

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/51 Shakespeare and other pre-Twentieth Century Texts</p>
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Key messages

- (1) At the start of the examination, candidates should carefully plan how much time is to be spent on each essay.
- (2) Candidates should ensure their essays include discussion of varying opinions of the set texts.

General comments

The general standard was once again satisfactory, with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were very few rubric errors and there were very few candidates who were limited by expression. Some weaker candidates adopt an informal style and register, which can limit precision and the development of arguments.

There were responses to all of the questions set and answers on each question were seen at all levels of attainment. Some texts remain very popular – Richard II in section A and Wuthering Heights in section B – with others remaining minority choices, such as Marvell and Shelley. The responses seen on these less popular texts suggest that they are still very accessible to learners at all ability levels.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

- (a) Candidates should apportion their time carefully across the two essays to be written, with sufficient time allocated for planning and writing each essay. In this session there were a number of candidates whose second essay was incomplete and often appeared unplanned. Careful note of timings and adhering to them would improve the overall mark and result for such candidates.
- (b) Candidates should be able to appreciate and discuss varying opinions of the set texts, as set out in Assessment Objective 5 for this syllabus. This can be evidenced in the candidate's essays in many different ways, of which some of the most common ones are:
 - (i) by appropriate use of critical or academic opinions
 - (ii) by discussing how a specific type of reader or audience might respond, such as a Marxist reader
 - (iii) by comparing possible responses from the writer's actual audience to those of, say, a modern audience
 - (iv) by critical analysis of different possible meanings to specific words or phrases.

There are other ways of meeting this assessment objective; in any case it is important that the candidates build into their essay plans some evidence of the ability to discuss varying opinions in order to meet the requirements of the syllabus in full.

Comments on specific questions

Richard II

This was a popular text in this session, with a large majority opting for the **(b)** passage question.

- (a) Nearly all responses had a sound knowledge of the text and were able to select relevant material to address the task. Weaker answers often approached the topic through the characters, summarising their various attitudes; some answers suggested at least an implicit comparison or

contrast, thereby presenting the beginnings of an argument. Better answers developed this approach, often contrasting Richard's and Bolingbroke's reputations with the court and the people. These approaches did very well when the arguments were supported by appropriate reference to text. Very good answers often saw this as a key concern in the text, exploring how Shakespeare develops the plot 'through the counterbalancing rise and fall of the two main characters' reputations,' as one suggested. Other answers saw how reputation was closely linked to 'flattery and the whole way the court operated at that time,' as one put it, with many noting how Shakespeare suggested reputation was 'fickle and often undeserved.' Where such arguments were supported with some understanding of the dramatic and poetic methods used by Shakespeare to present his concerns, the essays did very well.

- (b) This was the second most popular question on the paper. Nearly every answer gave an appropriate context to this passage – Richard's return from Ireland and Bolingbroke's 'invasion'. Weaker responses tended to lapse into paraphrase or moved away from the detail of the passage into summarising the preceding and following events. More successful approaches often discussed the importance of this passage to the plot of the play, exploring Richard's 'weak and impractical response to the threats to his crown,' as one put it, 'which would lead to his deposition and death'. Good answers saw the passage, for example, as 'revealing the poetic, unregal character of Richard,' as one answer suggested. Others explored the way Carlisle supports Richard's view of his divine right, contrasting with Aumerle's more practical attitude. Very good answers considered the detail of Richard's language and his use of natural and religious imagery, identifying the effects created and the significance to Shakespeare's concerns such as kingship, leadership and rebellion, with appropriate support from both passage and wider text.

The Winter's Tale

This was the most popular text on the paper this session with the vast majority opting for the (b) passage question.

