



GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION
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EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

SUMMER 2007

	Page
English	1
English Literature	29

Statistical Information

GCE (AS/Advanced)

This booklet contains summary details for each unit: number entered; maximum mark available; mean mark achieved; grade ranges. *N.B. These refer to 'raw marks' used in the initial assessment, rather than to the uniform marks reported when results are issued.*

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 2007

- 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, Adviser, Wakefield LEA;
 - Coursework - Mr. S.H. Sage, formerly 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

It is pleasing to report that more centres are using the checklist of activities, sent out with the coursework materials, before despatching the folders to the moderators. There are still a few issues which in some centres need to be addressed:

- In the Writing section of the English folder, the teacher or student should state whether or not a spellchecker has been used if the work has been completed on a word processor.
- Moderators find it helpful if less common poems are included with the pack.
- Many centres use a treasury tag to attach a student's work together, thus dispensing with folders. This reduces the postage costs and is a much more convenient way of presenting the students' work. Some centres still put coursework into plastic wallets. This is totally unnecessary and delays the moderation process.
- It is essential that when students have been helped with writing frames or other forms of scaffolding that copies of the materials are included with the folders.
- The specifications make it quite clear that in-text and summative commentary should appear on the students' work.
- The standard of justification for oral assessments has improved but there are still some centres where minimal consideration is given to this aspect. Such assessments should be student specific rather than simply stating the criteria for assessment. When justifications are deemed to be inadequate, moderators will request further information.
- I appreciate that the centre reports sometimes arrive too late in KS4 teaching for the advice to be acted upon for the Year 11 cohort. If this is the case, a letter noting this situation is help for the moderator. Obviously moderators do not want (or need) to comment on aspects that teachers are aware need adaptation. Such information from the centre prevents the moderator repeating advice.

- It is not necessary for centres to include information about the Speaking and Listening assessments, which are a totally separate part of the course. As noted above, if a piece of Reading or Literature is assessed orally, full justifications for the marks are essential.
- A small number of centres only sent one folder per teacher. It is essential that moderators see at least two but preferably three folders from each teacher. In big centres, this will mean extending the range of the sample beyond the normal 20 folders.
- Teachers are reminded that the 'split' mark only applies to the Writing section of the English folder.
- Care needs to be taken when transferring marks from the folders to the E1/EL1. A very large number of errors in transcription occurred this year.

Assignments

English folder: Wales version

As I reported last year, the Welsh Relevance aspect is almost always fulfilled with poetry. Gillian Clarke, Dylan Thomas and RS Thomas remain the most popular writers with a wide variety of verse represented. Some centres are now taking the opportunity to link Anglo-Welsh poems with poets from other cultures, for example Clarke's *Catrin* with Heaney's *The Follower*. Few centres look at Pre-1914 writers like Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd and Dafydd ap Gwilym who provide a rich source of verse still relevant to today's teenagers. It is perhaps a pity that such writers, especially the latter who can be regarded as the father of Welsh poetry, are not considered since there are a number of good translations on the market. When the Welsh Relevance aspect was covered by work on drama, Dylan Thomas (*Under Milk Wood*), Emyln Williams (*How Green is my Valley*) and *Act One Wales* are the only texts represented. As I noted last year, where drama is used to fulfil the Different Cultures requirement, Arthur Miller is the most popular.

English folder: England version.

Shakespeare

Task setting on Shakespeare has become fairly predictable. Most centres study *Romeo and Juliet* with a task based on a single scene very often linked to Shakespeare's way of creating tension or revealing character or themes. This close study has the advantage of allowing the students to write in detail on the way Shakespeare uses language though many candidates content themselves with rehearsing surface detail. It must be stressed that in Reading and Literature work students cannot gain high marks unless they are able to analyse text closely. It is not sufficient to 'spot' techniques. Students need to be able to explain how the technique uniquely works in that particular part of the text.

The other approach to the study of Shakespeare is more wide ranging. A very popular task this year was 'Who is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?'. Apportioning blame is relatively simple in a play where virtually all the characters are culpable in some degree or other and many students can demonstrate knowledge of the text very well in this type of task. However, I think it is more difficult for them to demonstrate the high level skills of close textual analysis. As I have said on previous occasions both in general reports and in Insets, it is important to match the task to the ability of the student and while the 'responsibility' question will allow students access to the middle grades, it can make reaching the higher grades quite difficult. The similar task concerning responsibility for Macbeth's actions in the early part of the play (typically 'Who is responsible for the death of Duncan?') does give the

students opportunities to investigate imagery. Some students tackled the task 'Montague describes Juliet as 'true and faithful' at the end of the play. How far is this true?'. Potentially this task has much to recommend it since it allows students to look at both Juliet's actions and her language while begging many questions about to whom she is 'true and faithful'.

I was pleased to see some centres are branching into new directions. For the first time this year I saw on work on *Coriolanus* ('How does Shakespeare show the arrogant and aggressive nature of Coriolanus?'), *Richard III* ('How does Shakespeare reveal Richard's character in Act 1 scene i?') and *Titus Andronicus*.

As I have pointed out on a number of occasions, there is no need for extensive biographical details in this or any other part of the folder. Generally such details are simply copied from a text or the internet and they add nothing to the work. Sometimes, however, historical or sociological aspects are pertinent. This year some students tackled the task 'Hero is a true woman of the 16th Century but Beatrice is a woman of modern times. Discuss.' This produced some very interesting essays where the students had clearly grasped Elizabethan attitudes to a daughter's rights and duties and could apply appropriate contextual material. The only danger with this type of task is that it could spiral off into a polemic on feminist issues thus leaving the text, which must be central to every essay, abandoned.

Different Cultures

As I noted in last year's report, textual choices remain disappointingly predictable in this section of the folder. Many centres rely on a small group of poems often including Agard's *Half-Caste* and Leonard's *Unrelated Incidents*. I remain convinced that these poems along with Ferlinghetti's *Two Scavengers in a Truck, Two beautiful People in a Mercedes* do not offer very much material for analysis and high quality essays upon them are very rare indeed. Last year I offered some different combinations and it was pleasing to see that some centres were prepared to consider these poems as alternatives. There is a wealth of poetry suitable for this section of the folder which is presently, for the most part, going unconsidered. In an attempt to widen the choice I note below some alternatives spotted in this year's folders. Most of these poems are available on the internet.

**I sing of the Body Electric* (Whitman)/ *I sing of the Body Reclining* (Nichols)
I am not that Woman (Naheed)/*The Bridegroom* (Lochhead)
Beach Burial (Kenneth Slessor) / *Futility* (Owen)
**Because I couldn't stop for death* (Dickinson) / *Visiting Hours* (Norman McCaig)
Hunting Snake (Judith Wright)/ *Snake* (Lawrence)
The Follower (Heaney)/ *Walking Away* (C Day Lewis)
For my grandmother knitting (Lochhead) / *Aunt Jennifer's Tigers* (Adrienne Rich)
Aunt Julia (Norman McCaig)/ *Death of an Irishman* (Michael Hautnell)
**Once upon a time* (Gabriel Okara)/ *We wear the mask* (Lawrence Dunbar)
My Village (Shfalika Verma)/ *I Shall Return* (Claude McKay)
**Stones rush to dance* (Divan 171) (Jalaluddin Rumi)/ *Sonnet 18* (Shakespeare)
I Shall Return (Claude McKay)/ *Nostalgia* (Carol Ann Duffy)
My Father (Tony Curtis)/ *The Mother* (Edwin Morgan)

Asterisked combinations could also be used in the Pre-1914 section of the Literature folder.

Since work in this part of the folder is likely to fill the Post-1914 poetry section in the Literature folder, it is important that when tasks are designed they demand a comparative element as I noted in last year's report. The fact that both poems are from a different 'culture' is not in my view a sufficiently strong basis for comparison. Thus a title like 'Read *Hurricane Hits England* (Grace Nichols) and *Not my Business* (Niyi Osundare) and discuss how the poets represent their culture' is unlikely to produce high quality work. Firstly it does not require students to compare, essential if the essay is to be entered in the Literature folder, and secondly the two poems are not clearly linked by theme.

The recommended approach to writing poetry comparisons both here and in the Literature folder is for each poem to be investigated before the comparative aspect is explored. This allows the student to demonstrate clearly his or her understanding of the content, theme, mood, viewpoint and style of each poem, using this as a basis for the comparison. Focus in this part of the essay should be on what the poet is trying to say and how he or she is trying to say it. The main weakness to be found in literature analysis is that the student often remains happy to concentrate on the content of the verse, thus missing the essential aspect of how the poet has shaped language for particular effect.

Narrative/expressive writing

Moderators generally find this the most interesting part of the folder and when tasks have been set up to give the students structured freedom both in terms of subject matter and approach the outcomes can be startlingly good. Even down the ability range with the right motivation and a suitable choice of subject, students can perform very well indeed. This is particularly the case in autobiographical writing which remains the staple in many centres. Such work is often very revealing especially when it is focused on significant or life-changing moments. In these cases, since the student has an emotional commitment to the subject matter, the outcome can be heartfelt and moving. Autobiographical work which tries to cover the whole of a student's life is generally less convincing.

I noted in the Administration section of this report that in the Writing section of the folder, the student (or teacher) should state if a spell checker has been used when the work is word processed. This requirement is noted in the Specifications but rarely fulfilled. It is worrying for a moderator if the general standard of mechanical accuracy in a folder is low and a word processed Writing piece is perfect in spelling and punctuation. When deciding on the mark for the Sentence structure, punctuation and spelling part of the split mark, consideration should be given to how much help the student has gained from the computer.

Happily, very few centres require all the students to write on the same topic. The days of an entire cohort writing a story entitled 'The Assassin' are thankfully nearly over though there are still a number of centres where this is the case. This year saw the appearance of a similar task on 'The Hunted'. Like the work on 'The Assassin' in previous years, this title resulted in formulaic writing which is not a very good preparation for the demands of Paper 1 Section B.

Another issue which worried moderators this year was the number of occasions where students had been asked to write an additional chapter to a novel or write empathetically about trench life in the First World War. As I have stated in the past, these types of writing are rarely fully successful (the former particularly) and they limit the response of the students in the only part of the folder where they can have some autonomy.

Analytic/Persuasive Writing.

Before choosing tasks for this section of the folder, it is wise to consider the criteria for assessment to be found in the English Specifications. For a number of years now some centres have been entering inappropriate material based on the analysis of a media text. Sometimes this work is directly taken from the student's GCSE Media Studies folder. Essentially this is a Reading task rather than a Writing one. The stress in writing for this part of the folder is on audience, format and purpose and the analysis of a media text allows the student no access to these essential parts of the assessment criteria. Tasks should have a clear audience from which other aspects will follow.

