

GCSE

English Literature

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J360**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

General Comments

In this entry there were over 26,000 candidates entered from over 260 centres. It is very pleasing to report that overall there was a consistency of marking and application of standards, and the responses to a wide range of tasks underlined the clear guidance that the teachers had given in order for students to complete their assignments without any teacher intervention. In general moderators were pleased to report that they were impressed with what they saw and were particularly pleased to see that many candidates had chosen texts from across the whole selection for both poetry and also the Shakespeare play.

A small number of centres were still marking both pieces of work out of 40, and some were not even paying any recognition to the need to be recognising QWC on controlled tasks this year. In most cases this did not affect the final mark that had been awarded, and again this is an oversight which may well have been the result of the different changes that has been imposed upon the specification in the last two years. As this is the final entry for this component it will not be an issue for centres in the future.

Generally there was clear evidence that internal moderation had taken place in the vast majority of centres and on this entry there were only some small adjustments needed to a small minority of centres. Marking was generally consistent and centres had been rigorous in their application of the assessment criteria. Moderators commented that there was a considerable amount of marginal annotations and summative comments that were closely linked to the marking criteria. Teachers are to be complimented for their consistently hard work in maintaining such high standards.

Some moderators did comment that some candidates had submitted incredibly long responses, and clearly this does raise issues as to whether some of these responses could have been completed in the time that should have been allocated for the controlled unit.

Generally this was a very impressive entry, and centres demonstrated a clear understanding of the specification and responded appropriately. Teachers are to be complimented for their commitment in delivering this component, and their conscientious approach and consistency of standards was reflected in the quality of work that was submitted for final moderation.

Comments on Individual Questions

Response to Shakespeare

On this entry the vast majority of centres responded to the tasks on *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but there were also responses to *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*. There was clear evidence that the use of the film had enhanced the interpretation of the play, and centres had clearly used the film to stimulate a general interest in the text. A number of teachers had clearly encouraged their candidates to watch more than one version of the Shakespeare film studied and were able to use this effectively in their work. For *Macbeth* the most common task was 2A, and moderators reported that these were mostly done well. Candidates answering 2B tended to concentrate on the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as well, but this in the main did not detract from the overall responses.

Responses to *Romeo and Juliet* were also again very popular and moderators reported that there were some clear insights into how directors used Shakespeare's text. There were some interesting observations on how Luhrmann's Nurse compared with Shakespeare's and there was clear understanding by a large number of candidates on the differences between Lady Capulet and the Nurse. The relationship between Romeo and Mercutio also produced some very good responses.

It is pleasing to report that the majority of centres are getting a sound balance between commenting upon the performed version against the literal interpretation of the text.

Most candidates showed clear and critical engagement with their chosen play and were able to refer to the text to support their observations. Centres had also clearly encouraged their students to look at the set scene in the context of the whole play and this enhanced the final response as a result. Moderators reported that candidates had been well prepared and were able to refer to the characters selected in the context of the rest of the play.

Response to poetry

The majority of centres responded to the poems by Wilfred Owen and his “anger” but there were also responses to the Browning poems and also to Chaucer, Rossetti, and Hardy.

Moderators reported that centres were offering salient connections and comparisons of the chosen poems and were pleased to report that the vast number of candidates were really engaged with the poetry, and could express in their responses the importance of the meaning and effects of the poets’ use of language.

The responses were generally of a very high standard and centres had applied the assessment criteria consistently.

It is rewarding to note, in this final report on this specification, how much good work was evident in this year’s submissions, and how hard both staff and students had worked to achieve such outstanding results. It is also noted with great sadness that this is the last year of entry for this specification as it will be replaced with a new GCSE (9-1) English Literature linear qualification, which compulsorily is assessed by terminal examinations.

I will close by thanking all the teaching staff involved with this specification, and all the moderators, for their consistent hard work and rigorous application of standards enabling thousands of students to engage and respond originally to a wide range of challenging texts.

A662 Modern Drama

General Comments

The overall quality of the work submitted was generally perceived as of a suitable standard, with a clear indication that the paper had proved to be very accessible. As in all previous years, assessors reported seeing responses that have given them fresh insights into texts they know very well; and the enjoyment and understanding gained by candidates from their study of drama is as clear and rewarding as ever.

It has again been particularly encouraging to note some pleasing traits that may well have reflected a tendency for centres to take on board the messages of previous Principal Examiner Reports. There seemed, generally, to be stronger evidence of candidates at both tiers of entry having absorbed the advice to contextualise extract questions succinctly, though some examiners commented that a failure to do this was still often a feature of weaker answers. There was continuing evidence of candidates really thinking about which characters are on-stage, what they know, what has led up to the extract and what happens as a result of it. In this session there appeared generally to be a pleasing absence of responses that merely worked through the extracts as if they were unseen and far fewer references to “readers” in proportion to “audience”, which seems to provide continuing evidence that many centres are now adapting their approaches to the teaching of the play as a performance, seen from an audience perspective, rather than merely as a text on the page.

The general consensus from examiners was that there was a significant and growing amount of analytical work, showing very sound knowledge of texts, evidence of thorough and imaginative teaching and an encouragingly increasing amount of comment directed at the play in performance. A significant number of candidates were able to cite specific productions and film versions that they had experienced and were, therefore, able to see themselves not merely as readers of a text, but as members of an audience and to engage with the ways in which an audience’s reactions are influenced by sound, movement, gesture and tone as well as the crucial effects of dialogue, characterisation and plot development. There was evidence, however, of a few candidates misjudging the balance with regard to this and being side-tracked into writing at inappropriate length about a particular performance with unconnected and undeveloped references to facial expression, gesture, and on-stage movement. Additionally, there were mentions of production details (such as music) that were written about as if they were the playwright’s own idea.

