

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/01
Coursework

Key messages

Learners do well when centres frame coursework tasks in such a way that they enable learners to meet the syllabus's assessment objectives.

Teacher annotation of written coursework is an essential part of the moderation process, enabling Centres to provide a clear justification for the marks they award.

The most effective oral responses are conversations in which teachers ask supporting questions that allow candidates to demonstrate their full potential.

General comments

In addition to this report, Centres will receive individual reports on their internal moderation of candidate work. This general review draws together the main points contained within the centre reports.

Much of the work showed candidates' thoughtful engagement with the texts they had studied. This was true of all three categories of the Coursework Portfolio: the critical essay; the empathic response and the recorded conversation.

Most centres set tasks that were in keeping with syllabus requirements and which enabled candidates to meet the requirements of the band descriptors in the highest bands. Occasionally, however, there were cases of inadequate tasks that had the effect of limiting candidates' performance.

Centres are advised to consult regularly the Syllabus, the 0408 Coursework Training Handbook and the 0408 Teacher Guide (all can be found on the Teacher Support website). It is particularly important that all teachers of IGCSE World Literature within a centre are following requirements and guidance contained within these documents. Many effective centres, for example, discuss potential coursework tasks towards the beginning of the course so that any problematic tasks can be remedied in a timely fashion. All the guidance that Centres need about the setting of suitable tasks can be found in the Coursework Training Handbook.

This Handbook (**Sections 5.1** and **5.6**) also contains clear direction about what constitutes effective annotation by teachers. Detailed summative comments on candidate record forms - or in the case of written work, at the end of assignments – including comments which draw on the wording of the relevant assessment criteria, enable teachers to justify the award of a particular mark.

In the case of written assignments, as well as summative comments, most centres provided focused ticking of valid points and concise comments in the margin about the specific strengths and weaknesses of a candidate's performance. Most Centres take great care over such annotation of candidate work as they recognise the importance of its role in providing a clear rationale for the award of particular marks. Meaningful annotation makes the process of moderation accountable and transparent. Clean copies of written assignments are not helpful to the moderation process. Ticks should be used purposefully; routine ticking of paragraphs, pages or quotations is much less helpful to the Moderator.

Critical Essay

The most accomplished critical essays sustained a clear engagement with both the text and task. For Bands 3 and above there should be clear evidence of the exploration of writers' techniques and effects. Learners performed best when tasks were worded in such a way that they explicitly invited a consideration of writers' techniques. Good tasks included the writer's name and began with questions such as 'How?' or 'In what

ways?’ or imperatives such as ‘Explore’. Examples of effective task-setting can be found in the Coursework Training Handbook and also in Set Texts past papers.

In some cases there were titles of assignments that were simply the titles of texts –these did not provide adequate direction to candidates – nor do vague topics such as ‘Death of the family woman’, presumably intended to sum up the content of the text.

Candidates should include the task in full - not an abbreviation or approximation of it - so that other readers, including the external Moderator, can judge how successfully the task has been addressed as they read the assignment.

Where a critical essay deals with poems or short stories, candidates should write about two poems or two stories. The syllabus does not require comparison nor do the assessment criteria award it.

Empathic Response

Most Centres had prepared their candidates well for this element of the Portfolio with its emphasis on a more creative approach to literary appreciation. Empathic tasks enable candidates to engage creatively with key aspects such as theme, characterisation and use of language. Good responses were *rooted in* the recognisable world of the text.

In successful pieces, the ‘voice’ selected belonged to a significant character in a significant text. Most piece selected characters from plays (e.g. *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Romeo and Juliet*) or novels (e.g. *The Sound of Waves*, *Purple Hibiscus*) as these provided ample material for them to draw upon. The vast majority of candidates pinpointed with at least some success a particular moment from the text for their voice’s reflections. The better moments enabled candidates to explore their chosen character’s thoughts and feelings with considerable insight.

For Empathic tasks, candidates must include details of both their chosen character and moment at the top of the response so that other readers can gauge how convincing the candidate’s response is to both character and moment.

Recorded Conversation

In the most successful conversations there was an impressive command of textual detail deployed to support candidates’ arguments.

The vast majority of centres adhered to the syllabus requirements on time limits and included conversations lasting between four and seven minutes. Teachers conducting the oral responses should bring recordings to a close once seven minutes have elapsed.

