

GCSE

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J360**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

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.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

© OCR 2015

CONTENTS

General Certificate of Secondary Education

English Literature (J360)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts	4
A662 Modern Drama	6
A663 Prose from Different Cultures	12
A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry	12

A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

General Comments

There were few administration problems reported this year. A number of centres failed to put the correct candidate number on the folders and this slows down the process of moderation. Some centres failed to even collate their sample of folders and just enclosed 20 folders with no separation at all.

Centres need to be aware again that this year OCR will not accept tasks that are anything but the ones that have been published for the June 2015 series.

A number of centres had used the incorrect mark scheme for 2015. They had in fact used the mark scheme that was used in 2014, which does not reflect the specific weighting of the components, or the additional weighting of QWC (Quality of written communication). In the final year of controlled assessment in 2016, centres are urged to ensure that they check that all candidates have been set the correct tasks and used the correct mark scheme.

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. A minority of centres sent the assignments in a separate package to the final annotated cover sheets and the moderator was then left with the task of collating the complete folder before the moderation process could begin.

Centres only need to include materials that they feel will facilitate the moderation process and which will clarify how the final mark has been awarded. Generally there was clear evidence that internal moderation had taken place in the vast majority of centres and on this entry there were only some small adjustments needed to a small minority of centres. Marking was generally consistent and centres had been rigorous in their application of the assessment criteria.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Response to Shakespeare

On this entry the vast majority of centres responded to the tasks on Macbeth or Romeo and Juliet, but there were also responses to Julius Caesar and The Merchant of Venice. Most centres got the balance between consideration of the scene text, film versions and references to other parts of the play right. Again it is encouraging to report that a number of teachers had clearly encouraged their candidates to watch more than one version of the Shakespeare film studied and were able to use this effectively in their work. As a result it was reported that there were some perceptive comments on directors at work.

A small minority of centres were still using alternative film versions of the play that were not on the recommended list that accompanied the tasks. Centres are advised to refer to this list when preparing to show the filmed version before undertaking future tasks.

It is pleasing to report however that the majority of centres are getting a sound balance between commenting upon the performed version against the literal interpretation of the text.

Most candidates showed clear and critical engagement with the play and were able to refer to the text to support their observations. Moderators reported that candidates had been well prepared and were able to refer to the characters selected in the context of the rest of the play. There was no evidence to suggest that centres had been nothing other than totally diligent and

conscientious in their study of the whole play, and then directed this into the selected scene for the final assessment piece.

Response to poetry

The majority of centres responded to the poems by Wilfred Owen, but there were also responses to the Browning poems and also to Shakespeare's sonnets Chaucer, Rossetti, and Hardy. Moderators reported that some centres were still concentrating on only 2 poems for their response, and that the task does ask that candidates refer to poems "in the selection", which should be more than two poems.

The responses were generally of a very high standard and centres had applied the assessment criteria consistently.

Summary

Generally this was a very impressive entry, and centres demonstrated a clear understanding of the specification and responded appropriately. Teachers are to be complimented for their hard work in delivering this component, and their conscientious approach and consistency of standards was reflected in the quality of work that was submitted for final moderation.

A662 Modern Drama

General Comments

The overall quality of the work submitted was generally perceived as of a praiseworthy standard, with the paper being seen as very accessible. As in all previous years, assessors have seen responses that have given them fresh insights into texts they know very well; and the enjoyment and understanding gained by candidates from their study of drama is as clear and rewarding as ever.

It has again been 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, though some examiners commented that a failure to do this was still often a feature of weaker answers. There was continuing evidence of candidates really thinking about which characters are on-stage, what they know, what has led up to the extract and what happens as a result of it. In this session there appeared generally to be a pleasing absence of responses that merely worked through the passages as if they were unseen and far fewer references to "readers" in proportion to "audience", which seems to provide continuing evidence that many 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. The general consensus from examiners was that there was a significant and growing amount of 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. A significant number of candidates were able to cite specific productions and film versions that they had experienced and 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. There was evidence, however, of a few candidates misjudging the balance with regard to this and being side-tracked into writing at inappropriate length about a particular performance with unconnected and undeveloped references to facial expression, gesture, and on-stage movement.

The passage-based question remains the preferred option of the great majority of candidates. A number of examiners did, however, observe that the quality of the discursive responses that they saw was very impressive. 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 and it is to be hoped that the perceived drop in the numbers of candidates attempting this option will not become an established trend.

Examiners generally felt that candidates had been well prepared for the extract-based question and were usually able to get the balance right between dealing with the dramatic detail of the extract and with its wider significance within the play as a whole. Answers including partially assimilated material (particularly in an attention to Priestley's supposed Communist leanings and Sherriff's war experiences for example) were encouragingly fewer than previous years. In general where this material did appear it was at the expense of a close and careful exploration of the drama rather than enhancing an understanding of the drama in any way. On a positive note, it is worth mentioning that the number of feature-logging responses that become an exhaustive analysis of the linguistic features of, for example, Miller's stage directions and even punctuation, which, after all, are not seen by an audience, were also not very evident.

Comparatively few examples of rubric infringements were reported, with the "multiple" answer rarely seen.

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. 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.

There were many candidates who wrote a plan of some description, ranging from a few words to a detailed account of the ground they would cover including quotations and paragraph content. Where those plans were over-long, there was a clear impact on what the candidate had time to cover – and several Examiners reported instances where good points were mentioned in the plan but did not appear in the essay itself. The general feeling seems to be that a plan can help candidates of all abilities structure their ideas into a coherent argument and make sure they include all of the key points; but that planning should not impact negatively upon the quality of the response itself.