The extract-based question remains the preferred option of the great majority of candidates. A number of examiners did, however, observe that the quality of the discursive responses that they saw was very impressive and there is no doubt that in this the last year of the specification there were more discursive responses than ever before. Whilst the organisational skills required to address these questions are clearly of a different order to the extract-based option, it seems to be the case that some candidates of all abilities, and particularly the more able, are often better served by selecting a discursive task.

Examiners generally felt that candidates had been well prepared for the extract-based question and were usually able to get the balance right between dealing with the dramatic detail of the extract and with its wider significance within the play as a whole. Answers including partially assimilated material (particularly in relation to Priestley’s supposed Communist leanings and Sherriff’s war experiences for example) were encouragingly fewer than previous years. In general where this material did appear, it was at the expense of a close and careful exploration of the drama rather than enhancing an understanding of the drama in any way. On a positive note, it is worth mentioning that the number of feature-logging responses that become an exhaustive analysis of the linguistic features of, for example, Miller’s stage directions and even punctuation (which, after all, are not seen by an audience) were also rarely in evidence.

Comparatively few examples of rubric infringements were reported, with the “multiple” answer rarely seen.

The best extract-based responses still managed to achieve a balance, spending the bulk of their time on the extract itself and moving out from it and returning to integrate comment on its wider importance within the play. The best discursive responses made a judicious selection of material and kept the given question in sight at all times, pursuing the dramatic function of the character/relationship rather than simply tracing their involvement through the play. A succinct and focused introduction often made a huge difference to the quality and structure of an answer, regardless of whether an extract-based or discursive response.

It was encouraging that there were many candidates who wrote a plan of some description, ranging from a few words to a detailed account of the ground they would cover including quotations and paragraph content. Where those plans were over-long, there was a clear impact on what the candidate had time to cover – and several examiners reported instances where good points were mentioned in the plan but did not appear in the essay itself. The general feeling seems to be that a plan can help candidates of all abilities structure their ideas into a coherent argument and make sure they include all of the key points; but that planning should not impact negatively upon the quality of the response itself.

Once again, it is pleasing to report that all six texts were covered in this examination session. *An Inspector Calls* remains the most popular choice; and it was generally considered that candidates engaged effectively with the play and were able to explore the issues arising with some sensitivity. *Journey’s End* and *A View from the Bridge* appear to be the next most popular options. *Educating Rita* continues to be studied by a significant number of centres, with candidates seeming to engage positively with the cultural and social issues the play encapsulates, though the humour of the dialogue sometimes proves difficult to grasp. *The History Boys* remains a minority choice and, again, the comic dialogue is often appreciated fully only by the most able candidates, though it is a text that has yielded some extremely sophisticated and critically aware answers. What was encouraging this year was an increase in the number of centres and candidates studying *Hobson’s Choice* - perhaps attracted by the play’s strong themes and characterisation.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1: The History Boys

A relatively small number of centres selected this text and the majority of candidates were entered for the Higher Tier.

Question 1(a)

The extract-based Q1(a) was the preferred option of most candidates and it met with varying degrees of success. Most candidates were able to convey a general understanding of the “entertaining” aspect of the extract based upon the very different retrospective comments from the boys about their Oxbridge interview experiences. As answers developed in quality, there was engagement with both the humour and the pathos of the extract – particularly, for example, an audience response to the irony of Rudge’s prior and unrevealed knowledge of his own success, and the Headmaster’s unrelenting lack of awareness. The strongest answers, however, were those that engaged with some of the dramatic detail and subtleties of the scene – the pathos of Scripps’s self-loathing, the mention of Dakin’s visit to “where Irwin was”, or Posner’s isolation and loneliness.

Question 1(b)

This was a less popular choice and attempted by relatively few candidates. Those candidates that attempted it were able to access sufficient material from the large amount available, particularly: Irwin's arrival at the school; the early interaction with the boys in his lessons; the way this interaction changes as the play progresses; and Irwin's conversations with the other members of staff. Candidates were generally aware of his place in the structuring of the play and his positioning within the educational debate. Stronger answers were able to comment on specific details of his conversations, particularly on the humour of those exchanges.

Question 2: Hobson's Choice

Although there were not a large number of responses on this text on the Higher paper, there were still an encouraging number of centres and candidates that had chosen this text and certainly more than in any previous year. The strong characterisation and clear thematic elements certainly helped nearly all candidates to keep a focussed and relevant response.

Question 2(a)

Most responses seem to have been able to respond to the demands of Question 2a appropriately, with candidates mostly aware of the dramatic contexts – Maggie's dealing with Ada Figgins and her equally forthright telling of Willy Mossop about her intentions. Candidates were also able to differentiate between the motivations and the reactions of the various characters to the news of Maggie's plans. Stronger answers were able to comment on both strands of the question: particularly in their treatment of the sea-change in Hobson's attitude to Willy in the light of the sisters' machinations and tale-telling, and the comic turning of the tables on the sisters when it comes to their own marital expectations. Many candidates responded appropriately, with varying degrees of assurance, to the significance of changing male/female roles that lie at the heart of the play.

Question 2(b)

At the time of writing, very few responses to Question 2(b) had been reported, but examiners felt that those seen had handled the question competently and displayed a clear awareness of the characters of the two suitors and their significant influence upon the development of the play and its concerns – with material for answers mostly garnered from Acts Two and Three. The comicality of Albert's visits to Hobson's shop and Maggie's bullying him into buying boots he doesn't need offered a lot in the way of opportunities to comment upon Brighouse's characterisation and his handling of comedy and stagecraft. Stronger answers also explored the comic exchanges with Willy and Maggie on their wedding night and were able to comment sensitively on the play's wider themes of equality and changing gender roles.

Question 3: A View from the Bridge

This continues its growth in popularity as a taught text, and again appears to have been both well-received and well-taught by centres and greatly enjoyed by candidates.

