

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21

Composition

GENERAL COMMENTS

The overall performance of candidates entered for this component was comparable with that of previous exam sessions, though Examiners reported seeing fewer scripts at the top end of the ability range. Nonetheless, there were some focused and informed responses which were enjoyable to read.

At the lower end of the range, a number of responses were marked by a level of accuracy not commensurate with AS level standard. The most frequent language problems were of tense confusion, lack of subject/verb agreement, absence of paragraphing and inaccurate punctuation.

More candidates than usual opted to write 500-550 words. Candidates are reminded that very short work is likely to be self-penalising.

To avoid unnecessary additional work on the part of the Examiner and ensure that the candidate's complete response is given consideration, Centres are kindly reminded of the need to instruct candidates to:

- write clearly on scripts the number and/or title of the question selected;
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If there was one question in **Section A** that troubled a few, it was Question 3, for which a number of candidates failed to provide a contrasting pair of reminiscences, or got carried away and lapsed into straightforward narrative, more-or-less writing stories. In addition, there remains a tendency in **Section B** to state a conclusion at the outset where candidates would be better advised to present an exposition and build up to their conclusion.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Section A: Narrative/Descriptive/Imaginative

Question 1

This was a popular question with a very wide range of interpretations. Most candidates managed something that had a twist at the end. There were some good responses with some rather simple narratives in other compositions; occasionally some rather fairy-tale responses with quite a generalised view of characterisation.

Question 2

This proved to be a popular choice, and produced some good and imaginative ideas about futuristic worlds; others tended to be clichéd desert island material with the plane crash quite often taking up more space than the business of actually being a survivor. A lot of candidates wrote a rather tedious exposition, as though they were going to write 300 pages. The majority, of whatever standard, tried hard to create an atmosphere of mystery and tension and this impressed the Examiners. The strongest candidates concluded the opening chapter with a convincing cliff-hanger.

Question 3

There were some highly competent responses to this question, with contrasts fully in evidence and the changes in age and experience brought out very well. Most candidates did manage to do something more than tell a story, and, at the top end, there were really interesting, contrasted pieces. Some were quite moving. A small number of candidates simply wrote one piece. One or two had both halves of the

partnership talking about now, or about the past. At the lower end of the ability range, there was a lot of greeting card sentimentality in the falling in love sections.

Question 4

Imaginative and descriptive responses demonstrated some thoughtful and effective vocabulary and expression with sentence structure variation clearly marked. Other responses tended to be narrative rather than descriptive. Occasionally, candidates wrote about places that they had been to themselves, and these were often very interesting and personal.

Section B: Discursive/Argumentative

Question 5

This was a popular choice with some well exemplified material; candidates showed personal and informed knowledge about the topic and a variety of approaches succeeded on different levels. However, there are blind alleys implicit, and a number went up them (e.g. writing only about one source of revenue or one sport and, as a consequence, repeating themselves quite a lot) leaving the reader admiring candidates' general skills but searching for something to reward beyond that. The strongest responses dealt with a convincing range of particular examples. Few candidates were able to balance the argument before coming out on one side or the other for themselves.

Question 6

This was an effective idea which was answered well by quite a number of candidates, bringing contrasts out very well indeed. Faith was often regarded by candidates as being belief in something, rather than religious faith, and this was perfectly acceptable. Few candidates actually took to heart the instruction to write a newspaper article, so most were simply argumentative pieces. Some candidates never got near to what we might be being saved from.

Question 7

There were some good responses to this popular question, with candidates taking some strong personal views on the topics; better answers showed informed exemplification. Many candidates managed some sound examples and could see that there are exceptions where rules can and should be broken. Most candidates grasped the point of this question. Many candidates were able to cite historical/political examples which were impressive.