Once again, it is pleasing to report that all six texts were covered in this examination session. “An Inspector Calls” remains the most popular choice; and it was generally considered that candidates engaged effectively with it and were able to explore the issues arising with some sensitivity. “Journey’s End” and “A View from the Bridge” appear to be the next most popular options. “Educating Rita” continues to be studied by a significant number of centres, with candidates seeming to engage positively with the cultural and social issues the play encapsulates, though the humour of the dialogue sometimes proves difficult to grasp. “The History Boys” remains a minority choice and, again, the comic dialogue is often appreciated fully only by the most able candidates, though it is a text that has yielded some extremely sophisticated and critically aware answers. “Hobson’s Choice” continues to be taught for the Specification by a significant number of Centres, perhaps attracted by the play’s strong themes and characterisation.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1: The History Boys

A relatively small number of centres selected this text and the majority of candidates were entered for the Higher Tier.

Question No. 1(a)

The passage-based Q1(a) was the preferred option of most candidates and it met with varying degrees of success. Most candidates were better able to address the “significant” strand rather than the “entertaining” aspect of the scene. There was a general grasp of the Headmaster’s insistence and focus on the better universities at the expense of all else; and better candidates were able to explore Mrs Lintott’s subtle undermining of his authority in this scene paying appropriate attention to the language and the drama. Candidates who were less secure moved quite soon to a discussion of other parts of the play that they saw as linked thematically. Addressing of the “entertaining” strand by considering the Headmaster’s clumsy flattery and Mrs Lintott’s verbal toying with him proved more difficult for candidates; and very few candidates indeed spent time looking at the second half of the passage to comment on Hector and Mrs Lintott’s shared resignation and cynicism.

Question No. 1(b)

This was a less popular choice and attempted by relatively few candidates. Those candidates that attempted it were able to comment on the ways that the lives of the characters had developed, and the extent to which those individual histories reflect on the wisdom of the various teachers and their philosophies. The temptation to re-tell the events that led to this moment was

avoided, and where there was consideration of the Hector/Irwin dynamic it was done relevantly and sensitively. There was an encouraging focus upon the language – particularly the unctuous praise of the Headmaster set in contrast with an understanding of what he thought of Hector and his methods.

Question 2: Hobson's Choice

Although there were not a large number of responses on this text on the Higher paper, there were still an encouraging number of centres and candidates. The strong characterisation and clear thematic elements certainly helped nearly all candidates to keep a focussed and relevant response.

Question No. 2(a)

Most responses seem to have been to Question 2a, with candidates mostly responding more successfully to the “entertaining” strand by focussing on the strong characterisation, the Maggie/Hobson relationship, and the comic contribution of the Doctor. The stronger answers made much of the Maggie/Doctor alliance against the increasingly vulnerable and powerless (if still entertainingly pompous) Hobson, and were able to link Maggie's brisk and sharp language with her challenging character.

Question 2(b)

At the time of writing, very few responses to Question 2(b) had been reported, but examiners felt that those seen had handled the question competently and displayed a clear awareness of the characters of the sisters, and their contribution to the drama of the play. As hoped for, candidates had a clear sense of the distinctiveness of the sisters, although aware of their common qualities – their ill-suitedness, for example, to anything involving inconvenience, work, or indeed concern for anyone other than themselves. That and their comically antagonistic relationship with Maggie gave candidates plenty of dramatic material.

Question 3: A View from the Bridge

This continues its growth in popularity as a taught text, and again appears to have been both well-received and well-taught by centres and greatly enjoyed by candidates.

Question 3(a)

The extract question (3a) was by far the most popular choice on this text and demanded both discussion of context as well as of the wealth of material available in the dialogue and staging. It was successfully answered by the majority of candidates, who were aware of its dramatically charged nature, although less assured candidates found the complex relationship between Rodolpho and Catherine confusing and led them on occasion to make over-simple comments about feelings, including Catherine's feelings for Eddie in the light of her comments on Beatrice's lack of understanding of him. Those less secure answers were sometimes also characterised by poorly assimilated detail on the cultural context of the play. Most answers, however, were able to comment on Catherine's preparedness to leave her home, as a result of the depth of her love for Rodolpho paired with her fear of what Eddie might be capable of. They were also able to comment on how Rodolpho's love for Catherine presents itself in pride for his country, and anger at what he sees as Eddie's controlling of her as something less than human. Stronger answers to this question picked up on the stage directions, which provide ample evidence of the tumult of emotions building – Catherine's nervous, hesitant, quiet admission of fear of Eddie; Rodolpho's angry pacing around and physical closeness to Catherine; Catherine's weeping as she admits to the emotional logic of the situation; and the increasing softness and intimacy of the embrace. Those candidates who were able to refer sensitively to the image of the bird and the frequent references to Catherine as a “child” were able to secure a better understanding of the power of the emotions.

Question 3(b)

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. It may well be that the very powerful and packed nature of the extract may have led candidates away from the discursive option here. The explicitness of the focus determined by the strands did in general as hoped deterred candidates from a general character summary and there to be a great deal of comment about the dramatic dynamics of the scenes involving Beatrice, her central role in terms of the development of the play's themes and issues, and the complex relationships she has with all of the major characters. In general, candidates were more secure on the complexities of her relationship with Eddie than they were with other aspects of her role and contribution to the drama.

Question 4: An Inspector Calls

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, still the most popular choice of text by some distance; and, as with all other sessions of this paper, candidates made comments that cast new light onto the text.

