

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/01

Reading

General comments

Most candidates responded very positively to the theme of the relationship between parents and children and engaged well with the texts. The majority of candidates demonstrated clear understanding of both texts and expressed the view that they could relate to the problems presented regardless of their own cultural background.

It was pleasing to see all candidates complete the paper. Many had time to write a plan or a rough draft, a positive indication that they had been well prepared in the techniques and requirements of the examination, as well as in how to manage their allotted time in the examination. The recommended word limit was better respected than in any previous year and very few candidates ignored the instructions: *Ecrivez entre 200 et 250 mots.*

There was a marked improvement compared with previous years in the quality and accuracy of the language used in answers overall. The 'classic' examples of confusion between *se* and *ce*, *ces/ses/c'est*, *on/ont*, *leur/leurs père (s)*, *les/leur*, *a/à*, and *son/sont* were still present in some scripts but less than in previous years. Much of the vocabulary and phrasing candidates needed to use in **Question 1** in particular were contained in the source documents. The Examiner was pleased to note effective manipulation by most candidates of the language of the source texts, with candidates managing to rephrase and avoid direct lifting. On the other hand, as is apparent from the detailed feedback on individual questions, some candidates could not be credited because in rephrasing the question they failed to provide a clear answer.

The Examiner stressed the importance in **Question 1** of candidates reading the sub-questions carefully and making sure that they answered in the format required by the question. The number of marks allocated by the side of each question serves as a clear indicator of the number of points that need to be included in order to gain full marks.

The general neatness of the answers and the quality of the handwriting were high, and it was pleasing to see the pride taken by many candidates in their work done for the examination.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

The sub-questions in **Question 1** ranged from the accessible – **(a)**, **(d)** and **(g)** to the challenging, **(f)** and **(i)**. The remainder of the questions in this exercise were pitched so as to be accessible to candidates who had a sound understanding of the text. **Question 1** as a whole offered all candidates the opportunity to perform according to their abilities.

Content:

- (a)** This question about what Amir was good at in school was well-answered generally and most candidates were able to explain that Amir could recite poetry, or win at *sherjangi*.
- (b)** This question tested candidates' ability to limit their answer to the lines quoted and not refer to the text as a whole. Where candidates focused on the lines mentioned in the question the contrast between the emotions of Amir and his father, Baba, at his winning the poetry competition could be readily detailed. Just a small number of candidates referred to Baba's general feeling of disappointment in his son, which was not related to the winning of the competition.

- (c) The Examiner was delighted to see so many interesting answers to this question. Many candidates explained the use of the word *dévorais* with reference to Amir's hunger for reading and his passionate attitude towards books. Mistakes stemmed from the association of the word with winning the game of *sherjangi*, with Amir 'swallowing up' his competitors.
- (d) This question asking candidates for one detail that showed in what ways Amir had taken after his mother was answered successfully by almost all candidates. Candidates could refer to Amir's reading of the books left by his mother or to the passion for reading she had inspired in him.
- (e) Candidates who answered well explained that Baba had dreamt of having a son who would resemble him in his taste for football and hunting. However, quite a few candidates simply rephrased the question by saying that Baba had not imagined that Amir would be like he was. This was too vague to be credited: for questions beginning with *Expliquez*, reference needs always to be made to the text.
- (f) This question was in two parts. Some candidates missed the reference in the first part of the question to the effect that the description of Amir playing football had on them and simply paraphrased the description itself. Better candidates were able to sympathise with Amir, having been in a similar situation themselves, or commented on the humour in the scene. A personal element to candidates' responses was essential to score full marks for this part of the question.
- The second part of the question differentiated well between outstanding and good candidates. Very few candidates scored the full 3 marks, with an explanation of how the wording of Amir's description, the comparisons used, the vivid way in which the scene was made present in the mind of the reader and the contrasts drawn in the text all contributed to an effect of irony or pathos. Weaker candidates copied the whole passage from the text.
- (g) This question as to why Amir pretended to be interested in football was very successful. Almost all candidates understood that Amir wanted to please his father, to make him happy and proud of him.
- (h) The majority of candidates managed to explain that the fact that children were not like *livres de coloriage* meant that their parents could not simply mould them as they wanted them to be. Several candidates, however, omitted to add that as a consequence parents had to accept that children would develop in their own way.
- (j) Candidates were asked in this question to comment on their own picture of Baba and Amir and the relationship between them. This question, the answer to which was not spelt out specifically in the text, required candidates to demonstrate skills of interpretation in order to find sufficient suitable material to gain the maximum six marks. The question differentiated well between strong and weaker candidates. All candidates were able to express one or two points relating to Amir or Baba's personalities and/or to the relationship between them. However, they did not always go into the depth or breadth expected for full marks.

