanhope's assessment of the raid, but, like Stanhope, had no option other than to follow orders from above. Such responses fully understood Stanhope's sarcasm and bitterness, the conflict between common-sense and duty and were able to explore in some detail the significance and symbolism of the red rags, the deluded optimism, the youth of the soldiers selected for the raid and the obdurate stupidity of the High Command. Less successful responses tended to be side-tracked into generalisations about propaganda, Sherriff's own war experiences and general coping strategies. Some mistakenly saw the Colonel finding time "funny" as a jocular displacement comment and others saw the Colonel, somewhat unreasonably, as simply callous and uncaring.

There were a good many responses to Question **6(b)**, the most popular by far of the discursive options, and the consensus was that it was generally well done by those who attempted it. Although some answers were disadvantaged by an inability to foreground the centrality of the relationship in the play and drifted into individual character study, the majority were well aware of

the trust, intimacy, loyalty and mutual respect that underpin the relationship and were able to select judiciously from the wealth of material at their disposal to shape an informed response. Many answers commented on Osborne's loyalty in the opening scene, on the tenderness of the tucking up in bed, on Raleigh's letter and on the aftermath of Osborne's death. The best selected the most pertinent moments, saw Osborne's role in providing the stability and support to keep Stanhope sane, movingly appreciated Stanhope's terrible grief at his death and perceived the dramatic importance of the relationship in terms of Sherriff's wider concerns of comradeship in extremis and the dreadful toll that war can take on young men.

### **Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)**

In this first session that includes the SPaG mark in this unit, it is perhaps worth making some general observations on candidates' performance. The level of achievement for SPaG was seen as largely very sound, particularly at the Higher Tier, with few candidates at either tier falling into the Threshold performance band. Two areas for attention were highlighted by examiners: the fact that a number of substantial scripts were presented as one "paragraph" running up to three sides of an answer booklet and the tendency of some candidates to spell the names of dramatists and characters consistently incorrectly. The ways in which a well-paragraphed response makes the candidate's argument clearer should provide an extra impetus to address this problem and Centres may well feel that, as SPaG now holds nearly a fifth of the total marks on the Higher Tier paper, it is worth encouraging candidates to pay more attention to the spelling of dramatists' and characters' names and to the spelling of specialist terms.

## A663 Prose from Different Cultures

### General Comments

The number of schools submitting students for the unit was significantly smaller than in the summer – 125 in the Higher Tier and about half that in the Foundation, entering a total of 7,300 candidates, of whom 1700 were Foundation Tier. This was smaller than last January which I am sure reflects the fact that mostly year 11 students would have been involved. The proportion of Foundation Tier entries was higher than in the summer at 23% though still significantly lower than last January.

The quality of work in the Foundation Tier was very similar to last summer; there were relatively very few band 5 and 6 responses, reflecting the fact that most candidates wrote at respectable length, demonstrated at least some understanding of text and question, and were aware of the necessity of linking to the social context. At the Higher Tier, the quality of work maintained the high standard achieved by students in January and June 2012.

*Of Mice and Men* continues to be most schools' text of choice. The relative popularities remain fairly constant, continuing with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and then *Tsotsi*, *Anita and Me*, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* and bringing up the rear *The Joy Luck Club*. In the Foundation Tier the huge majority of responses were to question 1a, though, unexpectedly, with most scripts marked, the only responses to Amy Tan we have seen have been in the Foundation Tier. In the Higher Tier, the passage-based *Of Mice and Men* choice was the more popular, but its dominance has receded somewhat – question 1b was chosen by a sizeable minority and was certainly no less well done than 1a. The *To Kill a Mockingbird* questions differentiated well, with able candidates demonstrating their confidence with irony and satire in answers on 2a, which most chose. Examiners commented again on the level of personal response evident in the *Tsotsi* answers, particularly the passage-based question. Candidates always appear to have enjoyed the novel and a strong sense of engagement comes out in their responses. 3a provided ample opportunities to explore how the two cultures are presented in *Anita and Me* and illustrate how Meena is caught between them. Question 3b was not at all popular.