Question 8

There were effective answers to this question but those at the lower end of the ability range tended to offer mirrored structures in each letter. Many candidates were able to write convincingly, using an appropriate tone. Some candidates simply reviewed the nature of providing a public service such as running a hospital, without ever really producing an argument for why they should not have funds cut. However, a good number of candidates seemed to know plenty about their chosen service, so, even where the language was not strong, the content was acceptable.

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Paper 8695/22

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- write clearly on scripts the number and/or title of the question selected;
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In **Section A**, *The Jungle* and *The Gangster* were popular choices; many candidates seized the chance to use films and computer games as their source material, which was not always a good idea. In **Section B**, a relatively small number of candidates opted for Question 8. There remains a tendency in **Section B** to state a conclusion at the outset where candidates would be better advised to present an exposition and build up to their conclusion.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Section A: Narrative/Descriptive/Imaginative

Question 1

Question 1 was popular, evoking the full range of responses, in terms of content and quality. There were some good efforts to establish mood, atmosphere and conventions; less successful ones relied on badly articulated and badly punctuated dialogue which limited effective progress and development, tending to fall out as predicted, with many criminals, drug-addicts etc. Some candidates went deeper into motivation, character creation, and gave a real sense of place and mood. However, much of the description of place was film-derived and unconvincing.

Question 2

This composition was solidly if unspectacularly done; some candidates focused too much on narrative. There were lots of stories about friends reunited and some very pedestrian descriptions of character and appearance at times, with candidates not really seeing how to use detail to create an impression without being explicit. There were an awful lot of poorly handled accounts of school proms. Nonetheless, many candidates managed clear contrasts.

Question 3

In attempts at this question, sometimes exposition obstructed the development of the main focus of the title, delaying introduction of the central topic. There were some answers that really went for character

development and these worked well. The best responses talked about quite ordinary situations, rather than exotic, thinking that exotic was going to be more convincing.

Question 4

There was a varied range of responses to this question and some candidates were let down by a focus on narrative rather than descriptive. These ignored the instruction about description and unloaded their survivors essay. A number of candidates selected this question and then seemed to have no knowledge of the sort of terrain or wildlife that lives in a jungle. Some attempted a sense of mystery with the idea of jungle noises at night. Very few candidates saw it as an opportunity for word painting. Some Examiners found genuine efforts being made to evoke mystery and the unknown, with some good twists.

Section B: Discursive/Argumentative

Question 5

This was a popular choice but sometimes essays focused on the benefits of the internet rather than the central words of the title. There were lots of accounts of the history of the internet and its current uses. At the top end, candidates did move towards some sense of the ethics and morality of the net, though this tended to centre on pornography. There was much discussion of why the internet should be limited in order to stop adolescents from damaging their brains etc. through over-indulgence.

Question 6

This was not a common choice and the question was generally satisfactorily attempted rather than brilliantly. Compositions were usually successful, though some candidates chose real people. Some candidates wrote about two different people and these were not penalised. Many did not really take on board the instruction to write for a magazine. Others managed the glossy magazine tone quite well. Some football-loving candidates successfully wrote in the style of a fanzine.

Question 7

Proficient and competent responses to this question showed good focus and knowledge of the topic; less secure ones tended to offer a history of technology. Many candidates balanced the two quite well but there was an awful lot of floundering here, with a lot of candidates giving lists of technologies without ever really tackling the question. Many candidates refused to see that they were being asked to say what they thought, not just simply arrange a series of possible arguments.

Question 8

This question was popular with a few Centres, though candidates often struggled with ideas of national security. Some candidates took seriously the injunction to write speeches, and worked hard to make their work sound like it could be spoken. One or two managed the trite conventions that dominate public speaking contests, with full reference to learned oppositions etc.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8695/23
Composition 23

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/91
Poetry and Prose 91

8695/91, 92, 93 Poetry, Prose and Drama

The examination produced a wide range of answers with good coverage of each of the set texts, though *Stories of Ourselves* and *Jane Eyre* were particularly popular choices. Nearly all candidates showed some interest in what they had read and were able to select from their knowledge to answer the questions. The real discriminator is the detail of that knowledge and the level of the candidates' understanding of the writing and construction of the texts. It is the candidates who can go beyond accurate recall of characters, events and even quotations, to say something about how the writers' choices shape meaning and affect the readers' responses, who achieve the high marks on the paper.