There was much evidence of skilful and sensitive questioning by teachers, designed to allow learners to demonstrate their skills of literary criticism to the full. There was, however, a minority of Centres where candidates were permitted to deliver what in essence were monologues, with minimal interventions made by teachers. This may be the practice of other examination boards which assess oral responses, but it is not for IGCSE. The oral response is referred to as the ‘recorded conversation’ in the syllabus and the role of the teacher conducting the recordings is discussed in detail in the Coursework Training Handbook.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/02

Unseen

Key Messages

- Good answers avoid introductions which reiterate the question.
- Candidates do well when they plan and select material carefully, paying attention to the wording of the stem question and focussing on the writer's methods.
- In good answers words and images are analysed in their context, not in isolation.
- Good answers support their ideas with specific textual references and quotations. They do not merely refer to line numbers.

General Comments

There were a very large number of highly conscientious, painstaking and thorough answers. Most Candidates had a sound technical vocabulary, though any comparison tended to be labelled as a "simile", any pause or use of a comma thought to be an example of 'caesura' and the terms, "assonance" and "personification", were misunderstood by a sizeable minority. Most candidates devoted a sensible amount of time to reading and planning before beginning their answers, though some produced such extensive plans, or even first drafts, that they left themselves little time to produce their actual answer. There were very few brief, unfinished or insubstantial answers and few examples of candidates tackling both questions. Poetry still proved to be far more popular than prose.

Opening paragraphs, which simply re-worked the question and bullets or listed devices without context, or closing paragraphs which just repeated points already made, added very little to the effectiveness of many candidates' answers.

The best answers avoided the line-by-line, running commentary approach which can lead so often to unselective paraphrase, or the generalised theme-searching approach which can hinder contact with the detail of the text, and successfully shaped a controlling overview supported by close attention to features of the writing.

Some less successful answer seized on a particular word and developed a lengthy response to it without consideration of context, so that strange conclusions were asserted about individual words like "crocodile" and "infectious", in the poem, and "sparkling", in the prose as if they always have an established meaning and set of associations, irrespective of their particular use in the text.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1 (Poetry) *The Schoolchildren* by Pedro Serrano

In response to the poetry question, successful answers kept the question clearly in view, thereby focusing on the poet's perspective and the fascinating energy and fluctuation of the children's movements. They demonstrated an overview of the poem, often shaping convincing conclusions about growing up or shifting friendship groups or the tensions between control/freedom and conformity/individuality, or all of these things, by selecting and commenting on a range of detail. Candidates noted significant patterns, contrasts and repetitions and explored their effect. The wind transforming into a breeze, the contrasts of merging and unravelling, being together and apart, dissolving and reassembling, pulling together and pulling apart and the effect of counting the numbers of children were all fully considered. Effective responses were able to focus explicitly on the structure of the poem by responding to features such as the patterns above and to the effect of specific examples of enjambment such as the isolation of 'reassembles' into a single-word line, or the

emphasis on 'Strange' at the end of a line but the start of a sentence or the gap between 'face' and 'an obstacle' and by demonstrating, with examples, that the free movement of the verse might well be reflecting the free movement of the children.

Strong answers wrestled with the poem's more complex meanings such as: 'consciousness demands pursuit' and unpicked similes and metaphors with precision and perception: 'Like leaves...', 'taking flight', 'ruffling', 'Magnetism', 'easy as a breeze', related them to what the poet is seeing, and developed a response. For example: 'taking flight, ruffling' suggests that the children are relishing an escape into freedom/maturity/independence like fledgling birds attempting to take off for the first time with the wind disturbing their feathers.'

Many responses explored the effect of changes in pace and tone, particularly at the end where the tone changes from frantic movement and agitation to softness and stillness – making this a strong final point for their conclusion.

Less successful answers became completely detached from the detail of the writing and asserted sweepingly symbolic and unsupported interpretations of the children's activities, sometimes based on the "negative/threatening connotations" of de-contextualised words such as "crocodile" and "infectious" and occasionally suggesting that there is something inherently sinister about an adult (usually a man) observing a group of children. Candidates identified particular features but found it difficult to comment on their effect, drifting instead into paraphrase or generalised labelling. Some candidates confused the literal and metaphorical, and often suggested that the children were being buffeted by the wind. They attributed miraculous properties to commas and other forms of punctuation, often devoting an early paragraph entirely to this. Some wrote a long section on 'structure' without a single specific reference to the poem and sometimes suggested that the 'free verse' form simply confirmed that the poet was so wrapped up in the children's activities that he could not be bothered to use proper rhyme and rhythm and had just poured the writing carelessly onto the page.