Overall, the opinion of most examiners was that the work of candidates continues to improve. I have made this point before, and offered the same explanations. Firstly the handling of AO4 becomes better, with fewer answers ignoring it and more managing to make contextual links that are relevant to the question. One examiner wrote:

*Schools have definitely tackled the requirements of AO4 vigorously and there was more evidence of candidates integrating their AO4 comments into their response rather than bolting on irrelevant detail.*

Secondly, candidates in general seem better prepared in terms of how much they write, how well they know the text, and in their ability to articulate a personal response.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### *Of Mice and Men*

- 1 (a) The great majority of candidates found both the extract and the question accessible. As one would expect, there was a great deal of sympathy for the dog expressed. Weaker responses tended to focus on its plight and Candy's efforts to postpone its demise, and wrote sometimes repetitively about the effect on the reader. Some seemed positively outraged by Carlson's actions – his arguments receiving very short shrift.

However, there were good opportunities taken to explore other areas and link to key themes and to the social context of the novel. These included:

- the hierarchy of authority
- the structural and symbolic links between Candy and his dog, and George and Lennie
- the significance of Slim's 'take a shovel'
- the build up of tension
- the clumsy attempts to comfort Candy.

Stronger answers tended to show more awareness of the importance of the other characters in the bunkhouse, especially Slim and George. These answers also tended to make the most effective links to later narrative developments.

Generally, candidates saw the actions of all the men involved very differently: Candy might be culpable in not standing up to Carlson; Carlson and Slim might be doing only what's best for the dog; George and Slim might be cravenly keeping out of it, or intervening skilfully in attempting to mitigate Candy's suffering. Carlson's behaviour, particularly, provoked a wide range of reactions, and it was fascinating and encouraging to observe candidates' effective use of the text to justify quite diametrically opposed views: one example of the value of the study of English Literature in stimulating independent thinking and moral debate.

Very strong answers sometimes commented on how sinister and disturbing Carlson's tenderness towards the dog is, as he leads him to execution. Some noticed how this foreshadows George's kindness to Lennie before firing the fatal shot. Candidates differed about whether Slim's 'Take a shovel' was an act of kindness – at least the dog will be buried – or a further sign of callousness, just as some thought George's closing of the door an indication of wanting to shut the scene out, or (more likely, given that he sets the latch 'gently') a sign of tenderness and respect towards Candy.

Occasionally responses completely lost focus on the passage, getting bogged down in commentary on the lonely life of itinerant farm workers, or becoming distracted by the cycle of death in the novel that begins with that of Candy's dog. Indeed, there are still some candidates who approach the question as the jumping-off point for a general essay about the whole text. Though these are happily relatively rare, candidates do need to be reminded that while comments which explore relevant links to the wider text are often a sign of a good response, they should remain focused on the passage for the majority of their answer.

Another weakness was the tendency to make sweeping generalisations such as there being no vets (so everyone went round shooting dogs, whose lives were hopeless in any case) and no-one ever keeping pets or having friends. Some candidates seemed to be of the view that Candy was in danger of 'going the same way as his dog', perhaps arising from a misunderstanding of the word 'canned'. (Times were tough, but not quite that tough!)

In terms of candidates' response to AO2, the author's choice of words, there was a huge range of attainment noted. Better responses honed in on Steinbeck's use of adverbs (though sometimes wrongly labelled as verbs or adjectives); '*uneasily*', '*gently*', '*rigidly*' are three of the meatiest examples. However, the opportunity to examine the language was sometimes lost in general explanation rather than in analysis of the effect.

Sometimes candidates' enthusiasm for linking the events in the passage to the great themes of the novel rather stood in the way of effective language analysis: George closing the latch 'gently' represented the door shutting on their dreams; Carlson taking the dog out into the 'darkness', represented the destruction of their hopes and the start of their journey into 'hell'. This kind of overblown writing is not uncommon among abler candidates and sometimes, in the neglect of the situation as it stands and the opportunity to write about the impact of the acts in themselves, they lose out.

Notwithstanding the weaknesses detailed above, this question was thought to have been successful in allowing candidates of all abilities to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. The callousness of the men was linked effectively to the economic situation in the country; their isolation and defensiveness to the nature of their employment. Abler candidates explored the power structure on the ranch and wrote successfully about how tension is built up and maintained with effective reference to AO2.