It is particularly disappointing when that kind of attention to the writing is missing from answers to passage based questions, where the candidate has the text printed on the question paper and has the opportunity, therefore, to examine the detail of the writing intensively. Every passage based question demands this kind of close commentary on the writing and candidates who do not acknowledge this requirement will not score high marks.

Examiners increasingly gain the impression that large numbers of candidates approach the selected poem tasks without having studied the poem prior to the exam; many answers carry the hallmarks of an 'unseen' response, often making rudimentary errors. Candidates who answer on poems which they have not studied put themselves at a great disadvantage.

On the other hand, Examiners were also delighted to mark and reward many substantial, well-informed and sensitive essays, based on detailed and often sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the texts.

There was a spate of rubric errors this session, often, but not exclusively, focused in particular Centres. It is important that candidates know that they need to answer one question from two sections on Paper 9.

Question Specific Comments

Question 1. Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*

- (a) Few candidates chose this question. Of those who attempted it, the most successful were those who clearly focused on the question's requirement that they discuss 'ways in which' relationships are treated in the poems. The relationships chosen varied between inspirational figures ('Sujata: The First Disciple of Buddha'), through lovers ('Love in a Bathtub') to children ('Genealogy').
- (b) 'The Writer' was much more popular and produced some interesting, sensitive responses. Candidates noted the poem's provocative opening and were often alert to language, repetition, rhetorical questions, personification and physical line placement used ironically to evoke an effective impression of the natural world while the poem expresses that impossibility. The strongest answers were able to express this paradox of 'the writer's art' explored in the poem.

Question 2. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) Candidates selected a wide range of poems to answer this question, though a number overlooked the detail of the question's wording and missed the focus on 'the relationship between human beings and the world around them' and wrote about what they perceived as nature poems. Most successful answers looked carefully at the relationship and the way it is explored by poets. Some interesting answers compared human beings' relationship with the natural world ('Hunting Snake' for example) with the relationship with the urban world ('The City Planners' for example).
- (b) This was a very popular option, though a surprisingly large number of candidates misread l.22's 'failed not' as 'failed' and thus misunderstood a large part of the poem. This was one of the features of answers which suggested that some candidates were looking at poems in the exam without prior study. On the other hand, many candidates were aware of Hardy's advanced age when this poem was composed and saw the poem as a wry subversion of his usual pessimism, accepting that 'he never expected much' out of life anyway. Such answers discussed the tone of the poem (described appositely by one candidate as 'two old friends having a chat'), with the dialogue between the speaker and the World, its repetitions and regularity of form. There was sensitive and well-expressed appreciation of the tone of the poem, with its understated mixture of acceptance and regret.

Question 3. William Wordsworth: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) A number of candidates were hampered in their attempts at this question by their choice of inappropriate poems and their determination to write about Wordsworth's view on nature. However, those who read the question carefully chose such poems as 'The Solitary Reaper', 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' and 'Lines Written in Early Spring' and showed how Wordsworth's choices of language, imagery and form transformed his observations into something evocative and significant. Candidates who knew a good range of poems and could recall key quotations were much advantaged.
- (b) The extract from 'Tintern Abbey' was a very popular option and most candidates made some reference to the rest of the poem from which it was taken. Some gave a rather summary-based account of the extract, but confident candidates focused on 'the development of Wordsworth's view of the natural world' and traced his images of boyhood wild ecstasy and recognised the shift in tone in l.26. The best answers looked at Wordsworth's use of blank verse and examined closely the choices of diction and imagery.