Question 2 (Prose) from *The Finest Story in the World* by Annie Saumont

When writing about the prose passage, successful answers focused on the "how" of the question and features of the writing which fore-grounded the "difficulties" rather than just outlining them. Strong answers considered the effect of the characterisation, the multiple narrative points-of-view, the ironies, the contrasts, the verb-less sentences, the listing, the repetition, the rhetorical questions, the syntactic reversals and parallels and the Kipling allusion. Many lively answers explored the portrayal of Armelle's needy and discouraging husband, children, parents, Aunt, friend as the real 'obstacles' to creativity. Such responses understood the significance of the Kipling allusion and the irony of 'woman' as 'obstacle', and were alert to the sexism of Armelle's own parents and of Pascal's signature, his study, his football, his demands, and his parental advice.

Detailed responses saw the relationship between the three lists, the repetition, the questions, the interruptions, the breathlessly short sentences and the use of Armelle's point-of-view and thought processes and her rushed and chaotic lifestyle. They looked in detail at word choice in context; one candidate, for instance, wrote a whole paragraph on the irony of the word 'shelved', pointing out not just that Armelle's dream is such a low priority that it does not even make the list but that "shelved" conjures up images of libraries and books, that in this case would not be written.

Less successful answers described the 'difficulties' but found explicit attention to the writing very difficult. They devoted a long section to 'style' but were unable to move beyond broad references to short sentences and to explore the effect of the writer's choices. They were unaware of tone and irony and developed a critical view of Armelle as a negligent mother who burns the stew and neglects her teething baby. Many ignored the other characters in the story and the Kipling allusion and some thought Jean was a girl, quoted "sparkling" out of context and misunderstood its significance.

WORLD LITERATURE

Paper 0408/03

Set Text

Key messages

Candidates do well when they tailor their detailed knowledge to the demands of the particular question.

In their critical responses the best answers include analysis of the techniques writers use to convey their meanings and achieve their effects.

Good responses to **Section A** extract-based questions engage with the detail and language of the extract, by selecting relevant words and phrases to address the question.

Successful Personal responses are substantiated by pertinent textual detail.

General comments

There were many candidate responses showing a sustained critical engagement with both text and task. These were convincing essays which integrated apt textual reference with perceptive critical comment. Less successful essays showed a detailed knowledge but needed to tailor that knowledge to the particular demands of the question.

Some of the least successful responses contained an excessive amount of extraneous contextual material, often biographical or historical. Some responses to the Ibsen and Mishima texts, for example, made quite general comments about the role of women 'in those days'. Stronger responses used contextual comment succinctly and only where it served to illuminate interpretation of specific textual detail.

IGCSE Literature questions make reference to the writer. Key words in questions include 'Explore', 'How?' and 'In what ways?' These words serve as prompts for candidates to explore the ways in which writers use techniques to convey meanings and achieve their effects. Where characters appear in questions, more is expected than a mere character sketch. Some of the most successful responses to the plays by Anouilh, Fugard and Ibsen wrote perceptively about the ways in which the playwrights presented their characters, seeing them as dramatic constructs rather than real-life people. These responses usually referred to the texts as 'plays' rather than 'books'.

In 45-minute responses candidates are not expected to cover every aspect of the text. For extract-based questions, essays do well which select detail carefully from the extract in order to write about it effectively. Commentaries which try to comment on everything tend to be superficial and do less well.

The strongest critical responses make judicious use of textual reference as an integral part of the analysis. These integrate quotations seamlessly and economically into their own writing. Lengthy quotations intended to illustrate a point are less helpful.

Comments on Specific Questions

Antigone

Question 1

The strongest answers responded perceptively to this moment's significance as the climax to the play. It was difficult to explore the powerful impact of this scene without making some reference to events preceding it. Candidates focused particularly on Antigone's provocation of Creon and his eventual acceptance of the situation. The importance of the Chorus's words was also acknowledged.

