

**WELSH JOINT EDUCATION COMMITTEE
CYD-BWYLLGOR ADDYSG CYMRU**

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Tystysgrif Gyffredinol Addysg Uwchradd

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

SUMMER 2005

ENGLISH & ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Statistical Information

GCSE

The Examiners' Report may refer in general terms to statistical outcomes. Statistical information on candidates' performances in all examination components (whether internally or externally assessed) is provided when results are issued. As well as the marks achieved by individual candidates, the following information can be obtained from these printouts:

For each component: the maximum mark, aggregation factor, mean mark and standard deviation of marks obtained by *all* candidates entered for the examination.

For the subject or option: the total entry and the lowest mark needed for the award of each grade.

Annual Statistical Report

Other information on a centre basis is provided when results are issued. The annual *Statistical Report* (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

ENGLISH

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2005

Chief Examiners: Chair of Examiners - Mr. B.J.D. Childs, formerly Deputy Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Dyffryn Taf, Whitland;

Higher Tier Papers 1 and 2 - Dr. K.C. Elliott, formerly Head of Humanities, Wigan and Leigh College;

Foundation Tier Papers 1 and 2 - Mr. E. Snell, English Adviser, Wakefield LEA;

Coursework - Mr. S.H. Sage, Assistant Headteacher, Holywell High School, Flintshire;

Speaking and Listening - Mrs. J. Hingley, formerly teacher of English, Tredegar Comprehensive School.

WRITTEN COURSEWORK (ENGLISH/ENGLISH LITERATURE)

Administration

The checklist of aspects to be considered before the submission of the folders, which was introduced in the 2004 INSET sessions, seems to have had a positive effect and there were relatively few administrative problems this year. Occasionally centres failed to enclose full and accurate teaching lists and the transmission of marks from the coversheets to the sample mark sheet was sometimes inaccurate. Otherwise the vast majority of centres took great pride in presenting the students' work in a meticulous fashion. Some centres with very large entries sent too few folders. Although the coursework manual states that twenty folders should be sent from centres with an entry of over a hundred, to make fair judgements as moderators we need to see at least two folders from each teacher. In centres where there are more than ten teachers, it is wise to increase the sample to accommodate this fact. This will save the moderator the job of requesting further samples. This point was made in the 2004 INSET sessions and a number of centres had taken cognisance of it but it would be helpful if all centres did so.

Moderators are grateful to those centres that hit the deadlines and the majority do. However, some centres are persistently late in the submission of the work and this can cause considerable problems. Obviously, there are occasions when external aspects make keeping the deadline difficult but centres which are late submitting work year on year rather strain the bounds of sympathy.

I should be grateful if centres could ensure that each piece of work bears the candidate's name. A number of packages of coursework collapsed in the postal system, were repacked by the Post Office and subsequently required resorting into complete folders. As I am sure you can imagine, when the individual essays are not named and especially when they are word processed, this becomes a difficult and time-wasting task.

Assignments

Reading in the English Folder:

Wales version (Work on a text with Welsh Relevance and Different Cultures. Poetry and drama to be covered across the two pieces.)

Rather fewer centres in Wales took this approach this year and virtually all chose to fill the Welsh Relevance section with work on poetry, with Gillian Clarke, RS Thomas, Dylan Thomas and Sheena Pugh being the most popular writers. Some centres cited Raymond Garlick and Roland Mathias's thorough anthology of Anglo-Welsh verse *Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1980* as a source and this information may be useful to those centres where there is a desire to investigate the enormously rich seam of Pre-1914 Anglo-Welsh poetry. As far as I am aware, no centres used both Pre and Post 1914 verse as a combination in this section of the folder and it strikes me that this would be a profitable combination for future development.

Where drama was chosen as representative of Welsh Relevance, the work was almost exclusively on *Under Milk Wood*. Work on Emylyn Williams did appear but it was very rare. It is worth reminding centres in Wales that *Our Day Out* is not considered to be a Welsh Relevance drama. Different Cultures drama again centred on the English Literature specification text *A View from a Bridge* where empathetic responses were popular.

Reading in the English Folder:

England version (Work on Shakespeare and Different Cultures poetry.)

Macbeth has now been usurped by *Romeo and Juliet* and these two texts accounted for well over half the work on Shakespeare. While it is understandable that many teachers continue to study these texts, different choices led to much engaging work. It is possible that a new challenge for the teacher engenders a freshness of approach. Obviously some plays are more likely than others to appeal to the 16 year-old candidates who make up the bulk of the entry but there does appear to me to be a reluctance to move from the present comfort zones. The appearance of any of the comedies apart from *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was rare this year and as suggested above the only tragedy studied by large numbers of students was *Macbeth* though *Othello* is beginning to become popular. It is my belief they would also enjoy encounters with the feminist issues in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the hypocrisy of the characters in *Measure for Measure* and the romantic love of *As You Like It*. Other plays also offer rich pickings: the vicious political intrigue of *Richard III*; the love and loss of *The Winter's Tale*; the farce elements in *The Comedy of Errors*. It is exciting to see *Hamlet* and *King Lear* making an appearance though in the case of these two extremely complex dramas it proved to be unwise to choose tasks that required the students to examine the whole play in detail.

Two approaches to task setting remain most popular: general questions covering a large part or the whole of the play ('Who is responsible for Duncan's death?', 'Who is most responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?', 'How far as Shylock a victim?') and essays on particular sections of the text ('Examine the way Shakespeare creates tension in Act I Scene I of *Romeo and Juliet*', 'How is the character of Lady Macbeth portrayed in Act I Scenes v and vii of *Macbeth*?'). Both approaches work well though the former can lead candidates into unnecessary story telling and some weaker candidates are outfaced by such large tasks. The latter provides candidates with valuable practice in close reading skills, essential for the *English* and *English Literature* papers. I would, however, reiterate a point I made in last

year's report. To gain access to the higher grades candidates must address the issue of how Shakespeare shapes language. Assertion and vagueness about detail inevitably lead to a low mark. It is also essential that candidates actually study the text. A number this year gave the game away by making reference to guns in *Romeo and Juliet*. Watching the video must not become a substitute for reading the play. However, there is good evidence that candidates enjoy their contact with the great Shakespearian texts and that teachers are continuing to inspire them through the study of the highest quality literature. Inappropriate tasks in this section of the folder are becoming a rarity to the benefit of candidates.

The selection of verse chosen for Different Cultures poetry did not vary a great deal this year. As mentioned in last year's report and in the 2004 round of INSET meetings, it is disappointing to see occasions where candidates had been given verse which they clearly do not find challenging. I fear this may be the result of a reliance on other examination boards' anthologies. It is worth reminding teachers that to gain the higher grades it is essential that candidates have studied substantial verse which allows them the chance to investigate in detail the way language is shaped by a particular writer. Some texts chosen this year simply did not give them this opportunity.

Since this part of the folder is likely to be dual entered for those candidates also attempting the *English Literature* examination, it is important that texts are chosen to generate clear lines of comparison. I maintain that is difficult for candidates to fulfil this aspect of the assessment criteria when studying two poems by the same writer. May I also remind centres that only one of the poems needs to fulfil the Different Cultures requirement? While a thematic link is essential between the poems, this aspect does not need to appear in the title of the task. When it did in this year's coursework submissions, candidates clearly found it to be a limitation. The main thrust of the assessment criteria for this section of the folder is on the understanding of literature rather than cultural differences.

If candidates are not attempting the *English Literature* examination, there is no need to study two poems in this section of the folder. However, as noted above, the vast bulk of candidates dual enter this assignment and to fulfil the Literature criteria comparison is essential. There was often very little evidence that meaningful comparisons had been made in submissions this year and this was often the result of inappropriate choices of text as suggested above. There are further notes on poetry below.

Writing

Narrative/ Expressive

This section of the folder is a delight on most occasions though I still have reservations about centres where all the candidates are required to tackle the same task. A significant number of centres this year used the title 'Assassin' for all candidates and I believe this did not necessarily help many students. Greater freedom of choice generally results in better responses. Standards in the basic skills of punctuation and spelling do not rise greatly but this is the one part of the folder where the candidates have the opportunity to reveal what they can do with language through their creative skills and so many of them impress.

While standards in narrative/expressive writing are generally high, reflecting sympathetic and sensitive teacher input, there are a number of points that need to be stressed. As I have noted in previous reports and INSET sessions, 'write-ons' simply do not work to the candidate's advantage. They limit the approach and are often inappropriately assessed using the Reading criteria. Similarly, writing based on genre study often restricts the candidate's response. Care must be taken that the writing fulfils the criteria. Thus reflective work experience diaries are

appropriate while work experience reports are not. While I have encouraged centres to limit the length of the narrative/expressive writing, some candidates' work this year was far too brief. A half page description of a beach scene for example will not allow candidates to access the aspects of the criteria relating to 'sustained' nature of the writing and provides precious little evidence upon which to base an assessment.

Analytic/Persuasive

Topics that have a local flavour work best. When candidates wrote about issues that directly affected them, be it the closure of their youth club or the appallingly dilapidated condition of their place of education, they produced work which was engaging and original. When they had been permitted to choose their own topic for the essay, a number simply went to the Internet and downloaded material. Cheating of this kind was most prevalent in this section of the folder and those caught have been penalised. Large sections of essays on euthanasia, abortion, drug misuse, capital punishment and other such topics plus film reviews were far too frequently simply stolen from sources. If as teachers we are to combat this, we shall need to be very much more aware of abrupt changes in style, vigilant in our assessment and insistent that at least some of the work is teacher supervised. Topics requiring 'research' should be avoided. Another aspect of task selection for this part of the folder that continues to worry me is appearance of analyses of other pieces of transactional writing. On these occasions, the candidates attempt to deconstruct an advertisement or article and explain its techniques. While this is a valuable preparation for English Paper 2, it does not fulfil the requirements for this section of the folder where candidates are expected to produce their own piece of informational or persuasive material.

The key to good analytic/persuasive writing is awareness of audience, format and appropriate style and content. Stress on these aspects resulted in some excellent work. One moderator cited a newspaper response to Bill Bryson's criticism of Blackpool as a perfect topic. Another noted a letter to the Principal complaining about the removal of a new video of *Othello* from the English Department as working particularly well. One centre utilised discussion on the positioning of a landfill site to generate letters to newspaper. In all three cases the audience and format are clearly established and the issues local.

Most but not all the centres used the 'split' mark criteria to arrive at assessments. This is now a requirement for Writing assessments for all the Boards.

English Literature

Poetry

It is universally the case that the Different Cultures or Welsh Relevance poetry comparison fills the Post-1914 poetry part of the Literature folder. Choices of text in this part of the folder do not change a great deal and the popularity of Marvell, Blake, Rossetti and Wordsworth continues. Tennyson and Shelley seem to be losing their appeal to teachers and the long reign of the Browning dramatic monologues is over. As I have suggested above, points of detailed comparison are more likely to be available to candidates when poems by different writers have been chosen. It is this comparative aspect of the work that remains the most difficult for candidates to access. Far too many at present are content to write about each poem individually and then simply stop but a glance at the *English Literature* criteria reminds us that a significant part of the assessment is centred on the ability to compare themes, style and content. As I have commented in recent reports and INSET occasions, the most profitable way for candidates to make comparisons is for them to analyse each poem in turn and then cross reference using as a basic guide aspects of theme, content, viewpoint, mood and style. To this list other considerations may be relevant, for example cultural differences and literary background though potted biographies are to be discouraged. Some candidates attempt to make comparisons without looking at the poems as pieces of literature in their own right first and this approach rarely works.

There are still some centres where line counting and image spotting is confused with criticism. Happily occasions where candidates were expected to compare three or more poems were rare this year.

Prose

This seems to be the Cinderella of the *English Literature* folder. Tasks range from 'How does Jane Austen reveal pride and prejudice through the characters of Elizabeth and Darcy?' to 'Describe the part played by Doctor Watson in *The Speckled Band*'. The first is clearly far too ambitious while the second is limiting in the extreme. Hence the choice of text and task, taking into consideration the ability of the candidates, is particularly important in this section of the folder.