- 1 (b) Though less popular than 1a this question provoked a wide variety of lively responses to the character of Curley's wife. Most candidates were prepared to bestow at least a modicum of sympathy on her, and many were on her side from the beginning. I am sure that in the decades *Of Mice and Men* has been on GCSE syllabuses the pendulum has swung a long way: she has gone from trouble-maker to victim. It could be argued that there is now a tendency to be rather too kind to her, and better answers tended to balance the sense of her as a victim of discrimination and abuse with some analysis of the way she treats others, especially Crooks.

Some candidates went into great detail about Curley's wife's first appearance – what she is wearing and her body language. There is much to be gained in terms of close textual support in this, though candidates had to be careful not to neglect equally or more important scenes later in the novel. Similarly in this question, examiners detected a reliance on material prepared for the Controlled Assessment task though this was sometimes more of a disadvantage than a help, as candidates were diverted into lengthy excursions into the role of women in 1920s America for example.

Higher attaining responses tended to focus on all three of Curley's wife's appearances relatively equally, and how Steinbeck manipulates and develops our response as her personality opens out. Weaker answers were more likely to focus to a great extent on what others say about her and her visit to the bunkhouse in section 2. Candidates of all abilities were quick to see her as representative of a disadvantaged social group, providing evidence in her lack of a name and in how her actions are interpreted by the men and therefore gained credit for their focus on AO4, the social context. However, responses that only considered her as stereotypical and missed the details that make her a more rounded character – like her treatment of Crooks, the revelations about her background, and her tenderness towards Lennie – tended not to attain the highest bands.

Most candidates are very aware of the demands of AO4 now and are keen to refer to the social and economic difficulties America faced in the 1930s. In this question particularly there was a tendency to indulge in sweeping generalisations about the treatment of women who were not all either prostitutes or downtrodden domestic slaves.

Some responses showed the sensitivity and independence of judgement we look for from the best scripts. This was a successful question.



**To Kill a Mockingbird**

- 2 (a) Mrs Merriweather is one of the vivid secondary characters who provide entertainment for the reader and also contribute to the discourse on racism that is central in the novel. The hypocrisy inherent in her particular brand of ‘telescopic philanthropy’ comes across powerfully in the passage and provided a good opportunity for candidates to achieve the top bands through their familiarity with irony and satire.

The key word in both tiers was ‘shocking’ and the hope was that most candidates would be aware of the ugliness of the sentiments lurking behind Mrs Merriweather’s pompous pontificating and middle-class respectability. Most candidates were aware of what was wrong with the attitudes on display here, and if not exactly shocked, were certainly exercised by the racism exhibited.

Weaker responses tended to have a too heavy focus on AO4, making repetitive comments about Maycomb’s racist attitudes. Most candidates were able to go further and wrote well about Mrs Merriweather’s treatment of Sophy, commenting – sometimes quite passionately – on the offensiveness of her comments about her maid, and on the way she trivialises the plight of the Robinsons. Many also saw the mis-match between her loudly espoused Christian beliefs and her callous comments about Sophy and Helen. A number saw her principally as a figure of fun, which is justifiable, though not perhaps fully appreciating the intensity of Lee’s contempt for her values. Candidates who understood the references to J. Grimes Everett and the Mrunas and therefore could fully explore Lee’s satirical purpose tended to score highly.

The incorporation of AO4 was relatively straightforward here; the attitude of these white women to their black neighbours mirrored the reality of race relations in the Deep South, and most candidates made this link as a matter of course and gained credit. There was some confusion, however, about how slavery fitted into this scenario and some weaker candidates seemed to think that its abolition was only in the very recent past, or indeed still officially existing.

- 2 (b) In the wording of the question, ‘revealing’ was shared between both tiers, with the Higher Tier swapping ‘entertaining’ for ‘memorable’, a more catch-all adjective. It was well done with candidates often focusing on Scout’s behaviour and what it shows about her personality, highlighting the ironic role reversals between Scout and Miss Caroline as well as what is revealed about Maycomb society by the teacher’s exchanges with Walter Cunningham and Burris Ewell as well as Scout. There was a good opportunity to target AO4 in Miss Caroline’s lack of understanding of the poverty suffered by the Cunninghams and in the complete lack of sentimentality in this rural community which is so at odds with the teacher’s choice of reading material for the children.