Since it is in this part of the folder that most plagiarism is found, it is wise to choose topics which make it difficult for the students to cheat. There is so much easily downloadable information on the internet about abortion, capital punishment, vivisection, drug abuse and similar topics. Setting tasks on these issues is dangerous. Generally, cheating is very easy to spot and the moderators are aware of the sites that are usually plundered for such essays. The punishment for plagiarism is generally the loss of all the marks for the folder. As I have noted in the past, there is a particular danger in setting a film review as a task though some centres avoided the obvious risks by making work on this topic fully supervised.

Local and school/college issues provide a much safer approach and I note below some which have been successfully attempted in 2007:

A report to the Headteacher on the suitability of the KS4 curriculum.

Report to the local education authority on why the school/college needs £25,000.

A pair of letters on a school trip: one from the school with details; a second from a parent concerned about health and safety issues.

A letter/report to a headteacher/principal on how a grant of £100,000 should be spent.

A speech to a meeting of local householders on the closure of a local park.

A report to a headteacher/principal on health and safety issues relating to the school/college.

A letter to the local town/county council on ways of improving local amenities to encourage tourism.

Two letters, one for and one against, on the siting of a retail park on the edge of a village/town.

Two letters to a local newspaper on local teenagers' behaviour.

None of these topics encourages whole scale downloading of information and all can be tied closely into local community concerns which are likely to be much more relevant to the students' interests than the 'big' issues noted above.

With this type of writing, it is essential that students think themselves into a real situation and have a clear idea for whom they are writing. The best responses come when the students believe that the designated audience will actually be interested in their views. Tasks related to schools and colleges can be made more real by telling the students that the Headteacher/Principal will see their work. This approach perhaps has the added benefit of making them more conscious of stylistic and accuracy aspects.

English Literature

Pre-1914 poetry

If, as is generally the case, this work is fulfilling part of the comparative requirement of the Literature folder, it is worth remembering that it is not necessary for both of the poems to be pre-1914. In fact, combinations of pre and post 1914 verse often lead to better outcomes since stylistic differences are likely to be more pronounced. As in the work on Different Cultures, it is best if students look at each poem separately before trying to compare. Despite comments in previous reports, some students believe that the prosodic elements are of greater importance than theme, content and style. Such students spend far too long analysing rhyming patterns, counting lines and trying to find significance in the number of verses. This often replaces a close examination of the way that the writer is using language, choices in vocabulary and the nature of the imagery.

The key to success when comparing poems is to analyse how the two poets consider a central theme. Thus the starting point must be a clear understanding of what the poems hold in common. Both, for example may be about rejection (e.g. *Tell me no more how fair she is* by Henry King and *Villanelle* by William Empson) or romance (e.g. *A Birthday* by Christina Rossetti and *Night Thoughts* by Goethe) or marriage (e.g. *Marriage a la Mode* by Dryden and *Call it a Good Marriage* by Robert Graves). Teachers and tutors need to be quite clear about how the poems are linked before deciding to teach them. Concentration should then be upon how the link is played out by the two poets. Sometimes sociological and cultural aspects will be relevant but as noted in the section of this report on Shakespeare, biographical details are not necessary.

Some interesting combinations spotted this year included:

Surprised by Joy (Wordsworth)/ *On my first Sonne* (Jonson)
Hunchback in the Park (Dylan Thomas)/ *The Gypsy Camp* (Clare)
Burial of an Infant (Vaughan)/*Graves of Infants* (Clare)
**I look into my Glass* (Hardy)/*Mirror* (Plath)
**Sonnet 17* (Shakespeare)/*The Writer* (Sujata Bhatt)
When we two parted (Byron)/ *Like the Touch of Rain* (Edward Thomas)
The Poison Tree (Blake)/*The Poison Flower* (Mary Coleridge)
**Upon my Son Samuel* (Anne Bradstreet)/ *Sweetest Love, I do not go* (John Donne)
**I, too* (Langston Hughes)/*A Slave's Dream* (Longfellow)
**Beggary Heart* (Rabindranath Tagore)/*Denial* (George Herbert)

Asterisked combinations could also be used in the Different Cultures section of the folder.

Most of these poems can be found on the Internet.

Prose

Most centres study a post-1914 prose text for the examination and so the coursework text is almost always pre-1914. Text choices do not vary greatly with short stories remaining predominant. The time demands of teaching KS4 unsurprisingly make the study of a full novel something of a rarity though there are centres where tasks are set which require knowledge of the whole text. The most favoured authors remain Dickens, Hardy, Mary Shelley, the Brontës and Austen. When a section of text is chosen, it is most often the opening chapter of the novel ('How does Dickens create tension in the opening chapter of *Great Expectations*?'). A study of the fifth chapter of *Frankenstein* is becoming more common. An increasingly popular novel choice is Wells' *War of the Worlds* though along with the Mary Shelley text, this work seems to attract a good deal of plagiarism. The most popular short stories are *The Speckled Band* (Conan Doyle) and *Lamb to the Slaughter*

(Dahl). *The Vendetta* (Maupassant) and *Desiree's Baby* and *The Story of an Hour* (Chopin) have a dedicated following. Sometimes tasks on these texts are far too vague (e.g. 'What happens in *Desiree's Baby*?') and give the student no access to the higher-grade assessment criteria. On other occasions, tasks are set which require considerable knowledge of the genre (e.g. 'Show how *The Speckled Band* and *Lamb to the Slaughter* are representative of the detective fiction genre.') The student needs to be very aware of the history of the genre to be able to handle a task like this and focus can move away from the text.

Less able students seem to thrive when writing about stories with lots of descriptive detail. Thus the common task on the opening of *Great Expectations* tends to enable students to write with focus on the textual aspects. These students unsurprisingly find it much more difficult to handle text which is transparent like *Pride and Prejudice*. As noted above, texts should be chosen with the ability of the student firmly in mind. More subtle aspects of literary style, like Jane Austen's constant ironic viewpoint, are much harder to pin down and write about effectively.

Assessment

It is essential that one person be responsible for the standard applied throughout a centre. This places a great burden on that person but does ensure that scaling is much less likely. There are plenty of very large centres (250 candidates plus) where year on year assessment is accurate and fair. The folders from such centres generally carry clear evidence of the internal cross moderation procedure. When this process results in a change in marks, it is helpful if the reason for the change is made apparent. In other centres where there is no single guiding hand, the assessments can be very wayward resulting in full centre or teacher scaling. Reports sent to centres early in the autumn term generally indicate the reason for any scaling applied.

Generosity in the assessments will lead to scaling. This must happen to ensure that all candidates are treated equally. Scaling will not be applied, however, without two moderators assessing the work. The most frequent reasons for generosity are optimistic assessments of the sentence structure, punctuation and spelling aspect of the 'split' mark for writing and the over-rewarding of image spotting and narrative approaches in the Reading and Literature work. The criteria for assessment make it clear that there is a progression from 'a response to' a text at G grade to showing 'originality of analysis and interpretation' at A*. Students, who are satisfied with a basically narrative approach, scooping the surface details from the text, are unlikely to gain more than high E ('familiarity') or low D grade ('understanding'). To gain a C grade the work needs to display 'insight'.

Plagiarism remains a problem especially in the analytic/persuasive section of the English folder and the prose section of the Literature folder. As I have commented above, the Shelley and Wells' texts seem to attract most occurrences of cheating. On a number of occasions this year, it has been immediately apparent to moderators that a particular essay is clearly not the work of the student. Differences in style and vocabulary are chief indicators of a plagiarised piece and it is worrying that such pieces have not been picked up in centres. Irregular mark profiles are also sometimes indicative of suspicious essays. Once again I urge centres to be vigilant for this type of malpractice. As has been noted in the past, it is helpful to set tasks that do not tempt students to plagiarise. Hence my worry about the 'big' issues noted in the analytic/persuasive section upon which there is a massive amount of easily available material to hand at the click of a mouse.

Over-reliance on very detailed worksheets also remains a worry. Obviously teachers will help students with their work but when a moderator sees two or more almost identical essays, suspicion is aroused and such cases will always be investigated. There have been cases this year where it has emerged that students have for the most part simply copied notes provided by their teacher. This is bad enough but when the teacher goes on to credit the student with comments like 'good understanding of language shown', when he or she is in effect marking his or her own work, it is difficult to see how this is not dishonest. Ultimately in these circumstances it is the students who suffer. Firstly they are led to believe that they have performed much better than they actually have and secondly the inevitable re-mark, which establishes how much of an essay is actually written by them, will almost certainly result in lower marks than they would have achieved had they been left to their own devices. I believe good students are particularly disabled by this approach. It becomes impossible to sort out the competent from the good and the very good.

While moderators will reach their own decisions regarding standards, it is always helpful if the class teacher has completed the summative assessment box on the coversheet. As noted in the administrative section of this report, it is a requirement that the students' work be annotated. In some centres this year, students' work bore no indication of having been seen by a teacher.

On a more cheering note, it is heartening to report that the vast majority of centres produce accurate assessments and the standard of in-text and summative commentary is often exemplary. This reflects how seriously English teachers in England and Wales take their departmental responsibilities. I am grateful for the sheer professionalism evident in most centres.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Administration

It is pleasing to report that there continues to be positive development in the basic recording of the tasks used for assessment. Many of the moderators noted that the information collected on the E3 form was much better than in previous years, with activities fully described and clearly linked to the purposes. It would appear that the days of the 'one-line commentary' are in decline. Records of the work undertaken also exhibit development, with many centres amending the record sheets suggested at INSET meetings to suit their own requirements. There were many instances of booklets and forms which accommodated peer and self-assessment, while also exemplifying the criteria. Pupils' comments were realistic and self critical. This trend was often being led by the Assessment for Learning agenda and was also influenced by the KS3 teacher assessments. In both instances it was seen as a way of raising the profile of Speaking and Listening with pupils.

There were still a few issues which arose and caused some concern – though it must be said these were in the minority.

- Some moderators had difficulties in arranging visits and, indeed, in contacting staff at centres. There seemed to be little flexibility in some cases to accommodate visits other than in a narrow range of time in February.
- There were a number of cases where moderators arrived for a visit to be told the member of staff responsible was absent – and no alternative could be arranged. Some moderators rescheduled visits on more than three dates, which seems unreasonable.
- In a small number of cases, there was considerable inconsistency within departments concerning the information recorded on the E3 forms, with variation from very detailed to minimal. It seems surprising that there should be such differing degrees of detail.
- The provision of unsuitable accommodation for the visit still occurs occasionally. This year one moderator found the room provided small and cramped, which restricted the activities and had an inhibiting effect on the pupils.
- Some centres still fail to provide all the pupils' records at the time of the visit. 'Samples' of records are often produced, which is not adequate. The situation was not as much of a problem as last year, but there are still a number of centres which will receive additional visits next year as a result.