The writer chosen will depend on the set text studied for the examination since both Pre and Post-1914 prose must be covered to fulfil the specifications. This means that the bulk of candidates study Pre-1914 prose; typical choices of author being Dickens, the Brontes, Austen, Conan Doyle, Hardy, Stevenson, Poe, HG Wells and Kate Chopin. It has to be said that some of these writers seem to inspire much better work than others. My empiric judgment is that candidates struggle with the Hardy short stories and Conan Doyle while Dickens, the Brontes and Austen encourage the best work.

The problem with the Conan Doyle short stories in particular is that candidates find it incredibly difficult, whatever task is given, to escape from the narrative thread. Tasks on these texts often centre on how typical the chosen tale is as a detective story and this tends to lead the students away from the examination of the work as a piece of literature. The same is true of Hardy (typically *Tony Kytes*) where the text itself does not lend itself to rewarding tasks and the only escape seems to be into narrative.

On the other hand, the rich descriptive detail in Dickens' writing gives plenty of opportunities for candidates to investigate the way language is used to evoke atmosphere and character. Centres seem to be moving away now from the previously ubiquitous *The Signalman* and are now finding profit in investigating, for example, the early chapters of *Great Expectations*. As in the work on Shakespeare, many centres are seeing the advantage of concentrating on a small section of text. With long prose works this is a very sensible approach given that a task like 'How does Pip change through the course of the novel?' requires considerable investment of teaching, and indeed student, time.

More centres are now tackling Jane Austen for coursework, though generally and wisely only with the more able candidates. Here there are no atmospheric details to be examined but instead a pellucid style which invites consideration of the ironic sub-text. A typical task is 'How does Jane Austen establish characters in the first three chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*?' which invites a close examination of style, thus giving candidates access to the higher grades. Very few centres stray beyond *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* but any work on this writer is to be welcomed.

Hardy's short stories are popular but I am generally unimpressed by the standard of work produced. Tasks are often dependent upon a narrative driven approach and occasionally can actually lead the candidate away from the text. The work on novels is generally more successful ('How does Hardy generate sympathy for Henchard in Chapter 44 of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*?').

As I have noted in the past, prose tasks very often lead to story telling. To avoid this the introduction of the word 'How' into the task gives candidates the opportunity to meet the higher grade criteria. Finally, I should like to remind teachers that only two comparisons are required. In a number of centres, candidates are required to write three and this I feel puts an unnecessary burden upon them.

Drama

It was extremely rare for the Drama slot in the Literature folders not to be filled with a dual entered Shakespeare piece and choice of texts for those who did not wish to take this option was very similar to last year.

Assessments

Many centres are a joy to moderate. The paper work is accurately completed and the work professionally assessed. However, there are a small minority of centres where the situation is less happy. I feel that it is essential that a specified person be given the responsibility of ensuring that assessments are consistent across the department. The reports sent to centres always highlight any problems in the assessment procedures and yet in some centres action does not seem to be taken to address the issues noted. The most frequent problems encountered by moderators include thin brief work being over-rewarded and weak technical skills being ignored in the Writing section.

Another problem that seems to have been more apparent this year is the use of writing frames. In the worst case I encountered this year, the candidates had been given complete paragraphs with gaps to be filled with words chosen from a list. In other cases, large swathes of work were identical in the essays of different candidates. Where this is spotted, we always follow it up as a possible case of copying. Distressingly on a number of occasions this year we have found that the teacher had been 'over-helpful' not perhaps realising that the finished product must be the candidate's own work.

As I have suggested in the notes on Writing above, plagiarism is a growing problem. Thousands of essays on well-known texts are available either free or for a small fee on the Internet and some candidates think they can take a short cut by utilising this provision. I urge teachers to be constantly vigilant for cheating of this kind and I repeat the advice I gave in last year's INSETs to ensure that at least part of each essay is completed in class. When cheating is discovered, the consequences for the candidate are considerable and such dishonesty brings a department into discredit. This problem will not go away unless we tackle it with resolution.

On a more positive note, the vast majority of teachers are to be praised and admired for the level of professional commitment they display when preparing candidates for this part of the examinations.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

The overriding issue emerging from the Advisory visits this year has been that of time. Many departments struggle to gain time for moderation of candidates, but in schools where there is a strong conviction of the value and centrality of Speaking and Listening to the whole curriculum, arrangements are made for departments to cross moderate properly. I am aware that this is an issue which has been highlighted through INSET, during visits and in the subsequent reports, but it appears that the message is still failing to penetrate some hierarchies. In some instances, the workload agreement is cited as exacerbating the problem of providing 'cover'. Conversely, centres do make use of Performance Management time to ease the process. This is obviously an aspect of Speaking and Listening which will not go away.

Administration

It is pleasing to note that many moderators reported a general improvement in the return of the E3 forms, with many more arriving promptly. There are, as ever, some centres for which this is a recurrent problem, despite regular reminders. There is concern that in some centres there is a lack of common policy regarding the details produced, with variation from one extreme of sketchy outlines of activities to the other of full overview of the range of activities within the same centre. A common approach to task setting appeared quite often, with variation within the task to suit the needs of individual groups. It is pleasing that the single E3 form to represent the whole centre appeared with diminishing frequency: as suggested previously, where it did, there were generally accompanying problems.

Some confusion arose concerning the tasks outlined on the E3 with some centres assuming that these should be the tasks on which candidates would be assessed during the Advisory visit, rather than giving some examples of the work undertaken. Also, some centres appeared to condense the assessments into a short period at the end of the course, rather than integrating it into the on-going work.

Record keeping is also an area where improvements are continuing, although there are still too many occasions when moderators are only shown a small sample of records. It must be emphasised that all records should be available on the day of the visit. Moderators were pleased to report a number of centres adopting the newly suggested format introduced during INSET. Almost all centres use a standardised form of recording throughout the department. However, it was noted that on occasion when this was suggested by, perhaps, a new, young and enthusiastic Teacher-in-Charge, some long-standing members of staff were resistant, not seeing the need for a unified scheme. Thankfully, this situation is rare.

Many more teachers use grade related criteria in both their own comments and in feedback to candidates. In some cases, self evaluation by candidates resulted in terrifyingly brutal and honest appraisal!

Visits were usually easy to arrange, although the initial communication with the teacher in the school was not always so easy to achieve. Moderators were full of praise for the organisation of visits, and the useful dialogue they were able to establish with centres, some of which they had visited on at least one previous occasion.

Assignments

The majority of centres ensured that at least two tasks were used for the assessments during the Advisory visit, and these were usually well planned, engaged the interests of the candidates and gave sufficient opportunities to assess their talents. Many centres seemed to view the visit as both an opportunity to excite the candidates into another expression of their talents and to view candidates afresh. Where problems arose, it was because vague instructions with little framework were given – classically (but infrequently) 'I want you to discuss this' without clear reference to what, precisely, candidates were expected to discuss! There were also fewer examples of product, although there were still times when candidates gave what was obviously a well-rehearsed 'performance'.

Individual presentations were at their best when candidates were able to demonstrate expertise in a particular field with genuine enthusiasm. One example cited by a moderator involved a candidate from an adult education centre giving a presentation on oral hygiene, using visual aids as a structuring device. She involved her audience in a practical activity and made use of both OHP and interactive whiteboard. The comment was 'They don't come much better than that!'. PowerPoint presentations have also become more common; at their best when the supporting material is in the form of images rather than text. At the other extreme, dazzling graphics may be there, but candidates do little more than read out the display material, sometimes looking over a shoulder to do so. There are lessons to be learnt here.

Group interactions also gave examples of good practice. The best tended to stem from media texts and from relevant local topics. Examples include the introduction of a 'Healthy Eating Programme' in one school and the proposal to build a Community Sports' Centre in another. Practical collaborative activities such as designing a poster or writing a press release allowed for real focus and engagement.

Drama focused activities also continue to develop and deliver more than the basic 'hot seating' exercise. Paired role play – such as a conversation between Friar Lawrence and the Nurse, was successful and popular – though at its best when candidates were fully familiar with the material and had studied it in depth. Links with popular culture – such as a *Jerry Springspeare* format for *Romeo and Juliet* or *This is Your Life: Macbeth* – also had potential to engage. More mature candidates were able to use their experience and motivation to engage with topical issues such as a family's experience of a soldier going to war.

There were many instances cited by the moderators of candidates showing familiarity with the demands of Speaking and Listening and valuing the self confidence which the possession of these skills engendered.

Assessments

Moderators were pleased to report that there were very few instances of teachers failing to refer to the criteria during the time of the visit when assessing the candidates' performance. The ensuing discussion of marks was fair and realistic, with high compatibility between the marks awarded by both teacher and moderator. There were, of course, instances where the performance 'on the day' differed from that observed during the whole course. It is important to reinforce with candidates in particular that they will not be penalised should they achieve less well on this one 'snapshot' occasion. Similarly, outstanding performance could possibly enhance the grade achieved.

It is pleasing to report that those centres which received an additional visit this year as a result of prior concerns had made great improvements in either record keeping or organisation. This in turn meant a reduction in the numbers of centres receiving Moderation visits this year. Centres continue to develop awareness of the anticipated overall parity between the different elements of the course, and many have strategies in place to monitor this.

Internal moderation continues to present problems for many centres, as already suggested in the opening to this report. In the ideal situation, such methods as paired teaching to share assessment, or a department member being given both responsibility and time to oversee the standardisation of marking within the department are used. In the many centres where this is less easy to achieve, the standardisation videos play a major role, although viewing and discussing these is often fitted in at lunch-time or after hours rather than in dedicated departmental time. A cross-section of candidates sometimes engage in common tasks to enable moderation to take place – again often in teachers' own time. Once again, I find that I am highlighting the necessity for those responsible for the management of schools and colleges to give time for the speaking and listening element of English.

In general, teachers are enthusiastic, committed and determined to allow candidates every opportunity to achieve their best. Teachers sacrifice their own time and put themselves under real pressure to provide stimulating, relevant assignments to enable candidates to develop their skills in an area which impinges on all aspects of the curriculum and beyond. They deserve to be praised.

FOUNDATION TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

PAPER ONE

Section A

The passage, from a Ray Bradbury short story, is set in a future that seems to be one of continuous war. The story focuses on a soldier, Sergeant Hollis, who tells his superior that he has invented a machine that will rust metal; this machine will bring an end to weapons of destruction and to war itself. His superior, 'the Official', believes him to be deluded but, having sent him to a doctor for medical tests, is suddenly faced with the realisation that Hollis has indeed started the process of rusting all weapons. The story ends with the Official pursuing Hollis with the only weapon he knows will be unaffected by the machine: a piece of wood. The story was a straightforward narrative, the attractions lying in the powerful story line and the two central characters, and the questions provided opportunities for candidates to show a full range of reading skills.

A1

This first question asked candidates to explore character and behaviour and most were at least able to show that there were some changes in the Official's behaviour and attitude towards Hollis in the first twenty lines. The real key to answering this kind of question successfully is being prepared to track the text methodically and then using the text to explore behaviour in some detail. Many candidates recognised that in the opening exchanges, the Official's behaviour is polite, reasonable and relaxed. Some candidates felt his authority over Hollis is clear from his opening invitation that is also a command, but many sensibly commented on the word 'pleasantly' to support their view that in the opening lines his behaviour is non-threatening. Stronger candidates also looked at the kinds of things he says such as, "Oh, nothing much" or "thought I'd call you in" as evidence of his care for his men. Weaker candidates, even at this stage, tended to only repeat what was said rather than offering an interpretation or view of his behaviour. The offer to move Hollis to another war zone was seen variously as further evidence of the Official's supportive nature or a devious plot to get rid of him but it is clear that after Hollis's comments about wishing to live in peace, the Official's patience begins to fade. This was where good candidates, able to track carefully, used the text to support their assertions. They saw that in the Official's, "Now stop all that idealistic chatter", there is a change in his approach. He becomes more dismissive, more assertive and seems to want to get the situation resolved. Some weaker candidates found this section demanding and either ignored it or simply repeated what was said without comment. Good candidates saw the change in behaviour and explored both what was said and their view of the Official. Some highlighted his tapping of the map as a sign of his increasing irritation. However, it was the final section of these lines where candidates who were in tune with the question scored highly as they recognised that Hollis's reply in lines 14-16 triggers another, rather different, response as the Official begins to feel the sergeant may be insane or on the verge of a breakdown. It was the exploration of having "to deal carefully with the sergeant" that showed the most able candidates' skills in interpretation. His other actions: "He smiled quietly" and "The Official laughed" also indicated his sense of unease and good candidates explored these quotations with some sensitivity.