The entertainment provided by the hapless Miss Caroline’s mistakes and Scout’s interventions was profitably discussed, though only a relatively small number of high-achieving responses explored Lee’s satirical attack on ‘modern’ educational ideas in, for example, Jem’s comments on the ‘Dewey Decimal System’. However, many candidates were able to point out the comic irony in Miss Caroline’s clear annoyance that Scout is literate before starting school.

**Tsotsi**

- 6 (a) *Tsotsi* continues to grow in popularity and this question proved the overwhelming choice of candidates. The plight of the children and the details of how they live provided plenty of opportunity for candidates to target both Assessment Objectives. Examiners frequently comment that students tend to respond to this novel with intense engagement and on this occasion expressed much poignant empathy with the predicament of the tunnel dwellers.

There was a full range of attainment noted here: weaker candidates were sometimes unsure of how this sequence fitted chronologically into the narrative, not perhaps understanding how young David is here; others failed to appreciate how the boys looked after each other, a few even thinking that, as apprentice Tsotsis, they actually did away with Willie. The best showed a very clear awareness of how important this scene is in shaping the character of the ruthless and unreflecting criminal we meet at the beginning of the novel. They therefore explored not just the details which show extreme poverty and callous neglect, but also the ways in which identities are exchanged and reshaped, and how the gang of boys has constructed its own rules and feral morality.

Most candidates managed to focus on the Assessment Objectives by exploiting the clear link to context in the state's neglect of its vulnerable citizens (AO4) and, in considering Fugard's choice of words, by selecting and analysing some of the details that help to make the children's difficulties so vivid, for example the food and the bedding (AO2).

- 6 (b) There were few responses to this question, arguably a function of the accessibility of the extract. Those who did tended to choose a single character, which, for anyone who can sustain writing about one person for 45 minutes, is probably the better option. David's mother was a good choice, as was Morris. A minority of candidates chose Gumboot or others whose fate is indirectly determined by the state; such choices were not penalised though weaving AO4 through the response was arguably harder where *Tsotsi* rather than the institutions of state is directly to blame. The most successful responses linked chosen incidents to why these were illustrative of state brutality or indifference and supported these points with a good level of language analysis.

**Anita and Me**

- 3 (a) The passage-based question on *Anita and Me* also inspired some lively and quite perceptive responses. Candidates were well aware of the cultural differences between Meena's family and the 'Ballbearings Committee' and generally made very thoughtful comments which demonstrated secure understanding. This passage was appreciated not only for how it contrasts the two different cultures, but also the amusing way in which they collide for an evening. There was entertaining comment on Meena's embarrassment and fine appreciation of the social nuances of the encounter as many candidates were alert to differences in dress, entertainment and choice of tipple between the groups, as well as in use of language.

Some good responses also saw this as a sign of how important Nanima's visit is to the progress of the narrative; some noted how Syal conveys Meena's awareness that it is possible to appreciate and to laugh at both cultures. The interweaving of contextual material was particularly well done, often in a more relevant and less heavy-handed way than was evident in responses to *Of Mice and Men*. However, some answers failed to look at the passage in enough detail, missing opportunities for AO2: there was attention to the differences between the family and the ladies of the Ballbearings Committee in terms of dress, attitudes and drinking habits but without much specific focus on Syal's choice of words.

Students appeared to have enjoyed studying this text and their enthusiasm was evident in many scripts making them a pleasure to read.

The remaining questions were attempted by few or very few candidates. For 3b, 4a and 5a I have included comments from examiners who saw sufficient scripts to draw tentative conclusions. Very few or no candidates attempted questions 4b and 5b.

- 3 (b) *'Answers to 3(b) did capture Meena's affection for her parents and her growing understanding of them and the moral stability they actually contribute to her life.'*

*'The less able responses described some characteristics of Meena's parents. More successful answers looked in more specific terms at what there was to like and admire about Mr and Mrs Kumar including their fond, supportive relationship and their efforts to adapt. Most successful answers managed to contrast this with the fragmented life of Tollington and supported their points with relevant language analysis.'*

- 4 (a) *'There were few answers to this passage. There is a great deal here, and candidates were able to bring out what was shocking not just in the events described but in the voice and attitudes we hear. They were sensitive to cultural difference and to the reminders of a much harder world, where human life was viewed as expendable.'*

- 5 (a) *'Responses did pick up on the importance of Paddy calling his brother Francis, instead of Sinbad, but did not fully contextualise this scene, either in relation to the splitting of Paddy's family or the bullying of Kevin, so they captured the drama of this moment, but not, perhaps its full significance. There was some sophisticated comment on the narrative voice and how Doyle's breathless style captures both Paddy's excitement and his confusion.'*

### Assessment Objectives

Many examiners noted how candidates' ability to integrate comments about the social context (AO4) is generally well done. This, I am sure, can be put down to effective teaching of this challenging skill.