Question 4(a)

Answers to 4a, the passage-based question, generated the full range of achievement, with candidates clearly appearing to have engaged with the play and to have understood the dramatic context and to have at least some awareness of the wider significance of the extract. Most answers were able to discuss the key dramatic features and context of the scene: Birling's attempts to 'protect' Sheila from the unpleasant details around her fiancé's involvement in Daisy Renton's death; Gerald's revelations around how the relationship broke down; and the different reactions of the characters to that description – in particular the reaction of Sheila and Mrs Birling. Differentiation came, and answers moved up the mark range, in an understanding of Gerald's explanation of what happened, and how he describes it to others; and Sheila's complex, changing and developing response (and perhaps Mrs Birling's less complex response). Some of the better answers commented upon how Gerald's response and his language mean a somewhat ambiguous response to him from the audience, showing well developed emotional intelligence in unpicking his attitude. Some good answers focused very much on Sheila's role and recognised the significance of her ending the engagement with a number of strong responses seeing this as the rejection or defeat of capitalist values, personified in Gerald, by the younger generation. These better answers saw candidates successfully reference the extract in the wider context of the play with comments as above on social responsibility, social class and attitudes to women at the time the play was set/written without ever losing touch with the details of the extract or losing sight of the drama. The character of Gerald in particular, caught as he is between the generations and partaking of something of each, gave candidates a very welcome opportunity to be a bit more ambitious in their exploration of character than the more common description of a generational conflict between dyed-in-the-wool capitalists and admirable social crusaders.

Question 4(b)

This question was attempted by a much smaller, though nonetheless significant number of candidates, probably being the most popular (b) question, and was probably done equally well as the extract-based option, with the majority able to show a secure understanding of the relationship between the Birlings rather than resort to separate character studies. Most candidates were able to comment on (and support) how Arthur and Sybil are connected by unpleasant characteristics: arrogance; materialism; self-centredness; and a willingness to judge others. Stronger answers showed a clear awareness of other factors that make the marriage 'work' – such as Mrs Birling's clear sense of the role of herself and her daughter in the male dominated society of the play. As answers moved up the mark range and the Bands, there were also a few references to occasions where the relationship is not as secure as it may appear - Sybil's reactions to her husband's social gaffes in the opening scene of the play; and her later insistence that she was the only one who did not give in to the Inspector's behaviours.

Question 5: Educating Rita

“Educating Rita” was a reasonably widely-studied text in this session, with the majority of candidates opting to attempt Question 5a; a particularly popular option for Foundation Tier candidates.

Question 5(a)

The passage and question allowed good scope for meaningful answers with the majority of candidates able to pick up on how the passage dealt with how both Rita and Frank had dealt with choices in their life, where they were on their respective life journeys, and how their journeys had crossed significantly. The focus of the question is on how the relationship is conveyed dramatically; and, although most answers attempted some contextualising, this tended to be rather general and didn’t often consider the difficult emotions of the previous meeting - with Rita asserting her independence, despite Frank’s desperate and forlorn attempts to mock her accomplishments. This (and his subsequent drunken phone call and his entering her for the examination) might have given them a securer context for the complex emotions of the scene. Most answers had something to say, however, about how Rita is now in full control of her own life, and is able to make choices independently. Stronger responses were able to pay close and appropriate attention to the stage directions and there were several interesting comments on the symbolism of Frank packing his books.

Question 5(b)

Question 5b was, predictably, the less popular option on this text, but those that attempted it appeared to have a clear sense of Rita’s background and family as a factor that holds back her development and candidates commonly selected Rita’s comments about her school, her contemporaries and their attitudes towards learning, her husband Denny and his pronouncements on what her life should consist of, her social and cultural setting, and her immediate family members as representative of the pressures upon her, at the same time as being representative of the factors that have made her want to change her life story. The better answers avoided the easy option of blaming Rita’s background for her sense of stagnation, and showed a sensitive understanding of the relationship between life and literature.

Question 6: Journey’s End

This is still a very popular text, enjoyed by the majority of candidates who, despite their relative youth and inexperience of the things the play ostensibly deals with, were able to engage with the very human dilemmas.

Question 6(a)

This question, as in previous sessions, remains one of the most frequently attempted questions, eliciting the full range of responses. It was encouraging that although there is not a huge amount that “happens” in the extract, candidates in general responded to the emotionally charged situation. Most answers were able to contextualise this passage and go on to say something about how the tension is created by Sherriff not only by what we know of what precedes this scene, but also the portrayal of deep feelings in an extremely suspense-filled environment. There were some answers that dwelt for too long on the “themes” of class, trench conditions or humour, or that detailed the historical war context (or who raised these matters without a clear sense of how they might impact upon the drama in this scene). Stronger answers as hoped, however, advertised themselves in their scrutiny of the complex, often understated but dramatic build-up of the extract; with differentiation coming through the range of feelings and tensions covered. There is Stanhope’s initial ignorance, and the audience’s awareness of the unexpected newcomer – with the irony made more pointed by references to some of the mundane realities of life in the trenches (food and alcohol); Raleigh’s awkwardly eager introduction and the hand-shake not accepted; Stanhope’s brooding, ominous realisation of who the new officer is who is

breaking into his self-contained world apart from the life he left behind; Osborne's clear sense of the need to ease the tension through distraction; Trotter's less aware affability and discussion about food with the new-comer, and the painfully slapstick humour of his comic attempts to sit and eat; and Stanhope's grim warning to Mason about his future if he falls down on the job again. There was also evident thorough work on putting the scene in the context of the play's wider themes of hero-worship; the coping mechanisms that the men look to, to avoid acceptance of what awaits them all (the obsession with food); and the toll that war takes on men (with reference to Stanhope's inward-looking, self-destructive passion).

Question 6(b)

There were proportionally far fewer responses to Question 6b, yet it was probably the most attempted discursive option, and the consensus was that it was generally well done by those who attempted it. Most answers were aware that Osborne has many qualities that would seem to suit the role of commanding officer: organisation; patriotism; loyalty; hard work; knowledge of conditions and the realities of front-line existence; patience and tolerance; tact and sensitivity; an understanding, humane, sympathetic, and avuncular manner. Most answers were also able to refer to incidents and language to illustrate those qualities and their value and relevance to the role. Because of the phrasing of the question, many candidates took the opportunity to include a detailed analysis of those qualities that made Stanhope suitable or unsuitable, and this was very much part of a legitimate response.