The question was one where, as the situation developed, the Official's behaviour towards Hollis changes, and this could only be probed by a fairly detailed examination of the text. Weaker answers were frequently short and often asserted that he was merely 'nasty' or 'unkind' and these responses often failed to see the changes in his behaviour. More secure candidates were comfortable dealing with the first half of the section but it was the more able who were able to explore the subtleties of his changing behaviour across the whole of the twenty lines who scored really high marks.

A2

This question focused on how Hollis tried to convince the Official that he really had created a machine that would rust metal. Good candidates recognised there was a wealth of detail about the invention and its capabilities and that the ways in which Hollis tried to convince the Official were as much about the details as about his emphatic earnestness. It was the willingness and ability to separate out the details and make sensible comments that marked out the good responses. The responses of weaker candidates tended to fall into two categories: those that merely quoted large chunks of text without comment and those that were very brief responses, selecting just a few details from what Hollis had said. As before, good candidates worked with the text methodically, exploring not just what was said but commenting appropriately. For example, it is clear from Hollis's opening explanation that he has planned to share the details of his invention with the Official for some time, and that the invention had taken time to perfect. He shows how earnest and serious he is when he tells the Official, "I'm glad you called me in." Some candidates commented on the details coming out in a rush through the opening short sentences, or offered the evidence that because it wouldn't be programmed to work on all metals, this demonstrated Hollis's thoroughness of planning. Others commented on the italicised '*all*' to indicate his certainty about the effectiveness of his machine. He had planned the machine to be selective, to work on particular metals but had also recognised that buildings needed to be unaffected. Good candidates not only selected these details but were able to comment on Hollis's planning and organisation and on his absolute certainty that the machine worked, making weapons rust away, "just by being near them".

When the Official suggests that Hollis sees a doctor, Hollis's calm reaction, "You think I'm lying", suggested to many that he was in perfect control and that he recognised others would find it impossible to believe in such an invention. Some commented to good effect on the short, steely reply, "I'm not". There were opportunities to gain marks by noting the details of the machine: its small size and the ease of hiding it, the preciseness of the machine's range and its versatility. Good candidates then explored the way Hollis had planned a programme to ensure other countries' weapons would be destroyed and some commented on the plausibility of the planning. Others commented on Hollis's calmness or his certainty. Many candidates realised the way that Hollis drew a comparison between his invention and other, previously unthinkable, advances was an important way of trying to convince the Official. When even this failed to impress, it was clear his mind was made up. Hollis's final comment, "I knew nobody would believe me" was often seized upon as further evidence of his seriousness.

Many candidates were able to get reasonable marks by a process of steady accumulation of detail and those who were prepared to push on a little further to explore 'how' by commenting on the details or on Hollis's approach were the candidates who moved into the upper band of marks.

A3

In last year's paper, there was a question inviting candidates to offer their thoughts and feelings on a character; this year the question asked candidates to focus on the Official's thoughts and feelings. Positioning for the response is vital and good candidates realised that many sentences in their answer would begin: "The Official thinks / feels....".

Candidates who tracked these eighteen lines carefully usually were able to give sound responses. At first he feels confused by the whole situation – he sighs and rubs his hands over his face. When in conversation with the doctor he feels sorry for Hollis but thinks there is little to help him; he feels he has become another casualty of a long war. There was plenty to say in this early section of the text about his feelings and thoughts but there is a significant change when he searches for his pen. There is almost a pause in the narrative, as he can barely believe what is in front of him. He feels stunned, unable to act as he realises the significance of the powder of rust he sees in front of him. This short but key sentence proved difficult to explore for all but the most able who were able to see how this influenced the sudden and dramatic change in the Official's thoughts and feelings. His thoughts quickly return to Hollis and he knows he must act quickly. He is now decisive, thinking of the havoc that could be wrought, but he also feels desperate, ordering the guard to 'kill him' in any way possible.

Weaker candidates struggled to position themselves for this question and sometimes drifted into mere re-telling or suggested that the Official had ordered Hollis's death because he had damaged his pen! Stronger candidates kept their focus on the question throughout their answer and were successfully able to explore the Official's changing reactions, thoughts and feelings.

A4

This final question tested the candidates' ability to tease out the key parts of the story but also gave opportunities to explore the craft of the writer and the way the final section gave an exciting conclusion to the narrative.

Candidates approached this in different ways. Some chose only to focus on the events, others only on how it was exciting. Both of these approaches made it difficult to secure the highest band of marks because of the inevitable omissions. More sensibly, an approach which tracked the key events but also made sensible observations about what made it an exciting read usually produced a good mark.

Most candidates began with the bewildered soldier trying to explain to the Official that he couldn't use his gun because it had rusted, although some suggested it was because he didn't want to shoot anybody. Many were also able to point to the picture of destruction taking place as Hollis's machine worked with complete effectiveness. Stronger candidates recognised that the Official now saw that Hollis could only be stopped by less conventional means as he ordered the guard to kick him to death or choke him. The moment that he instinctively goes to his gun but finds only rust was a telling one for some candidates who then saw the reason for smashing a chair and racing after Hollis with a chair leg, some also commenting on the way this linked back to the story's title.

In dealing with the section as an exciting ending, many wrote about the cliff-hanger ending and the desire as a reader to know whether the Official eventually caught up with Hollis and this, of course, was one of the attractions of the ending. Others were able to comment on the fast moving pace of the story at this point, with events crowding in and becoming ever more frenetic, as shown by the exchanges between the Official and the guard. A few very able

candidates also saw that actually the action was not all frenzied, that the description of the tanks and planes collapsing to powder actually slowed the pace and the long, descriptive sentences in the paragraph between lines 70-75 were an effective juxtaposition to the fevered activity and conversation in the Official's room. Candidates who only had formulaic responses like, "he uses a lot of short sentences" without exemplification gained little reward; similarly there was limited reward for candidates who talked about "the lexis of hate" but steadfastly refused to focus in upon or explore the impact of particular words or phrases. Stronger candidates were able to explore and comment on the Official's increasingly frenzied behaviour or the description as he races from the room, and gained reward where they probed the power of individual words or phrases and considered the effect upon the reader. This was a particular feature of responses in the top mark band.

Section B

Section B is common to candidates on both tiers and the key messages in the Higher Tier report apply equally to candidates who took the Foundation Tier examination.

B1

It was possible, and entirely acceptable, to tackle the description in a number of ways and some candidates chose to focus on the scene outside the school, whilst others concentrated on the scenes in the classrooms. First person narratives were still in evidence and among weaker candidates, short, half page responses gave limited opportunities to build and develop the 'snapshots' of activity. As in previous years, more able candidates understood the importance of using a four or five paragraph structure, each developing a particular scene and then linking into the next. These candidates often focused on the groups of waiting parents outside the school gates, the various groups of young children as they left the school and then on a teacher or two, usually looking tired and harassed but clutching the hand of the tearful child whose parents had not arrived to collect them on time. Snatches of dialogue between parents and a little extended description of a few individuals was often enough to give candidates sound marks for content and organisation. Weaker candidates often failed to move the description from a level of generality to specific description of individuals or used a level of exaggeration that meant that all of the children became part of an escaping herd of elephants, raging lions or other assorted animals.

Writing in complete sentences in the descriptive task has long been an issue for candidates on both tiers, but as last year, more able candidates are now paying greater attention to sentence structure and variety, although for weaker candidates, problems remain with this and with familiar grammar and spelling errors.

B2

(a) The Gift.

This was a popular choice and candidates focused on a similar range of 'gifts' as those on the Higher Tier. The most successful sensibly structured a time-limited narrative around a single incident that followed receipt of the 'gift'. These narratives were usually first person and to an extent, using this approach made it easier to construct and control. As with Higher Tier candidates, those who tried to structure a narrative around the acquisition of paranormal 'gifts' often struggled to make their writing convincing.

- (b) Write about a time you had to after a neighbour's pet.

This proved to be a good choice for many, and often the tales revolved around a few days of mayhem trying to restrain 'Fang' or 'Brute' the neighbour's dog or re-capturing a pet that had escaped. Some chose to write about more exotic pets and snakes often featured although I also came across scorpions, parrots and in one case, a giraffe! Humour and exaggeration, when exercised with a light touch, worked particularly well on this title and there were many entertaining stories to enjoy. Some weaker candidates tended to over-exaggerate and made their tales entirely unconvincing and in fact many of the more successful tales had simple story lines but were narrated with a clarity and with a focus on the feelings of the narrator.

- (c) Write a story which begins with these words:
Sam knew there was trouble coming as soon as Mrs Thomas closed the door.

The title indicated a third person narrative but as in the Higher Tier, there were many stories that suddenly became first person and the whole story then lost its impact. The best pieces, as might be expected, focused on a single incident and frequently the narrative drew its strength from the attention paid to the characters. Weaker candidates seemed to find this demanding, perhaps because of the need for good characterisation, but where this was done well, it often carried the plot and sometimes meant the central incident did not need to be particularly important.

- (d) A Night Out

This was the most popular option on the Foundation Tier and many followed a predictable format that started with the preparation for the evening. This involved lashings of make-up or after shave. Meeting up with a large group of friends usually followed before the visit to a noisy city-centre club, where drinking, flirting and then a fight or two became a predictable outcome. Some candidates were determined to give every detail of the after-effects of heavy drinking and some of the tales had a depressing ring of authenticity. The more able candidates were able to use description, characterisation and a twist of events to build a more engaging narrative but weaker responses often drifted into a mere list of events. Often the more successful pieces were those that told of family celebrations, the 'school prom' or attendance at a particular event.

- (e) Write a story which ends with the following:
My mother just looked at me and said, "I told you it would never work." I realise now that she was absolutely right.

Weaker writers always find it difficult to structure a narrative that builds towards a given final sentence and even though this particular title gave lots of opportunities for a range of scenarios, it nevertheless meant that candidates had to plan carefully before they began writing and try to embed clues into the narrative that would guide the reader towards the concluding sentence. Relationships and inventions formed the bulk of the stories and the most successful were built around a single event or a limited time-frame, which then allowed opportunities for characterisation and description to be developed alongside the plot.

PAPER TWO

Section A

The two texts seemed to present few difficulties in terms of understanding and perhaps raising the profile of 'Fairtrade' bananas was no bad thing either. There was a lot of reading for candidates but repeated messages at INSET sessions about time management do appear to be having an impact and most candidates seemed able to complete all of the questions. The questions were familiar in terms of wording and range and well-prepared candidates seemed clear about how to tackle them.

A1

Most candidates tackled this first question successfully. Bullet point or numbered responses were more effective than a response in a lengthy paragraph and the location of details that explained why bananas are now so popular should have been straightforward. Some weaker candidates ignored the instruction to focus on the first on the first five paragraphs and they inevitably struggled. There were also some one-word responses that gave insufficient detail – for example, it was necessary to note that bananas are rich in potassium rather than just note the word potassium, although it was perfectly acceptable to include the use of the single words, fibre and vitamins, each of these being rewarded with a mark. Most candidates combed the text methodically, selecting and listing the details appropriately and this should have given them the confidence to move on to the more demanding questions that followed.