With regards to AO2, candidates are good at discussing structure, exploring links between different characters and events: 'foreshadowing' is still a favourite word though it is not always accurately or effectively deployed. Points involving punctuation are also popular; usually to do with the effect of pausing or sentence length, and again success was variable.

Candidates are generally good at using direct quotation to support their observations. However, more candidates could have engaged at length and in detail with the writers' creation of effects, through more specific and developed comment on language and style. Many made good points and provided relevant textual evidence without really evaluating how the language of the quotation supported the point made. Similarly, many candidates made a range of valid points without moving from explanation to analysis

**It may help to point out areas which could be focused on to improve candidate performance:**

- ***Inadequate focus on the extract in the passage-based question:*** *this is still relevant with candidates pursuing a link to the social context a long way; also in discussing how the extract links to major themes in the novel like dreams and loneliness without linking closely to the content of the passage. The rule of thumb is that at least two thirds of the response should focus directly on the extract.*

- **Overlong preamble, for example introducing the novel, the author, the decade:** *a good number of candidates still like to warm up with a short summary of the novel and some biographical details about the writer. Unless the paragraph ends with an overt link to the question it attracts little credit.*
- **Over-focus on very technical features of language:** *Some examples were those mentioned above under 1a, including Steinbeck's use of the word 'darkness' in the extract. In addressing AO2, candidates are urged to include some word level analysis which can be a marker of high attainment, but the emphasis should be on style and effect. Other technical features which are sometimes given to much significance include:*
  - *Punctuation;*
  - *Colloquial language; especially in Of Mice and Men where the characters mostly use the same register*
  - *Sentence length;*
  - *Alliteration and onomatopoeia; very precise discussion of sound effects perhaps more suited to a response to the language of poetry.*
- **Over-simplification of the differences between here and there; then and now:** *This is entirely understandable as the incorporation of telling references to the context is never straightforward. This tends to be more apparent in Of Mice and Men– it is challenging to relate the plight of the characters to the wider society without resorting to generalisation.*

# A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry

## General Comments

In comparison with the June 2012 entry, the numbers entered for this unit were quite low. This is unsurprising as unit A664 is most suited for candidates at the end of the GCSE course. Candidates are expected to respond to two texts from two different genres in the longest of the three examined units and perhaps the best time for them to take this unit is when they are at their most mature moment in Year 11. Candidates generally seemed to have been entered at the appropriate Tier this series.

A number of examiners commented on the sometimes flat vocabulary candidates often adopted. In poetry in particular, language was often described as being “negative” or “positive”. To state that Robin has “negative” feelings about Batman in *Kid* hardly suggests that the poem is expressing his “powerful” feelings, or that Armitage’s writing is conveying Robin’s feelings as “so powerfully”. Similarly to claim that Heaney has “positive” feelings about blackberry-picking in the first part of *Blackberry-Picking* is to underestimate and devalue the feelings the poet expresses.

Examiners also commented on what appears to be the demise of the word “contrast” and its replacement with the Latinate polysyllabic “juxtaposition”, which, of course, does not mean the same as “contrast”. Needless to say, candidates are not penalised for using vocabulary that does not meet with an examiner’s approval, but it is a pity that some otherwise lively responses are somewhat muted by inaccurate terminology.

The most popular prose texts were Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. There were a number of responses to Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and a few to Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Eliot’s *Silas Marner*, but there were almost no responses to Hardy’s *Wessex Tales*. Almost all responses were to the extract-based questions, which require close focus on the extract itself, and which, especially at Higher Tier, also require close attention to the writer’s choice of language. The more discursive questions, the second on each text, seem increasingly unpopular.

Some examiners noted the increasing usage of inappropriate vocabulary in prose responses. There were some not infrequent references to caesura and enjambment, terms appropriate to poetry but not to prose which has accustomed itself over the years to such fittingly prosaic terms as full stop, semi-colon, colon and comma.