Question 3(a)

The extract question (3a) was by far the most popular choice on this text and demanded both discussion of context as well as of the wealth of material available in the dialogue and staging. It was successfully answered by the majority of candidates, who were aware of its dramatically charged nature, although less assured candidates found the complex relationship between Rodolpho and Eddie confusing and this led them on occasion to make over-simple comments about feelings in the light of Eddie's kissing of Rodolpho. An encouragingly large number of candidates appreciated the pivotal importance of this scene in the growth of Catherine, her movement away from Eddie, and the structure of the play (set within the context of Catherine's confession to Rodolpho of her confused emotions with regard to Eddie, and the impending climactic visit of Eddie to Alfieri and his phone call to immigration). Stronger answers were those which trod with some assurance among the complex feelings – Catherine's pity for Eddie mixed with fear; Rodolpho's "testing" nod; Eddie's mockery tinged with disbelief and panic.

Question 3(b)

At the time of writing this report, examiners had reported very few answers to this question. It seems to have been competently answered by those candidates that attempted it; however, it may well be that the very powerful and packed nature of the extract may have led candidates away from the discursive option here. In particular, it was encouraging that those candidates who did answer this question did focus on the “relationship” rather than undertake separate if linked character studies of the two characters. Stronger answers explored the implications of the brothers’ presence in the Carbone household, and their close familial bond; additionally, these stronger answers highlighted issues that lie at the dramatic core of the play - law, natural law, family honour and identity.

Question 4: An Inspector Calls

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, still the most popular choice of text by some distance; and, as with all other sessions of this paper, candidates still made comments that cast new light onto the text for even the most experienced of examiners.

Question 4(a)

Answers to 4a, the extract-based question, generated the full range of achievement, with candidates clearly appearing to have engaged with the play and to have understood the dramatic context and to have at least some awareness of the wider significance of the extract. Most answers were able to discuss the key dramatic features and context of the scene: Gerald’s return with the suggestion that it has all been a “hoax”, and the phone call to the Chief Constable. Similarly most candidates were able to comment on the clear difference in the two attitudes that structure the developing play – that of the older Birlings and Gerald, and that of Sheila and Eric. Stronger answers avoided general “political” identification and categorisation and commented instead on Priestley’s characterisation – showing an awareness, for example, of Mrs Birling’s smug (and imperfectly remembered) insistence on her own fortitude in the face of the Inspector’s questioning; or the mounting disquiet of Sheila and Eric at their parents’ attitude and the growing bond between them as they express their determination to learn from their misdeeds and accept responsibility. These better answers saw candidates successfully reference the extract in the wider context of the play with comments as above on social responsibility, social class and attitudes to women at the time the play was set/written without ever losing touch with the details of the extract or losing sight of the drama.

Question 4(b)

This question was attempted by a much smaller, though nonetheless significant number of candidates, probably being the most popular (b) question, and was largely done equally well as the extract-based option, with candidates drawn by the clear character lines of Birling. It was also encouraging to see that most candidates avoided general remarks and instead attempted to support a response to Birling’s numerous and distinct negative qualities: his uncaring theories about business; his *toadying* attitude towards Gerald and his family; his witless comments on the Titanic and the likelihood of war; his treatment of his own children; his attempts to bully the Inspector; his defending of Gerald’s infidelity; his unwillingness to learn from what has happened. Stronger answers were those that appreciated these distinctions and combined that understanding with judicious selection of material, wide-ranging analysis, and a focus on Priestley’s writing and stagecraft.

Question 5: Educating Rita

Educating Rita was a reasonably widely-studied text in this session, with the majority of candidates opting to attempt Question 5a; a particularly popular option for Foundation Tier candidates.

Question 5(a)

The extract and question allowed good scope for meaningful answers with the majority of candidates able to pick up on how the extract dealt with how Rita has significant doubts about the quality of her present life and culture and the effect it is having on her. Most answers understood that even at this relatively early stage of her journey towards being an educated woman, she has a clear desire to break free from the confines of her present life, revealed at the end of the extract in her determination to feed her passion for learning. Better answers engaged strongly with the intensely felt, comic, brutally honest, yet touching self-analytical language of Rita in the extract. Going beyond this, stronger answers still were able to chart the drama of Frank's growing awareness and interest after his initial, minimal world-wary responses; were able to look both backwards and forwards from the extract to establish the context of Rita's current emotional position; and explored the metaphorical implications of the drug/disease language used to describe life with Denny.

Question 5(b)

Question 5b was, predictably, the less popular option on this text, but those that attempted it appeared to have a clear sense of the many and various obstacles that hold back Rita's development - and candidates commonly selected Rita's comments about her school, her contemporaries and their attitudes towards learning, her husband Denny and his pronouncements on what her life should consist of, her social and cultural setting, and her immediate family members as representative of the obstacles that hinder her, at the same time (particularly with stronger answers) as being representative of the obstacles and hindrances that have made her want to change her life story. The better answers avoided the easy option of blaming these obstacles for her sense of stagnation, and showed a sensitive understanding of the relationship between life and literature. The strongest answers were those that went beyond the above to consider Frank's ambiguous regard for her and Rita's own flawed perceptions of what it is to be "educated" as being obstacles also. These stronger answers also engaged with how Russell's language and stagecraft presented these obstacles and Rita's efforts to overcome them.

Question 6: Journey's End

This is still a very popular text, enjoyed by the majority of candidates who, despite their relative youth and inexperience of the things that the play ostensibly deals with, were able to engage with the very human dilemmas, relationships and experiences.

Question 6(a)

This question, as in previous sessions, remains one of the most frequently attempted questions, eliciting the full range of responses. It was encouraging that although this extract would have received detailed treatment in schools, there was still in general a freshness about the responses to what is a shocking and emotionally charged situation. The vast majority of candidates were able to appreciate the context of Raleigh and Stanhope's previous contact, the relationship between Stanhope and Raleigh's sister, and the conversation between Osborne and Raleigh. Further encouragement and satisfaction came from the number of candidates who were able to comment not only upon the central Raleigh/Stanhope relationship but also upon the significance and impact of Osborne's involvement – his gentle but astonished interjection and the way in which Stanhope turns upon his most loyal and trusted confidant. Stronger answers were able to go beyond this, and consider amongst other things: the impact of the tense silence after Raleigh's exit; Stanhope's growing shame (masked by blustering and self-justification, and dramatically conveyed by his nervous digging at the magazine with his pencil; the tremendously moving and personal nature of what Raleigh has actually written; and the way in which the extract contributes to some of the play's wider themes (such as the toll that war takes upon men and the nature of comradeship and hero-worship).