SPAG

This is the third session that includes the SPAG mark in this unit, and 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 particular areas for attention were highlighted by examiners: better paragraphing practice, where evident, helped candidates to structure their ideas and guide the reader to an understanding of the analysis and support being offered; and the correct spelling of the names of dramatists and characters gave confidence and fluency to the assessment process.

A663 Prose from Different Cultures

General Comments:

For the first time candidates were reminded to support their ideas with details from ‘the rest of the novel’ as well as from the passage. This change to the rubric in the passage-based (a) questions was designed to encourage candidates to make more of the connections between the extract and the novel as a whole. They were rewarded according to how skilfully they handled this requirement both to explore the passage and to reach out from it.

Most candidates handled this requirement well: the key to success was still in sustaining the main focus of the response on the extract, while showing awareness of how this moment fits into the structure of the novel as a whole, usually with reference to either character or theme. For example, in ‘Of Mice and Men’ candidates who demonstrated how the boss’s aggressive approach to his new employees, as reflected in Candy’s comments here, is confirmed when they meet him soon after, will have been given credit; conversely candidates who found themselves giving an account, say, of the fight between Lennie and Curley would probably not have been as well rewarded for it, as the link to the passage is likely to be so much more tenuous.

The other key aspect of success in A663 is the extent to which meaningful links are drawn to the social context in which the novel is set, and again it is the candidate’s skill in integrating contextual information that to a fair degree determines success. Examiners were again impressed by candidates’ ability to handle this requirement; long paragraphs of social history only very tangentially related to the extract or the novel are much rarer than they used to be.

Examiners also commented favourably on how much energy and commitment candidates demonstrated in their responses. It is pleasing that the novels on the syllabus continue to stimulate and engage students. The plight of Lennie in ‘Of Mice and Men’ and Tom Robinson in ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ for example, again inspired much thoughtful and sensitive writing and, although these qualities are hard to assess in themselves, they do certainly contribute to the quality of understanding displayed in the work.

Comments on Individual Questions

Please note that the questions are discussed in order of popularity. The first four account for all but a tiny percentage of candidates’ choices and so comments will become more tentative and anecdotal as we go down. There are some questions where any analysis of strengths and weaknesses in responses would be based on such a dearth of evidence as to be more likely to distort than to inform any conclusions drawn.

Question 1

Question 1(a)

The extract provided rich opportunities to explore both the physical and human aspects of the ranch environment. Candidates of all abilities cited examples of the lack of warmth, comfort and cleanliness in the bunkhouse and most could tie that to the existing economic situation. Better candidates picked up on the hints provided by the ‘Western magazines’ that were ‘secretly believed’ and also on what lies behind the rather fractious conversation between George and Candy.

The passage did provide opportunities to look at Steinbeck’s choice of words (AO2) and stronger responses focused effectively on the symbolism in elements like the ‘dust-laden bar’ and the

flies compared to 'shooting stars'. Sometimes candidates were keen to see symbolism where it probably didn't exist, for example in the playing cards, the wooden latch or the stove, but it was impressive that such a large majority of candidates were fully aware of the requirement to look at language choice. Many, for example, were alert to the significance of 'secretly believe' and linked the phrase both to the importance of the dream and to the macho culture of the ranch,

Differentiation in this question was also to be found in the way the rest of the novel was embraced: discussion of Candy's role in the novel can be readily tied into his appearance here; comments about way the ranch is run can be linked to what Candy says about the boss. Less successfully, as discussed above, candidates sometimes found themselves recounting in some detail the treatment of Curley's wife and Crooks and the themes of racism and the position of women where the links to the passage were less well established. However, many candidates made quite sophisticated judgements about how much detail extraneous to the extract should be included: for example, because Lennie comes in behind George they offered some discussion of their relationship with reference to elsewhere in the novel, while appreciating that this is only one short phrase in the passage so to spend a good deal of time on this topic would not be appropriate.

Links to the social context were generally well made. (This applies to the full range of novels). Here, candidates explored how the predicament of the ranch hands is connected to the economic situation where, because of unemployment and the degradation of the land in the mid-west, all the power lay in the hands of the ranch owners in California and exploitation was rife. A few candidates still felt the need to introduce their response with some potted history of America in the 1930s (as indeed they did with 'To Kill a Mockingbird') but they tended to be briefer than in past years; it was interesting to note that many candidates had been taught to bring the focus in on the novel and the question by the end of the first paragraph, and that technique worked well.

Question 1(b)

This was much less popular but it offered good opportunities to demonstrate textual knowledge. Candidates are obviously put off by the fact that they have to work with a much larger canvas in the b) question but here they were given the opportunity to explore big moments in the novel like the fight scene or the shooting of the dog, and candidates who were brave enough to choose it often did well.

Best answers saw the violence as endemic which allowed profitable links to context and also were able to target AO2 by, for example, commenting on Curley's language to and about Lennie.

Candidates who knew the novel well often attained band 3, 'good overall understanding', by virtue of the fact that they could roam freely and select suitable quotations from wherever. Responses that did not achieve at least band 4 tended to drift away from the question, often into a narrative account of one or more scenes that had more to do with re-telling the story than analysing the violent nature of the society.

Question 2

Question 2(a)

This question was unusual in having two fairly distinct parts and candidates had to work out how to balance these requirements. Positive marking (rewarding what is there rather than penalising what is not) is a key principle in the marking of this paper, so if candidates focused more on one element than another, this was not considered a weakness unless the response concentrated on one to the virtual exclusion of the other. That said, examiners were impressed with the way many candidates managed to discuss discrimination here through an exploration of Atticus's determination to fight it thus targeting both requirements of the question.

AO4 was particularly well handled here, and comment on the social context was linked to the obvious admiration and respect candidates held for the character of Atticus and many saw his courage as a hopeful sign for the future, pointing the way to the civil rights' movement of the 50s and 60s and the great men and women who led it.