Language

This year saw a continuation of the improvement in the quality of language used by candidates noted at last year's session. Good candidates were generally able to reword ideas from the text effectively and, apart from **Question f(ii)**, the Examiner found very little evidence of lifting. Many candidates expressed themselves with fluency and confidence. The main mistakes found included the spelling of *fier*, used mostly in its feminine form for Baba and Amir, even though candidates were clear that both characters were male. The Examiner also noted a wide variety of spellings for *faisait* and *faisais*. For some candidates, verb endings in the imperfect still constitute a challenge, likewise the use of the *passé simple* compared with the *imparfait*. The *passé composé* tended to pose fewer problems.

Question 2

Content

Candidates were asked to compare and explain the attitudes of both fathers and the reasons for the dissatisfaction they showed, and to compare the experience of the children in both texts.

It was relatively easy for candidates to achieve a high content mark because each text provided sufficient information and most candidates were able to express the expectations of the fathers and the reactions of the children clearly.

The best candidates began their comparison with a brief introduction, followed by two paragraphs, one relating to the fathers presented in the two texts, and the other to the experience of the children. They finished with a clear conclusion.

Candidates could also focus in the two paragraphs referred to above on how the texts differed from and resembled each other. However, this led for some candidates to a confusing situation as they tended to forget some points and/ or to repeat themselves. Where this was the case it applied largely to middle range candidates.

The Examiner's advice is to answer the questions in the order in which they are asked and to address all the points referred to in each question. Candidates who did so tended to score better results. It is likewise important to read all questions carefully.

Some weaker candidates misread or misunderstood the rubric completely and either wrote a piece on how parents should behave towards their children or vice versa, or responded to just one part of the question, writing at some length on **either** the parents **or** the children.

Language

Most candidates were able to complete their summary of the two texts in the right number of words, using the vocabulary from the source texts as well as their own and more candidates than ever before on this paper used suitable words and appropriate sentences to indicate a clear comparison (*par contre, ainsi que, en ce qui concerne les enfants/parents etc.*). Generally, lexical knowledge of parental attitudes and childrens' feelings was well used by candidates. Some candidates referred to Simone as a boy and used the masculine form, probably thinking of the boy's name Simon, but the text itself makes it very clear that we are dealing with a girl: *elle aurait pu* (line1). Spelling and grammatical mistakes were similar to those listed for **Question 1**.

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/02

Writing

General Comments

It was pleasing to see that all candidates submitted two essays, one from each section, as required in the rubric. While many candidates performed equally well on both essays, some showed greater strength on the discursive essay than on the creative one.

In order to maximise their chances of success, it is important for candidates to organise the time allocated to the two essays efficiently. Candidates should read all the titles carefully before choosing the ones on which they wish to write. Writing out the task title and underlining keywords helps candidates focus on the question being asked and avoid writing material that is irrelevant and making spelling errors. Candidates should also make sure they give the question number and letter, **(a)**, **(b)**, **(c)** or **(d)**, identifying the title they have chosen.

Time should be spent on planning the essay prior to writing it. It was disappointing to see that a number of candidates had not planned their essays. One result of this was repetition of ideas or, in some cases, contradiction. While most candidates produced a clearly defined introduction and conclusion, paragraphing was less clear at times, and absent altogether in some instances.