A2

Both this and the A3 question followed a familiar format and the bullet points should have provided the opportunity to structure a considered response; many good responses were four paragraphs, each dealing with a separate bullet point. For weaker candidates the question posed challenges simply because of the amount of material available and some found refuge in merely repeating material used in the first question. Whilst it was certainly true that the writer, Robin Mckie focuses on the health benefits of bananas, the article also covered aspects including the rapid growth in popularity of the fruit, their versatility, some of the issues surrounding their cultivation and the ways in which the fruit is now marketed. Good candidates saw the range of the article and were prepared to comment sensibly on the ways this approach kept readers interested. Most candidates were able to make at least some reference to some of the statistics used in the article but more able candidates were able to then explore or comment on why the statistics had been used or what effect this had on the reader. These candidates also selected some of the key statistics, linking them to points they covered in their response to the first bullet point. On the whole, candidates seemed to find it easier to link comment to the use of photographs than to the text. At the simplest level, some candidates just saw the appeal of colourful photographs but many saw that the photographs of celebrities eating bananas provided a form of endorsement for the fruit and commented that readers would be interested to know their favourite sports or media stars enjoyed eating them. Some candidates also sensibly commented on the way the photographs demonstrated the broad appeal of the fruit, including children as well as adults. There were often good comments on the use of the headline but only the more able candidates were prepared or willing to look in any detail at the writer's choice of words and phrases across the whole article. Where candidates were able to make sensible comments about the use of the language, it was often the confirmation of a good response. There was no shortage of material upon which to draw for this answer but more able candidates were able to use the details as a basis for their comment, while less assured candidates tended to only say what was in the article.

A3

The Fairtrade campaign sheet had clearly set out to persuade readers to buy Fairtrade bananas and candidates who were prepared to explore both the content and the kinds of persuasive techniques on display usually achieved good marks. Many candidates recognised that the campaign sheet starkly described the difficult conditions faced by the plantation workers and the poverty they endured. Many were able to select some of the disturbing facts but the more able saw the purpose in using such details was to make the reader feel sympathy for the workers. Once it became clear how Fairtrade bananas meant that producers were guaranteed fair prices and a 'better deal', these candidates saw that they were made to feel guilty for not choosing Fairtrade bananas because the solution to poor working conditions lay with them. The direct appeal to the reader, the use of imperatives and the invitation to act in a range of decisive ways were all techniques that careful readers were able to explore. As with the previous question, there was plenty of material to work on though for weaker candidates, selecting what was important proved difficult and they sometimes tended to resort to copying chunks of the text, saying what was in the campaign sheet but not linking the details to the question. Some drifted away from the question, simply offering their views about the leaflet but better candidates kept referring back to the question, giving their response a tighter focus and always trying to answer the question 'how.'

A4

The final question proved to be a demanding one for many candidates but particularly for those who ignored the instruction to work through the four bullet points. The very weakest answers were often short and covered just one or two of the areas required or in some cases failed to make clear references to each specific text.

Where candidates used headings or tackled each bullet point in a separate paragraph, answers were usually stronger and clearer, although even identifying the purpose of each text proved very challenging for some, who explained the content of each text rather than its purpose. It was only necessary to say that the purpose of the newspaper was to entertain or inform or tell the reader about bananas in general, whereas the campaign sheet's purpose was to persuade the reader to buy Fairtrade bananas. Where candidates took each text in turn and worked methodically, responses were always stronger. Candidates who started: "Both texts..." were usually quickly in trouble. The layout and presentation of the two texts were often just given the scantest of detail even though the differences in terms of continuous prose, photographs, use of bullet points and sub-headings across the texts gave those prepared to look at these areas easy opportunities to accumulate marks. The areas of similarity were related mainly, but not exclusively, to the plantation workers and the work of Fairtrade, and this demanded careful scanning, particularly of the newspaper article. However, once the sections of text had been located, able candidates successfully identified some of the similar content. Most candidates were able to recognise that in considering the differences in content, the article was wide-ranging and general whilst the campaign sheet was narrowly focused on banana farmers and how their situation could be improved. Because high marks could only be achieved by candidates tackling all of the headings, some responses were self-limiting. Candidates who approached the question in a methodical way, dealing with each bullet point in turn and looking at each text in turn usually produced answers that gained the highest reward.

Section B

B1

This writing task gave candidates the opportunity to produce a leaflet for their school or college, persuading students to eat more fruit during its 'Healthy Eating' week. Although this looked to be a straightforward task, it was important that candidates saw that they had to balance persuasive technique with relevant information, ensure they kept their target audience in focus with an appropriate register and style and consider layout and presentation. There were many very impressive responses that combined all of these elements to good effect but there were also some candidates who did not do themselves justice. The weakest responses were often very brief and sometimes more of a poster than a leaflet. Where candidates ignored the advice to "write about one to two pages" and produced very short responses, it usually made it difficult to gain good marks for content and organisation. Other candidates sometimes lost sight of the task and wrote a leaflet that contained few references to the benefits of eating fruit or any mention of the school/college's 'Healthy Eating' week.

Given the obvious link with the reading material, many candidates selected information about bananas and used it as part of their leaflet's content. This was often incorporated into the leaflet very well and the most able writers made good, selective use of material, weaving this into leaflets that extolled the benefits of all fruit. Weaker candidates tended to copy unselectively and some leaflets were made up of little more than a paragraph or two from the original newspaper article. There was also considerable variation in the attention given to the intended audience. More able candidates constantly referred to the students and both content and register were relevant. They often wrote about fruit being good for the figure, the complexion and those on diets, they reminded the reader that it was required eating for any would-be sports stars and commented on its value compared with chocolate, junk food and chips. These lively and engaging leaflets made direct appeal to the reader, often by the use of imperatives but also through simple but punchy slogans and sub-headings such as, 'Fruit is Cool' or 'Say No To Junk'. They also showed an awareness of presentational issues, indicating briefly the detail of illustrations they would use. Weaker candidates often showed less awareness of their intended audience and sometimes content was not well matched to the task. For example, some leaflets that drew heavily on the newspaper article told their teenage or college audience how good bananas were for weaning babies, or they drifted into a discussion about junk food leading to heart attacks in the over-40s.

This seemed to be a task that worked well overall and well-prepared candidates who recognised the multiple demands produced some very impressive pieces of work.

B2

Candidates on both tiers tackled this task and the comments in the Higher Tier report apply equally here. The importance of shaping the writing to the intended audience was again very significant in this task and where candidates saw this, many realised they could have some fun with their reviews, using an informal register and employing current teenage vocabulary and phrasing. Candidates tackled music, film and book reviews in equal numbers and there were some very good pieces of writing in all three areas. Where good candidates chose to write film reviews, there was usually a balance between an explanation of the basic plot, the quality of those appearing in key roles, aspects of the film such as the photography or the music and their opinion as reviewer. Many of these pieces were sometimes well over a side long and showed considerable knowledge of the films they reviewed. Importantly too, they remembered the reader might also wish to see the film and they were usually anxious not to reveal the ending; it was an indication of writers who were very much in tune with the task.

Weaker responses were usually short and lacking detail; however some were over-long, tending to give a laboured account of everything that happened but with little reader-awareness.

The music reviews made me feel old as I struggled to recognise some of the 'brilliant' new releases. Rappers seemed especially popular, with some reviewers keen to point out their shock value on parents and the robust language contained on the CD. Good reviews combined lively and sometimes controversial opinion with a detailed examination of a few tracks and at times a little biographical or 'band info' that lent these pieces an air of authority. Readers were urged to "go and buy it today" for those 5-star rated discs and many of these reviews captured the sense of the task very well indeed.

Reviews of books covered a surprisingly wide range, although as with some Higher Tier candidates, some were driven to review set-text books. 'Harry Potter' figured frequently but books by other well-known writers also appeared and there were non-fiction and biographies reviewed as well. Some candidates had mis-read the question and reviewed a magazine and in a small number of cases, wrote about why books were good to read, without reference to a specific one. However, as with the other reviews, good candidates managed to capture the essence of the book without revealing everything, successfully conveyed the impact the book had made on them and made it sound well worth reading.

Overall, there did not appear to be huge numbers of candidates who failed to tackle this task, and time-management appeared to be rather better this year. Given the huge range in the abilities of candidates entered for this tier, it was very pleasing to see the high levels of commitment and effort made by almost all candidates across both papers.

HIGHER TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

PAPER 1

Section A

The passage focused on the relationship between parent and children and it was quite subtle in its presentation of the theme of 'growing up'. There was a dark, even sinister, feeling to the story and it certainly was not a version of happy families. The action was dramatic, intense and troubling in its way as the central character lost his illusions about his own children and experienced their capacity for violence. It was a demanding test of the candidates' reading skills as they had to pick their way through the powerful emotions and the disturbing implications of the narrative.

A1

This was a very familiar type of question and it was intended to get the candidates thinking about the nature of the relationship between Robert Quick and his children. However, it was not particularly easy and there were some subtleties here which only the able candidates could handle with any confidence.

As usual, the safest method was to track the text methodically and most saw clearly that he loved and admired his children and wanted to be with them. The evidence for this was obvious as the first paragraph of the passage mentioned that he had missed his two small girls and was looking forward 'eagerly' to seeing them. The fact that he went straight into the garden to see them before changing his clothes also indicated how keen he was to be with them.

The better candidates also saw the significance of the garden as a 'wilderness' where the children could do as they pleased. The inference here was that Robert was an indulgent father who tried to please his children and let them do as they wanted. It was possible to argue that he spoiled them.

However, the nature of the relationship was not so obvious when the girls responded rather indifferently to his arrival. Most candidates noted that Jenny virtually ignores her father's greeting and Kate responds only in a 'muffled voice'. It was not necessary to read too much into their lack of enthusiasm at this stage but some candidates saw this as the first hint that this relationship was rather 'one-sided'. Robert keeps his distance and is untroubled by their undemonstrative behaviour and does not demand or expect displays of affection from them. Indeed he despises parents who do demand such displays. He has persuaded himself that they are impulsive, affectionate children, capable of passionate devotion. He obviously thinks they can do no wrong and are growing into exciting women with admirable qualities. Robert's love for his children was fairly easy to spot but the more thoughtful candidates saw his tendency to make excuses for them and to take for granted that they were as close to him as he was to them. There was an element of wishful thinking in this relationship and the girls' behaviour was at odds with Robert's interpretation.

The weaker candidates were tempted into sweeping generalisations that did not really apply but the good answers engaged with the subtleties of the text.

A2

This question invited the candidates to engage with the craft of the writer and the wording pointed to the ambiguity of the text. The action of the narrative was relevant to the answer but it was also necessary here to explore the language of the text. In some ways this incident could look like children having fun, albeit in a very boisterous manner. However, the writer makes us puzzled by the violence and cruelty of the girls' behaviour and the candidates had to explore how this uncertainty was created. It was not easy to maintain an overview of the situation and some candidates struggled for clarity as they grappled with the question of whether Robert was overreacting or not. Holding alternative readings of a text is a high level skill but the methodical approach, tracking the text carefully, was a reliable way of dealing with this question. However, it was also possible to consider the ways in which this seemed to be like a game and then to consider the opposing view.

It was possible to argue that the way Jenny ignored her father for a second time was significant as it reinforced the impression that she was not as loving and devoted as he assumed. However, Robert comforts himself with the thought that children are honest and 'never pretend', persuading himself that this behaviour is normal and natural. Some candidates shrewdly argued that this 'honesty' indicated that their subsequent behaviour could not be a game. Nevertheless, most candidates felt that the treatment of the dog was shocking and represented a sinister turn in the narrative. In a way it looks like a game but Kate kicks and shouts at the dog while Jenny 'hurls' a stick at her 'like a spear'. As most of the candidates grasped, throwing a stick *for* a dog is one thing but throwing it like a spear *at* the dog is quite another. The reactions of the dog added to the sense that this was not really playful as she was 'startled' and barked 'uncertainly', not knowing if this was a game or not. When the girls pursue the dog, they throw anything they can find at the 'fugitive' and then try to extricate her from her hiding place by trying to hook her collar with a rake.

The writer uses Robert's reaction to guide the reader. He is 'shocked' and calls 'urgently' and attempts to intervene to save the frightened animal. The 'game' then becomes a version of 'Cowboys and Indians' as they 'rush' at their father with the rake being carried 'like a lance'. The curious juxtaposition of the girls' laughter and the disturbing violence of their actions and words created the uncertainty. The laughter suggests that this is high spirits but the action seems to contradict this impression. The language also contributed to the effect. Verbs such as 'tore' and 'battered' suggested violent intent as did the description of Jenny's face as that of a 'homicidal maniac'. Robert's reactions were used again to suggest that this had gone well beyond normal play. He was 'frightened' and saw the children as 'completely mad' and 'vindictive'. He is hurt and eventually feels he is being strangled, which prompts a violent response from him. When he is bitten by the dog, Jenny's expression changes and she shows concern but Kate continues to giggle. Most candidates were drawn to the conclusion that this was not a game but the better answers did see that the writer was deliberately creating ambiguity. Less successful answers were not really addressing the issue of 'uncertainty' and simply noted examples of violent behaviour.