Assignments

Contact with centres prior to the visits has extended beyond simply arranging an appropriate time, with many teachers keen to discuss the format of the visit and to run through the proposed activities. This sensible approach ensures that the balance of tasks is appropriate and can preclude situations where there is either too much reading to be done on the day, or tasks are over prepared and stale. Thoughtful planning was much in evidence with teachers striving to create tasks which were both enjoyable and structured. There was much less reliance on Literature based material, which was to the pupils' advantage, although judiciously chosen texts of any kind can give pupils some focus. However, there were still examples of rehearsed and over prepared tasks, with pupils repeating assignments they had already 'done' for an earlier assessment. Again, there were instances of pupils being involved in only one activity – in one instance, fifteen different pupils each performing once – which made assessment difficult. It really is best if the suggested group size of six to eight pupils is used, and all are given the opportunity to be seen in at least two different contexts to allow a fair assessment to be made. There were also cases where the emphasis was on product rather than process. One moderator recalled a particularly painful experience

where a group of pupils discussed their literature text with the moderator, teacher and other pupils as an 'audience'. Needless to say, their discussion was very inhibited.

PowerPoint presentations seemed more popular this year, but were not universally successful. Too often they simply replaced reading from a script, often with the pupil's back to the audience. Although the technological 'pyrotechnics' (as one moderator described PowerPoint presentations!) can be entertaining, there are serious matters to consider. Weak candidates for whom spelling and punctuation is a challenge have errors magnified by PowerPoint: perhaps an element of proof-reading should be involved. Their ineptness with the mechanical side of English is normally hidden by the Speaking and Listening task, but not so with PowerPoint. Some pupils simply download material from the Internet to give a biography of a so-called celebrity, accompanied by a series of facts. Their real knowledge of the celebrity is often non-existent. However, where pupils use the technology as an additional feature to enhance their presentation, its use can be impressive.

As has happened with written coursework, some teachers are finding inspiration from websites such as 'teachit'. A word of caution here: while there is good material – one example cited, 'Doctor's Dilemma', was seen to work well in a number of cases with able pupils who had had opportunity to prepare their roles overnight – it should not be used as a 'one size fits all' solution.

From the many successful tasks observed by the moderators, I have selected the following which may prove helpful in broadening the range on offer.

Individual Extended Presentation

- Promoting a set of 'Modern Wonders of the World'.
- Personal interests, which included James Bond books and films; the Joys of Juicing; Model Aircraft; Barn Owls (complete with live visual aid) and Burnley Football Club.
- Room 101 – but a stipulation that one object had to be serious (which enabled access to 'complex material' aspect of the A grade criteria).
- Design a product and make a presentation to a panel of prospective backers.
- A 'shoebox' activity: bringing in a shoebox containing a number of personal items which had strong memories associated with them, then talking about each item.

Group Discussion and Interaction

- Issues such as 'The new school uniform' or 'The new school day'.
- How to spend a set amount of money on school improvements.
- Discussion on *Celebrity Big Brother* and the relative merits of such role models.
- Proposed raising of the school leaving age.
- Charities as fashion.

Drama Focused Activity

- *The Seduction* used for chat show role play.
- Are we obsessed with looking good? Role play between advertising executive, a size zero model, a worried mum and a teenager aspiring to be a model.
- Improvising 'modern' versions of scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Assessment

Positive and valuable discussion was a feature of the sessions following the tasks. In general, assessments were easily agreed between moderators and teachers, basing judgements on what was seen on that occasion, and closely related to the criteria. There were times when preconceptions about a particular pupil's performance overshadowed his or her performance on the day and led to anomalies of assessment. There is sometimes a tendency to think that what is seen on the day must overrule previous assessment. This is definitely not the case – although if a pupil performs particularly well there is no reason why this should not be taken into account in the final mark.

In some centres, the sample of candidates comprised some pupils other than the teacher's own. This can be a very good idea – providing individuals are not simply 'thrown together' on the day, which can result in considerable awkwardness. The advantages include greater objectivity and less likelihood of allowing prior knowledge of pupils to influence judgements.

There was a tendency in some centres to reward speaking and not give sufficient import to listening.

Smaller centres are in a particularly difficult situation and welcome the expertise of the moderator in confirming their assessments. This is also true of centres with new members of staff who appreciate someone who can give an overview.

There are still vast discrepancies in the time given for internal moderation. Although there is wholehearted acceptance of the necessity for dedicated time to be given in order to ensure fairness of assessment, in many instances senior management teams remain unconvinced. There is an on-going battle to achieve parity with Welsh and Modern Foreign Languages in many centres. Centres are reminded that there is clear guidance concerning cross moderation in the specification, which can be used to support requests for time.

Many centres are using their own video footage as a basis for departmental discussion of standards, and this is proving a useful addition to the standardising materials produced by the Examination Boards. Other methods in place include using Year 10 examination time for a day of Speaking and Listening. One centre has a timetable whereby every twentieth teaching day the normal timetable is suspended, and departments make 'bids' for year groups. This could allow for an extended period of speaking and listening activities.

Once again, moderators have commented very positively on the development of speaking and listening, with huge improvements in record keeping, self assessment and quality of task-setting featuring in many reports.

FOUNDATION TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

PAPER ONE

This year's Foundation Tier papers followed a pattern that I hope most teachers and candidates will have felt comfortable with, and there should have been no surprise about the types of passages used or the questions candidates were asked to tackle. As always, time management and tackling all questions was important and it was disappointing to see incomplete papers. That said, it was clear that most candidates were able to demonstrate their reading and writing skills and there was much to enjoy in their responses.

Section A

This year's passage by Alexander McCall Smith was a straightforward and uncomplicated narrative. The three characters and their interactions with one another offered interesting opportunities for exploration and there was plenty of material around which candidates could frame their responses. There was a need for close reading and to be able to make sensible inferences from the text to move into the upper mark ranges and candidates who wrote only brief responses struggled to achieve good marks.

A1

This question required the candidates to read the opening 16 lines, tracking the way Mr Matekoni reacts to Mma Ramotswe's suggestion about having a diamond engagement ring. The best responses followed the text closely, offering comments or giving an overview when selecting textual details. Candidates often began well, recognising the 'uncertain' reaction of Mr Matekoni as he looked at the ground in response to Mma Ramotswe's opening comments. Some explored his reaction a little more, suggesting he was uncomfortable, anxious or nervous about getting involved in discussions about a ring, and in particular the effect it would have on his finances. Weaker candidates sometimes wrongly suggested he was angry in these opening lines or they drifted into a discussion about Mma Ramotswe's motives, which led them away from the focus of the question. There was plenty of evidence that supported any view of his rather anxious response and good candidates were able to select appropriate detail: his voice is "strained", he repeats himself and lots of his comments are questions, he looks "glumly" and responds "weakly". Whereas candidates in the mid-range often tended to quote large chunks of text, more confident readers were able to be more selective, looking at the effect of a particular word or phrase. Most candidates were able to see that Mr Matekoni felt strongly for Mma Ramotswe and reacted to the hint that maybe he was unappreciative of her. Again there was a tendency for weaker candidates to quote chunks of text and weaker readers often quoted the whole paragraph of lines 11-15 with little comment. Stronger responses broke the text down, adding comments to clarify Mr Matekoni's reaction, and the best responses often tried to show him wrestling with his feelings for Mma Ramotswe and his concern about the expense it would cause him. It was possible to get a creditable mark by careful tracking and selection of detail, and where candidates did this and also offered sensible comments on his thoughts, feelings and actions, they invariably gained marks in the top mark band.

A2

This question required the ability to make simple inferences but the jeweller was not a complicated character and candidates who read carefully could gain high marks. Most candidates saw him as a 'typical salesman' when he smiles and opens the conversation in an easy manner; for some, the exploration of his opening comments suggested he was observant or even nosy and this seemed a perfectly sensible inference. Some candidates tried to make too much of the shop's location or its name but most sensibly kept their focus on the individual. The first clue that he is perhaps not as pleasant or open as he might have initially appeared is when we are told he looks at them "through his shifty eyes". This perception of him seems to be confirmed with Mma Ramotswe's early thoughts that he "cannot be trusted" and the implication that he may be scheming or sly. Good candidates seized on the complimentary comments he makes, recognising that this was to entice Mr Matekoni into buying not just a ring, but "a very big ring" to suit her size. Some interpreted the jeweller's comments about "a cheerful fat woman" as being insulting but more careful readers saw that Mr Matekoni understood it as a compliment, and replied showing it to be so. Many candidates commented on the way the jeweller pressurises Mr Matekoni, and there was plenty of evidence to draw upon, many, for example, discussing the impact of the jeweller's remark, "You can afford a good ring."

As candidates tackled this question, there was a tendency for weaker ones to drift into re-telling the story rather than keeping firmly focused on the jeweller. This often happened when Mma Ramotswe spoke up and annoyed the jeweller. Good candidates took the incident as an opportunity to comment on what this revealed about him, whilst others merely repeated what he did in response. At the end of the section of text, the jeweller attempts to sell the couple a big ring by bringing out a drawer of large, impressive rings. Some noted the way the jeweller seductively displayed the rings, "nestling in velvet" and many commented both on what he said, "I can offer big discounts", and the way he spoke, "lowering his voice", though some explained that he did this because he didn't want them to hear him! Markers saw many good responses to this question and the quality and range of comment on the jeweller, linked to good supporting evidence was what marked out the best responses.

A3

In many ways this was a similar question to A2 and required the same skills of inference and selection. However, perhaps because it was a rather shorter section of text and because almost every line offered some opportunity for exploration, some candidates found this a more demanding question. Weaker readers often re-told the story or simply explained what Mma Ramotswe said with little comment. Candidates who quoted at length also found it difficult to gain high marks. From the very beginning of this section we have evidence that she is a woman who knows her own mind, when she tells the jeweller. "These are too big". She is clear and direct, and good candidates went on to explore the way she deals with the jeweller. She knows he is still pushing to sell a big ring but her comment, "Perhaps we shall have to go to some other shop", shows that she understands how he is operating and that she is prepared to browbeat him until she gets what she wants. Candidates who were prepared to dig into these opening lines often gained good marks, as there were opportunities for a number of comments here. When she has won the battle of wills, she shows that she is not interested in the opinions of others and many picked up on Mr Matekoni's view that she "had no time for showiness". The dialogue between Mma Ramotswe and Mr Matekoni offered plenty of evidence of her feelings for, and gratitude to, Mr Matekoni and candidates were often able to select appropriate textual evidence to support their views.