## Literary Heritage Prose

### ***Pride and Prejudice***

There were too few responses to this text for useful comment to be made.

### ***Silas Marner***

There were comparatively few responses to *Silas Marner*, these almost invariably being made to the extract-based question. Candidates at both Tiers were able to recognise that this is an important turning-point in the novel and certainly shocking. Shock was principally aroused by William Dane’s betrayal of Silas and, at Higher Tier, the significance of Silas’s repudiation of “a God of lies” was carefully noted. Some candidates commented only on William’s betrayal of his friend, without noting that William himself was the thief and was framing Silas. Very few candidates expressed even mild surprise at the methods adopted to convict or acquit Silas.

### **Lord of the Flies**

The passage-based question proved very popular at both Tiers. Candidates found much to horrify them. The significance of the conch, and its destruction, were well understood, candidates often linking it to Piggy's death, both illustrating the loss of democracy, order, logic and intelligence. The consequent unleashing of anarchy in the extract was seen as an inevitable consequence. Jack's outburst signalled to many a further stage of the descent into savagery. Some responses limited themselves to discussion of only the first seventeen or so lines, writing at too great length about Piggy's death and its inevitability. There were sometimes lengthy discussions of pigs, hunting, and Piggy's name to establish the point that Piggy's death had been long "foreshadowed". Sometimes there were long accounts of the history of the conch from its discovery in Chapter One, through its role in meetings to its destruction. Such lengthy accounts often allowed candidates little time and space to explore other areas of the extract, such as Roger's appearance marked by his gravity and "hangman's horror" and the quiet terror he inspires in Samneric.

The significance of Piggy's death was usually well understood especially by candidates able to focus on what is horrifying about the way Golding presents it. Many commented on the simple almost uncomprehending description of Piggy's head ("and stuff came out") elaborating well on "stuff" to suggest that this refers to his brain and his scientific thinking, without which the boys' acceleration into savagery can proceed unchecked. How Piggy died was not invariably understood; "a glancing blow" was sometimes misinterpreted, a considerable number of candidates believing that Piggy was crushed by a mighty boulder and not by the fall onto the "square round rock in the sea".

Good responses here tended, when they focused closely on Jack, to look at his words immediately after Piggy's death, his actions (including his "stooping") and his tormenting of Samneric. They were also aware, as some candidates were not, that Roger is not afraid of "the Chief" whom he almost shoulders out of the way as he "advances" on Samneric. Such responses often commented shrewdly on words such as "advanced" and "wielding" noting how they added to the horrifying aspect of the episode.

The second question **3(b)** on *Lord of the Flies* attracted few takers at either Tier. However, there were some good responses, where candidates focused closely on the early behaviour of the boys and contrasted that with their later behaviour. However, some candidates limited themselves by using the extract printed for **3(a)** as the basis for their **3(b)** answer. It proved difficult for them to discuss changes in behaviour if they confined themselves to the extract.

### **The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales**

Too few responses to this text were seen for any general comments to be useful.

### **Animal Farm**

This was a very popular text at both Tiers, with candidates, almost without exception, opting to discuss what was dramatic and significant about the extract, or how Orwell's writing made it so. Good responses, at both Tiers accepted the invitation to write about both parts of the question: the drama and the significance.

Many candidates contrasted the animals' probable enjoyment of the "pleasant evening" and "warm weather" with their amazement and terror at the spectacle of the pigs' march round the farmyard. Clover's "terrified neighing" and the rushing and galloping of the animals were seized upon as being dramatic, as was Orwell's use of one paragraph sentences. The significance of the pigs' walking on their hind legs was discussed by most candidates, who often linked this action to the first of the Seven Commandments. Many also commented on the whip Napoleon holds in his trotter, linking it to the brutality of Manor Farm and the reincarnation of Jones in the form of Napoleon. Weaker responses tended to approach the extract chronologically and spent so much time on the early paragraphs (discussing, for example, the existence of "a piece of waste ground" and speculating that the farm was now totally neglected and run-down) that Napoleon's appearance was scarcely considered. The best responses included in their analysis of the parade of the pigs the effect of language choices such as "strolling", "file", "march" and "majestically upright".