A3

The vital issue in this question was 'positioning' as the candidates had to track Robert's thoughts and feelings about his children in the light of their violence and cruelty. Those candidates who understood how to tackle this type of question knew that a lot of sentences would begin with 'He thinks' or 'He feels'. This was not a difficult question and it was possible to score well simply by being methodical.

At first he feels he cannot look at them as he feels anger and surprise at what has happened. He feels shocked and haunted by the look on Jenny's face. He thinks she had really wanted to hurt him and he now believes they hate him. He feels that something new has entered and changed their relationship and that he has had a disturbing glimpse of the 'brutal, primitive world' they have inside them and in which he does not belong. He feels like a stranger, an outsider.

When he reluctantly submits to them nursing his wound, he feels relieved that this is more like a game and at least 'not murderous' but at tea he thinks they are putting on a performance and enjoying it. Robert now thinks it is as if he did not exist and he begins to adjust to the fact that they are growing up and this is part of an inevitable process which will push him aside as young men come prowling. He feels that he wants to be alone and when Jenny joins him he feels uncertain about her, realising that this was not a game. This part of the passage was quite tricky but the better candidates saw that Robert's naïve illusions have been shattered and he now feels that his relationship with the girls has changed forever. He feels less complacent and aware that both he and the children are growing up.

It was possible to make good progress here by following the surface details of the text but the really good answers also grasped the inferences and had an assured sense of sequence.

A4

This question also tested the candidates' understanding of the craft of the writer and it widened the focus to the whole passage. It was not an easy question and a successful answer required some overview of events, a grasp of narrative technique and sensitivity to language. However, the bullet points did provide a framework.

The sensible place to start was with the description of the garden. It was described as a 'wilderness' and there were several references to it being 'wild'. The sense of something untamed and primitive was reinforced by language such as 'untouched nature', 'the frontier' and 'primeval forests'. This location becomes the symbolic setting in which Robert sees a frightening and sinister part of his daughters' personalities. The better candidates saw the link between the garden and the girls.

Words such as 'impulsive', 'passionate' and 'strong' suggested natural, powerful emotion but, ironically, also hinted at something unrestrained and rather frightening. The behaviour of the girls towards their dog and towards Robert could be described as sinister, even brutal, and the language was deliberately violent. The threats to 'kill' and 'scalp' seemed to show something very frightening happening and Robert's reactions confirmed this impression. The obvious words were 'mad' and 'vindictive' and most used 'homicidal maniac' as a clear example of something sinister. Even the nursing seemed bossy and 'stern', although the 'game' itself is described as 'murderous'.

The 'civilised' behaviour of the girls at tea is described as a 'performance' and Robert realises that something has changed and that he has seen something very disturbing. Jenny sits on the wall in a 'superior' position and Robert is convinced that this was not a game.

The events are seen through Robert's eyes and the writer uses his reactions to ensure that we share his responses and interpretation. The story is structured to show the dramatic contrast between the 'perfect relationship' at the beginning, the violence in the middle section and the disillusion at the end.

A few very bright candidates noticed the disturbing contrast between the trappings of middle class life and the sudden eruption of primitive emotions and behaviour.

B1

This is a form of writing which candidates have always found difficult and the familiar weaknesses were again in evidence this year. The tendency to slip into first-person narrative is a perennial problem as is the use of the verb less sentence. I mentioned last year that this piece of writing should probably consist of four or five paragraphs of well-organised observation and there are dangers both ways if this is ignored. A failure to paragraph the writing is clearly a weakness but using too many paragraphs makes the writing scrappy and does not allow the description to develop convincingly.

There are some positive features of descriptive writing which apply generally. The better answers sustain a clear perspective and they also bring a sense of logical structure to the writing, observing from a fixed point or across time but avoiding lengthy introductions. The good responses also show an ability to link material effectively to create an overview of the scene they are describing. Careful choice of lexical verbs, adverbs and adjectives is very important in this type of writing but a key discriminator is the ability to focus on individuals rather than deal in generalisations. A scene is made vivid by the precise details of individual appearance and behaviour.

It was possible to interpret this particular task as an indoor or outdoor scene and both approaches were accepted.

B2

I have commented several times in earlier reports that choice is not always a blessing in examinations, and some candidates would be well advised to take a moment or two to think before they choose. I am sure that the best narratives know what the destination is before they set out on the journey.

This selection of titles was taken from the Foundation tier and offered opportunities to write fiction or about personal experiences. The specific titles change from year to year but the types of question are quite predictable, offering opportunities to write fiction or from personal experience. However, the content and organisation of the narrative is not everything and candidates should remember that a significant proportion of the marks available is allocated to technical accuracy. Examiners delight in the entertaining narrative but assessment also involves judging the technical skill of the writer.

(a) The Gift.

This type of title is particularly enabling because it allows the candidates to show imagination but also lends itself to personal experience. The gifts ranged from the obvious 'presents' such as a new bike, or even a car, to some more imaginative interpretations such as health, wealth or children. Sporting or musical talent could be used effectively. The least successful were the paranormal 'gifts' which often involved absurd and utterly unconvincing forays into forms of clairvoyance.

- (b) Write about a time you had to look after a neighbour's pet.

Some candidates could attempt this title by drawing on personal experience but most realised that it was not necessary to stick to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It offered an opportunity for self-deprecating humour but there was actually no need to indulge in improbable antics. The success of these narratives really did lie in the telling and the best established a relationship with the reader. There were a lot of very entertaining responses to this title and it proved a good choice for many of those who attempted it.

- (c) Write a story which begins with these words:
Sam knew there was trouble coming as soon as Mrs Thomas closed the door.

The gender of the central character was deliberately ambiguous here but there was no doubt that it was a third-person narrative. Too many candidates slipped into first-person and, even more strangely, changed the name of the protagonist. This often led to what I can only describe as a certain amount of confusion for the reader.

Many of these stories were 'school based' with Sam and Mrs Thomas acting out some rather familiar scenes of crime and punishment. This was the obvious way to approach the title but there were others who had Mrs Thomas closing the door behind her and leaving Sam to a different kind of trouble. The outcomes were predictably uneven and the art of this kind of narrative lies in the ability to plan quickly but clearly. The problems most candidates get themselves into are often to do with their failure to think through where they want to take the narrative.

- (d) A Night Out.

There were some odd 'nights out' on offer here as some candidates clearly felt that anything would work as long as it happened at night. For example, a flight to London from South America conveniently took off at night and provided 'a night out' of sorts!

However, it was completely predictable that the overwhelming majority of these responses would involve dance, drink and other less legal activities. The 'club based' night out often exploded into drama of one sort or another. Some were merely unsavoury but those who had good narrative technique showed that they could write powerfully without indulging themselves. I was impressed by many of these responses and more often than not it was when there some restraint in the writing. The ability to develop a situation convincingly, or even humorously, and to involve the reader with the characters was more important than a breathless succession of increasingly alarming events. Without doubt, my favourite 'night out' was a delightful account of an appearance by Rolf Harris at the Sidmouth Folk Festival. It was handled with humour and managed to combine a witty, detached observation of the event with a real appreciation of how it felt to be part of an enthusiastic crowd of people. Furthermore, there was not an alcoholic drink in sight!

- (e) Write a story which ends with the following:
My mother just looked at me and said, 'I told you it would never work.' I realise now that she was absolutely right.

This type of question is not easy to structure effectively and when it fails it can do so quite spectacularly. Some candidates used the 'title' as an opening to a story but most did at least try to structure a narrative which led to the given conclusion.

Unsurprisingly, many of these stories involved 'star-crossed' relationships but there were some amusing tales of inventions or plans which went badly wrong. My favourite was a simple tale of a young man who decided to repair his own rucksack with predictable but hilarious consequences. His mother was proved conclusively right but he showed exactly how to make a lot out of a little. The secret of the good narrative lies in the telling and this made a delightful change from the tales of failed relationships.

PAPER 2

Section A

The attraction of the Internet article by the Spin Doctor was precisely that it was so intemperate in tone and argument. It adopted a provocative approach to a controversial topic and it contrasted well with the personal experience of Candida Crewe whose attempts to live without a car were probably closer to the experiences of the candidates.

A1

This was essentially an exercise in finding relevant material but it also tested the candidates' ability to construct a coherent response based on appropriate material from a text. The better answers maintained a clear focus on the question but it was possible, and acceptable, to address 'why' and 'how' simultaneously or to take them separately. This was an opportunity to score well and most candidates took it. However, some answers were very thin and missed some very obvious points.

Candida Crewe had coped without a car for most of her adult life by using public transport such as tubes, buses and taxis. She admitted to hiring cars when necessary but basically she had managed with a double buggy for the children and a shopping trolley. She also walked a lot.

Her motives for doing this were not difficult to spot and the first paragraph of her article claimed that she had seen a car as 'a pointless extravagance for a single girl living in London.' She was appalled by the cost of buying and running a car and also concerned about the environment. She admitted that she felt rather smug and pleased with herself and became quite stubborn about the criticism from her friends. As she put it, 'disapproval' made her more determined to carry on without a car. She managed to forget the moments of frustration and felt that she was coping 'perfectly well'. In a way it had become a matter of honour and she also knew that if she did buy a car there would be no going back.

A2

This question tested the candidates' ability to follow an argument and it was important to look closely at what she said. However, language and structure were also relevant here and the better answers had a clear sense of 'how' as opposed to just 'what'. The best answers do take the extra step and analyse the textual detail rather than simply spotting it.

Candida Crewe presents herself as being driven beyond endurance and uses strong language to show her frustration with public transport. She justifies herself by pointing out that she really did try to do the right thing and she did hold out for a long time, resisting pressure from friends and sticking with public transport for seventeen years. She even persisted in her 'careless' lifestyle when she was heavily pregnant. Some candidates understood how this gave a kind of moral justification to her decision to admit defeat and most saw the relevance of

details such as buses taking forever, tubes sitting in tunnels for hours and taxis not turning up in making the negative case against public transport. The fact that she had endured cold, hunger and tiredness, and subjected her children to such discomfort, was also significant in this argument. However, the two anecdotes of the journey to the swimming pool and the 'trip' to the party showed the total misery she had suffered and were clearly decisive. The humiliation, delay and unacceptable treatment she had to endure certainly seemed to justify her surrender to the car. She describes public transport as 'torture' and few would wish to argue.

She also makes the positive case for the car, suggesting that her life has been transformed into comparative bliss. She mentions 'convenience and freedom' and 'mobility' as liberating features of the car.

The specific details were not too difficult to spot here but the best answers also saw the structure of her argument and the way she had used persuasive techniques to justify her decision. Above all, the good candidates understood that this was not a sudden decision prompted by an isolated difficulty with public transport.

A3

Some candidates were taken aback by the unsubtle, outrageous nature of the article by the Spin Doctor but it was very important to resist the provocation and stay with objective analysis of the persuasive technique. It was possible to follow the bullet points and look at content first but it was completely acceptable to follow the structure of the article and deal with various techniques as they appeared.

Some candidates argued, quite rightly, that this article gained influence from appearing under the banner of Top Gear and that it did no harm to have the picture of Jeremy Clarkson at the top of the page. The heading was certainly arresting and intriguing and the text pursued the image of 'boiling the frog', suggesting that motorists were similarly being boiled without noticing and that 'anti-car' measures would gradually increase until it became too late to stop them. This argument was central to the attempt to encourage motorists to 'do something NOW' and not everyone grasped the point of the extended metaphor, although most did at least notice it.