A pointer to high achievement in 2a, and mostly absent from the few Foundation Tier responses seen, was the ability to look at how Scout's naivety allows Lee not only to illuminate Atticus's qualities as a father, but also the extent of the prejudice he was up against. It was impressive how many Higher Tier candidates understood this complex aspect of the novel's structure and were able to make effective links to AO2, the author's choice of words.

This question was particularly well done by candidates of average and above average ability.

Question 6

Question 6(a)

This passage offered candidates a straightforward route into both Assessment Objectives: the activity which is the subject of the extract sums up the reality of daily life for the people of the township, and Fugard's vivid, evocative style enhances its impact on the reader.

The question differentiated well among candidates: weaker responses tended to stray too far and too often from the extract, offering a general account of life for those living in the township; band 4 answers focused on the physical details of the scene and the contrasts between the various social groups who formed the queue, while at band 3 and more particularly bands 1 and 2, scripts incorporated an analysis of Fugard's choice of words in creating atmosphere, for example in his use of repetition.

The evidence continues to indicate that 'Tsotsi' is a novel that appeals to a wide range of students and allows candidates of different abilities to achieve to their potential.

Question 3

Question 3(a)

This vivid extract elicited a strong response.

Better responses here, as well as examining the incident, including Meena's response to the woman's words and the implications of her keeping the truth from her father, managed to focus on what gives this moment its special power to shock through a consideration of Syal's choice of words.

This novel, like 'Tsotsi', benefits from having a straightforward route into both AOs thanks to its setting and vivid use of language to create atmosphere and effect. It also encourages candidates of all abilities to achieve to their best standard.

Question 4

Question 4(a)

'The Joy Luck Club' in its length and narrative complexity doesn't perhaps have the same broad appeal as most novels on the syllabus and this is reflected in the quality of the work seen on it every year. The small group who chose it nearly all answered the a) question and most explored the way the extract evokes the subservient role of women in Chinese society well, focusing on the antics of the matchmaker and the lurid way she is described. Candidates were also quite skilled at linking Lindo's experience to those of the other Chinese mothers without losing focus on the extract.

No other question produced more than a handful of responses which makes it impossible to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of these questions and the strengths and weaknesses in the candidates' work on them.

It is perhaps not surprising that the vast majority of candidates opt for the passage-based question: the passages are always chosen because they offer direct access to both AOs; with the b) option candidates have to find their own links to the Assessment Objectives to a greater extent. This freedom must appear daunting on the day, especially given that the exam is only 45 minutes long. However, for candidates who know the text well there are advantages to the larger canvas and examiners read some impressive responses, particularly to 1b), that explored incidents and characters and incorporated quotations from all over the novel, and they tended to be well rewarded. The b) question also has the advantage of not obliging candidates to balance comment from inside and outside the extract.

Overall examiners continue to be impressed by the engagement shown by the candidates, and by the skill with which they incorporated the Assessment Objectives, particularly AO4, into their writing.

A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry

General Comments

As in previous years, Examiners reported that candidates do themselves no favours by misidentifying parts of speech when commenting on a writer's choice of language. Too often, much is made of a writer's use of adverbs when referring to nouns, adjectives or even verbs. Such misidentifications provide little confidence in a candidate's ability to come to grips with a writer's use of language.

Section A: Literary Heritage Prose

This summer saw an alteration to the wording of extract-based questions, a change for which Centres seemed to have prepared their candidates well. At Foundation Tier, the steps or prompts were removed, but candidates generally were well aware of what the question was asking of them and were able to show their understanding, with strong responses often attempting to make some comment on the language. At both Higher and Foundation Tier, candidates were explicitly required to link the extract to the rest of the novel. Usually they were able to make links showing whole-text knowledge and avoiding the temptation to narrate chunks of the novel at the expense of focusing on the particular passage set. It perhaps needs emphasising that, at Higher Tier in particular, candidates are invited to consider not just what a writer is saying, but how he or she is expressing thoughts and ideas. Close focus on the passage is therefore important; attention to the passage should provide the bulk of the response as an Examiner is then able to assess how well a candidate is meeting the AO2 demands of the question.

As in previous years, *Animal Farm* was the most popular of the prose texts, followed quite closely by *Lord of the Flies*. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* again proved to be quite a popular choice, with a fair proportion of candidates opting for *Pride and Prejudice*. Only a few candidates opted for *The Withered Hand and Other Wessex Tales*, whilst few Examiners encountered responses to *Silas Marner*.

Also, as in previous years, the extract-based question was by far the more popular question of the two offered on each text. Whether this is because the passage is printed on the question paper; whether candidates have more practice in dealing with extracts; or whether the discursive question seems less accessible and perhaps less predictable; is impossible to say.

Literary Heritage Prose

Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 1(a)

As in previous years, *Pride and Prejudice* proved attractive to a significant number of candidates, principally at Higher Tier. Responses were almost exclusively to the passage-based question, with so few choosing to write on Caroline Bingley that no helpful comment on question 1b can be made. The appearance of both Elizabeth and Darcy in the passage-based question helped to eclipse the rather less central, though somewhat intriguing Caroline.

Most candidates were able to discuss in some detail the uncharacteristic behaviour of Elizabeth and Darcy, both betrayed by the "shocking" news into revealing previously concealed aspects of themselves. Much was often made of Elizabeth's fragmented sentences and Darcy's concerned and compassionate questioning. Responses sometimes probed the probable guilt felt by both for being, in different ways, complicit in Wickham's abduction of Lydia. The best responses were

those that moved beyond Elizabeth's concern for Lydia's welfare to explore the social disgrace facing the Bennets and the certain ruin of Elizabeth and Jane's matrimonial expectations. These also explored the element of suspense in the extract, noting that Darcy's responses might suggest both to Elizabeth and the reader that, far from intending to retrieve the situation, Darcy is about to disengage himself completely from the Bennets. The weakest responses here occurred when candidates provided no context, offering no explanation of what "the shocking news" was.