Not all candidates engaged with the roles of Squealer and the sheep in the extract. Some responses simply stated that Squealer provided propaganda on the farm and that the sheep were particularly stupid. These, quite rightly, commented on Orwell's use of "ordered" to show that not all animals indeed are equal, but did not make a link between the learning of the "new song", Squealer's intentions, and the drowning out of any possible protest at the pigs' breaking of the first commandment. Good responses tended to observe that Napoleon's dogs are "gambolling round him" and not being openly used as a means of tearing out the throats of Napoleon's supposed enemies.

The question was often well answered and almost all candidates were able to offer some sort of valid response to it.

There were too few responses to **3(b)**, the question on Frederick and Pilkington, for helpful comment to be made here.

### ***The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

This continues to be a fairly popular text with centres, a significant number of candidates answering on it and particularly on the extract-based questions. At both Tiers candidates focused well on the text, rarely straying for lengthy periods from it. Responses varied, with some simply paraphrasing parts of the extract without exploring it to any extent. These tended to see Jekyll as a well-nourished and healthy Victorian gentleman, on good terms with Mr Utterson to whom he shows courtesy and gratitude. Better responses probed more deeply into the extract, picking on the significance of "slyish", Jekyll's somewhat contradictory attitude towards Lanyon, the pallor of his lips and the blackness of his eyes on hearing Hyde's name, and his "incoherency of manner". These also hinted at the theme of the duality of man, but generally resisted the temptation to elaborate on this at the expense of detailed consideration of the extract. However, some responses wrote at some length about Utterson, perhaps honouring the memory of a direct question on the lawyer set in January 2012.

Few candidates attempted the second question, but found a plentiful supply of material to hand. Better responses did more than simply summarise parts of the plot, and probed at features of the genre and Stevenson's choice of language and structure.

### **Poetry**

The most popular of the named poets were Simon Armitage, Carol Ann Duffy, and, to a lesser extent, Seamus Heaney. Quite a large number of candidates at both Tiers opted to respond to the Unseen Poem, often with considerable success.

### **Armitage**

There were responses to all three questions, the majority of them to *Kid*, a poem that candidates often wrote about with evident enjoyment. Most were able to identify Robin's feelings of bitterness and anger, with quite subtle responses developing the idea that Robin's "rant" is an attempt to boost himself, unjustifiably, at Batman's expense. The effect of the opening line, with its alliteration, was frequently commented on, with strong responses looking carefully at the language deployed elsewhere in the poem. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase parts of the poem without exploring its language in any detail, or argued that all of us know what it's like to be "dumped"/abandoned and can sympathise with Robin's situation. The personal appeal too often came in the way of analysis/discussion of language. Only a few noted the effect of all lines ending in -er.

Comparatively few candidates responded to *In Our Tenth Year*, *Mother*, *any distance greater than single span* being the more popular of the choices offered in **7(b)**. The question focused on the moving quality of the relationship in the chosen poem, and only the best answers at both Tiers kept the question's focus to the fore. There were a number of informed explanations of what the poems were about; *In Our Tenth Year* was often taken to be only about disagreements and suspected adulteries, with little discussion of stanzas other than the second.

There were too few responses to *Wintering Out* for any useful comment to be made. However, there were several lively responses to *Gooseberry Season*, where candidates found both the behaviour of the “guest” and his treatment by the family memorable and were able to comment effectively on Armitage’s language.

### Clarke

There were very few responses to the Clarke questions. However, these were often very sensitive in the case of *The Field-Mouse* and *My Box*, though surprisingly responses to *Miracle on St David’s Day* sometimes omitted to deal with the “miracle” itself.

### Cope

There were comparatively few responses to the Wendy Cope questions, and these were almost exclusively to *Tich Miller* and *On Finding an Old Photograph*. Some examiners felt that candidates prefer to avoid questions involving terms like “entertaining” or “amusing” on the grounds that humour is perhaps too subjective or too difficult an area for candidates to approach with confidence. However, candidates did respond well to what makes Tich Miller’s situation so moving (some found the voice’s situation and perhaps guilt moving too) and few neglected the powerful last line of the poem.