Although this was a very familiar type of question, it was nevertheless one that demanded close attention to the details in the text. For those prepared to probe in some depth there were opportunities for high marks but a number of markers reported rather too many short, generalised responses.

A4

In some ways Mr Matekoni might be seen as a good but nevertheless rather weak, unassertive character when viewed against Mma Ramotswe and the jeweller. His feelings for Mma Ramotswe are clear but he is anxious about the cost of a diamond ring, even though he understands why it is important his fiancée feels she should have one. In his dealings with the jeweller he is seen as potentially easy victim to the hard-nosed salesmanship he encounters and is only saved by Mma Ramotswe's determination to deal firmly with the jeweller and have what she wants rather than what he would like to sell them. The diary question afforded a good opportunity for candidates to show their understanding of his character and in particular how he reacted to the events of the day. Capturing a sense of Mr Matekoni, however, was quite demanding and some weaker candidates wrongly made him into an almost aggressive character as he explained how he dealt with the jeweller and got what he wanted. Other weak responses showed a lack of understanding about his relationship with Mma Ramotswe, with some making him angry about having to go for a ring at all. Competent readers gained marks for showing some understanding of his perceived dilemma in the opening twenty lines and for selecting the key points about the encounter with the jeweller. At times there was a tendency to re-tell without comment, but stronger candidates kept their focus on his feelings at each stage of the shop visit. Good candidates explored in particular the way he felt unnerved, even bullied, by the jeweller's persistence and then how he felt about Mma Ramotswe's handling of the situation. Although candidates did not have to deal with the twists in the narrative that were seen in the 2006 paper, this question required a sound, perhaps sensitive understanding of character and relationships and the ability to select and comment upon key parts of the story. There were many good responses to this question from candidates who could do these things and could adopt the tone and attitude of the character.

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

There has been much attention devoted to this type of writing task in INSET sessions and although the key messages often remain the same, it is clear that well-prepared candidates are now producing descriptive writing where there is attention to detail, and where, as in this year's work, a real sense of place emerges. It is true to say that the familiar problems continue to be seen: narrative rather than descriptive writing; generalised rather than specific detail; and a tendency to write in the first person rather than third person. However, markers also saw some very good examples of writing where there was attention to individuals in the fish shop, both customers and workers, and where candidates took time to build and develop these, we saw some very convincing characters emerging who gave the description life and authenticity. Many also took the opportunity to convey a sense of place and the important thing here was to focus on the detail so that it became a 'real' shop. Creating a series of 'snapshots' or 'freeze frames' of what was going on and then 'zooming in' on detail was often the key to engaging, convincing writing that gained high marks. In contrast, weaker candidates often slipped into an exaggerated and generalised reality where grease ran down the fish shop walls, all the customers were drunk or abusive and where the description of the food would have had the Health and Safety Inspectorate closing the place down immediately.

There seemed to be fewer examples of candidates deliberately choosing to ignore the instruction to write 'about a page', although there were still rather too many brief attempts seen. Where this happened, it sometimes appeared that the candidate had simply run out of ideas, often because they had not moved into specific detail, instead keeping description at a level of rather vague generality.

B2

(a) The Interview.

This title worked well for many of the candidates who chose it, perhaps because it was a time-limited narrative and because many could draw upon their own experience of job/college interviews. The best attempts were able to create character as well as situation and many captured the experience of the interview very well.

(b) Write about a time when you broke something.

This was a popular choice among candidates and like the title above many drew on personal experience. As on the Higher Tier, broken limbs featured as frequently as vases, though on occasions some candidates tried to construct improbably complex tales when a simple, clear account would have worked more convincingly.

(c) Write a story that begins : 'I really wish I had not agreed to this, but there was no going back now.'

Where candidates had thought about the kind of situation that might lead them to the reflection above, the results were often engaging. Taking part in a school production and taking part in a charity sky-dive were two examples that I saw that worked very well. Where the situation was unrealistic or merely created an opportunity to write 'The Haunted House' type tale, the results were often little more than a string of improbable events.

(d) The long walk home.

This proved to be a popular choice, but among those who chose this, too few had really planned it sufficiently well and many were struggling after the first paragraph or two, once the circumstances leading to the walk home had been dealt with. For those able to build description, the title offered some interesting possibilities but too many ran out of ideas that usually ended with the narrator being followed by someone or something unknown.

(e) A visit to the relatives.

There were some engaging, and at times touching accounts of a family visit, alongside accounts of forced visits to grumpy grandparents or aunts at Christmas. Many of these were entertaining and lively because of the character sketching that many pieces involved. For some candidates it was an opportunity to write from personal experience or to embellish the reality of an experience and there were many good examples seen on this choice of title.

PAPER 2

Section A

The use of a promotional leaflet paired with a relevant article should have been familiar territory for most candidates. The Warwick Castle leaflet had all the features one might expect of an attraction competing with theme parks and similar places for the day-visitor trade, and the article offered a personal overview of a family visit to the castle and an evaluation of its attractions, particularly to young children. The questions followed a familiar pattern too, though as ever, there was a lot to do in two hours and not all candidates organised their time well.

A1/A2

These 'search and find' questions offered a gentle introduction to the paper and most candidates were able to navigate their way around the leaflet successfully to secure the correct information. Occasionally candidates spent too long on A1, choosing to explain in considerable but unnecessary detail why a particular place would be interesting to visit and I saw one response that was almost two sides long. In A2, some candidates did not always select the correct information, for example the appropriate telephone number in A2(c) or they muddled their response: one candidate in response to A2(a) 'Which day is the castle closed?' responded, "Every day except Christmas Day"! Fortunately, slips like this were fairly rare and most candidates now seem very comfortable with locating and selecting relevant information.

A3

This question was perhaps the most demanding on the paper in that it required skills of analysis but it was clear that well-prepared candidates knew what was required and could structure very sound responses. As with the 'Sheffield' leaflet on the Higher Tier paper last year and the 'Walking' leaflet used in this year's Higher Tier exam, it was important that candidates understood what the question demanded. Too many candidates wrote about why they would want to pick up and read the leaflet. The weakest responses often drifted quickly into a 'drill' of vague comments about text that, "made me want to read on", or pictures that were, "eye-catching". There was little reward for generalised comments that could have been applied to almost any leaflet.

The leaflet contained a wealth of material upon which to draw and good candidates maintained a firm link between any feature they focused upon and the question, 'How/Why would this make me want to visit?' This approach ensured that evidence was linked to comment and avoided the mere 'spotting' of details. Many recognised that there were lots of different things to see and do, both in and around the castle and that these attractions could appeal to all ages. Often candidates then sensibly focused on some of the attractions. Some emphasised the authenticity of the attractions: the dungeons appear to be as unpleasant and uninviting now as they would have been in times gone by; walking through the 'Kingmaker' scene would make you aware of the sights and sounds of daily life and the Great Hall and State Rooms sound impressive and accurately recreate history for the visitor. Many candidates focused on the visitors' involvement as they toured parts of the castle, wearing the armour that soldiers used and feeling for themselves the weight of a broadsword, emphasising that this became an 'experience' rather than just a visit, a point many also picked up from the wording on the front cover.

As with any promotional leaflet, the choice of words, pictures and illustrations help to persuade potential visitors and this leaflet had all the familiar features. Good candidates homed in on the use of the word, 'greatest' and the way the leaflet used personal appeal throughout, selecting and commenting on the impact of some relevant phrases. Some also explored the way the leaflet tried to emphasise the realism of the experience a visitor would have and there were lots of examples that could be used to support such a view.

Weaker readers often spotted words that were deliberately employed to persuade but failed to comment on their impact or, on occasions, simply put a list of words together, though not always the most appropriate ones. These candidates also tended to generalise about the photographs/illustrations, saying merely that they "make it look good/exciting/interesting", sometimes without specifying which photograph had this effect upon them. Stronger candidates were able to be much more selective, focusing on specific words and pictures and exploring how they would make a reader want to visit. For example, some discussed the impact of the aerial view of the castle, emphasising its scale and dramatic beauty. One candidate wrote how it looked, "like a complete castle not just old ruins" so that a visitor would be able to, "really see what history was like". The photograph of the medieval jousting, the young boy in his armour, the Mill Manager working the huge old machinery all offered opportunities for comment and good candidates were able to make effective use of some of these. Candidates who gained good marks kept a very firm grip on the question and many tended to offer quite lengthy responses. Selection and apt comment were central to achieving a good mark and there were some impressive answers.

A4

'What' and 'Why' questions allow less assured readers to gain some credit for spotting relevant detail but the 'Why' part demands inferential skills and this offers more able readers the opportunity to gain the highest marks. It was important for candidates to 'track the text' in order to accumulate the marks but there was plenty of material that could be drawn upon. The dungeon and torture chamber and the armoury were both areas of the castle where the children enjoyed themselves. In both of these places guides entertained them with tales that engaged, amused or amazed them. Candidates then often focused on the things that the children could see or do, such as trying on the soldier's helmet or they explained how they were fascinated by the gun collection. The article went on to describe how the children's interest was held by the interactive displays and how they had tried on costumes from medieval and Victorian times. Weaker readers were often able to find the details, though at times fell back on copying chunks of text without comment. Stronger responses linked the 'what' with the 'why'; for example, explaining that the enjoyment in trying on Victorian clothes was often because young children like dressing up and because the clothes will have been so different from their own modern ones. Some candidates explored their active involvement or the fact that they could be safely scared by what they saw and did. The strongest responses tracked the text methodically and always took the opportunity to link a comment to any example of what had engaged the girls' interest.

A5

This question asked candidates to look across both texts looking for specific information in a similar manner to last year's question. Both texts emphasised that visiting the castle was an 'experience' and this provided the basis for the question as candidates were asked to select examples from each text that showed visitors could do more than "just look at things". Some weaker candidates seemed unclear about the question and simply listed things that visitors could see but careful readers were able to accumulate marks quickly. For example, they saw that in the article the interactive displays meant visitors had to open the chests to gain the correct answers, they could hold a medieval sword or actually try on a soldier's helmet. Visitors could also be shown how to use a bow and arrow and as the young girls did, they could try on medieval and Victorian costumes or meet the 'knight' and hear tales about the

dungeon and torture chamber. The leaflet also made it clear that visitors could 'handle the weight of a broadsword' or try on a soldier's helmet. The leaflet also explained that visitors could meet the Mill Manager, 'scale' the towers of the castle as well as enjoy the castle grounds and perhaps eat in the castle's restaurants. Those prepared to look closely at the leaflet could also refer to some of the other attractions if they emphasised that what the visitor did was more than 'just look'.