Question 4. Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

- (a) This question provoked pleasingly personal responses, with candidates arguing very different views. The best answers looked at both sides and appreciated the ambiguity of Brontë's portrayal of Bertha. Candidates picked out the gothic nature of some of the bestial descriptions of her and her wild behaviour and used this to argue that the reader's sympathies are with Rochester and Jane. Others, however, interpreted the behaviour as symbolic of frustrated passion and jealousy for Jane and sympathised with Bertha. Discussions of Rochester too showed a range of views, with as many detractors for his incarceration of Bertha as supporters for his desperation for a meaningful relationship after the insanity of his wife.
- (b) While there were some narrative responses, candidates who looked at the language, imagery and dialogue of this passage found plenty of interest. In particular, some candidates closely examined the structure and language of St John's speeches, suggesting that they create the effect of a legal case being prosecuted rather than a proposal of marriage. This was contrasted with Jane's shorter, punchier speeches which couple reason with feeling. Candidates who did not quote and comment on the detail of the passage missed its opportunities – and opportunities to gain marks. Successful candidates were able to build on passage detail with references to other parts of the text, particularly contrasting this scene with Rochester's proposal and linking the imagery applied to St John and Brocklehurst.

Question 5. Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) Nearly all candidates who attempted this question were able to show their knowledge of the text and many worked through various female characters to comment on their roles. Tambu, Nyasha and Miaguru received a lot of attention, with others extending to Lucia and Tambu's mother. Some answers were usually sound, but more developed and successful answers were able to conceptualise the issues by making comparisons and considering the roles of men as well. In this way, some candidates were able to challenge the accepted view and argue that some of the women are not inferior. Successful answers avoided assertions and sweeping assumptions about women in Africa, instead referring to specific incidents and quotations from the text.
- (b) Some of the changes in Nhamo were noted by most candidates; the more successful answers closely focused on Tambu's perception of those changes, as the question required. Such answers noted the implications of the tone of voice in both recognising the physical changes and the apparent loss of knowledge of Shona. The gradual irony of its 'miraculous' return was usually noted and the best answers were able to demonstrate the detached observational quality of Tambu's narrative here, particularly apparent in the final paragraph of the extract.

Question 6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) Several stories from the anthology were chosen by candidates for this question, including *Of White Hairs and Cricket*, *Sandpiper*, *Tyres* and *The Open Boat*. In many cases, unfortunately, candidates progressed little further than relating the narrative of their two chosen stories. Successful answers considered the structure of the stories, the narrative voice and perspective, considering the ways that these features affect the reader's understanding.
- (b) There were quite frequent signs of candidates approaching this question without prior knowledge of the story, as several answers lacked any knowledge of the identity of the narrator or his relationship with Usher – to whom some candidates referred a 'the Usher'. Those more familiar with the material often wrote well, showing appreciation of the drama conveyed through the imagery and language. The better answers were sensitive to the Gothic style with the passage's archaic language and were able to pinpoint the heavily charged parts of grammar in the sentences. The importance of the description of the weather conditions was noted, as well as the irony of the final line.

Question 7. Arthur Miller: *A View from the Bridge*

- (a) Less confident candidates limited their discussion to Rodolpho, or Eddie's distrust of Rodolpho, while more successful answers used this area as a springboard to consideration of masculinity more broadly in the play. The role of men as bread winners was discussed, as well as physical strength and sexuality. There was much profitable discussion of Eddie, Rodolpho and Marco and even some thoughtful comment on Eddie's friendship with Louis and Mike.
- (b) Candidates who looked closely at the dialogue, and matched this with close attention to the stage directions, were able to develop strong answers which acknowledged the balance of love, affection and tension in this extract. Answers which did not look closely at the writing of the passage were much less successful.

Question 8. Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) Though there were few answers, candidates often used the question's stage direction to focus on the theatrical way Shaffer presents the horse chorus. Weaker answers described what happen to horses in the play, while strong answers were alert to the drama created by movement and sound in the chorus.
- (b) Some candidate engaged personally with the argument here, debating whether Alan is deserving of support and treatment for his 'pain' after committing such a violent crime. Fewer candidates were able to explore the implications of Dysart's sense of regret. Personal responses were successful when matched by close attention to the dialogue to show how that debate is treated in the scene.