Question 6(b)

There were proportionally far fewer responses to Question 6b, yet the consensus was that it was generally well done by those who attempted it. Most answers were aware that although the Colonel makes only three relatively brief appearances in the play, he has a major impact upon the audience and its understanding of the play. Candidates were also generally aware of how the arrival of the Colonel on stage is always associated with bad news and that there is a developing sense of conflict and tension between him and Stanhope. Better answers were those that moved away from generalisations about who or what the Colonel might represent and focussed upon the language of the scenes, or the dramatic detail of the interchanges: the Colonel's clear and inappropriately cheerful elation at the "success" of the raid; Stanhope's overwhelming grief and unappreciated bitter sarcasm at the death of Osborne.

SPAG

It is perhaps worth making some general observations on candidates' performance with regard to the SPAG mark. The level of achievement here was seen as largely very sound, particularly at the Higher Tier, with few candidates at either tier falling into the Threshold performance band. Two particular areas for attention were highlighted by examiners: better paragraphing practice, where evident, helped candidates to structure their ideas and guide the reader to an understanding of the analysis and support being offered; and the correct spelling of the names of dramatists and characters gave confidence and fluency to the assessment process.

A663 Prose from Different Cultures

General Comments

For the last two sessions candidates have been reminded to support their ideas with details from ‘the rest of the novel’ as well as from the extract. This change to the rubric of the extract-based questions was designed to encourage candidates to make more of the connections between the extract and the novel as a whole. Examiners noted an improvement in candidates’ ability to handle this requirement both to explore the extract and to reach out from it, especially in answers to 2a), the *To Kill a Mockingbird* question. Examples of good links to ‘the rest of the novel’ are given under individual questions.

The other key aspect of success in A663 is the extent to which meaningful links are drawn to the social context in which the novel is set, and again it is the candidate’s skill in integrating contextual information that to a fair degree determines success. It is again pleasing to report that teachers have taught this tricky skill well: candidates were almost always aware of the requirement to link the events of the novel to contemporary society; and examiners noted an increased readiness, especially in the *Of Mice and Men* answers, to go further, towards a consideration of the author’s role as a commentator on and critic of that society.

Weaker responses, conversely, were often characterised by the absence of references to context, or, more commonly, not integrating them into the argument. This was sometimes exacerbated by a failure to get historical information right; examples noted by examiners include that slavery was abolished only a few years before *Of Mice and Men* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* were published, or that the dust bowl affected the whole country, or that prostitution was the main, or the only, way for women to avoid a life of domestic servitude in the 1930s, or that old ranch hands no longer pulling their weight could literally suffer the same fate as Candy’s dog. This kind of exaggeration and distortion remains an effective discriminator in terms of Assessment Objective 4 in A663.

On the other hand there was much of the usual pleasing evidence that students had been stimulated by the texts: not only empathy but also a more sophisticated consideration of what the novels tell us not just about Apartheid South Africa, for example, but also about race relations in the here and now.

Examiners also were impressed by the detailed textual knowledge at the candidates’ disposal. This was most evident in the answers to the b) questions and particularly impressive in responses to *To Kill a Mockingbird* which is several times the length of *Of Mice and Men* or *Tsotsi*. This ability was demonstrated by the wide range of quotations used, often relating to small but illuminating details from the authors’ use of description or dialogue. In the extract-based question few candidates were unable to place the extract within the text and provide details of how it leads on from what went before and leads up to what comes next.

Comments on Individual Questions

Please note that the questions are discussed in order of popularity. Conclusions become more tentative as we proceed. Neither Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha nor The Joy Luck Club provided enough evidence to generalise about candidates’ strengths and weaknesses in their approach to either task.

Question 1: Of Mice and Men

Question 1(a)

The two key elements in the scene are what it tells us firstly about George and Lennie's relationship and secondly about their dream. Nearly all candidates were aware that Lennie behaves like a child and that George looks after him. Better responses illustrated this successfully from the text, for example in the fact that George keeps Lennie's spoon. Candidates achieving more highly saw that there was more to the relationship than George acting as *in loco parentis* which could be explored through comparing and contrasting their attitudes to the dream.

Many responses picked out '*became deeper*' and '*rhythmically*' in reference to George's voice, and explained that this suggests how often he has told the story. Weaker candidates saw this as an indication that George is bored with it; more developed responses illustrated how George uses the dream as a way of keeping Lennie happy and channelling his energies, using words like 'lullaby' or 'bed-time story'. The most perceptive candidates understood how George too is at least partly seduced by the power of the dream, and could link the beginning of the extract to the end where he breaks off as his cynicism or perhaps just common sense breaks through.

Again, top responses saw the way George opens the cans of beans as an indication of his frustration or annoyance at allowing himself to be carried away. They also accepted the chance to make a language point by commenting on Steinbeck's use of the word '*drove*' here.

Many candidates made links to AO2 by picking out '*delighted*' and '*delightedly*' as demonstrating Lennie's childishness; some took this further by exploring the author's use of repetition and punctuation to the same end. Candidates who saw the poignant irony in the contrast between the dream and the reality (eating beans out of a can) scored particularly well.