This was not a question where unselective copying offered any help and some weaker candidates struggled to select appropriately or they produced a jumbled response where it was unclear which detail applied to which text. However, most candidates followed the advice to use the two headings indicated in the question and those who kept the question firmly in mind often gained very good marks.

Section B

B1

This writing task encouraged candidates to draw upon content they were knowledgeable about but they then had to be able to shape it for the audience and purpose demanded in the question. Weaker writers and those who failed to read the question carefully often ignored the instruction: "Write an article" and instead produced a promotional leaflet, sometimes along the lines and format of the Warwick Castle leaflet. These responses often also ignored the intended focus on "all the family" and there were too many responses that were essentially little more than a list of the rides to be found in theme parks like Alton Towers, Oakwood or Drayton Manor.

Where candidates were more successful, some adopted the approach used in the reading section article and tried to explain why a particular place offered something for different members of the family, using a similar personal, anecdotal style to good effect. Theme parks inevitably featured in a lot of responses and the best of these gave a comprehensive overview of why there was 'something for everyone'. It was often a feature of the most successful writing that they offered a range of hints and pieces of advice about how to enjoy the day out to maximum effect. These responses often had an easy, relaxed tone that assumed a comfortable relationship with the reader and they were genuinely informative. Candidates took advantage of the scope offered in the question and there were good, engaging articles about particular museums, towns and resorts, though occasionally some candidates stretched the notion of a 'day out' to include exotic locations as far afield as Europe, America and Australia! Good articles were invariably well structured, with topic sentences leading into paragraphs that dealt with specific attractions, then linking neatly with another feature or attraction and concluding with an overview that summed up why the place would be a worthwhile day out.

Despite some concerns expressed here about those candidates who struggled with appropriate content and format, there were many impressive pieces of work that showed how well organised material could be shaped into genuinely interesting and informative writing.

B2

Higher Tier candidates also tackled this task and many of the features highlighted in the Higher Tier report were also seen in Foundation Tier candidates' work.

Some candidates seemed to assume the newspaper editor was either responsible in some way for the music festival or had adopted a particular attitude towards it, and this sometimes made it difficult for the candidate to establish the correct writer-reader relationship or to maintain the appropriate audience for the letter.

As is so often the case, the opening sentence was very important in establishing the tone and purpose of the letter, and whilst some offered a crisp, clear introduction and viewpoint, others seemed to stumble through a rambling opening that unfortunately often set the tone for what would follow. It was important for the opening to make it clear where the writer stood on the issue and then to be able to put a few convincing points that would show why their views were correct.

The best of the work seen used paragraphs as a structuring device so that each argument could be stated clearly and then developed over a few sentences. Choosing the perspective from which to write was also important, since this allowed the writer to shape his/her argument accordingly. Some chose to rant, whilst others were at pains to present a considered, measured view of what benefits or disadvantages would be gained or lost if the festival were to be held, and there were good examples of both approaches seen.

Although capturing an appropriate tone for this type of formal letter was not an issue for most candidates, it was usually the quality of the content and the structuring and development of the arguments where weaker writers became exposed.

HIGHER TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

There were no real surprises in the structure of the papers this year and the questions followed a familiar pattern. As ever, there was a lot to do and the papers required disciplined time-management from the candidates. However, some candidates did fail to organise their time sensibly and there is an important message here about judging the length of answers and practising on past papers to ensure that the candidates know what they can produce in the time available. It was not sensible to devote too much time and effort to Section A if this was done only at the expense of Section B.

PAPER ONE

Section A

The passage by Alexander McCall Smith was set in southern Africa in the apartheid era and in some ways took the candidates outside of their own experience and into an unfamiliar setting. That said, the narrative was powerful and exciting and there was nothing particularly difficult in the surface of events. It was a relatively short and self-contained passage and this seems to have helped the candidates.

A1

This question required the candidates to read a relatively short piece of the text and then explain the process as well as the circumstances and motives which led to the central character leaving his home to become a miner in South Africa. The best candidates followed the text in sequence and 'disentangled' the appropriate material to construct a coherent explanation of why someone who loved his own country and did not want to leave moved abroad to work as a miner. Weaker answers were either thin or unselective.

However, most spotted the point that 'things were bad' when he was young and some explained that this suggested that Botswana was poor at that time. Young men had to go to South Africa to find work in the mines and the text implied that this was normal and Obed was following an established pattern of life. South Africa needed workers and they actively recruited them, sending the 'recruiting truck' into Botswana.

Obed's father said he should go as the land could not support him and a wife. The family were poor and did not have enough cattle. They only just had enough crops to support the family.

The recruiting process was simple, suggesting that it was relatively easy to become a miner. Obed was the right age and he passed the fitness test. He was probably flattered when the man said he would make a good miner. Having established he had no criminal record, that was that. As one candidate neatly and knowingly put it, 'the usual means to employ cheap, unskilled labour'.

All that was required here was clarity and a sensible selection of material. Many candidates scored very well in this question.

A2

This question required a series of inferences tied to textual evidence but it was not really a difficult question and those candidates who had a good technique could score very well here. Close attention to the details of the text and some thought about what they 'showed' or 'suggested' produced good answers.

The text gave the impression that the work was physically demanding as the recruits had to undergo two weeks of training to make them even stronger for loading rock. The 'steam treatment' implied that the work was in hot conditions, although some candidates wanted to see this as evidence of cruelty. It was clearly dangerous as they were given safety lectures and the salutary lesson of listening to what had happened to the man with no legs. The language of the mines was full of words for giving orders, which suggested that the work was very disciplined, and the miners were ordered about strictly. Some candidates also argued, quite sensibly, that this showed that there was no place for emotion or human contact in the mines. The image of the cage shooting down like 'hawks falling on their prey' suggested that the descent to work was frightening. Some answers were perhaps rather too fanciful in interpreting the significance of 'cage' and the 'hawk' but the point that the miners were treated like animals was fair enough.

It was easy enough to note that the tunnels were 'dark' and 'dusty' and the work was very hard as they worked long hours. The miners worked ten hour shifts and there was no mention of breaks. The fact that the men spent money on women, drink and clothes suggested to some candidates that this was a way of escaping the harsh conditions of the mines.

A3

This was a predictable question testing the candidates' ability to analyse the craft of the writer. There were some misguided attempts to apply half-understood jargon to the text but those who looked carefully at the content, the language and the narrative technique in a methodical way made good progress.

This part of the story began with the reader being told that Obed 'witnessed a terrible thing'. This obviously built tension and the narrative technique was interesting because it prepared the reader for a dramatic event without actually saying what was about to happen. The mention of Obed's job as an assistant to a blaster introduced the possibility of something related to explosives and this was one of several false trails laid by the author. The incident developed as Obed was sent 'alone' to retrieve the tin can for the blaster and had to go into one of the tunnels. The tunnel was lit but still needed care as the galleries were ominously deep and the reader was informed that men occasionally fell into them. The candidate who tried to argue that the 'great galleries' were dramatic because of alliteration might have been better advised to note that they were 'two hundred feet deep'.

However, the narrative took a more dramatic turn as Obed entered a round chamber where there was a warning sign to discover four men were already there on the edge of a gallery. It was not difficult to argue that it was dramatic that they were holding a man over the edge of the gallery. Obed witnessed the man being thrown over the edge. He 'screams something about a child' but then disappeared into the darkness. It was indeed possible to make the point here that the short sentence 'Then he was gone' was shocking in its stark sense of finality but too many candidates failed to notice the drama, and indeed horror, of this incident. They were too caught up in the excitement of short sentences, or indeed long ones, to notice a particularly brutal and cold-blooded murder. Indeed, it was surprising that so many candidates reacted with so little feeling to this incident.

The tension was increased as for a moment Obed had not been seen by the men. However, one of the men turned round and shouted. The chase was on and it was tense and dramatic, not least because Obed knew that he would be killed if he was caught. This was a 'race' and Obed knew that it was a race he could not afford to lose. The incident was a matter of life and death. Answers which failed to mention either the murder or the chase, and there were quite a lot of them, struggled to impress.

A4

This question focused on the conclusion of the passage but it was important for the candidates to approach the text methodically and 'track' their own thoughts and feelings as the narrative moved to its conclusion. Too many candidates struggled to 'position' themselves and their answers lacked focus on the question.

Candidates needed to make a personal response to what happened in the story and to link their thoughts and feelings to the textual evidence. The bullet points offered a framework but it was sensible to work methodically through the text with the bullet points firmly in mind. Some candidates trusted their emotions and did very well on this question. However, those who did not read the question found it, unsurprisingly, difficult to produce a convincing answer.

The first response was surely a sense of relief as Obed got away from his pursuers but there was still a strong sense of fear or anxiety as he knew they would track him down and kill him because he was a witness to their crime. When Obed confides in the blaster, he does so because he is a 'good man' and the only white man he trusts. Most candidates felt that the blaster justified this confidence and thought that he was different and admirable. His advice that Obed should go to the police was well intentioned but most felt that it was wise to ignore him. The simple nod showed clearly that the blaster understood and accepted Obed's fears and it was difficult not to be impressed, or even quite moved, by the way the white blaster and the black miner had this relationship of mutual respect. Some understood the real significance of a white man shaking Obed's hand and the text made it clear that this was the first time this had ever happened to him. Obed's response was similarly emotional and dignified as for the first time he calls a white man his 'brother'. Some candidates noticed the way that the blaster seemed to offer Obed an 'excuse' for leaving by suggesting he should go home to be with his wife as opposed to running away because he was afraid. However, some took the view that Obed was a coward. This was a particularly rich area of the text and the best candidates explored it with insight and sensitivity.

Most candidates felt it was unjust and sad that Obed had to leave in secret 'like a thief' but most also shared his emotion when he returned to his beloved Botswana with a 'full heart'. He reflects on his experiences in South Africa and he contrasts it with Botswana. It would have been difficult to feel anything other than sympathy for Obed and outrage at the conditions he had had to endure in Johannesburg. However, he had escaped the threat of death and the ending was happy in its way. As last year, the ending was a disappointment for those who were determined to experience a 'cliffhanger'. He had left the 'danger and sorrow' and the 'wailing siren' which had called him every day into the 'hot earth'. There were no policemen with dogs and he had escaped the great crowds of homesick men. Above all, most readers felt relieved and pleased that Obed had escaped from the 'great, groaning prison', which was Johannesburg.