Question 9. William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part 1*

- (a) There were not many answers to this question. Less confident candidates described differences between the characters and events in the court and tavern – often the question's focus on the 'dramatic effects' of the 'contrasts' was overlooked. Stronger answers showed how the tavern often presents a distorted mirror image of the court and noted the importance of Prince Henry's inhabiting of both worlds.
- (b) The strongest answers to this question had some sense of the context of the exchange in the play and were able to discuss the language of King Henry's speech in detail, with its formality and structure. They also noted the significance of the inclusion in the extract of Prince Henry's final reply.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/92
Poetry and Prose 92

8695/91, 92, 93 Poetry, Prose and Drama

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Examiners increasingly gain the impression that large numbers of candidates approach the selected poem tasks without having studied the poem prior to the exam; many answers carry the hallmarks of an 'unseen' response, often making rudimentary errors. Candidates who answer on poems which they have not studied put themselves at a great disadvantage.

On the other hand, Examiners were also delighted to mark and reward many substantial, well-informed and sensitive essays, based on detailed and often sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the texts.

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Question Specific Comments

Question 1. Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*

- (a) There were few answers to this question, but those who attempted it usually made useful comments about poems such as '3 November 1984', 'The Need to Recall the Journey' and 'The One Who Goes Away'. The most successful of these were those which paid attention to the writing of the poems and discussed Bhatt's language, form and structure, rather than just recalled the content.
- (b) This was the more popular choice and many candidates wrote well about the way the visitor is described and the way the poem treats the relationship between him and the speaker. Strong answers explored the relationship effectively as one between teacher/student, mother/child, saint/disciple, master/apprentice, noting the poem's description of ritualistic nourishment involving trust, compassion and co-operation but ending in a spiritual bond, mutual respect and devotion.

Question 2. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) A wide range of poems was used in answers to this question, the most popular being 'Where I Come From' and the extract from 'Long Distance'. Examiners were able to reward answers which were based on the writing of the chosen poems, looking, as the question demanded, at 'the ways in which poets explore memories'. Weaker answers described the memories in the poems with little attention to how they are presented. Accurate recall of quotation is not enough – candidates need to comment on the effects created by what they quote.
- (b) This was a very popular question, and very effective in discriminating between candidates. In the lower range of marks were answers where candidates described the content of the poem with little attention to the question. There were also several answers which struggled to comprehend the poem, again suggesting that the candidates were looking at the poem for the first time. Candidates who read the whole poem as a metaphoric extension of the speaker often came unstuck, however inventive the analysis. There were, though, very many personal, careful responses to MacCaig's poem, producing varied and interesting readings of it. Such thoughtful answers considered 'self' as part of the poet's meandering, meditative observations of the everyday activities on the farm which also inspire the metaphysical reflections on the multi-layered, multi-faceted complexity of his identity.

Question 3. William Wordsworth: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) Those that answered this question offered responses which referred to childhood incidents described in the poems, but it was rare to find candidates taking the words from the prompt ('beauty and... fear') and investigating this duality. A number of candidates wrote extensively on background and historical context – the importance of the French Revolution, or the nature of Romanticism – but at the expense of a close focus on the texts. More successful answers chose poems carefully – 'The Prelude' and 'Nutting' were particularly popular – and showed how Wordsworth presents the natural world as a moral guide to the child.
- (b) Good answers closely analysed the presentation of the Leech Gatherer in the extract to suggest that he represents Wordsworth's Pantheistic ideology. Such answers focused on the symbolic value of his presence: extraordinary qualities of determination, dignity, honesty, stamina and inner strength which are all inspirational for the poet's own personal admonishment. These answers were based on close attention to the language, imagery and form of the poem.