Practically all candidates made reference to the Depression. The practice of dealing with AO4 by starting off with a paragraph of potted history has declined markedly through the years. Most candidates were able to relate the social context to the situation here by showing how the slump forced men to take to the road looking for work. Many also saw how George's situation is affected by attitudes to disability and the lack of social welfare at the time. Most candidates were also well versed in the concept of 'The American Dream' and those who explored how ideas of self-determination and material prosperity, which are two of its key ingredients, manifest themselves in George and Lennie's dream did well.

There was considerable variation in how candidates responded to the rubric instruction to refer to 'the rest of the novel'. The key is to show good textual knowledge by making reference to other moments, without losing sight of the fact that the primary focus should be on this extract. Overall, as alluded to in the previous section, examiners noted an enhanced ability to get a good balance between extract and novel as a whole in this as in all extract-based options.

Many made reference to the way this scene is replayed at the end of the novel; the concept of 'foreshadowing' was quite commonly introduced though Steinbeck's use of it adds more to that final scene's power to move the reader than this one's. Weaker responses sometimes found it difficult to leave the last scene alone; there was a sense that, since it has much in common with this scene plus a much more dramatic narrative line, candidates were led to focus as much on that as on the given scene.

Examples of other effective links to 'the rest of the novel' included comment on how the power of the dream affects not only George and Lennie but also Candy and Crooks later; references to Weed to demonstrate how much of a liability Lennie is; links to the fight with Curley to show how Lennie is dependent on George.

Overall, examiners found that what this extract tells us about Lennie was well understood by candidates, as was the role of the ‘American Dream’ in underscoring the scene, but that George’s more complex feelings about Lennie and about the story he tells him were less well handled. This was often pointed to in how much focus there was on the final element in the extract, the arrangements for eating: weaker responses tended to miss it out, stronger to explore it in some detail.

Question 1(b)

This was more popular than many previous 1b) questions; ‘loneliness’ is central to the novel and provides the most straightforward way into any thematic discussion of *Of Mice and Men*. The three secondary characters – Curley’s wife, Crooks and Candy – can all be defined by their isolation and any exploration of that will lead naturally into a consideration of the social context. Many candidates took full advantage of these opportunities.

However, a surprisingly large number of responses focused on George and Lennie here; they either explained why they were less lonely (because they had each other) or why George was lonely (because Lennie was not a proper companion) or even why Lennie was lonely (because he always killed the pets he was given). This approach was linked to another which also caused problems for candidates which was the tendency to use the extract largely or even exclusively to answer the question. This narrowing of the scope of the response would have had a limiting effect on attainment. It is hard to know how much of this was a conscious decision, the candidate perhaps thinking that what the response lacked in breadth it would make up for in depth, and how much was unplanned; in some instances, where it was clear that the candidate has put the wrong letter at the top of the essay (where the wording of the question is used at the start of the response for example), examiners did have the freedom to change it if it would be to the advantage of the candidate, but mostly the candidates were using the extract to answer the discursive option and often under-achieved.

Usually it is the case that AO4 is targeted well in b) questions and so it was here. However many candidates were able to range widely to find apposite quotations, and high-achieving candidates clearly selected examples that would also give them the opportunity to write about Steinbeck’s choice of words. Instances of these included Crooks’s bitter remarks to Lennie, Curley’s wife’s vicious put-down of Crooks, and in Steinbeck’s description of Candy staring at the ceiling after the shooting of his dog.

Other profitable areas explored by candidates included the influence of the itinerant lifestyle, the macho ranch culture, and the physical description of the bunkhouse; in relation to the latter examiners noted candidates’ familiarity with last year’s extract, no doubt in many cases from their mock exam.

Question 2: To Kill a Mockingbird

Question 2(a)

Candidates found many ways of targeting AO2 in this question: the description of the fight with Scout’s use of vivid, idiosyncratic vocabulary, and the poignant description of Boo provided rich pickings. Responses also scored highly here if they commented on Lee’s way of creating suspense by holding back on the identity of their saviour.

There was also good work on the heinousness of Bob Ewell’s crime which candidates used as a way into discussing ‘Maycomb’s disease’ and the role of Boo Radley as one of the Mockingbirds, along with Tom Robinson, of the title. Those who saw Scout’s words in greeting Boo in a friendly and natural way as evidence that she had left her days of thinking of him as the ‘malevolent phantom’ far behind, and with it her own prejudices, scored well here. It was pleasing to see candidates’ understanding of how this represents the end of Scout’s journey, and the author’s hope that racism and other forms of persecution can be overcome.

The way that candidates made effective links to other parts of the novel impressed examiners. Not only did they make reference, for example, to Boo's kind actions in the past – the presents in the tree; the blanket on the night of the fire – they could also, in many cases, find telling quotes to illustrate these links.

Weaker responses tended to be narrative ones here, with some candidates re-telling the story of the fight, or of the trial, or of the children's early encounters with Boo; these tended to stray far from the extract and sometimes the question.

Question 2(b)

This question provided ample opportunity to tackle both AO2 and AO4. The relatively few candidates who tackled it found opportunities to explore context and language in the poverty of the surroundings and the contrast in the attitudes of the two races towards each other. Many candidates picked out details which allowed them to discuss effectively the meanness of the facilities and the dignity of the congregation with its strong, cohesive identity.

Question 6: Tsotsi

Question 6(a)

This extract was particularly effective in evoking a personal response from the candidates. This was a lot to do with the character of Miriam with her courage and dignity, her care for both children and her generosity towards Tsotsi. Candidates used her repetition of '*Simon is dead*' as an indication of her strength of character and determination to move on with her life and also as a way into making links with the context. Better responses made these references fairly swiftly and returned to the extract; others provided lengthy accounts of the system of Apartheid and how it operated, which weren't so effective. A few candidates did well by exploring the irony in the fact that Tsotsi and his gang might have also had something to do with Simon's disappearance, and he is the man she is now willing to accept into her life.

Question 6(b)

Again there were few responses here. Candidates who did best responded not only to the 'violence' in the 'question' but also the 'everyday life' and emphasised, as in the murder of Gumboot for example, the way that violence seeped into even the most public and routine of situations.

