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FOREWORD

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

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8695/02

Composition

General comments

The Paper produced many excellent responses at the higher end of the range; there were some amazingly developed answers, suggesting thorough preparation in appropriate skills. In the middle and lower ranges there were some focused and engaged responses, some of which may have contained promising and thoughtful ideas without quite being aligned to technical accuracy (particularly in the use of consistent tenses). Many candidates responded to both types of writing with enthusiasm and zest and seemed to respond to the challenge of the Paper with focused attention. In the first section candidates need to ensure that they recognise the need for descriptive content regardless of the question choice.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a popular choice. The good answers were mature and well constructed. There was careful control of the lexis and syntax with openings and conclusions that were engaging and effective. Less secure responses tended to be predictable and dogged. A few responses tended to be derivative and drew on identifiable sources. One or two candidates failed to take notice of the wording and simply wrote horror stories that were set at parties or amongst crowds without any sense of isolation.

Question 2

A few candidates attempted this but the question demanded some notion of radio scripts; some were skilled enough to produce such scripts aligned to a sense of the specified genre; they were aware of medium, character and conventions. Those without relevant expertise tended to just write a play without a clear focus on the question, and therefore could not score well.

Question 3

This was a very popular choice. The best responses chose incidents carefully and combined them with a sense of purpose and audience. Even answers in the lower range provided sufficient focus and direction. Often candidates seemed to gain confidence as the piece progressed. However, some candidates tended to treat such material as a means of personal therapy – that is, some felt it was a chance for an 'outpouring' rather than a piece of descriptive or imaginative writing. Centres may wish to advise candidates that it is hard to assess such responses in terms of style of writing and that they will do themselves a disservice if they do not keep to the form of writing under examination.

Question 4

This, too, was a popular choice and produced some carefully constructed contrasts. There was some excellent use of vocabulary and expression here. Candidates are reminded that they should address both parts of such questions, the before and the after.

Question 5

This was a popular and, on the whole, well answered question. Responses were often focused clearly on the needs of the visiting audience; there were some eloquently informative and humorous speeches and it was pleasing to see candidates relax and take an appropriate and independent line of approach. There was a clear sense of pride and fondness displayed from a diverse range of countries and nationalities.

Question 6

This proved to be an effective and popular question. It was convincingly argued whichever stance was taken. There were many lively and enthusiastic responses. Candidates drew on a pleasing range of examples. Perhaps the most enjoyable answers were those where a really strong stance was taken supported by a clear line of argument interwoven with a diverse range of illustrative material.

Question 7

Some of the best answers included interviews with a variety of voices expressing cogent opinions and views. This suited the idea of a magazine particularly well when the views were summed up efficiently by the article writer. Other very good answers adopted magazine speak but presented the arguments for and against with a lively, emotive and persuasive style. There was an informed and pleasing range of examples used to illustrate particular points.

Question 8

This was also a very popular choice. Very good answers included those which were prepared to look at a range of technological developments with particular reference to young people and with a lively examination of both the serious implications and the advantages which technology provides. Less secure responses tended to focus solely on the Internet. Candidates need to ensure that they have a suitable range of examples.

Paper 8695/09
Poetry, Prose and Drama

General comments

Overall, candidates seem increasingly well prepared for the nature of the examination. While there were candidates who struggled to answer questions, the general level of competence is improving. Candidates are demonstrating awareness that a simple recounting of narrative, while it might show their knowledge, will not earn them high marks. They show an increasing appreciation that the thrust of questions is a focus on authorial technique and effect. Those candidates who concentrated on *how* the authors presented character or theme, giving appropriate examples, achieved marks in the higher bands. At a simple level, candidates should recognise the difference between, for example, writing 'Okonkwo is cruel' and writing 'Achebe presents Okonkwo as a cruel character, describing him as one who "ruled his household with a heavy hand."' Further discussion of the author's choice of language would improve this kind of comment even further.