Eliot: *Silas Marner*

Question 2

There were very few responses to this text. Several candidates responded to Eliot's portrayal of Priscilla in the extract, but these were largely superficial. The best responses focused quite closely on the lengthy fourth paragraph where Eliot allows Priscilla to amuse the reader through what she says about men, the Miss Gunns, and marriage. There was an occasional response to the invitation to discuss two particularly dramatic moments; the moments were often well selected and included Silas's discovery of the loss of his gold; the arrival of Eppie; and Godfrey's revelation to Silas and Eppie that, as Eppie's father, he wants to claim her.

Golding: *Lord of the Flies*

Question 3(a)

As in previous years, this proved to be a very popular text. Most responses, at both Tiers, were to the passage-based question and to the ways in which these early paragraphs foreshadow later conflicts in the novel. This proved to be an extremely rich passage. Candidates focused on the rivalry starting to develop between Ralph and Jack over the issue of leadership; the importance of the conch; "democracy" and the signs of descent into savagery; the authorial comments on Jack, Ralph and Piggy; the introduction of Roger ... The passage was indeed so rich that candidates were often aware of a need to be selective and not try to cover everything that it offered. They often kept a good balance between analysis of the passage and references to later events, though, inevitably, weaker responses drifted towards narrating later incidents in unnecessary detail. Some good responses opted for discussion of the contest for leadership: Jack's arrogance was contrasted with Ralph's stillness and attractive appearance; the importance of the conch was considered; Jack's "mortification" and its consequences were thoughtfully discussed; the way the choir and Piggy voted was also seen as indicative of future conflicts. Golding's brief description of Roger as the "dark boy" often led to interesting discussions of the implications of "dark". However, Examiners noted that on occasion Golding's reference to Roger triggered a response inordinately devoted to Roger throughout the novel, discussing his evolution, or descent, from stone-thrower to murderer in such detail that the passage became forgotten. On occasion, this was also true when candidates were seduced by Golding's use of "arrogance" and "hunters" into tracing Jack's progress throughout the novel from chorister to masked chief, again at the expense of the novel.

Question 3(b)

The question on the significance of Simon was only infrequently attempted and only rarely with great success. Although the question asked about his significance, responses too often confined themselves to simply providing an account of what Simon does in the novel. He was often said to be kind (he gives the littluns fruit), helpful (he assists Ralph with the huts), considerate (he goes back to communicate with Piggy), and, mistaken for the beast, he is killed. Noticeably candidates tended to shy away from his particular significance in the novel: his encounter with the Lord of the Flies and his understanding of what the beast is. Attempts to cast Simon as a Jesus figure were too often based on assertions and given no textual support, almost as if it were a truth universally acknowledged that Simon is a reincarnation of Christ. A tricky argument

to sustain, it requires a considerable amount of textual underpinning, and, too often, candidates gave it none.

Hardy: The Withered Arm and other Wessex Tales

Question 4

Too few candidates responded to this text for meaningful comment to be made. The few responses to **4a** tended to paraphrase the two meetings, sometimes without showing awareness of Rhoda's dream or of Gertrude's "one little ailment". A few responses seemed focused on AO4 and offered discussions of the unsympathetic treatment of unmarried mothers in the early nineteenth-century, especially in rural areas.

Among the few responses to the question on life in Longpuddle, some offered entertaining accounts of the problems facing the musicians in the choir and the unforgiving nature of the Longpuddle elders.

Orwell: Animal Farm

Question 5

Examiners reported that much of their allocation was taken up by responses to this text and to the passage-based question in particular. There were some excellent answers where candidates focused on the thrust of the question, which was on the organisation of life on the farm, and demanded focus on the way events like the Spontaneous Demonstration, with its organised ranks indicating the hierarchy of the farm, its military formation, its banners, the shooting of the gun and the songs and speeches were created to distract the animals from the realisation that "their bellies were empty". Similarly they recognised the organisation of the sheep as a means of silencing potentially rebellious murmurings, and the re-writing of the Battle of the Cowshed as propaganda needed to tighten Napoleon's authority over the farm by casting him as saviour of the revolution and protector of the farm from external threat and internal sedition. Such responses avoided lengthy character studies of Napoleon or heart-felt condemnation of the tyranny of the pigs. Often they took advantage of the opportunity to discuss Orwell's language: the lack of spontaneity of the Spontaneous Demonstration; "Napoleon had commanded"; the "dogs flanked"; the unanimous election of Napoleon ... Good responses here also used the extract to link neatly to other areas of the novel; for example, they identified fear of the dogs arising from their flanking the procession and the silencing of the animals' criticism in their proximity, and did not need to illustrate the fear solely by referring out to the executions in the yard. There were some weak responses which took the re-writing of the Battle of the Cowshed at face value and accepted the version here as gospel. As ever, some candidates spent much space and time drawing attention to parallels with the Soviet Union, so that on occasion they lost sight of Napoleon, as if he had turned not just from man to pig, but from pig to Stalin. This question enabled candidates to show their knowledge of the novel, the organisation of the farm, Orwell's purposes and his skill as a writer.

Question 5(b)

Candidates writing on the pigs' shocking treatment of Boxer often produced very sensitive responses to a character to whom they had clearly, and appropriately, warmed. There were often perceptive accounts of what the farm, and the pigs, owed to him, with much emphasis on his hard work, loyalty and naivety. The best responses looked closely at his removal from the farm and at Orwell's language, not least at the poignant sound of his ineffectually drumming hoofs. Less secure responses recounted Boxer's actions and words, without engaging with the word "shocking" in the question, which was the invitation to a personal response both to Boxer's situation and Orwell's language.