Most candidates responded to this ending and those who kept the question in view did themselves a lot of good.

Section B

B1

This piece of descriptive writing gave almost everyone the opportunity to write from memory and personal observation and the best answers brought a sense of authenticity to their work. More candidates are developing a technique for coping with description by avoiding long preambles and the trap of slipping into narrative. The use of third person is the safest method and the ability to move easily from the general to the particular is a feature of successful descriptive writing. Convincing observation of physical details and characters is the key to this type of writing and the best achieve a balance between the two, creating an authentic sense of place and 'zooming in' on the people who inhabit the scene, both staff and customers.

However, the familiar weaknesses do crop up again and again, particularly the tendency to slip into first-person narrative and the use of the verbless sentence, even by those who would never dream of using them elsewhere. A description of a fish and chip shop too often became 'a time I visited a fish and chip shop' and most candidates would be well advised to assume the position of the detached observer. The instruction to write 'about a page' should not be ignored. The better answers do avoid being 'skimpy' and they devote enough time and energy to the task to produce work of some substance. However, they do not waste time by being self-indulgent. Realistically, this piece of writing should probably consist of four or five paragraphs of well-organised observation.

The weakest responses were those which exaggerated wildly and produced an unrecognisable picture of noisy chaos in which people screamed, sweated and even fought. The 'generalised' approach does not work well and too many produced a 'cartoon' rather than a snapshot.

B2

The choice of titles allowed the candidates to write imaginatively or from personal experience and, as usual, the best were thoroughly engaging and interesting. This question is often done well and there are some outstanding responses. However, some candidates launch into a narrative before they have thought about it and too many are either improbable or aimless.

(a) The Interview.

This type of 'open' title is familiar enough and it could be interpreted in a number of ways. The obvious approach was the job or college interview but there were some other possibilities, some of which did involve the police.

(b) Write about a time when you broke something.

This title was popular and there were many confessions of damage done to Mum's favourite ornament or a treasured toy, often belonging to a brother or sister. However, there were also broken limbs and hearts and a lot of these were handled very well.

- (c) Write a story that begins: 'I really wish I had not agreed to this, but there was no going back now.'

The openings of stories can provide a moment of inspiration but there has to be a sense of continuity and the best candidates avoid the awkward transition from the first sentence to the rest of the narrative. Some of the responses to this title were very forced and the wildly improbable tales of nights spent in abandoned or haunted houses did not impress.

- (d) The long walk home

It was possible to treat this as a personal narrative but it could also be imaginative. It was a popular choice but few found inspiration. The predictable walk from a club late at night invariably ended with the narrator being followed into a wood or forest. It was equally implausible that no teenager ever seemed to have a mobile phone that actually worked. On a more serious note, it really is unwise to plunge into a narrative which has not been thought out and is not leading anywhere except to more and more unconvincing or melodramatic events.

- (e) A visit to the relatives.

There was a lot of scope here for entertaining accounts of reluctant visits to relatives but it was also possible to write about trips abroad to see family members for the first time. There were some very good answers to this title, perhaps because it offered scope to the witty and imaginative but also allowed some candidates to write from real experience.

PAPER TWO

Section A

Bill Bryson's account of the trials and tribulations of walking in America contrasted neatly with the worthy attempts of the leaflet to encourage health and well-being through walking. The humour of Bill Bryson's writing is always engaging and it is just possible that the leaflet may have succeeded in encouraging its readers to take some exercise. However, it would perhaps be naïve to invest too much optimism in the leaflet's effect on the habits of young people. They were perhaps more inclined to take the American view that walking is a risky and unnecessary activity which is best avoided where possible.

A1

This type of question is really a form of 'search and find' and there was no need for unnecessary explanation or analysis. However, it was very helpful to understand that 'evidence' can be examples as well as facts and figures. The best answers also avoid long quotations and use the text in relatively short pieces, recognising where relevant points are being made and weaving the answer into a coherent and clear response.

Bill Bryson relied a lot on statistics to prove his point about the 'ridiculous' attitudes of Americans to walking and he began by pointing out that he walked further in twenty minutes on the Appalachian Trail than the average American walks in 'a week'. He told us that '93% of all trips' are taken in a car and the car is used 'whatever the distance.' He claimed that almost no-one 'walks anywhere, ever, for anything', even when it is easy to do so. He used examples from his own experience of a neighbour who 'drives eight hundred yards to work' and another, 'who is perfectly fit but drives one hundred yards to pick up a child.' He said that 'virtually all children' are picked up from school by car and points out that the journeys involved are very short. He tells us that most young people of sixteen or over have their own

car and he uses another statistic, suggesting that Americans only walk an average of 350 yards a day (or 1.4 miles a week). He also pointed out that it is impossible to be a pedestrian in many places in America.

The reaction of the man at the Post Office, who assumes that Bryson will have a car, suggested that walking is considered unusual, if not really weird. He suggested that a mile is a formidable distance and the fact that he suggested taking a cab for a journey of less than two miles was evidence of American attitudes to walking. He didn't get the joke about taking 'emergency rations' which seemed to confirm the 'ridiculousness' of the American view of walking.

A2

This question covered a specific, and relatively short, area of the text and it seems to help the candidates when the questions identify exactly where they should look for the relevant material. This approach was also used last year with the Orwell passage about Sheffield and the secret of success is to 'disentangle' the text and use it to move into explanation. A purposeful selection of relevant material took most candidates well on the way to a good mark but the best answers pushed on and provided a clear and coherent overview of Bill Bryson's exciting adventure in attempting to walk to the shop. Some candidates addressed the issues of danger and dirt separately but most simply worked their way methodically through the section of the text.

He arrived 'grubby' because the journey was like an assault course and he was 'trembling' because it was dangerous and very frightening. If those points were established, then everything slotted neatly into place and the candidates could weave the textual detail into the framework they had established.

The walk started pleasantly enough but he soon arrived at a 'mad' junction at Burger King. The road had six lanes and was very busy with traffic. There were no facilities for pedestrians such as sidewalks, zebra or pelican crossings or central refuges, all of which made his walk dangerous. He had to 'clamber' over concrete barriers and push his way through overgrown hedges, both of which almost certainly contributed to his 'grubby' state. However, I was not so convinced by the suggestion that Bryson was 'trembling' because he feared being caught on 'privet property'!

Having to walk on the road while 'pressed against dusty railings' to avoid the traffic was both dangerous and dirty and the danger was emphasised as cars had to 'swerve' to miss him. He was 'honked' at four times, no doubt adding to his nervous condition and he had to cross a muddy stream where he fell and slid down a bank. Even when he reached his destination, he was on the wrong side of the road and had to 'dash' across six lanes of 'hostile' traffic. Answers which were detailed and methodical scored very well here.

A3

This type of question is predictable and the bullet points provided a structure for the answers. I hope that the lay-out of the leaflet helped too, as leaflets can sometimes be difficult to navigate and candidates are left wondering where to start with them. However, this leaflet was not really difficult and its purpose and techniques were reasonably clear. There was a wealth of detail which could be used, although the best answers could prioritise and show some skill in summary and overview.

The leaflet listed the health benefits of walking (and so did a lot of the candidates) but also encouraged people by suggesting it was safe and painless and easy to do because no equipment is needed and you can walk anywhere and anytime. It is free, unlike a gym, and you can meet people and make friends. Perhaps the most important point for most of us was the claim that walking is not strenuous and doesn't have to be 'hard'. The leaflet stressed that walking is 'easy' and does not leave you speechless or gasping for breath. Simple suggestions and tips were given to help people to get started and the emphasis was on minor changes to lifestyle and everyday activities. The advice given was consistently reassuring.

The language and presentation were carefully chosen to convey information clearly and simply but there was some subtlety in this leaflet, which gave the able candidates some scope to show what they could do. The leaflet used direct address and imperatives but not in a threatening or aggressive way. The language and tone were reassuring and encouraging and there was no attempt to scare the reader into action. Activity is described as 'moderate', you breathe a 'little faster' and you build up 'gradually'. You take 'small steps' to health and fitness and walking is described as 'perfect' for health. The leaflet asked and answered questions, all of which were likely to be asked by the potential, or reluctant, walker. Some candidates argued that the logos of respected companies and organisations were persuasive as they gave credibility to the leaflet, although some also pointed out the irony of it being sponsored by a car company.

It was possible to make a brief reference to the presentational features of the leaflet but it was important to remember that the question did not ask why you might wish to 'pick up' the leaflet or 'read on'. However, the better answers did not get bogged down in presentational issues. These candidates realised that, although the medium may be significant, it is still the message which matters. Most candidates would do well to remember that it is highly unlikely that anyone would be persuaded to take a walk, or indeed visit Sheffield, because of the inherent appeal of a bullet point.

The pictures showed young and old as well as male and female to suggest that walking is for everyone and can lead to celebration and smiles as well as longevity. The diary was a clever touch as it was saying that walking can be built into the busy routine of daily life. The better answers looked at the individual pictures and did not try to make generalisations which were unconvincing. For example, a glance at the man walking the dog might have made some candidates think again about claiming that all of the pictures showed happy, smiling faces.

There was certainly no shortage of material here and it would have been unreasonable to expect anyone to cover every possible point. However, vague, formulaic comments were not the answer and the better answers focused on specific details and those features of the leaflet which were genuinely persuasive. Above all, candidates should avoid comments which could be applied to any leaflet.

A4

Last year's paper established this approach to cross-referencing and it worked well enough to repeat the experiment. It seems to help most of the candidates to have a clear focus for comparison and the bullet points give them a structure within which they could work purposefully. Using the bullet points as headings simply encourages this clarity of focus and, although it is not really a requirement, it is sensible. However, those candidates who ignored the instructions in the question simply produced a shapeless jumble, which was difficult to reward.

The two texts were in broad agreement about the attractions of walking. In general, Bill Bryson liked walking, found it enjoyable and thought it was good. He said he 'prefers' to walk and it can be 'wonderful' and liberating', allowing him to take in the scenery. The leaflet agreed and went further. It claimed it was good for health and fitness and it was safe, easy and free. It was a chance to make friends and it can be done anywhere. The difference was really that Bryson saw walking as an end in itself whereas the leaflet, although not disagreeing, tended to see it also as a means to an end.