Question 3: Anita and Me

Question 3(a)

This was the last question with sufficient examples to allow us to comment on how it was handled. It is notable that this novel has regularly been chosen by some centres with students who can relate directly to Meena's experience and this was particularly apparent with this question. Candidates picked out elements like accent, food and fashion that separate the two cultures, affirming that these are still relevant today. This made the task of relating responses to AO4 relatively straightforward. Targeting AO2 could be done through a focus on 'entertaining' in the question, and that was more challenging, but some candidates did manage to highlight the comedy in the contrasting appearance and demeanour of Pinky and Baby on the one hand and Anita on the other, with Meena stuck somewhere in the middle.

A664 Literary Heritage Prose and Contemporary Poetry

General Comments

Examiners reported seeing a great deal of excellent work this session where candidates demonstrated engagement and enthusiasm in their responses. Most candidates chose the extract-based question on their prose text and the majority focused on the question set. A few wrote more general responses, sometimes commenting on the extract with little reference to the question. The most popular prose texts were *Lord of the Flies* and *Animal Farm*, followed closely by *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Fewer responses were seen on *Pride and Prejudice* and the Hardy short stories, although there were a number of excellent responses on these texts, but very few responses were seen on *Silas Marner*.

In Section B Duffy, Armitage and Heaney were the most prevalent choices for taught poems, and the unseen poem remained a popular option in this session.

Key messages for improvement:

- **Use of quotations:** candidates need to be aware that quotations should support a point being made not the other way around. The approach of providing a quote and then explaining or re-writing it is still prevalent and is not helpful to candidates.
- **Language:** commenting on precise words/phrases to support comments could be improved. Often language comments were not developed sufficiently with candidates taking a 'device spotting' approach, providing an example for each device identified, but failing to develop a purposeful comment.
- **Contextual knowledge:** candidates should be aware that the inclusion of large amounts of learned contextual information is unlikely to improve their performance. Focusing on the question and the text is essential in this examination.
- **Use of bullet points in the unseen poetry question:** many candidates were too dependent on the bullet points provided, focussing on addressing each bullet point evenly to the detriment of a fluent and natural response to the poem.

Section A: Literary Heritage Prose

At both Higher and Foundation Tier, the extract-based questions were the most popular. Candidates were explicitly required to link the extract to the rest of the novel. Usually they were able to make links showing whole-text knowledge and avoiding the temptation to narrate chunks of the novel at the expense of focusing on the given extract. It perhaps needs emphasising that, at Higher Tier in particular, candidates are invited to consider not just what a writer is saying, but how he or she is expressing thoughts and ideas. Close focus on the extract is therefore important; attention to the extract supports this analysis and an examiner is then able to assess how well a candidate is meeting the AO2 demands of the question.

As in previous years, *Animal Farm* was the most popular of the prose texts, followed quite closely by *Lord of the Flies*. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* again proved to be quite a popular choice, with a fair proportion of candidates opting for *Pride and Prejudice*. Only a few candidates opted for *The Withered Arm and other Wessex Tales*, whilst there were no reported responses to *Silas Marner*.

Also, as in previous years, the extract-based question was by far the more popular question of the two offered on each text. Whether this is because the extract is printed on the question paper; whether candidates have more practice in dealing with extracts; or whether the discursive question seems less accessible and perhaps less predictable is impossible to say.

Question 1: Pride and Prejudice

Question 1(a)

As in previous years, *Pride and Prejudice* proved attractive to a significant number of candidates, principally at Higher Tier. Responses were almost exclusively to the extract-based question, with so few choosing to write on Mr Wickham that no helpful comment on question 1(b) can be made.

Most candidates were able to discuss in some detail the presentation of Mrs Bennet in the extract and how Austen uses her thoughts and opinions on the events at the Meryton Ball, and the characters encountered, to introduce key themes and relationships. The best responses were those that moved beyond Mrs Bennet herself and explored the implications of the events for future developments in the novel, particularly the relationship between Mr Bingley and Jane, and the initial impressions of Mr Darcy. Many also commented on the response of Mr Bennet and what that may suggest about their own relationship. These also explored the element of comedy in the extract. Successful responses also looked at the relationship between Jane and Elizabeth as presented in the extract, many commenting perceptively on the authorial comment that 'Elizabeth felt Jane's pleasure'. The weakest responses merely described the extract without making clear links to the wider novel.

Question 2: Silas Marner

Question 2

Unfortunately, there were too few responses to the text for helpful comment to be made.

Question 3: Lord of the Flies

Question 3(a)

As in previous years, this proved to be a very popular text. Most responses, at both Tiers, were to the extract-based question. This proved to be an extremely rich extract. The best candidates focused on the question, exploring the shocking nature of Jack's failure to admit his full responsibility for the fire going out, and his attempts to hide his embarrassment and discomfort by taking his feelings out on Piggy as an easy victim before making an insincere apology to Ralph simply to earn the approval of the other boys. They often kept a good balance between analysis of the extract and references to later events, particularly analysing the growing rivalry between Jack and Ralph. Many good responses focused on Jack's violent and bullying treatment of Piggy in the extract, noting the foreshadowing of later events, and citing the breaking of Piggy's glasses as a significant moment. There was also some good analysis of language: words such as 'hacked and pulled', 'the bolting look came into his eyes', the mimicking of Piggy and the fragmented nature of Jack's apology. However, examiners noted that on occasion responses were distracted by irrelevant comments on the Second World War and Jack as a representation of Hitler. Such considerations tended to lead candidates away from the extract and regurgitate learned material without linking it to any clear points or ideas. Weaker responses tended to overstate Jack's 'descent into savagery' with some candidates confusing the events in the novel and assuming that this extract takes place much later. These responses often mistakenly thought that the extract traced the events leading to Piggy's death.