It was easier to spot the significance of the example of parking restrictions and the insidious nature of the attack on the freedom of the individual. The assault on the motives and tactics of local councils was another obvious technique. Criticising the local council is a popular hobby and the Spin Doctor tries to demonise local government, suggesting that its actions are vindictive, wasteful and immoral. He presents the situation as bureaucracy gone mad when individuals cannot hand over a part-used ticket to someone else and he even claims that this is suppressing a decent human instinct to be neighbourly. He makes the claim that councils are raising more money from parking than council tax and suggests that officialdom is determined to 'screw' every penny out of the poor motorist. He uses the examples of congestion charging in Durham and London to suggest that motorists are being persecuted and claims misleadingly that the police 'keep the cash' from their cameras. The final paragraph lists the legitimate reasons for wanting a car and then points out the dangers of doing nothing. Many candidates noticed the 'scare tactics' and the exaggeration for effect (needing a second mortgage to pay for a parking space or petrol at £3 a litre) as well as the assertion that 'speed doesn't kill'.

This article was not difficult to analyse in terms of language and tone. There was no pretence at measured debate here and the ranting tone included use of ridicule and sarcasm. Phrases such as 'privatised goblins' or 'brown-nylon trousered intellectuals' or 'we're in the Councilworld here' were obvious examples of the way the writer had tried to demonise petty officialdom and make drivers feel they were being persecuted. The use of second person was intended to establish common cause with the reader as was the assumption that the audience was a natural ally in the phrase 'my fellow drivers'. The informal, colloquial language was a reflection of the 'vox populi' style and there were some arresting turns of phrase such as 'anti-car claptrap' and 'buses are rubbish'. The dismissive tone was quite deliberate. He uses the word 'cure' to suggest that we are dealing with a disease and there are witty touches such as 'a cylinder short of the full six'. Some candidates noticed the use of imperatives and capitals and bold for emphasis. The reliance on stereotypes was another feature of the article.

The best answers showed understanding of the various persuasive techniques and they could point to specific examples and explain the effect. However, there is a real danger in simply spotting devices or just asserting the presence of sarcasm or rhetorical questions. Some candidates got themselves hopelessly lost in a vain, pointless search for technical features. My personal favourite was the candidate who assured me that the Spin Doctor was attempting to influence us by using 'superlative adjectives' such as 'You' and 'We'. The most successful candidates engaged with the substance of the text itself.

A4

This question involved evaluation of the texts and a good case could be made for either or both. I have said in previous reports that opinion is free and it is simply the quality of the argument on which the preference is based which matters. The bullet points were intended to help the candidates to construct a sensible response and a concise paragraph addressing each of the bullet points ensured that the answer had some shape and coherence. However, the key to successful evaluation is the ability to 'justify a preference', as one senior examiner put it, and most candidates would do well to remember that phrase.

There were a lot of influential arguments in each of the texts but many candidates were impressed by the way Candida Crewe used personal experience and anecdote to detail the difficulties of not having a car. Her description of the 'careless' life no doubt struck a chord with many of the candidates. She also made the case for the freedom and convenience offered by cars. The Spin Doctor was more assertive and his most telling argument was perhaps the claim that there is a conspiracy of authority against motorists. However, candidates also agreed with his arguments that cars are a necessity of modern life, that cars offer freedom and buses are 'rubbish'.

The language of Candida Crewe's article was generally factual, measured and reasonable, although she was not afraid to show her feelings and frustrations. She used some touches of humour and the style was conversational and occasionally colloquial. However, the Spin Doctor aroused stronger feelings. Some liked the lively, punchy style, the use of slang and insult while others were put off by the deliberately provocative manner and the 'frog' metaphor.

The attitudes of the writers were interesting and I think they were very influential. Candida Crewe's personality and approach appealed to a lot of candidates. The fact that she did try to live without a car and endured the nightmare of public transport worked in her favour. She expressed shame at having given in to the car and she also showed genuine concern for the environment. It was hard to disagree with her position. The Spin Doctor was more aggressive in his 'pro-car' attitudes and adopted the voice and attitudes of the common man. Some liked

his honesty but others noted the selfish, rather irresponsible views. There was no mention of the environment here and no attempt to explain the thinking of councils. Some picked up the assertion that 'speed doesn't kill' and were horrified by the apparent irresponsibility of that attitude.

Candida Crewe's article had a very clear sense of organisation and structure as she detailed her struggle against the car and the difficulties of trying to use public transport before admitting the advantages of car ownership. The text was 'plain' but the picture helped the reader to identify with her and the scene behind her summed up the problems she had faced.

The Spin Doctor approached the topic more obliquely but used illustration to support his view that there is a conspiracy against motorists by local authorities and the police. The Internet format was modern and lively and had the authority of the Top Gear programme behind it.

Section B

B1

This question gave the candidates their opportunity to respond to the Spin Doctor but this was a formal letter with a specific audience. The layout of the letter was more important than it usually is because it was up to the candidates to define their audience. They had a choice and, as I have said in these reports, choice is not always a blessing. Many candidates failed to give any clue about their intended audience and generally the layout of these letters was poor.

This was not an easy topic for young people to discuss, although they certainly have experience of public transport and the car is a reality of life for everyone, irrespective of age. The most sensible candidates tended to write about their own experiences of using various forms of transport and often they wrote well about the problems which were specific to their area. For example, those candidates who lived in rural, or even tourist areas, were inclined to see things differently from those who lived in towns and cities. It was not easy to follow the lead of the Spin Doctor and too often the local council was naively attacked for being responsible for the high price of petrol and other grievances over which they have no influence. Demands for unrestricted parking seemed similarly unconvincing. The most straightforward approach was to point out the problems, both local and environmental, of living with the motor car.

This task allowed the able candidates to show their sophistication in organising and expressing an argument and it is worth repeating that a clear sense of audience and purpose is absolutely essential in successful transactional writing.

B2

This question also had a particular audience, but the review provided a contrast with serious formality of the letter in B1. Although the bullet points were intended to help the candidates in structuring their answers, most were entirely comfortable with the style of a review and they knew their audience well.

Some candidates were driven to review their set books from *English Literature*, and it was difficult to resist the thought that their audience might not have been completely receptive to even the most enthusiastic encouragement to read *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *An Inspector Calls*. However, there were some excellent reviews of books which sixteen year olds might actually choose to read and some very mature choices, including Nick

Hornby, Bill Bryson and Mark Haddon. No one has quite managed to convince me about Harry Potter but that could be my problem!

The music reviews often left me feeling that I had stepped into an alternative universe but I have a significant list of albums to avoid. Coldplay featured prominently, as I might have expected, among a bewildering array of rappers, heavy metal bands and other performers who were clearly well suited to the task of provoking parents, or driving them to distraction. It was huge fun!

I particularly enjoyed the film reviews and they were often very sophisticated indeed. There are several films where I feel I virtually know the script by now and I have no desire to see any of them. *House of Wax* never quite did it for me, although it is clearly a massively popular film. *Star Wars* attracted much favourable comment but it was also the subject of a withering piece by a particularly gifted young man who could be writing for a magazine now.

More seriously, I do like this kind of task and I think it works well in various ways. It allows the candidates to draw upon their own interests and tastes but it also encourages them to write for a real purpose and audience. It also discriminates very well as those candidates who really do have a repertoire of styles can show their journalistic skills. It produces work which is fun to read but it also produces work which is very good.

In conclusion, I would simply like to express my appreciation to the teachers, examiners and candidates who all play their part in the success of this examination. It is not easy for any of us but there is so much to admire in what the candidates do in examination conditions.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2005

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SPECIFICATION A

Again, candidates of all abilities impressed examiners with their knowledge of, and engagement with, their set texts, and their ability to respond with insight and sensitivity to the unseen poems, a testimony to preparation in the classroom. This year, there was the added perceived challenge of the examinations being closed book; however, it would be fair to say that this made little or no difference to the qualities of the responses. Indeed, there was often a sense of liberation, with candidates no longer feeling the need to include lengthy chunks of quotation or marginalia. Having said that, it was impressive how candidates of all abilities were able to make accurate direct reference, or use brief integrated quotations. Some confidently asserted, "so and so says something like..." and were not penalised for doing so, as they were still showing detailed knowledge of the text. However, some candidates optimistically limited their response in the essay to the detail in the extract, and thus penalised themselves. This was probably most evident in the responses to *An Inspector Calls* and *Stone Cold*, for some reason! There was also more of a tendency this year for candidates to draw on material they had used in their mock exam, presumably (i.e. last year's paper), which sometimes worked better than others. On the whole, however, candidates took the closed book exam completely in their stride.

There was another slight difference in the papers this year, in that the "advice to an actor" type question appeared in Higher Tier questions for the first time, an innovation heralded both in INSET meetings and in this report last year. Candidates at this level, as at Foundation in previous years, responded well. The important factor in assessing these responses was, would what was written be helpful to an actor, and, while some candidates really engaged with the task, and explored, for example, body language, a more conventional, character study type approach was equally valid. Some, however, got on the wrong track, and gave advice to the character, rather than the actor. As ever, candidates need to be aware that they should show off their knowledge and understanding of the text, whatever the question.

Both poems elicited strong responses; some candidates, however, are still constrained by trying to fit the poem into a predetermined agenda. Whilst some can use acronym style frameworks to their advantage, (some used this year included STILTS, TWIRLS, and FISTS, which candidates had conscientiously written at the top of their answer!) they get in the way for others. And there is *still* the compulsion to identify rhyme schemes, as an end in itself. Thus, apparently *Sometimes* "has a rhyme which is a,a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,c,i,a,d,a,c,j,a,c,k," according to one candidate! Although candidates are not penalised for such observations, clearly it's a waste of their time to note them so punctiliously, without even attempting to link them to the poem's possible meaning. Device spotting perhaps reached its nadir with this declaration: "*The semi-colons create excitement.*".

Finally, although there were fewer rubric infringements, these few are too many, as it is really distressing to find candidates working their way through the whole booklet, on some occasions, until they finally reach a text they recognise. This happens on both tiers, so part of the exam preparation should include candidates handling "real" papers, whether in the mocks, or closer to the actual exam.

Higher Tier

Whilst the most frequently studied texts are still *Of Mice and Men* and *An Inspector Calls*, there seemed to be a slight increase in the study of other texts, often with great success: even *Hard Times* and *The Tempest* had a final flurry of activity in their last appearance on this specification! *The Merchant of Venice*, in particular, seemed more popular this year, very possibly owing to the recent film. There were more responses on *Anita and Me* at this level, too, candidates revealing real engagement with the novel. Of course, the film of *Anita and Me* had also been seen by many candidates; unfortunately, it's significantly different from the novel in some aspects, as is the case for perhaps the majority of film versions of the set texts, so we get references to Sheila Birling trying on a hat, or detailed reference to Lennie in the fields. This is something which needs to be kept in mind during the run up to the examination: while use of film versions of texts is undoubtedly useful, candidates need to be aware of any differences between film and text (a discussion of which can be valuable in itself, of course).

Section A

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings was, as ever, answered on by more than those who had studied it, owing to its place in the paper, and, also as ever, some of those managed a very respectable performance, tackling it as an unseen. The best answers explored the detail of the extract thoroughly, focusing on the images of "cement faces", and Uncle Willie as "a casserole", and all were clearly aware of the tension between characters. Q.1(b) was the more popular of the two essay options, and, although some relied a bit too much on last year's "po' white trash" episode, others selected detail thoughtfully, including the later appearances Momma makes in the text, and commented confidently on her "power and strength". Those who chose Q.1(c), answered with real insight and understanding of Maya's character and situation.

There was plenty of detail to comment on in the extract from *Hard Times* (and, indeed, again, some did well on it as an unseen!) Dickens' description of Bitzer gave ample opportunity for candidates to discuss, and the best achieved an overview of the character, too. Q.2(b) was the more frequently chosen essay of the two, although only the candidates performing at the highest levels showed their appreciation of Sissie's situation at the end of the novel. Those who chose Q.2(c) often wrote about industrialisation and the exploitation of the workers, and did so with insight and understanding.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha continues to work very well for the relatively small number of centres whose candidates study it. The best answers moved on from the knee jerk identification of short sentences, to show how they built up the rhythm of the beating. There were also thoughtful and insightful discussions of the relationships between the characters. Some, however, saw the incident more simplistically, from a 21st century standpoint of corporal punishment. There were some perceptive discussions of Kevin in Q.3(b), often showing how Paddy's changing relationship with him marks Paddy's development. Q.3(c) was also a popular choice, where, probably prompted by the extract, Paddy's Da got very short shrift, on the whole.