However, they had contrasting views when it came to the problems involved in walking. Bill Bryson thought that walking in urban America was a nightmare. It was difficult, if not impossible, and it was dangerous and frightening. It was not, in his view, an urban pursuit. In contrast, the leaflet admitted that you could overdo it and have to see a doctor but seemed to suggest that really there were no insurmountable problems.

Bill Bryson used a personal, anecdotal style and his approach was conversational and humorous. He relied heavily on statistics and examples. The leaflet used direct address and the question and answer technique. It included a lot of specific information, often in bullet points. It promised many benefits and stressed it was not difficult. The cartoons tried to put across a serious message in a 'light' way.

Section B

B1

This type of writing gives the candidates an opportunity to write in a journalistic style and the task allowed them to treat the subject seriously or to adopt an ironic or amusing tone. The 'article' does give the candidates a lot of scope as it does not have to be persuasive or even informative. The anecdotal, rather personal approach could work very well here and there was a good deal of writing about experience of P.E lessons in school. However, the best answers also maintained their sense of audience and purpose, showing journalistic awareness and occasionally real flair. This was not 'hard news' but it was a kind of feature journalism and it gave the able candidates a chance to shine.

Some chose to imitate the style and format of a leaflet and, although that approach was accepted, it tended to be self-limiting. Lists of sporting activities were particularly aimless and dreary. I suspect that few teenagers needed to be told that football, rugby and running were forms of exercise. That said, most candidates had something to say here and most managed a reasonably sensible and coherent response to this task.

However, there were some quite outstanding pieces of writing. They had an assured sense of their audience and its attitudes to and experiences of exercise! Those who opted to attempt something close to the style of Bill Bryson were usually on fertile ground and, if they had the ability to handle irony, they were very good indeed. I particularly enjoyed the young lady who argued forcefully that the only form of exercise that gave her any joy at all was shopping. She made her case with real conviction, and a lot of humour.

B2

Although this was a formal letter and had to be appropriate for publication in a newspaper, the topic encouraged those with a sense of humour to entertain their readers. Many good answers argued in favour of the proposed festival but a lot of the most able candidates adopted a 'persona' and launched into an intemperate rant. Some of these were very amusing, and alarmingly convincing. Perhaps the most important decision to be made here was whether to write from a teenage perspective or whether to create a 'character' who might have very different views from those of the enthusiastic festival supporter.

The problem for a number of candidates was the inability to think their way into the situation they had been given. They misjudged the audience and purpose of the letter, some assuming that the festival was definitely happening and offering to be involved in all kinds of improbable ways or demanding action from the newspaper editor which would be quite beyond his or her power.

It is worth stressing again that the key to all good writing of this type is to get a clear sense of audience and purpose.

In conclusion, I would like to express my thanks, yet again, to the teachers and examiners who contribute so much to the success of this examination. It has become a very large operation and it relies on the commitment and professionalism of a lot of dedicated people. Above all, the candidates never fail to impress me with their commitment. Almost without exception, they work very hard in these examinations. They also provide a lot of entertainment to lift the spirits.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2007

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SPECIFICATION A

As in previous years, examiners on both tiers noted how well prepared the majority of candidates were to show their detailed knowledge and understanding of their set texts and to provide engaged responses in all three sections of the examination. Gratifyingly, messages from INSET and reports are clearly being absorbed and passed on to colleagues, and then to students, and rubric infringements and mismanagement of time, for instance, are becoming increasingly rare, although they do still crop up.

So, to this year's main messages, the first of which relates to entry policy. Some candidates had been entered for the Higher Tier who, it appeared, may have been more comfortable on the Foundation Tier, as was indicated by their relying on the printed extracts, at the expense of the extended answers, where there was less support in the form of bullet points or simpler wording, and which, in some cases, were very underdeveloped - only a paragraph in some instances. Whilst entry policy is, of course, the centre's own business, it may be worth considering whether candidates operating at lower grades would be better served by Foundation Tier. The second message relates to the extract questions where there is a discernible trend for candidates to treat them as an unseen exercise ("The reader wonders what George is going to do" - where, presumably, the candidate knows very well, having already read the text!) Brief contextualisation is a sensible way into the extract questions, although, of course, the response needs to focus closely on the detail of the specific extract. The best extract responses also pay heed to the question, and select detail accordingly - some candidates launch into an almost mechanistic tracking through, almost regardless of the focus of the question. A few moments of thought before starting to write should ensure that all key areas of the extract can be addressed - including its ending, which is sometimes neglected. The next message relates to the use of often lengthy mnemonics as an aide memoire for the unseen poetry. Whilst these could be useful in the classroom, as a way of fostering independence and confidence, they can get in the way in the examination (even in the length of time it must take to transcribe some of them onto the script!), when not every category may be applicable. The bullet points provided on the paper should give sufficient support, and are general enough to fit all poems. Sometimes there is evident a tendency to over interpret the poem, even to the extent of turning it on its side in order to extrapolate some significance about its structure. It may be worth pointing out that the poems *will* be accessible, and a sensible approach would be to take the most obvious, straightforward reading as a starting point.

Areas of improvement this year included an increased willingness in essays to show knowledge of the whole text (including the end!) and, perhaps, rather less dependence on film versions, although this is still a matter of concern, particularly with *Of Mice and Men* and *An Inspector Calls*.

HIGHER TIER

Although, of course, *Of Mice and Men* is by far and away the most popular prose text, followed by *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the latter giving it a reasonable run for its money on this tier, there was evidence this year that some centres were venturing further in their choices, and it was a pleasure to read engaged and knowledgeable responses to all the texts on the list, from candidates representing a range of abilities. In Section B, *An Inspector Calls* is still the most popular text, probably followed by *Blood Brothers* and *A View From The Bridge*. The Shakespeare texts also hold up well, as does *Hobson's Choice*, although *Under Milk Wood* remains something of a minority choice.

Section A

Although *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* is one of the longer texts on the list, candidates retain it well, and messages of previous years about the benefits of showing knowledge of the later parts of the text seem to have registered, as fewer responses limited themselves to Maya's early years in Stamps. The extract elicited sensitive and engaged responses, with understanding of Maya's point of view tending to be a discriminator. Q.1(b) was the more popular choice of essay, with candidates discussing Daddy Bailey and the impact his late arrival in the children's lives had on Maya. Most included relevant detail about his relationship with Dolores and the trip to Mexico, whilst some went on to compare his relationship with Maya with that of other father figures. Those who chose to write on Maya's experiences of education usually extended their discussion to include the more informal sources of education for her, from Mrs. Flowers to her stay in the junk yard.

Pride and Prejudice is clearly enjoyed by those who study it. There was real sensitivity to Elizabeth Bennet's situation in the extract, many also appreciating her strength of character, bearing in mind the historical and cultural context. The best acknowledged, and discussed, her mixed feelings. The question on Mrs. Bennet elicited very strong, and usually very critical, responses, perhaps a by product of screen versions, (one candidate even declared: "I believe the best representation of Mrs. Bennet is through the film") with little acknowledgement of her situation. Those who answered Q.2(c) had been well prepared, some taking the novel's first title of "First Impressions" as a starting point, and some confidently suggesting that the novel is about much more than pride and prejudice. It is a measure of the excellent preparation of candidates, and their confidence in using their detailed knowledge of the texts, that open questions such as this work so well.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha still remains the choice of a relatively small number of centres, but is another complex text which invariably elicits really engaged and well detailed responses. The extract worked well (with its "yeuch" factor!) with the best going beyond the rather knee jerk spotting of short sentences to explore Doyle's style. Those who chose to write as Paddy's Ma, showed clear empathy and sound knowledge of the text, whilst many in Q.3(c) chose Paddy's Da as the greatest influence, using their knowledge of the whole text to support their discussion.

One text which seems to be enjoying something of a revival this year is *Silas Marner*, and, with its strong narrative and characterisation, it works well for candidates of a range of abilities. Some interpretations of the extract saw it as more of a romantic encounter, swayed, it seemed, by the starlight and the kiss, but the best appreciated its full context, and responded sensitively to Godfrey and Nancy's situation. The focus of Q.4(b) was intended to discourage simple narrative, and was largely successful in doing so, whilst the question on Godfrey elicited engaged and well argued responses, as well as a range of opinions.

The extract from *To Kill A Mockingbird* was rich in detail, and to do themselves real justice, candidates needed to establish its context and see how the different sections are related, from the naivety in response to the "Hot Steams" to the competitiveness between them, to the terror of the tyre roll, to the tension surrounding the Radley place, to Jem's bravado at the end. The best candidates explored the richness of the language, particularly during the tyre rolling, while weaker responses resorted to feature spotting, and, sometimes to a rather laborious tracking of the first part, effectively treating it as an unseen ("Jem growled" makes him sound like a wild animal, and this makes the reader wonder what is going to happen next...') and not always getting to the end of the extract. There were some lovely responses to the Aunt Alexandra question, with candidates showing a clear grasp of her quite complex character. Most were comprehensive in their coverage, discussing key events and characters, and, as ever, the best went to the end of the novel! This was also the case with Q.5(c) where good answers saw the impact of the trial on the rest of the novel, including the climactic attack on the children. There were many sustained and thoughtful evaluations of the trial, linking it to key themes, and showing its impact on a range of characters and Maycomb itself.

With the extract from *Of Mice and Men* some candidates again took the unseen approach ("Lennie has probably done something wrong") which is not helpful; the best were clear about its context from the start. Some also failed to go to the end of the extract, missing out Curley and Slim. Others who did consider the reactions of these characters were perhaps rather sentimental in their interpretations, thinking that even Curley is sympathetic as he speaks "softly" and that Slim has either had a similar experience, or is, on balance, glad to be shot of Lennie so that he can be George's new best friend! The best, however, had clear overview, for example making the connection between the ashes of the fire and the beginning of the novel (with some also going deeper into the symbolism of the ashes), showing sensitivity in their discussion of the exchange between George and Lennie, and the shifts in atmosphere, aided by the use of sounds and close detail. The question on Slim may well have been anticipated, as many candidates had an impressive selection of references at their disposal. The very best explored his presentation as being too good to be true, and his symbolic significance. Some, validly, pointed out that had he not given the pup to Lennie, the tragedy may have been averted. Others showed appreciation of his structural function in allowing George to relate the events in Weed. It's worth pointing out that a small but significant number of candidates confused him with Candy, Crooks, or, less often, Curley. A clear grasp of characters should, at the very least, be a prerequisite for the examination. Those who chose Q.6(c), and used the reference to hopes and dreams going wrong were more successful than those who chose to divide characters into "mice" and "men" in different ways. Some also got caught up in the mice motif, and tracked Lennie's obsession with mice to the detriment of showing their knowledge of the whole text, and the thematic context. Many, however, wrote perceptively, placing the novel in the context of the American Dream, and exploring different characters' dreams, the reasons for them, and the reasons for their failure.