Those candidates who answered the passage-based questions using plenty of detail from the extract printed on the Examination Paper, also did well. The passages give candidates a real opportunity to demonstrate their analytical skills, using close comment on language, imagery and structure to inform their answers to the question.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) Answers on Blake, which was an immensely popular text again, were equally divided between the two questions. There were some very good answers relating the lines from 'London' to other poems in 'Songs of Innocence and Experience', often acknowledging Blake's role as a social commentator and critic, demonstrating considerable contextual knowledge. Those candidates who used this selectively, maintaining a focus on the poems themselves, were the most successful. Less assured answers tended to include all the candidates' knowledge about Blake without selectivity, or concentrated on themes without considering poetic style or tone. There were some essays of knowledgeable generalisations about Blake and his historical context without close attention to his poetry and these scored only a few marks.

- (b) There were some very interesting, informed and personal responses to 'The Tyger'. Many candidates were often informed by 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', suggesting that without contradiction there can be no progression: reason and energy, love and hate are all necessary to human existence. In some essays the Tyger was seen simply as a representative of evil, but many answers explored the ambiguity of the poem, seeing in the tiger a symbol of the God of energy, a dual being with the gentler God of 'The Lamb'. Those candidates who followed the progress of the poem carefully, noting its structure, language and imagery, wrote the most persuasive answers, some noting, for example, metaphors drawn from the Industrial Revolution. A few candidates discussed the Biblical allusions; the stars were variously interpreted, either in the light of Revelations or Blake's theories about their hostile influence.

Ed. Hydes: *Touched with Fire*:

- (a) Answers on two poems relating to childhood tended to be straightforward accounts of the poems, sometimes supported by quotation; discussion of the ways in which poets approached the subject often proved more difficult. The most popular choices for poems about children were 'Nursery Rhyme' of Innocence and Experience, 'Rising Five', 'The Early Purges', 'Little Boy Crying' and 'The Toys'. Candidates discussed such matters as the problems of parenting as well as growing up and the pains of sensitivity in childhood.
- (b) Examiners read some very interesting answers on 'Ozymandias', which discussed the enduring truth of art and nature's superiority to man as well as the futility of human ambition in the face of time. Some candidates saw the poem as a means of criticising contemporary politicians, pointing to its implied warning; others linked it with the Romantics' use of mythology which, they believed, embodied eternal truths. Shelley's use of the sonnet form was surprisingly seldom discussed, but candidates were alert to his use of irony. There were one or two very sophisticated answers about the poem as narrative, noting the route by which the story of Ozymandias' statue reaches the reader.

Question 3

Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) In answer to the question on Plath's use of colour, those candidates able to select and comment on specific references from a detailed knowledge of the poetry, wrote the most successful answers. There were some good answers which commented on the frequent use of red, black and white in the poetry, which also noted that the colours' suggestions and effects vary according to the context of individual poems. Some well-prepared candidates were able to contrast the 'meaning' and effect of Plath's use of red, for example, in 'Tulips', 'Cut', 'Poppies in October' and 'Poppies in July'. Some candidates used the poems they knew best without careful selection and drifted from the question.
- (b) Many answers on 'You're' appreciated its humour and enthusiasm for life, in contrast with much of the poetry in the selection. Most successful in answering the question were those candidates who showed some knowledge of the pre-natal child and were sensitive to the playful visual imagery employed by Plath. Almost all made useful references to other poems about children and the lighter tone displayed in these poems, while some compared this poem with others which explore the burden of the responsibilities of motherhood. Essays which concentrated on Plath's life and suicide were clearly ill-directed.

Question 4

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

- (a) This text was again enormously popular, and again produced some very good work. In answer to this question, many candidates showed detailed knowledge of the novel and appreciation of the cultural influences on Okonkwo. They linked his relationship with, and treatment of, Ikemefuna to events in other parts of the novel. Most candidates were sympathetic to Okonkwo, regarding him as a tragic hero. However, in their defence of Okonkwo, some candidates ignored Achebe's balanced and dispassionate narration and in defending Okonkwo's every action against criticism, they ignored or dismissed textual evidence which reveals his psychological complexity. Most answers noted the effects which Ikemefuna has on Okonkwo's household, including Nwoye in particular, and noted that his death is a turning point of the narrative, foreshadowing Okonkwo's downfall and the disintegration of the clan.