### Duffy

Candidates at both Tiers responded well to *Before You Were Mine*, focusing on the “speaker’s feelings about her mother”. Most noted the love the speaker feels, her possessiveness and her guilt at the way her birth and existence have affected her mother. The glamour of “Marilyn” and the significance of “relic” were clearly understood. Some candidates argued that the mother was now dead (the clattering “ghost”), confused her with the speaker’s grandmother, or felt that the mother had lost totally lost her sense of fun because of her daughter (despite the *Cha cha cha* steps on the way home from Mass). However, the poem led to some lively and engaged responses.

There were a number of responses to *War Photographer*, where comparatively few candidates had a really clear view of him. Some adopted a sympathetic approach, seeing him as doing a job that had to be done despite the comparative indifference of both his editor and the paper’s readers. More often than not the view taken was unclear; that he was both a figure whose witnessing of suffering deserved sympathy and one who exploited suffering for personal enrichment. Few responses resolved the dilemma. Responses to *Head of English* had little difficulty in finding the speaker thoroughly memorable and supporting their opinion with well-supported textual reference.

Few engaged with either *Liar* or *Mrs Lazarus*, but it was interesting to note how well candidates responded to Mrs Lazarus and to Duffy’s sympathetic portrayal of her.

### Heaney

All five poems were considered by a significant number of candidates. Almost all showed sound understanding and some degree of confidence in their analysis. Few candidates knew who Bluebeard in *Blackberry-Picking* was; of those who mentioned him many thought he was a children’s tale pirate, but this interpretation did not seriously impair the reading of the poem, though the effect of the blood-stained hands image was weakened. Some interpretations of *Blackberry-Picking* argued that the poem was about sexual awakening, and/or/guilt at despoiling nature, presumably a reading linked to *Death of a Naturalist*. Where the interpretation was coherently argued and supported, it was, of course, given due credit. Heaney’s portrayal of farm-workers in *Follower* and *The Early Purges* was often carefully considered, though some responses to *Follower* focused more closely on the voice of the poem than on the father, whilst some responses to *The Early Purges* focused on the unfortunate kittens rather than on Dan Taggart, the purger.



### **Zephaniah**

There were few responses to Benjamin Zephaniah. Of these, candidates found discussing the content of the poems easier than engaging with the poet's language. Certainly, it is less difficult to comment on, for example, Heaney's choice of language than it is on Zephaniah's.

### **Unseen Poetry**

A considerable number of candidates at both Tiers, opted to respond to the unseen poem. Many answered the questions competently, and a number answered astonishingly well.

### **Paul D. Wapshott: *My Family***

At Foundation Tier candidates were able to identify elements of the poem that they found moving and were able to navigate their way through the poem's structure. Many were able to discuss the contrast between the excitement of the first two stanzas with the sadness of the last two. The death of the speaker was found to be moving, and the best responses engaged sensitively with the pathos of the poem's last two lines. There was often evidence of careful thought about the poem, even when the interpretation was slightly awry. The age of the "grown up girl of three" puzzled some candidates, and some thought that the soldier had left three daughters behind. A number of candidates were apparently unaware that *The Sun* is a newspaper, with others a little confused by the gender of "Pop". However, most responses were thoughtful and engaged, with many examiners commenting on the freshness of responses not weighed down by the burden of poetic devices learned for the examining occasion.

### **Anne Stevenson: *The Fish Are All Sick***

Freshness of response also characterised answers at Higher Tier on *The Fish Are All Sick*. Some answers betrayed some anxiety by arbitrarily and dogmatically imposing a meaning or context on the poem (for example, it is about the aftermath of an oil spill or urban development); on the other hand, those who were prepared to examine the language systematically and explore tone and connections, while accepting a degree of uncertainty and mystery, showed insight into how the poem works, realising that the uncertainties were part of the "disturbing" that they were invited to explore. That said, candidates who opted for the oil spill interpretation were often able to offer a coherent account of the poem. Candidates who had apparently been well prepared to tackle the unseen poem looked thoughtfully at such phrases as "villages stranded in stone" and "like pearls on the fringe of a coat" and engaged profitably with mysteries like "Water keeps to itself" and the repetition of "closing its grip" in the last line. Very few candidates indeed made nothing of the poem: almost all, to a greater or lesser extent, found much to say about it.

As an option, the unseen poem is very attractive to Centres and candidates; many examiners found assessing responses to it enjoyable since they are thoughtful and individual, no two seeming identical, a comment that cannot always be made about poems that have been thoroughly taught.

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