Candidates should remember that they are required to write between 350 and 500 words for **each** essay. Many essays fell far short of the 350 words, which meant that candidates' ideas and points of view were not fully developed and could not be credited as if they were.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Argumentative/ Discursive tasks

Question 1

(a) *Seriez-vous prêt(e) à modifier votre mode de vie pour préserver l'environnement?*

This was a very popular topic. It was gratifying to see that many candidates were well aware of the various environmental problems and possible solutions to them. However, many candidates failed to address the question fully as they did not include in their argument what **they** as individuals would be prepared to do.

It was disappointing that some candidates consistently misspelt the word *environnement*. The masculine gender of *mode* referring to way of life was not commonly known, affecting the clarity of the message being conveyed in some cases.

(b) *“Vouloir c'est pouvoir”. Discutez.*

This was the least popular of the four discursive essays. Those who attempted it were not always aware of the exact meaning of the saying. Their arguments were limited to concrete anecdotes relating to everyday life: wanting material goods such as a dress or a new television, for example, and finding ways to obtain them. While many candidates saw clearly that the impossible cannot be realized, weaker candidates sought to argue that simply wanting something is enough to succeed in getting it. The examples these candidates gave often related to unrealistic and effectively unrealisable targets.

(c) *Devrions-nous tous devenir végétariens? Discutez.*

This was a popular title. Many candidates were able to present and weigh up the pros and cons of the question. Cruelty to animals on the one hand and a lack of essential nutrients in a vegetarian diet on the other were among the main arguments advanced by candidates. However, their conclusion was almost invariably that they were not prepared themselves to give up the meat they so much enjoyed.

(d) *Pensez-vous que dans 20 ans les gens iront toujours au cinéma? Pourquoi/Pourquoi pas?*

This was a very popular essay. There were many well-structured essays in which candidates explored both sides of the question and came to a logical conclusion. Modern technology and the rising cost of a visit to a cinema were among the key arguments put forward for its likely demise.

Weaker candidates misunderstood the question and discussed whether films would still be produced.

Section 2

Descriptive and narrative tasks

(a) *Décrivez un paysage qui vous est cher.*

There were many successful descriptions of scenery that candidates often recalled with great nostalgia. Candidates' descriptions conveyed well-defined ideas and images which made the picture clear to the reader. Essays often contained a wealth of effective descriptive vocabulary. In the case of weaker candidates, there was a tendency to concentrate in their descriptions on objects and animals, which was not really relevant to the title.

(b) *Décrivez les changements d'activité tout au long d'une journée dans une ville de votre choix.*

This was the least popular of the four titles. There were, however, some very good attempts where candidates gave a detailed description of the different activities connected with the time of day and people's mood and state of alertness at different points.

Weaker candidates tended to describe their daily routine and activities, ignoring the context referred to in the title.

(c) *"Soudain je remarquai une odeur inhabituelle!..."
Incorporez cette phrase dans une courte histoire.*

Even though this was a popular question many candidates simply told a straightforward story of everyday happenings without any build-up of character or setting. The unusual smell was often just referred to in passing without any connection being made to their story. Even better candidates often failed to bring their story to any kind of climax.

(d) *"Une rencontre imprévue". Ecrivez le début ou une partie d'une histoire portant ce titre.*

There were many imaginative essays which incorporated building up of tension and a sudden turn of events. However, at times, these aspects of the story tended to be rather lengthy, leaving less room for development.

Weaker candidates tended to narrate a simple series of uninvolved events which failed to engage the reader.

Conclusion

There were many pleasing pieces of work. A number of candidates showed an impressive flair for the language and a good grasp of complex vocabulary and structures.

It must be remembered that candidates need to show a sense of purpose when structuring their whole essay. While there were some good introductions and conclusions, the body of the essay itself was not always as effectively organised as it could have been.

Candidates need to allocate some of their time in the examination both to planning how to structure their ideas and to checking the accuracy of their language. There were several errors of vocabulary which resulted in a misleading message being conveyed: the value of wide reading in enabling candidates to extend their ideas and vocabulary and their fluency in a range of different registers of language cannot be over-estimated.