Question 7

Responses focused on Antigone's child-like qualities: her slight build, her nanny, her pet dog and, more perceptively, her idealisation of childhood. Her using Polynices' childhood spade to cover his body was noted. The strongest responses explored Antigone's unwillingness to compromise, her horror at ageing and Haemon's dying for love because he cannot endure life without Antigone. Many focused on the contrast between the idealism and fervour of youth and the compromise and realism of old age.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress

Question 2

The extract captured the joy felt by Luo and the narrator of at last getting their hands on the books hidden in Four-Eyes' suitcase. Most responses saw the significance of the books to the novel as a whole and, in particular, the characters' growing obsession with them. The strongest responses were able to chart the increasing tension of the extract and the boy's fear of being caught, and analysed closely Sijie's techniques in creating the tension. There was often reference to Luo's mistaken belief that the books would transform his 'simple mountain girl', with telling reference to the circumstances of the Seamstress' actual transformation later in the novel.

Question 8

Most responses included reference to the more obvious features of life in the village: working in the mines, the primitive house on stilts, the persistent rain and the alarm clock that so intrigued the villagers. Stronger responses explored Sijie's depiction of the 'revolutionary' attitudes towards music and fiction instilled into the peasants. The strongest responses showed how these attitudes are skilfully subverted by the boys whose story-telling and 'oral cinema shows' leave the villagers (unaccustomed to film or fiction) so enraptured.

'Master Harold'...and the Boys

Question 3

Most responses focused on the specific details of this memorable extract: Sam's overtures of reconciliation with Hally, Hally's apparent shame and despair, and Willy's promise to reform. The significance of the symbolism of the whites-only bench was generally acknowledged. The strongest responses had an assured grasp of the dramatic impact of this closing scene, including the poignant symbolism of the song and dance ('Let's dream') at the close of the play.

Question 9

Responses focused on a number of possible choices for this question: the teenage Hally ordering two middle-aged 'boys' about; the description of caning in jail; the whites-only bench; the father's racist attitudes in the confrontation between Hally and Sam. Stronger responses explored the detail of their chosen moments and engaged effectively with the ways in which Fugard achieves his effects.

Hedda Gabler

Question 4

There were many responses to this question on a text appearing on the syllabus for the first time this session. Most candidates were able to explore with at least some success Hedda's romantic idea of suicide, the dramatic impact of Brack revealing the truth about Lovborg's suicide and Hedda's revulsion as the truth finally sinks in. The strongest responses explored the dramatic qualities of the extract itself and also its significance in the wider play: in particular, how the closing lines prepare the audience for what is to take place at the very end of the play.

Question 10

There were some very engaged and perceptive responses to the ways in which Ibsen presents the character of Tesman. His dullness, dependability and/or gullibility were illustrated fairly comprehensively. That he was a man who combined academic research with his honeymoon made him a somewhat unsympathetic character for some. Others were more forgiving of a man dominated by a wife who behind his back pours scorn on him and their marriage.

Stories of Ourselves

Question 5

Most responses were able to comment on key aspects of the characters: Mr Mitra's impulsiveness, irritability and general cluelessness; Mrs Mitra giving the impression that she is used to this sort of performance from him. The strongest responses considered the craft of the writing; for example, an economy in the use of revealing details about the everyday frictions between the two: she looks at her watch, he sighs. Some commented on the largely silent presence of the driver (and his likely views of the couple). A few remarked on the way in which the purpose of the journey is revealed, with the news of the suicide delivered in parenthesis.

Question 11

The few responses to this question lacked the energy and engagement of other **Section B** questions, and often re-told the story from the narrator's viewpoint. There tended to be little close engagement with the terms of the question: 'how...the writer memorably depicts the life of the narrator'.

The Sound of Waves

Question 6

Many responses explored the key aspects of this extract: Shinji's pleasure in the storm as this enables him to meet Hatsue and his atypical behaviour of singing and swinging from the door lintel. The strongest responses commented on Mishima's presentation of Shinji's feelings at this moment in the novel, making reference to his mother's surprise at this behaviour of a 'stranger' and to his communion with the 'kind' sea. Candidates commented on Mishima's depiction of Shinji's innocence and straightforwardness, qualities to be admired.

Question 12

Most responses regarded Uta-Jima as an ideal place to live, citing the industry and innocence of its inhabitants, the unity with nature, the notable kindness of most characters, the lack of crime and respect for elders. By contrast, some referred to the obvious class divisions, the toughness of fishing and diving, and the prevalence of gossip. Chiyoko and Yasuo were seen as symbols of everything that Uta-Jima did not stand for. The strongest responses analysed the ways in which Mishima's techniques established setting and themes.