Question 4. Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

- (a) There were some narrative and descriptive answers to this question, but most candidates selected appropriate material. Many acknowledged the use of dreams as a narrative tool to achieve a range of effects. Such answers argued that dreams are used in the novel as a structural device with their integral and symbolic function to act as warnings or premonitions of later events. Strong candidates were also able to show how the dreams highlight the gothic, supernatural and mysterious elements of the novel and reflect Jane's emotional development and destiny.
- (b) This was a very popular question. Most candidates recognised the extract and were able to place it in context. While a disappointing number of candidates used the question as an opportunity to re-tell the whole plot of the novel, stronger candidates saw the passage's significance as the dénouement of the novel. A number of candidates saw the importance of the role of the commentators on the marriage, whose comments are in keeping with the low-key wedding, a contrast with the first abandoned one. The strongest answers also acknowledged the narrative tone and address to the reader.

Question 5. Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

- (a) Less accomplished candidates used textual knowledge to recount the events of the novel. Successful answers focused on particular key episodes and considered how Tambu narrates. In this way, these answers were able to acknowledge some of the ambiguities of Tambu's development.
- (b) The passage provoked some very personal responses as candidates sympathised with Nyasha's emotional state. Strong answers contrasted the passage's initial tone of observant detachment with the intimate description of Nyasha's violence in the last paragraph. They also noted the force of Tambu's rhetorical questions and the tone of Nyasha's dialogue.

Question 6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) Successful answers to this question demanded an appropriate choice of stories; several candidates chose to discuss stories which are not written in the first person, which prevented them from answering the question. Some candidates chose to relate the plot of their chosen stories, with some acknowledgement of the narrator's position. Such answers did not receive high marks. More successful were those candidates who picked up elements of the prompt quotations and were able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the particular narrative position and the narrator's experience. *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *To Da-duh*, *In Memoriam* and *Tyres* were particularly successful choices in this regard.
- (b) The passage from *A Horse and Two Goats* was a popular option and candidates appreciated the humour of the extract. In some cases, the humour was asserted without explanation, but successful candidates were able to note the effects of the situational comedy achieved through the juxtaposition of two contrasting characters and cultures. By looking closely at the narrative writing and the dialogue, they explored the comic effects of the body language, assumptions, misunderstandings, misinterpretations and language barriers between Muni and the American.

Question 7. Arthur Miller: *A View from the Bridge*

- (a) Most answers restricted their considerations to Catherine's potential working career and her arguments with Eddie to achieve her independence and gain employment. Wider answers considered Beatrice's role too and considered relationships and marriage as well as work. Some linked the opportunities for women with the opportunities for immigrants and noted the beginnings of social change in America.
- (b) This extract produced some strong responses, the best always based on a very close discussion of dialogue and stage directions. Strong answers noted the importance of what is not said as well as what is expressed, and showed how the dialogue creates tension by revealing its subtext about Eddie's attitudes to Rodolpho and Catherine.

Question 8. Peter Shaffer: *Equus*

- (a) Less successful answers described some of the methods Dysart used to gain Alan's confidence and help him express his suppressed feelings and memories. Better answers noted the question's focus on 'ways' and examined dramatic structure, staging, dialogue and the use of props.
- (b) Successful answers noted the ways in which the scene builds the audience's expectations through Hesther's hints and Dysart's jokes before the climax created by the description of Alan's crime and the subsequent '*long pause*'. Good answers also noted that Hesther's praise of Dysart's skills also builds the audience's expectations for the first meeting between him and Alan.

Question 9. William Shakespeare: *Henry IV part 1*

- (a) Candidates were well informed about Hotspur and were ready to offer their opinion of him. The most successful answers were able to refer to other characters' judgements of him and compare these with examples of Hotspur's behaviour.
- (b) There were some good responses to this short extract. The strongest acknowledged what the audience already knows of Falstaff before Act 2 Scene 2 and looked closely at his and Prince Henry's dialogue in this extract to show how an audience's understanding is developed.