Question 3(b)

The question asked candidates to explore the significance of Piggy's death. Responses too often confined themselves to simply providing an account of Piggy's role in the novel as a voice of reason and a representation of civilised society. As a result, many wrote a rather general account of Piggy's role in the novel, or became completely distracted and wrote a response that largely focused on Roger's role in the novel. The best responses focused on the build-up to, and actual events of, Piggy's death, looking closely at Golding's use of language and its significance. There was some very sensitive understanding of Piggy's importance in the text in these responses.

Question 4: The Withered Arm and other Wessex Tales

Question 4(a)

Too few candidates responded to this text for much meaningful comment to be made. The few responses tended to paraphrase the extract tracing Lizzie and Stockdale's feelings for one another, but offered very few insights into what makes the extract moving.

Question 4(b)

Again, very few responses were seen to *The Son's Veto*, but there was some clear understanding of Randolph's unfair treatment of his mother: his snobbery and lack of sensitivity were uniformly reviled, and Sophy's suffering was alluded to as a direct result of his selfishness.

Question 5: Animal Farm

Question 5(a)

Examiners reported that much of their marking allocation was taken up by responses to this text and to the extract-based question in particular. There were some excellent answers where candidates focused on the thrust of the question, which was on the shocking nature of the meeting, 'confessions', and subsequent executions. The best responses took advantage of the opportunity to discuss Orwell's language: Napoleon 'sternly surveying his audience'; his 'high-pitched whimper'; the behaviour of the dogs who had 'tasted blood' and 'appeared to go quite mad' then 'tore their throats out' after the pigs' confessions. They traced the build-up of the shocking events until 'there was a pile of corpses' and 'the air was heavy with the smell of blood'. Good responses here also used the extract to link neatly to other areas of the novel to demonstrate Napoleon's growing control. Other responses failed to focus on the extract, for example, they identified the repeated mention of Snowball in the confessions, then wrote a response about Snowball's role in the novel. There were some weak responses which merely described the events of the extract. As ever, some candidates spent much space and time drawing attention to parallels with the Soviet Union, so that on occasion they lost sight of Napoleon, as if he had turned not just from man to pig, but from pig to Stalin. These responses tended to regurgitate learned material without making it relevant to the question.

Question 5(b)

There were very few responses to this question. It was not generally well answered, candidates often missing the importance of the windmill in terms of the rivalry between Snowball and Napoleon, what the windmill stood for, and how it was used by Napoleon to cover his own failings from the animals but not the reader.

Question 6: The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Question 6(a)

This was quite a popular text at both Tiers. The extract-based question was attempted by the majority of candidates who answered on this text. Responses were generally sound, showing some engagement with ideas and language as well as textual knowledge. It was answered more successfully by candidates who provided the context and recognised that Hyde feels threatened and vulnerable at this point in the novel: 'Hyde in danger of his life was a creature new to me'. The best responses focused on the question and explored the dramatic nature of Mr Hyde's thoughts and actions in the extract, looking in detail at the language and how Hyde's increasing discomfort and fear generates violence and anger. The extract also afforded candidates the opportunity to discuss Stevenson's language, and, with the references to animals, hell and devils, they often found much to say. Some responses strayed from the question and offered a general interpretation of the extract. Many focused on Hyde's appearance in great detail, although this did not address the question. Some responses offered unnecessarily detailed discussions of Victorian society, and the shock Victorians, and Victorian women in particular, must have felt when reading the novel for the first time; detailed support for such assertions was often lacking, and sociological digressions often led away from the set question.

Question 6(b)

Unfortunately, there were too few responses to this question for helpful comment to be made.

Contemporary Poetry

Examiners reported that the most popular poets in *Reflections* (at least for the purposes of this part of the examination) were Armitage and Duffy. A number of candidates opted for Heaney and some for Zephaniah, but there were few responses to Clarke and Cope. The unseen poems were also very popular, and candidates often responded sensitively and perceptively to both. Examiners also reported that individual candidates tended to answer at a similar level to the prose and poetry questions; the poetry section did not appear to tax candidates more severely than the prose section. The poems were generally well understood. However, as in previous years, some candidates seemed engaged on a quest for literary devices. Often as early as the second paragraph of a response, references to caesuras, enjambment, rhythm and rhyme featured widely, often with little indication of what they were adding to the understanding or enjoyment of the poem under discussion. Obviously these devices can be important, but do not usually deserve to be highlighted so early in a response, and comments on language devices should be embedded into the response naturally to be effective.

Question 7: Simon Armitage

Question 7(a)

Armitage proved to be a very popular choice with candidates, the majority of whom opted to answer on *Poem*. This poem was popular probably because of its apparent simplicity. Good answers looked at the subtleties of the language and structure of the poem, carefully analysing Armitage's presentation of the subject as 'everyman' or an average working father. These responses approached the final line of each stanza as a sign of imperfection in an otherwise uneventful life, and looked carefully at the final stanza, offering interesting interpretations of 'sometimes he did this, sometimes he did that'. Less successful responses tended to paraphrase the poem offering explanations for the man's behaviour. Many saw him as a violent and abusive father, husband and son, ignoring the careful balance of the poem. Others explained his behaviour as drunken (misreading 'tipped up') or psychotic, again focusing purely on the negatives and ignoring the careful structure.

Question 7(b)

A number of candidates wrote well about *Alaska* and its angry speaker, understanding and illustrating his bitter attitude towards his ex-partner. Many explored his language carefully, the repetition of 'girl' and references to domestic chaos since her leaving him; the kitchen a 'scrap heap', 'trying to handle the big king-sizer...'. Very few candidates looked at the significance of the poem's title *Alaska* and the coldness it implies, or the references to 'nodding donkeys' or the 'Bering Strait'. Most read the poem at a fairly surface level.

Question 7(c)

There were very few responses to *Without Photographs* so no meaningful comment can be offered.