There were some excellent answers on *Silas Marner*. Candidates explored the detail of the passage with a sensitive understanding of the characters involved. The option to write as Nancy was taken by fewer than Q.4(c); candidates seem to be unsure of what to make of her, perhaps being a bit thrown by her loyalty to Godfrey along with her kindness to Eppie. There were some lovely responses to Q.4(c), however, with candidates really engaged with the question, although, again, some did not know what to make of Nancy!

To Kill A Mockingbird continues to be a very popular choice on this Tier. There was lots to write on in the extract, with the best noting the change from the familiar domestic scene established in the first paragraph, and highlighting features such as Scout's naivety, the use of darkness and the half heard conversation.

There still seem to be some centres where candidates are advised to steer clear of empathy tasks. This is a pity, as, when they are well done (which is more often than not, in fact), they can lift the whole script. Most who answered Q.5(b) established very convincing voices, interpreting characters and events from Atticus' thoughtful and measured point of view, although there were some surprising omissions of the trial, which would surely have loomed large in his memory. Q.5(c) was more frequently chosen, with responses ranging from narrative driven accounts, to thoughtful explorations of the "growing up" of a range of characters, even including the town of Maycomb. It may be worth pointing out that there are still candidates who arrive at the examination confusing the characters of Jem and Scout, or believing Scout to be a boy!

As ever, candidates responded to *Of Mice and Men* with confidence and engagement. Fortunately, although most referred to the social and historical significance of Crooks' situation, they didn't labour it, rather, more aptly, exploring his state of mind as revealed through his speech and behaviour in the extract. The best closely analysed how his body language revealed his opportunistic attempts to establish power, up to his capitulation at the end. Some candidates launched into tracking through the passage without focusing on the rubric "state of mind" and wrote more generally about the relationship between Lennie and Crooks. Close focus on the question and on the *whole* of the extract is always the key to success with this sort of question. The essays seemed equally popular. Many candidates obviously relished adopting George's dialect, and did so to good effect, showing a sensitive appreciation of his situation. A significant, if small, number, wrote as Lennie, so, while they got credit for what was relevant, inevitably penalised themselves. Every possible animal or derivative thereof was uncovered and discussed at one time or another in responses to Q.6(c), from the "cooties" to the ostrich feather mules and even, on one occasion, the sausage curls, although most sensibly focused on the more obvious features such as the mice and dogs, and discussed how they conveyed Steinbeck's ideas and the themes of loneliness, dreams and prejudice. Some very successfully explored the symbolism of the heron and the water snake, or of the restlessness of the horses. Just occasionally, candidates concentrated on Candy's dog in inordinate detail.

Stone Cold can elicit excellent responses on this tier, and this was also the case this year. All could empathise with Link's predicament, but the better candidates saw how Ginger's arrival affected Link, and the best got to grips with Swindell's use of language. There was some improvement on the tendency of previous years' candidates to neglect the later stages of the novel in the essay questions, although answers were often narrative driven, at the expense of the second part of the question in Q.7(b). Candidates who neglected the dramatic climax to the novel in their responses to Q.7(c) were doing themselves a disservice; the best wrote about the novel's structure, as well as its events.

Although *Anita and Me* is one of the longer texts, candidates retained its detail very well, and had clearly enjoyed it. The extract was rich with imagery which candidates addressed with insight and confidence in their discussion and analysis of its mood and atmosphere. The essays were probably equally popular. Candidates showed sensitive appreciation of the impact of Nanima's visit in Q.8(b) and those who chose part (c) discussed the relationship between Anita and Meena, and how Meena feels overshadowed by her for much of the novel, with thoughtful insight. It appears that this has been one of the more successful additions to the list, and one that may well gain in popularity.

Section B

Under Milk Wood, although not often studied, seems to be taught by enthusiasts of the play, and there were some excellent responses, analysing the extract in order to reveal the warmth of the relationship between the Cherry Owens. Answers on Q.9 (b) were thorough and sensitive, showing an appreciation of both the pathos and humour inherent in the text. Although Q.9(c) was less frequently chosen, it was also competently dealt with.

Close reading of the dialogue and stage directions allowed candidates to show clear understanding of Eddie and Beatrice's relationship, for those answering on *A View From The Bridge*, and there were many thoughtful and sensitive discussions of its complexities. The better answers here showed a good knowledge of Eddie's character, and selected apt parts of the play to support their judgements. Some gave advice to the character, as opposed to the actor, and some were over selective with their evidence. When writing about Eddie, the boxing, chair lifting, the kisses and his death would seem to be obvious key areas for focus, as well as his relationships with others. Most agreed with the statement offered in Q.10 (b), although some, validly, made cases for other themes. Some narrowed their discussion to justice, whilst some were narrative driven. The best answers, however, really probed the various loyalties involved, within the context of the Sicilian/Brooklyn cultures.

An Inspector Calls is the most frequently studied text for Section B, and most wrote well on the conflict between Sheila and Gerald. There was useful focus on the stage directions ("coolly", "bitterly", "with authority", "harshly" and so on). The better candidates discussed Gerald's change when Daisy's death comes home to him, although some made a valid case for him putting this on. The characters of Sheila and Gerald seemed to elicit particularly polarised opinions from this year's candidates. Some sympathised wholly with Sheila (one candidate even concluded, "*Well done, Sheila!*") whilst a surprising number were champions of Gerald : he'd obviously had the same effect on them as he did on Daisy and the older Birlings! Q.11(b) was the more popular of the two essays, with Sheila being the usual choice, followed by Eric (or some couldn't decide between the two), then Gerald and some struggled to make a convincing case for Mr. or Mrs. Birling. The most successful responses devoted the main part of their response to discussion of their chosen character; those who tried to discuss each character in turn before revealing their choice did not always manage to reach the level of evaluation associated with the highest grades. The most successful of responses to Q.11(c) would have been useful to any actor playing Birling, helpfully pointing out, for example, the importance of the irony of his early speeches, and his probable use of "a provincial accent to highlight his lack of upper class credentials". Less useful would be those specifying a specific build and colouring!

Responses to all three Shakespeare texts seemed more assured this year, and more willing to address the close detail of the extract - possible another positive by-product of the closed book examination. The passage from *The Merchant of Venice* worked well, although, surprisingly few candidates understood the meaning of "humour" and commented on Shylock's sick joke. There were also quite a few who had the misapprehension that Shylock's

long speech is addressed to Bassanio, rather than to the Duke. Some comments were engaged, if simplistic, such as Shylock "taking the micky" or being "quite cocky"! Where candidates really got to grips with the detail of the extract, however, they reaped the just rewards. Empathy questions can work particularly well with the closed book, and there were some highly convincing Bassanios, most of whom dwelt briefly with their having taken advantage of Antonio, before settling down with Portia (with apt caution after the business with the rings!) Q.12(c) elicited some very thoughtful responses. One candidate noted how Shakespeare seemed to "want the audience to know that justice isn't all it's cracked up to be", whilst another remarked on how, "Shylock's blind call for justice in turn justifies the justice we see inflicted on him".

With *Romeo and Juliet*, there were sensitive responses to Romeo and Balthasar's dialogue, with the majority noting the dramatic irony, Romeo's urgent string of questions, and Balthasar's predicament. Those who highlighted the role of fate moved on to demonstrate overview. There was, however, the occasional give-away of over dependence on the Luhrmann film, such as the candidate who noted that "the post van didn't get to Romeo's caravan in time"! There were many confident responses to Q.13(b), although some candidates got bogged down in itemising a stream of "what ifs". Some, too, spent too long probing other characters' culpability, and ran out of time to discuss the Friar. One candidate astutely introduced the role of fate by pointing out that, like Romeo, the Friar is also "fortune's fool." Q.13 (c) elicited varied and interesting responses, with many insightful comments on the different types of love, although, on occasion, there were some who seemed (like with the "animals" essay for *Of Mice and Men*) determined to include as many types of love as possible (such as Tybalt in love with fighting) so that more fruitful detailed discussion was cut short.

In that odd way we've come to expect, there was something of a late spurt of interest in *The Tempest* in its last year, before being replaced by *Othello*. Candidates had no problems discussing the characters of Antonio and Sebastian in Q.14(a), whilst most chose to write about Ariel, and did so well, exploring his function. Those who chose to answer on Q.14(c) selected quite a range of characters, with valid cases established for all.

Hobson's Choice continues to be a relatively popular choice - candidates write with real engagement on the play, and with real sympathy for Maggie and Willie, seeing beyond the bossiness of the former (most picked up, for example, on her retaining the flower). Most chose to write about Hobson, another character who always elicits strong responses, and, again, were considered in their judgements.

Another text which elicits engaged responses is *Blood Brothers*, and the extract was very successful again this year: for some reason, candidates proved adept at appreciating the classroom politics involved! Indeed, there was more sympathy for the teacher than may have been expected, and less for Mickey, "the class clown", as he was identified by many. Q.16 (b) was well handled, too; some focused on characters, working through systematically, then drawing a conclusion; some focused on specific characters; some discussed class and/or fate. As with the other advice to actor questions, some gave advice to Mrs. Johnstone, about her relationships with Mrs. Lyons and her children, but the majority did support their advice to the actor with apt detail. It would be fair to say, however, that there was a trend for responses to this sort of question to be thin on textual support, so this may be a message to pass on to candidates of the future.

Section C

The poem, *Sometimes*, by Sheenagh Pugh, worked really well for candidates throughout the ability range. A few missed the gloss for "muscadell", and some were a bit thrown by the enjambment (reading lines as "Sometimes things don't go, after all" and "Sometimes our best efforts do not go", for example), while some drew our attention to the ungrammatical "A people"! The majority, however, worked at the detail of the poem and reached personal and sensitive conclusions. Many were rightly touched by the final words, and left the exam room feeling they had been personally wished well for the rest of their exams! Others made links with recent events such as natural disasters, wars, or the General Election. Some identified an almost spiritual element ("*it is almost as if there should be an amen.*") Indeed, it was a fine example of how poetry can communicate at many different levels, and the confidence candidates felt in tackling the poem was really impressive. Those who really worked with the detail, particularly, for example, that of the hard frozen "field of sorrow" were likely to achieve marks at the upper end of the mark range.

Foundation Tier

There was a very high quality of work evident on this tier this year, and, at the top, a lot of scripts that would have stood up really well on the Higher Tier. Candidates, through the grades, wrote with engagement and evident knowledge, and there were fewer rubric infringements, mismanagements of time, or incomplete scripts, than in previous years.

There was evidence of candidates of all abilities answering on the whole range of texts, although, predictably, *Of Mice and Men* and *An Inspector Calls* were the most popular, probably followed by *Stone Cold*, *A View from the Bridge* and *Blood Brothers*.

Section A

As usual, and as on the Higher Tier, some coped pretty well with the extract from *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* as an unseen, but those who had actually read the text before the examination fared even better, and some wrote with real passion about the injustice of the social context, and with perception and anger about the complacency of the used-to-be sheriff. Some, in responses to Q.1(b), were not entirely clear who was not from Maya's family, and wrote about Bailey, for example, but otherwise Mrs. Flowers was a popular choice. Q.1(c) was the more popular choice of essay, however, and the incidents with the powwhite trash and the dentist were the most frequently selected. This text, although not frequently studied at this level, does work well, candidates engaging empathetically, and retaining its detail well.

When it comes to *Hard Times*, very few had studied this text at this level, but, interestingly, some managed to get a mark representing Grade C on the extract as an unseen, owing to its richness in detail. With the essays, the bullet points proved facilitating, and candidates wrote thoughtfully on both.