- (b) Unfortunately, quite a number of answers here summarised the content of the passage, ignoring the instruction to comment on 'the content and style of Uchendu's advice'. Successful answers took careful note of Uchendu's role as an elder, who dispenses careful advice through simple examples, rhetorical questions, proverbs and other features which indicate an oral tradition. They also noted the various strategies which Uchendu employs, such as chiding, encouraging, challenging and warning Okonkwo. Strong answers noted that the content of Uchendu's speech explores the duality of masculine and feminine influences in Ibo society and argues for a balance which Okonkwo finds difficult to accept. Answers which commented on the importance of Uchendu's advice for Okonkwo's exile in Mbanta were able to assess its effect on him using references to the text, such as the names he gave his children, in support of their views. Some commented on the foreshadowing of his eventual fate in Uchendu's comment that he did not hang himself.

Question 5

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) The question on the title of the novel provoked some very interesting and personal essays; candidates seemed to relish the opportunity to debate the issue. Certainly there were some essays which paraphrased the plot, and were therefore unsuccessful, but very successful were those candidates who argued from a position of secure knowledge, with an ability to select appropriate references. The balance of the arguments opted for *North and South*, suggesting that the novel hinges on the geographical differences and their effects on the heroine. Those who preferred Margaret Hale argued that the novel in essence concerns one character's growth through experience, a genre of the 19th century novel which includes Mary Barton and Nicholas Nickleby, for example.
- (b) There were fewer answers to the passage question, despite its wealth of detail. Those candidates who did opt for it, perhaps the more confident with close textual reading, tended to do rather well. They noted the extract's position at the beginning of the novel and the way it prepares the reader for Margaret's decisiveness combined with compassion, picking out her dialogue, authorial comment and details of her hands. Many candidates compared Henry Lennox with John Thornton, both as individuals and as representatives of the South and the North respectively.

Question 6

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question, but a number of points featured in those answers which were offered, such as the influence of the Cohen boys and their books, Martha's disillusionment with her parents and their values, her idealism and disillusionment. Key references were made to the van Rensbergs, the Left Book Club and Martha's observation on the escorted group of prisoners.
- (b) Most candidates answering on this text chose the passage question. They often made astute comments on what the extract reveals about the disparity between Martha's intentions and achievements. The descriptions of her typing attempts and the language of humiliation after her visit to the Zambesi News were noted. More sophisticated answers examined Lessing's narrative tone in the excerpt, observing a wry and possibly indulgent sense of humour which pervades the description of Martha's dawning realisation of her incompetence.

Question 7

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a) There were not many answers on this play, but responses to this question usually showed a sound knowledge of the text. Both social and political points were made about Joyce's contribution to the play, with essays making particular reference to the setting of Joyce's backyard and kitchen, her relationship with Angie and the contrast with her sister Marlene. The most balanced answers recognised both the strengths and the weaknesses of Joyce's position in the play, particularly in her argument with Marlene in Act 3.

- (b) The dialogue between Angie and Kit was generally less successfully discussed. Those who seemed to find the discussion of such apparently simple dialogue problematic. Those who responded to the extract as drama and commented on the childishness of the extract, combined with the stage directions, found a more fruitful route through the question. They focused on Angie's attention-seeking and Kit's logical questions which undercut her, demonstrating her dominance in the relationship, despite her younger age.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) Again *Macbeth* was, by a considerable margin, the most popular of the drama texts on the Paper. In response to this question, candidates discussed most of the children who actually appear, as well as the ghostly children in the witches' predictions. The majority also made reference to Lady Macbeth's unmaternal comments and some went on to develop some discussion of the imagery of children in the play.
- (b) Answers here identified both the comedy and tension in the extract, references to hell and equivocation being apposite in the light of the murder of Duncan. Again, candidates who responded to the drama of the passage, examining sound effects, delays and entrances, found much to discuss. Such answers were alert to the development of suspense and the importance of dramatic irony. Less confident responses largely narrated and quite often paraphrased large sections of the plot.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) This was largely well answered, most candidates picking up on Williams' use of Tom to guiding the action of the play. Strong answers also considered staging, lighting, music and projections, all of which contribute enormously to the creation of the memory play. It is important that candidates consider stage directions as an integral part of dramatic texts.
- (b) The comment above about stage directions applies equally to answers to this question. Williams makes such ample use of descriptive stage directions that it is particularly important with his plays. Too many candidates concentrated on discussing the character of Amanda in general terms; often such answers were lively and personal, but lacked close attention to the set passage. Candidates who wrote in detail on the extract found a great deal to say about the stage directions as well as the dialogue, and thus were able to answer the question, which was on 'dramatic presentation'.