Question 8: Gillian Clarke

Question 8(a)

There were very few responses to Gillian Clarke's poems. The few seen in response to *The Hare* found it quite a challenging poem and struggled to offer reasons for its disturbing nature beyond the most obvious; the 'terrible darkness', the 'sharp cry' and the suffering of the hare. Few responses went on to look at the relationship of the sisters or the deeper implications of the final stanzas.

Question 8(b)

There were no reported responses to this question so no helpful comments can be offered.

Question 8(c)

There were a few responses to *Cold Knap Lake*, which was the most popular of the Clarke poetry questions. Many responses were thoughtful and made some well-supported assertions about the 'fairy-tale' imagery of the 'long green silk' and the pride felt for the 'heroine' who gave 'a stranger's child her breath'. The best responses went on to comment on the 'poor house' and the uncertainty of the final stanza, often commenting insightfully about the 'cloudiness' of the memory and the implications of the final lines of the poem.

Question 9: Wendy Cope

Question 9

Unfortunately, there were too few responses to Wendy Cope's poems for helpful comment to be made.

Question 10: Carol Ann Duffy

Question 10 (a)

The majority of candidates writing about Duffy chose to do so on *Mrs Tilscher's Class*. The question asked them to focus on how Duffy makes the changes in children's lives so dramatic. The best responses carefully focused on the question looking at the language of the poem and comparing the happy, carefree language of the first two stanzas ('skittle of milk', 'the laugh of a bell', 'glowed like a sweetshop') with the more dramatic and uncertain language of the final stanza ('feverish July', 'electricity', 'heavy sexy sky', 'split open into a thunderstorm'). Through their analysis they were able to trace the changes in the children. The best of these responses identified the importance of the third stanza, also the 'tadpoles' coming 'question marks' were

often cited as the beginning of puberty, and the ‘rough boy’ as growing awareness of sexuality combined with childish innocence as ‘stared at your parents appalled’. Less successful responses failed to focus on the question instead offering a general interpretation of the poem, or just focused on the first two stanzas and how Duffy presents the classroom. Some candidates struggled to write about the structure of the poem and spent a great deal of time discussing the number of lines in each stanza with few credible links to the question.

Question 10(b)

Before You Were Mine was attempted by a few candidates, but many did not fully address the question, looking solely at the memories of the mother’s past life. There were some confused responses, which did not differentiate between the memories of the mother’s and daughter’s pasts. Some overstated the mother’s feelings about motherhood seeing huge regret and resentment towards the daughter, which is not supported by the poem.

Question 10(c)

A few candidates writing on Duffy chose to do so on *Mrs Lazarus*. The longest of the Duffy poems in the anthology, the poem presented something of a challenge to candidates. In general, candidates worked through the poem quite methodically, focusing on Mrs Lazarus’s grief but many were confused about the ending of the poem. Some judged Mrs Lazarus rather harshly, or dismissed her as an insane woman throughout the poem.

Question 11: Seamus Heaney

Question 11(a)

Heaney, as ever, was a reasonably popular choice of poet for candidates at both tiers.

Few candidates wrote on *Servant Boy* but those that did were challenged to make very meaningful comments. Many responses made a few general comments about the disturbing nature of the poem, referring to phrases such as ‘Old work-whore’ and ‘slave-blood’, but they struggled to go further and paid little attention to the later stanzas.

Question 11(b)

This was the most popular of the Heaney questions and produced a range of responses. Candidates often wrote very well on *The Summer of Lost Rachel*. The poem was usually well understood and candidates wrote well about Heaney’s use of the natural world to reflect grief and loss. Most candidates were able to make some reasonable points about Heaney’s use of language in the poem, although many made rather general comments about the rain or the ‘flowering’. A few responses were confused about the identity of Rachel, some candidates suggesting that Heaney was grieving for his mother.

Question 11(c)

Few candidates chose to write on *Wheels within Wheels* and there were some confused responses that focused on Heaney’s enjoyment of cycling when he was a child. Better responses recognised that Heaney enjoyed experimenting with his bike and that the memories of childhood were evoked in the poem. Very few candidates focused on the rich earthy language in the poem.

Question 12: Benjamin Zephaniah

Question 12(a)

Examiners reported seeing comparatively few responses to Zephaniah, all of which were on Question 12a. Candidates seemed to find difficulty in finding much to comment on as far as language, structure and form were concerned and accordingly tended to paraphrase the poem. As this is a relatively long poem, most candidates were able to make relevant points about the situation in the poem, linking their comments to the question. Many cited his suffering in terms of loneliness, isolation and powerlessness and offered some good support for how the thoughts of the speaker move the reader.

Unseen Poems

Question 13

The unseen poem remains a popular option at both Foundation and Higher Tiers.

Candidates found *April 5th, 1974* a very accessible poem, recognising the poet's fascination with the beginning of spring. Good responses showed a pleasing ability to analyse both the language and mood of the poem, and many made admirable attempts to comment on the structure of the poem and how it reflected the poet's sudden rush of thoughts. There was some sound language analysis, focusing on contrasts between death, dullness and stillness with life and movement in the thaw. Pleasingly, the majority of the candidates commented on the effect of the final line of the poem, 'flowers I said will come of it' making some plausible assertions about the effect of this line as the concluding thought of the poem.

Similarly, *Winter* attracted a considerable number of responses, the vast majority of candidates understanding the harsh presentation of winter in the poem. Most were able to appreciate the personification of winter and how this added to the powerful effect of the poem. Pleasingly, a number of candidates made thoughtful comments on the structure of the poem, many commenting on the repetition of the first lines of each stanza: 'Winter crept... Winter prowled... Winter raced...'. Most appreciated that winter seems to grow in power and speed as the poem progresses. Weaker responses simply paraphrased the poem, usually showing some understanding, but this approach does not move beyond making straightforward comments about the poem. Many candidates also struggled to explain the last line 'at his back was death' often assuming that winter was a person running from death rather than causing it. However, there were some excellent and assured responses, where candidates showed a freshness of response to a poem not previously studied.

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