Another minority choice, relatively speaking, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, works well with candidates of all abilities, and many picked up on the anger, unfairness, and, even, humour inherent in the scene, whilst those working at the higher grades probed the subtleties of blame, and how the swearing served as a release and bonding factor for the brothers. The essay on Kevin was probably slightly less popular than that on the parents. Those who attempted it showed an understanding of Kevin's influence on Paddy, and how and why it changes. Some who wrote about the parents' relationship were a bit shaky as to the details of the relationship, particularly in the later stages of the novel. Strategies to clarify the detail of

story lines would be a valuable pre-exam activity for all, particularly those studying the longer texts, where re-reading may be less likely.

There seemed to be a greater number of Foundation Tier candidates studying *Silas Marner* this year, and very well they did, too: the clear story line and strong characters seem to compensate to a degree for its length and relative complexity of language. As usual, Godfrey was given short shrift, whilst there was much empathy evident for Eppie and Silas.. As on the Higher Tier, there was a tendency not to know what to think about Nancy, so the end of the extract was often skimmed over. Consequently, perhaps, Q.4(b) was not as popular as Q.4 (c), where candidates were able to select apt evidence in order to discuss Silas' character.

The better answers on the extract from *To Kill A Mockingbird* tracked through the extract, and most who did so clearly highlighted, or at least showed awareness of, its inherent tension. The best clearly appreciated the sense of threat, and the vulnerability of the family. Candidates are clearly very fond of the character of Atticus, and most showed sufficient empathy and knowledge of the text to achieve at least a D in their responses to Q.5(b). In responses to Q.5(c), those who attempted a narrative approach were disadvantaged, and apt selection, with judicious use of the bullet points, was the key to success. Again, with the longer texts, in particular, practice, just prior to the exam, in selecting key moments, is likely to be time well spent. With both these questions, the bullet points again proved useful to candidates.

By far the vast majority of candidates on this tier answered on *Of Mice and Men*. The key to C and above was an understanding of Crooks' situation and his essential loneliness, and, in (ii), of how the reference to George triggers Lennie's reaction. As usual, close reading, tracking and thoughtful selection reaped their own rewards. The quality of the empathy responses, with candidates writing as George, was very high, and raised the overall performance of many. Candidates felt sufficiently confident to offer their own interpretation of the character, and some had George relieved, some philosophical, and some angry. All were valid, and most remembered to include plenty of relevant detail. Q.6(c) was popular, too, and the bullet points steered them in the right direction. All coped with these, and an impressive number went on to address "importance", discussing the novel's symbolism and structure.

Stone Cold is the second most popular prose text at this level, and answers ranged from those who thought that Ginger had actually made £400 (and spent it on a bin bag!) and that Link had ideas beyond his station, hoping to stay in Buckingham Palace, to those who appreciated the warm relationship between them. Q.7(b) was the more popular essay choice. Some answers tended towards the narrative, and some focused on the early parts of the novel too much, omitting to mention the role of Gail, for example, who was one of the more obvious choices for "others". Many, however, used the bullet points well, and showed a clear knowledge of events and understanding of characters and relationships. Most of those who chose Q.7(c) had probably focused on the novel's structure and style in their preparation for the exam, and were well equipped to show their understanding of narrative technique, supported by detailed reference to the plot. Others could at least pinpoint tense parts, although, yet again, the novel's climax was often neglected.

As the extract from *Anita and Me* was so rich in detail, there were plenty of opportunities for discussion, and many candidates successfully highlighted apt detail, whilst all recognised the context. There was plenty of empathy with Meena, and the end of the passage, with the strong disagreement between the characters, got candidates writing (and also served as a useful launch pad for Q.8(c)). The clear focus of Q.8(b), together with its bullet points, helped candidates avoid straight narration, and this was also the case with Q.8(c). Although

it's a long novel, candidates at all levels of ability were not at all fazed by this, and really seemed to engage with the characters and their situations, and numbers opting to study the text seem to be growing.

Section B

Under Milk Wood was not often seen on this Tier, but those who chose it made relevant judgements about Mr. and Mrs. Cherry Owen, enjoying the slapstick fun of the extract, the better candidates picking up on the ritual element of the couple's drunken evenings. Characters featuring in responses on Q.9 (b) were usually drawn from Willy Nilly, Myfanwy Price, Polly Garter, and the Ogmores-Pritchards. Those who chose Q.9(c) often produced detailed responses. The play seems to be one of those texts which tend to be taught by real fans, and teachers' enthusiasm clearly transmits to their candidates!

A View from the Bridge, on the other hand, is one of the more frequently studied texts on this tier, and continues to elicit as good responses as ever. Candidates at all levels of ability had strong opinions on characters' speech and behaviour, with some pleasing focus on close detail, such as the significance of the italicised, "I'm no different," from Beatrice, or Eddie's biting of his lip. That sort of attention to detail is what gets candidates to C or higher, so any practice in identifying and discussing the effects of language is always invaluable. This "advice to the actor" task was, perhaps, the most successfully tackled of this type. Candidates focused usefully on the complexity of the character, and, therefore, the motives for his speech and behaviour. Those who chose Q.10(c), quite often, in a crafty, though understandable, move, chose the part of the play featured in last year's paper, or the boxing and chair lifting, or the kisses - all eminently appropriate. Some had retained their chosen part of the play in amazing detail, perhaps because they may have focused on it closely in class?

Probably the "favourite" on this tier, as on the Higher, is *An Inspector Calls*, however. Candidates certainly did not hold their punches when discussing Sheila and Gerald, often proving strictly partisan for one or the other. Others were more balanced, recognising Sheila's hurt, and her admission of collective guilt, as well as Gerald's distress when he takes in what has happened - although some hard bitten cynics, as on the Higher Tier, made a valid case for his putting this on, for sympathy! Q.11(b) was the more popular of the two essay choices; the bullet points here were intended to steer candidates away from merely telling the story, which this text tends to lead towards, and, on the whole, they were successful in doing so. Sheila was the most frequently chosen character, although most of the others, apart from Edna, cropped up at one time or another! The bullet points for Q.11(c) were similarly intended to focus candidates and help them avoid straight narration, but here were not quite as successful - perhaps because candidates were not entirely sure what happened before and after the inspector's visit. There were also candidates who gave advice to Mr. Birling (to be more understanding, etc.) rather than to the actor playing him. It would be well worth addressing this type of question prior to the examination (maybe for coursework?), as, when done as intended, it can work very well indeed, and seems to be enjoyed by candidates.

Since the demise of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare texts tend not to be studied so much for Foundation Tier, although there's no evidence that candidates are disadvantaged by such a choice. All were clear about the context of the extract from *The Merchant of Venice*, although some tended to duck the challenges of Shylock's long speech in order to focus on the dialogue with Bassanio. Those who selected a few key details from the whole extract and explored them in some detail would be in the C and above range of marks. Some of the Bassanio empathy responses spent too long on the first two bullet points, to the detriment of the rest of the answer; Q.12(c) was slightly less popular, even though its main focus was the

trial. It does seem that candidates can lack confidence in tackling the trial scene - maybe the popularity of television shows like *Law and Order* will re-engage them!

The extract from *Romeo and Juliet* worked well, many candidates discussing its dramatic irony with some insight. With Q.13(b), the most successful responses used the bullet points carefully, which drew them away from lengthy narrative. There were some well informed and thoughtful discussions here - most proving very charitable to the Friar. Less successful responses to Q.13(c) wrote generally; better ones pinned their discussion to specific characters and events in the play.

The Tempest is very rarely studied at this level, but those who did so understood well what was going on in the extract, made sensible comments about Ariel, or (a very few candidates here) expressed sympathy for a character - some good cases were made for Caliban, Ariel, and Miranda. Although the play can work well at this level, as at Higher, not many are going to miss it, rather sadly!

Those candidates who had studied *Hobson's Choice* showed a real grasp of the characters of Maggie and Willie. Even those candidates who did not pick up on the fact that it was their wedding night found plenty to say about their characters and relationship. Those who saw Maggie's softer side, exemplified by her retaining the flower, did particularly well. Most chose Q.15(b) for the essay option, having, understandably, perhaps, more to say about Hobson than Albert. This is a warmly received text, and always elicits strongly engaged responses.

Blood Brothers is the other "big hitter" amongst the drama texts. There were interesting responses to the extract: some found it pretty typical: some felt it was typical of a certain type of school (!); some felt it was rooted in the bad old days: some were sympathetic to the teacher; some were sympathetic to Mickey - all, however, had strong opinions, and those who tracked through and selected evidence to support their judgements, did very well. The bullet points for Q.16(b) proved facilitating (*Blood Brothers* is another of those texts where candidates feel compelled to tell the story). With Q.16(c), those who did not make the mistake of advising the character on birth control and so on, and actually selected and highlighted detail from the text in order to help the actor, were rewarded accordingly.

Section C

The poem *About Friends* by Brian Jones allowed for responses, and, therefore, achievement, at all levels, and even those who slightly misread the situation, and felt the talking of hundreds of sentences showed their closeness, still could get a long way by focusing on the poems detail. The main differentiating factors tended to be an awareness of the change in mood (achieved by those who picked up on the word "sad") for D and above, and those who discussed the significance of the last line, and the image of the river, ("*Friendship is like a river. It has to keep going or it dries up and dies*") for C and above. Some interestingly probed the references to the twigs and butterflies: it was good to see this sort of close attention to detail. One, for example, speculated, "*I think the butterflies symbolise the fluttering away of time and true friendship.*". Some felt it was an appropriate choice of poem for candidates at a crossroads in their lives, and determined to maintain their friendships, so they would not get in a similar predicament!

So, again, it was a privilege to see how candidates time and again and rose to the considerable challenges of the examinations, revealing not only their knowledge and understanding, but also their enjoyment, of the set texts and the unseen poems - centres from all over the country should be rightly proud of their candidates' achievements.

SPECIFICATION B

I am happy to report that the move to closed book examination seems to have had no effect on candidates' performance. Teachers and candidates deserve credit for this achievement. Clearly some candidates had their lists of learned quotations (and one even supplied the list in the answer book) and were able to use them appropriately within their answers. Although this was pleasing I'd like to repeat last year's INSET message that close reference to events and 'echoing' are also effective methods of providing evidence.

I am a little concerned that many candidates feel that every question I set can be answered by referring to the first twenty lines of any of the prose texts. There were many occasions this year when I wanted to ask why the first twenty lines were the only ones to be discussed. Again this poor selection of material had an effect upon performance. For example candidates writing about *Villa Park* would have been better served by concentrating upon the description of the match, or the journey to the ground rather than dealing with the opening.

The examination continues to be dogged by uneven performance. Candidates must realise that answers on the extracts are worth ten marks while the comparative essays/drama questions are worth twenty marks; it is alarming that this simple realisation seems to escape so many candidates. Lots of candidates penalise themselves in this way and it has a great impact on performance especially as three questions are out of twenty.

There were times this year when I felt that some candidates were dealing with unseen material they had not seen before and an important message has to be that candidates are expected to have studied the entire anthology. Teachers who decide to omit material are taking a big risk.

Prose extract.

This worked well with candidates alert to the narrative shifts in the piece. Answers ranged from the account of an encounter between a man and a horse to psychological readings about attempting to reclaim childhood or the ongoing struggle between Nature and urbanisation. I was quite willing to consider full marks for candidates who were able to demonstrate the power shifts between man and horse; in fact I think it is helpful to start with the textual surface.

Prose essays.

The question dealing with life-changing encounters was of a familiar type and was often dealt with successfully. Responses ranged across the texts. However, as detailed above, candidates who relied exclusively on the opening of stories inevitably penalised themselves.

The question on setting and atmosphere was dealt with less successfully. Part of the problem was selecting the opening lines rather than having the confidence to go to the description of the football match. Often candidates selected appropriate passages of text only to be incapable of accounting for the authors' skills in creating atmosphere. Some candidates inevitably narrated while others launched prepared character studies. For the second year some candidates were convinced that I had set a question on "tension". I had not.

Selected poem.

I was surprised to find a dip in performance on this element of the examination. I felt this was an accessible poem but with the benefit of hindsight I might have provided bullet points on both tiers. I do wonder, however, if some candidates were not prepared for this poem. Some teachers possibly felt that it was too short or too straightforward to merit close attention in class. I felt that it was important to realise that it was in fact pollution which caused the beautiful sunsets but unfortunately many candidates believed that the sunsets had vanished due to the pollution.

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