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

Question 6(a)

This is quite a popular text at both Tiers. The passage-based question was well answered especially by candidates who provided the context and recognised that the violence was inflicted on Sir Danvers Carew. Best responses discussed in detail Hyde's grateful indulgence in his "lust of evil" and Jekyll's immediate and extreme remorse after drinking the restorative draught. Jekyll's increasing inability to restrain Hyde, evident in the first line of the extract, came in for comment, though comparatively few candidates noted the last line where Hyde again "began to growl for licence". Recognising the context saved candidates from such misconceptions as Jekyll being the "unhappy victim" of Hyde in the first paragraph, and Jekyll suffering the pain of transforming into Hyde in the second. At Higher Tier candidates took the opportunity to feel considerable sympathy for Dr Jekyll on the grounds of his inability to suppress Hyde, his remorse and his determination to redeem himself. Others argued, with some conviction, that Jekyll had brought his misfortunes on himself, and that as Jekyll he vicariously enjoyed the brutal actions of his alter ego. Examiners rewarded either interpretation, provided that candidates provided relevant textual support. The extract also afforded candidates the opportunity to discuss Stevenson's language, and, with the references to animals, hell, devils and redemption, they often found much to say. Some responses strayed from the extract and offered unnecessarily detailed discussions of Victorian society, the hypocrisy of the Victorian gentleman, the shock Victorians, and Victorian women in particular, must have felt when reading the novel for the first time; detailed support for such assertions was often lacking, and sociological digressions often led away from the set question.

Question 6b

Required candidates to discuss both the violence inflicted on the little girl in Mr Enfield's account and the violence inflicted on Sir Danvers. Accordingly, candidates discussing only one of these incidents unnecessarily penalised themselves. Some candidates claimed that Hyde murdered the little girl, while others confused the narrative voices and attributed the account to Mr Utterson. There were some excellent answers that offered an almost exhaustive stock of relevant quotations to illustrate Hyde's violence, and commented perceptively on Stevenson's language. Often the reaction of observers was relevantly included: such as the doctor's desire to kill Hyde, the harpy women, and the maid's fainting at the horror she witnessed.

Contemporary Poetry

Examiners reported that the most popular poets in *Reflections* (at least for the purposes of this part of the examination) were Armitage and Duffy. A number of candidates opted for Heaney, but there were few responses to Clarke and Cope, though rather more, though not significantly so, to Zephaniah. The unseen poems were also very popular, and candidates often responded sensitively and perceptively to both, especially to *The man on Crewe station*. Examiners also reported that individual candidates tended to answer at a similar level to the prose and poetry questions; the poetry section did not appear to tax candidates more severely than the prose section. The poems were generally well understood. However, as in previous years, some candidates seemed engaged on a quest for literary devices. Often as early as the second paragraph of a response, references to caesuras, enjambement, rhythm and rhyme made a centre-stage appearance, often with little indication of what they were adding to the understanding or enjoyment of the poem under discussion. Obviously these devices can be important, but do not usually deserve to be highlighted and isolated so early in a response.

Armitage

Question 7

Armitage proved to be a very popular choice with candidates, the majority of whom opted to answer on *My Father Thought it Bloody Queer*. Most were able to convey clear impressions of the son, seeing him as a somewhat timid rebel who half concealed the piercing from a father he hoped perhaps to shock. They supported his timidity with discussion of what was seen as his “wimpishness” in not piercing the lobe himself. Discussion extended to the piercing itself and the consequent infection, which was often seen as a metaphor for his relationship with the father. The father was usually seen as a blunt Yorkshireman who enjoyed mocking his son for the way he was so easily influenced. The word “queer” was sometimes seen as meaning “decidedly odd” and sometimes as the father’s opinion of his son’s sexuality. The second interpretation occasionally led to rather lengthy condemnation of homophobia. “You should have had it through the nose instead” was sometimes misinterpreted as the father’s suggesting that the son should have had his nose pierced; being led like an animal was not always suggested as a probable meaning. Candidates often discussed the first two stanzas with some understanding, but often were, perhaps not unreasonably, puzzled by the much denser and more cryptic final stanza, some choosing to ignore it altogether.

A number of candidates wrote well about *True North* and its bumptious speaker, understanding and illustrating his patronising attitude towards his home village. Again it was the later stanzas that caused some candidates problems. The Falklands/Malvinas references were often not understood, the ambiguity of “the penny drops” caused difficulty, and the wolves massed “on the shoreline of Bothnia” were often ignored.

To Poverty is quite a long poem and the best responses to the question on the speaker’s feelings tended to select from it carefully and thoughtfully, while less convincing ones tended to go through the poem line by line and unselectively. Many were able to make something of Armitage’s language (“like Siamese twins, joined at the pocket”, “pass the buck, the bug”, “find a novelist”), and a few noticed the humour arising from the twisted and oblique references to the words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Frost. As with *My Father Thought it Bloody Queer* and *True North*, candidates often seemed to detect no humour in this poem. Responding to humour in an examination hall is, perhaps an unlikely, even impossible, business.

Clarke

Question 8

Unfortunately there were too few responses to Gillian’s Clarke’s poems for helpful comment to be made.

Cope

Question 9

Unfortunately, there were too few responses to Wendy Cope’s poems for helpful comment to be made.

Duffy

Question 10(a)

A substantial number of candidates writing on Duffy chose to do so on *Mrs Lazarus*. The longest of the Duffy poems in the anthology, the poem presented something of a challenge to candidates. In general, they worked through the poem quite methodically, focusing on Mrs Lazarus’s grief (though not all candidates knew who she was grieving for) and noting that she

was, after a while, able to “move on” even to the extent of discovering a new love, the schoolteacher. (Endearingly, some candidates expressed surprise, bordering on astonishment, that such an unlikely professional could inspire love in the widow.) However, going methodically through the poem prevented a number of candidates reaching the last three or four stanzas which contain perhaps the most striking of Mrs Lazarus’s experiences, the resurrection of her husband from the grave. Candidates who knew the Biblical story of Lazarus were at some advantage perhaps, but candidates who engaged closely just with Mrs Lazarus’s stages of grief and with Duffy’s language were rewarded. Those candidates who approached the poem with an overview and therefore avoided the line-by-line approach coped best with the poem.