- (a) There were relatively few responses to this question. Nearly all of them revealed a sound knowledge of the text and were able to select relevant material to address the task. Weaker answers often summarised what happened in each of the two main locations, Sicilia and Bohemia, some offering at least an implicit comparison or contrast, as a way of suggesting an argument. Better answers developed this by comparing and contrasting the characters in the specific locations, such as Perdita in the shepherd's cottage and then in Sicilia at Leontes's court, often showing some awareness of Shakespeare's methods of characterisation through location and setting. More successful answers also saw how courts and countryside were also contrasted, comparing for example the atmosphere at the sheep shearing festival with that at Hermione's trial. Some very good answers saw the topic in more abstract terms, exploring how Shakespeare presents his concerns, such as loyalty, parenting, relationships and love, through exposing how 'places change the way people behave and show us the different ways that people love and live together,' as one essay suggested. These approaches did very well when the arguments were supported by appropriate reference to text, with developed understanding of the dramatic and poetic methods used by Shakespeare.
- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper, with most candidates able to give an appropriate context. Basic answers tended to discuss the character of Paulina generally, often with some paraphrasing and summary of the rest of the play; some understanding of the situation and its significance lifted such responses. Better answers noted, for example, 'How Shakespeare contrasts the Paulina we see here, with the one earlier in the play, trying to force baby Perdita into her father's arms,' as one put it. Many good answers explored how audience response here might reflect different attitudes to Leontes, some accepting his apparent remorse at face value, whilst others remained sceptical of its true nature. Very good answers explored the language and tone in detail, considering the effects of Leontes's response to 'killed', for example. Paulina's significance as the protector of Hermione's memory was often very well explored, especially her language and emotion, with some noting that 'earlier in the play, she is a lone female voice in a man's world, and the only one with a true understanding of the rights and wrongs,' as one suggested. Very few answers discussed the deeper context to Paulina's role here – that she is the only one on stage who knows that Hermione is still alive and therefore understands the dangers of Leontes remarrying. Those answers which explored this aspect of the passage and were able to find support from the wider text did very well indeed.

Northanger Abbey

This was a popular **Section B** text, with an even split between the two options.

- (a) Nearly every answer showed relevant knowledge of the text and some understanding of the task. Weaker answers tended to approach the topic through the characters, with the Thorpes and General Tilney popular choices, often summarising what the characters did, sometimes in great detail. Better answers at this level saw some of the contrasts Austen offers between and even within the various family groups, such as the Tilneys and the Morlands. Good answers often saw this as one of Austen's major concerns in the novel, exploring how and with what effects the different attitudes, 'from the grasping, acquisitive Isabella to the naïve, unmercenary Catherine, are presented to the reader,' as one put it. Some answers developed such arguments into a consideration of Austen's methods of characterisation, considering her use of language and tone, for example, to reveal the different attitudes of her characters and thereby develop the plot and the structure of the novel as a whole. Where such ideas were supported by apposite quotation, the answers did very well.
- (b) Nearly every answer recognised the general context to this passage and was to some extent able to consider what is revealed about Catherine here. Weaker answers often lapsed into a summary of the events leading to her visit to the Abbey or offered more general comments on Catherine and what happens to her in the novel, rather than exploring the detail of the given passage. Better answers considered Austen's concerns in detail, and the 'mock gothic atmosphere,' as one put it, as well as what is revealed about Catherine's state of mind at this stage in the novel. Very good answers focussed on the detail of the passage, analysing the narrative techniques, such as narrative voice and Catherine's internal dialogue, as well as language and tone. Answers which developed such points into considering the effects on the reader, including comic ones, often did very well.

Wuthering Heights

This was the most popular **Section B** text, with the majority choosing the **option (b)** passage.

- (a) Nearly every answer had some relevant knowledge of the text – and of Cathy Linton in particular – with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to summarise what she did, often in great and accurate detail. More successful answers considered her role as the 'woman in the love triangle with Heathcliff and Edgar,' as one suggested. Better answers shaped such ideas to the prompt. For some, 'she was a spoilt child, who never really understood those around her'; for others she 'was genuinely torn between the passion of Heathcliff and the comfortable lifestyle of Edgar,' as one put it. Good responses developed such ideas into a consideration of Brontë's methods of characterisation, exploring her use of language, pathetic fallacy and symbolism, for example. Those answers supporting such approaches with apposite quotation and appropriate analysis did very well.
- (b) Most answers were able to give a clear context – the death of Catherine and the birth of Cathy. Basic answers often paraphrased the passage or generalised about the characters, especially Heathcliff here and elsewhere in the text. More successful responses focussed on Brontë's characterisation of Heathcliff and Nellie at this point in the novel. Good answers considered the effects of Brontë's writing in detail, considering, for example, the narrative techniques and the narrator, as well as Brontë's use of language and dialogue. Where such methods were fully analysed and the effects considered, such as how a reader might respond to Heathcliff's inability to say Catherine's name, the answers often did very well, especially when brief, apposite references to the wider text were integrated appropriately.

The Franklin's Prologue and Tale

This was a popular, if minority, text on the paper, with most candidates choosing the essay question, **option (a)**.