Question 10(b)

Brothers as a poem about the family elicited strong responses from candidates who were able to analyse/discuss in detail all four stanzas. A number of Examiners reported that candidates sometime found this a deceptively difficult poem. Most understood the first ten lines, commenting on the brothers as children, noting the shared amusement at the “random” quote from the play they were in, and the passing of time between the second and third stanzas. Candidates were often aware of the distancing effect of time (“time owns us”) but were uncomfortable with the last stanza, uncertain about the “box”, who it might contain, and why the “I” figure should pay for it. Few candidates appeared to know what a UB40 was. Some spent a considerable amount of time wrestling with the puzzling line “the breeding words, the word that broke her heart”; “the word that broke her heart” was sometime taken to refer to the poet’s sexual orientation and triggered long and usually unrewarding biographical speculation.

Question 10(c)

Responses to *In Mrs Tilscher’s Class* showed, as in previous years, how much candidates enjoy this poem. Many wrote with enthusiasm about the excitement and fun of being in Mrs Tilscher’s class as well as the protection it afforded from an external world that could harbour Brady and Hindley. The best responses focused on the wording of the question, “the experience of growing up”, showing that growing up included growing awareness of the words of the rough boy, the development of tadpoles into frogs, and the thunderstorm threatened by “the heavy sexy sky”. Less convincing responses tended to respond only to the child’s situation in the early stanzas, appealing to a shared common experience of being in a joyful and safe primary school classroom. So rather than responding to the language of Duffy’s “skittle of milk”, candidates often urged examiners to remember how much they enjoyed a break-time drink of milk years ago; or, rather than responding to Duffy’s “scent of a pencil, slowly, carefully, shaved”, candidates commented reminiscently only on the pleasure of using coloured pencils in primary school. The strongest candidates conveyed their personal engagement with the poem through detailed discussion of its language.

Heaney

Question 11

Heaney, as ever, was a reasonably popular choice of poet, and candidates at both tiers often wrote very well on *An Advancement of Learning* and *The Early Purges*. Too few wrote about descriptions of nature in *Serenades* for useful comment to be made. *An Advancement of Learning* was usually well understood. Foundation candidates usually provided a narrative account that showed some understanding of the boy’s encounter with the rats and his overcoming of his fears. Weaker responses tended to appeal to a shared common experience of fear, stating that we all know what it is to be afraid, but did not engage with Heaney’s specific fear of rats. Stronger responses focused on specific details of the rat’s appearance and also of its sound. The best analysed the military imagery with commendable confidence, and noted such language details as the effects of the alliteration that heralds the rat’s appearance.

Candidates at Foundation Tier understood how Dan Taggart inspired fear in the child in *The Early Purges*, focusing on the kittens and the list of victims in the fifth stanza. Responses varied

from the personal and emotional, condemning the wickedness of killing any animal, to thoughtful evaluation of Heaney's language and Taggart's influence on the older voice of the final two stanzas.

Zephaniah

Question 12

Examiners reported seeing comparatively few responses to Zephaniah. Candidates seemed to find difficulty in finding much to comment on as far as language, structure and form were concerned and accordingly tended to paraphrase whichever of the three poems they chose. The best responses showed an awareness of the subject matter of *Three Black Males* and *The Woman Has to Die* but often there was little sense of context, so comment on *Three Black Males* was sometimes limited to comments on racism with no link to Raphael Rowe, Michael Davis and Randolph Johnson, all of whom are named in the poem. Similar approaches to *The Woman Has to Die* led to candidates discussing general gender issues, such as male oppression, without reference to the particular woman and why the love was "forbidden". The few candidates who answered on *Press Ups an Sit Ups* tended to paraphrase the poem, but were sometimes able to comment on aspects of the poem's humour.

Unseen Poems

The unseen poem remains a popular option at both Foundation and Higher Tiers. Candidates found *The Sea* a very accessible poem, its emphatic opening line clearly stating the metaphor which informs the poem. Good responses showed a pleasing ability to trace the metaphor through the sea's different moods in the three stanzas, with the best responding sensitively to the vivid descriptions, particularly in the long first stanza. There was a considerable range of responses, at the lower end candidates identifying the metaphor without any development, whilst, at the top end, it was followed tenaciously and explored thoroughly.

The man on Crewe station attracted a considerable number of responses, the best displaying an impressive ability to select viable material to show what might be moving about it. Many candidates discussed the man's handing in of his possessions, most importantly "his life", to the girl with green finger-nails; her filing and forgetting was frequently noted, but, surprisingly, the alliteration and its effect were often not discussed. Other profitable areas of discussion proved to be the dinner with colleagues "round the table" and the closed circle with himself, the following morning, outside. The finality of the last two words was often carefully considered. Candidates often commented perceptively and in detail on the model train set, where the train, like the man's life, was sometimes stopped and shunted into sidings. Many considered too the man's journey, starting where it finished and why it wasn't precisely there. There were perceptive comments on the questions in the first stanza, literally suggesting the movement of the train but metaphorically the rightness of the man's own choices. Some candidates were led astray by the girl with green finger-nails (there were thoughtful speculations on the significance of the colour) and built their response on an office romance that was ending in heart-break. However, there were some excellent and assured responses, where candidates showed a freshness of response to a poem not previously studied and possibly made over-familiar by classroom discussion.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
is a Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England
Registered Office; 1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU
Registered Company Number: 3484466
OCR is an exempt Charity

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

© OCR 2015