- (a) Nearly every answer revealed relevant knowledge of the text and some understanding of the task. Weaker answers were mostly able to find relevant material to address the task, often giving a summary of Arveragus and what happened to him. Better answers considered how Chaucer's ambiguous presentation of the knight was exemplified in the given quotations, 'contrasting his desire for her to be his equal, with what he actually does and makes her do,' as one answer

suggested. Good answers also explored his role in terms of the contrasts with the squire, Aurelius, and how he represents how 'the squire's attitudes, which he seemed to share early on, soon change following his marriage,' as one suggested. Very good answers developed such ideas with appropriate reference to the detail of the text and, where some analysis of the poetic methods and their effects was included, these answers did very well.

- (b) Most responses gave an appropriate context and were able to see this as a crucial moment in the plot development of the poem, as Dorigen sees the 'grisly rokkes blake'. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or to write generally about the preceding and succeeding events. Better answers focussed on the detail of the passage. Many responses saw this as revealing Dorigen's genuine love for Arveragus, and, for some, his for her, in his letters to her. Good answers also explored Chaucer's methods of characterisation, his use of language and imagery, to develop Dorigen. Very good answers often considered a more symbolic interpretation of the situation and Dorigen's response, seeing 'her recognition of the rocks and the dangers at sea as representing her misgivings about her missing Lord,' as one put it. With some detailed analysis of Chaucer's style, especially the use of language and imagery, to support such arguments, these answers often did very well.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

This was a minority text in this session, with most candidates choosing **option (b)**, the passage question.

- (a) Nearly every answer had sufficient knowledge of the text to discuss this topic relevantly. Weaker answers tended to approach it through the characters, especially Angel and Alec, contrasted to Tess herself. More successful answers saw the contrasts Hardy creates between characters, for example Tess and her mother and how they respond to the pregnancy and Alec's responsibilities. Better answers saw how Hardy develops his characterisations through the different attitudes to morality, with good answers seeing how this might lead to contrasting, even contradictory, responses in the audience, for example over Tess's baptism of and burial of Sorrow. Very good answers saw this in the context of Hardy's wider concerns, including Angel's and Tess's moral development and the reader's response to them individually and as a couple. Where this was supported by an exploration of the narrative techniques and methods with appropriate reference to the text, the answers often did very well.
- (b) Almost every answer recognised this as a significant point in the novel, where Tess realises the impossibility of escaping her past. Some weaker answers were confused as to the precise point this occurs and even the location – Tess and Angel's pre-marriage trip to town. Almost all answers had a secure knowledge of the Angel and Tess relationship, though weaker responses spent too long discussing the previous and subsequent events, with a consequent loss of focus on the passage. Better answers explored the structural and narrative effects of this incident, with some seeing Angel's sudden violence as surprising in terms of characterisation, whereas others saw it as a foreshadowing of Tess's own act of violence at the end of the novel. Very good answers explored the language and narrative techniques in detail, showing how the various effects are created. Such answers did very well when the points were developed with apposite, precise references to the wider text.

Andrew Marvell

There were almost no responses to **option (a)** and very few for **option (b)**.

- (a) There were too few answers to this question to be able to make any general comments.
- (b) This was a minority choice. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, needing to link it to the wider selection, and others apparently approaching it as an unseen. Better answers explored how Marvell presents the girl and his attitude to her, using contrasting language and imagery. Others explored the use of natural imagery in detail, with some linking ideas here to those in 'The Garden' for example. Good answers explored Marvell's wider concerns here – youth, innocence, desire and nature, for example, were all well discussed. Very good responses explored the detail of the poem, noting, for example, the symbolism and the development of the ideas and moods. Other, rarer answers explored Marvell's use of poetic form and his poetic style in detail. Answers which developed such ideas with apt reference to the rest of the selection often did very well.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

There were almost no responses to **option (a)** and very few for **option (b)**.

- (a) There were too few answers to this question to be able to make any general comments.
- (b) This was not a popular choice, with only a few answers seen. Some weaker answers appeared to be responding as to an unseen poem, with a consequent lack of understanding or context. Better answers were able to discuss the extract in its context, though some answers did give too much attention to general points on Romantic poetry, with a consequent lack of attention to the detail of the poem. Good answers considered what this extract reveals about Shelley's poetic concerns in detail, especially his 'adoration of the natural world and what it teaches him about being a poet,' as one suggested. Other answers offered detailed discussions of the language and imagery, though rarely the poetic form. Where this was developed with detailed analysis of the effects of these methods, the answers often did well, especially when linked to the rest of the poem and the wider selection.