Stone Cold does not seem to be used as often on this tier as has been the case in the past, but the extract elicited sound discussions of Shelter's extremely disturbed state of mind and use of military language. Answers on Gail, in the main part, avoided straight narrative, and showed how Swindells provides clues to the reader, whilst managing to conceal her true identity. There were also perceptive and comprehensive discussions of Link. The best were well balanced, and considered the impact of other characters on Link's development as a character.

There continues to be a gradual take up of *Anita and Me* as a choice of novel in Section A, and it seems to be well received by candidates. The extract, although relatively short, was packed with detail, and the best used Syal's language to explore Meena's mixed feelings about her baby brother. Those candidates who knew the text well explored Meena's experiences growing up with engagement and insight, including those not included in the film! There were few attempts at Sam Lowbridge, although his character is integral to key events and themes.

Section B

Under Milk Wood is still studied far less frequently than any other text. Those candidates who answered on it found plenty to say about the extract, with, as ever, those who nailed exactly what the mood and atmosphere is from the start doing the best (as opposed to the "Dylan Thomas creates a lot of mood and atmosphere..." type of response.) The bullet points were aptly used in responses to Q.9(b), whilst the question on dreams tended to elicit narrative driven responses, with only the better candidates focusing on the importance of dreams - when this was done well, it was done very, very well, however!

A View From The Bridge continues to be a very popular choice, working well for candidates of all abilities. The extract provided plenty of fodder for discussion. Most had at least a sense of the brewing trouble, with many picking up on Rodolfo's unfortunate choice of song (although, at times this fell prey to over-interpretation, with references discerned to Rodolfo wanting his *papers*, and so on). Candidates are much better prepared to use stage directions these days, and the best went right to the end of the extract, with its ominous description of Eddie. The best candidates can really visualise the scene in drama questions, and it appeared that some had acted out parts of the play, which had obviously been useful in fixing it in students' memories. There were some interesting interpretations of Rodolfo's character: sometimes he came across as rather chilling and self serving, which was an entirely valid reading, although most used their knowledge of the play to convey his innocent confusion in being caught up in the dynamics of the relationships in the household, and his dawning realisation of Eddie's feelings. His voice was well echoed - a testimony to Miller's writing. The more popular choice was the question on Eddie's culpability. Responses to this were always thoughtful, and often evaluative, with a clear understanding of how Eddie could be blamed, although he was generally treated with sympathy. The best answers also made apt references to Alfieri's contributions, both as narrator and as character.

It's always fascinating when reading hundreds of responses on *An Inspector Calls* to see how the character of Sheila Birling provokes quite polarised judgements, and the extract this year was no exception, with some seeing her as unnecessarily mean to Gerald (with words like "childish" and "spiteful" featuring) to what may be considered as more conventional responses, noting her maturing nature and sensitivity. Both views, of course, are perfectly valid, and given credit, so long as they are supported by apt detail. Priestley, like Miller, is generous with his stage directions, and candidates made good use of them. In some cases, better use could have been made of the end of the extract: it's worth candidates remembering that extracts start and end at specific points for a reason. Candidates are growing used to the advice to the actor type question, although some still seem to think they can change Priestley's script to meet their requirements or that it is necessary, in answers to Q.11(b) to advise Mrs. Birling about her dress, hair style, colouring ("if possible, her face should try to be a bit redder") and stance ("You should tilt your head back as you speak."). Many relished expressing their views on Mrs. Birling's character, however, in well informed and engaged responses. The question on Inspector Goole was popular and well done, on the whole. Many considered the character's significance as a possible ghost, a representation of characters' consciences, or of Priestley's views and so on. Reliance on film versions sometimes was evident here, with references to his sudden disappearance and the empty rocking chair.

In responses to the extract from *The Merchant Of Venice* it was rather surprising how some candidates either did not get its context at all, or misunderstood what was going on between the characters. The best, of course, explored Portia's possible motives, often (as with Sheila Birling) thinking she was being a bit mean to Bassanio. Of the two essay choices, the second was the more popular, with most choosing to write about "hate", often focusing on the trial and the feud between Shylock and Antonio.

The extract from *Romeo and Juliet* sorted out those who were confident in their use of the text from those who were perhaps rather over dependent on the Luhrmann film. The language of Juliet, in particular, is necessarily confusing here, and some candidates were as confused as Paris presumably is. The better answers were sensitive to Juliet's situation, and saw the change in her behaviour once she was inside the Friar's cell. There were some lively suggestions about the presentation of Romeo's character, with, again, the best reflecting a detailed knowledge of the play, rather than the "be good looking and learn your lines" sort of advice! There were some very full responses to the question about conflict, including not only scenes of physical conflict, but also internal conflicts and conflicts in language and style. Others were more narrative driven and dependent on "what ifs".

There is a gradual increase in uptake with *Othello*, and most candidates engaged well with the extract from the play, showing a secure understanding of Othello's confused state of mind and discussing his language, such as his broken syntax, with perception and insight. Those prepared to engage with the dramatic force of Shakespeare's language invariably are the most successful, but, with all the Shakespeare texts in the examination, some candidates seem very wary of it. The Cassio empathy task was rarely attempted, perhaps because the other, on Othello and Desdemona, was a more mainstream choice. Whilst many responses were probing and analytical, exploring the relationship and the factors both internal and external, leading to its collapse, with confidence, some took the line that they were ill suited from the start and never really loved one another, which is a more tenuous interpretation.

Hobson's Choice continues to be a relatively popular choice of drama text, and one that candidates do seem genuinely to enjoy. The plight of Ada elicited a good deal of sympathy here, and (as with Sheila, and Portia,) many were highly critical of Maggie. More thoughtful responses pointed out that if the extract were seen in the context of its time, and in an overview of the whole play, Maggie's behaviour was more understandable. Others, although not many, appreciated its humour, with Maggie's strong character overriding the weaker ones of Willie and Ada. There was quite a wide range of characters selected for sympathy in responses to Q.15(b), from Tubby Wadlow, to Ada, to Willie or Maggie, and, quite often, Hobson himself. Sound cases were made in all instances. The tracing of the development of the relationship between Willie and Maggie was usually tackled with understanding and empathy, with the best showing a sensitive appreciation of the relationship as presented at the end of the play.

Blood Brothers is a popular text at all levels of ability, and responses to the extract revealed sensitivity and insight. Some blamed Linda, but most could see that she is at the end of her tether. Some, perhaps surprisingly, had some difficulty in placing the extract. The best, of course, went right to the end, and considered the ominous presence of the Narrator, as well as the significance of his words and of Linda's phone call, with close readers picking up on her initial hesitation. Some of the responses to Mrs. Lyons were unswervingly condemnatory, but more were more balanced, and noted her insecurity and increasing instability. Virtually all answers showed a secure knowledge of the text. Some of the responses to Q.16(c) remained at a rather superficial level - basically posh versus not posh, seeming to think that the use of slang, swear words and house size are the key indicators of class. Others were more thoughtful, and explored the presentation of the different backgrounds, whilst others went on to consider Russell's use of stereotypes, and the fact that despite Edward's advantages he was not necessarily any better off.

SECTION C

There was an interesting range of responses to the poem *Shopkeeper* by Greg Hill. Some "got it" immediately - and these were often candidates not operating at the higher levels elsewhere on their scripts - whilst others were so thrown by its apparent lack of stylistic features that they didn't quite know what to make of it. Some saw it as a plea against the demise of corner shops, some as a message about global warming. Tellingly, a significant number did not know what snowdrops were, nor that Spring follows Winter. On the whole, if candidates could see there were two voices, they were on the right lines, although some thought that it was a tree or woodland creature who was watching the shopkeeper go. Some thought the stanzas suggested the shelves in the shop, whilst others turned the poem on its side and believed it represented a line of trees. However, credit was given for a range of interpretations, and if an awareness of quietness was expressed, or an understanding of "different types of quiet" was evident, candidates would be moving into the C/D area and beyond, whilst those who carefully selected and highlighted detail to reach an understanding of the speaker's and shopkeeper's conflicting views, and the beauty of the regeneration of nature would be achieving in the higher levels. Many candidates fully grasped the central message, and provided perceptive and sensitive interpretations, backed up by textual references, and were consequently rewarded. It is to be hoped, however, that the candidate who averred, "The descriptive way he portrayed the poem makes me want to exit this hall, walk home through the woods and read a book in my back garden next to the pond" finished their script before they took this action! To conclude then, with the unseen poem, careful reading is the key, and those candidates who come into the examination room primed to spot a series of stylistic features ("I was disappointed with the lack of metaphors. I think a good poem should use a range of techniques such as alliteration or metaphors. Maybe even an oxymoron.") are doing themselves no favours at all.

FOUNDATION TIER

A general observation would be that, with fewer rubric infringements and more developed answers, the quality of work on this tier was impressive, with some candidates producing papers that would have stood up well on the Higher Tier, whilst clearly being supported by the elements of differentiation in the Foundation paper, and candidates at all levels producing engaged and informed responses. *Of Mice and Men* is the runaway favourite on this tier, as on the Higher, but *Stone Cold* continues to be relatively popular in Section A, with all other texts attracting some takers. In Section B, the more popular texts are probably *Blood Brothers*, *A View From the Bridge*, and *An Inspector Calls* followed by *Hobson's Choice*, with fewer answering on Shakespeare and fewer still on *Under Milk Wood*.

Section A

As ever, some answered on *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* because it is the first question they come across, and also as ever, many did pretty well on it as an unseen; this year the extract was packed with detail which elicited empathetic and aware answers. There was a fairly even split between the essay choices, with candidates responding particularly well to Q.1(c). Although this is a challenging read in many ways, it is very well received and retained by candidates of all abilities.

Predictably there were fewer responses to *Pride and Prejudice* on this tier, and those there were tended to be at the higher end of the Foundation Tier range. They responded in often a spirited way to the proposal and its rejection, and, again, there was a fairly even split between the essays, with rather more opting for the second, on the title, probably owing to its having been covered thoroughly in class.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, with its relatively select coterie of enthusiasts, is another demanding text, which candidates have, nevertheless, clearly enjoyed, and which they write on well. The extract was identifiable, and elicited engaged and empathetic responses, and there was a fairly even take up on the essays, the empathy one on Paddy's mother being perhaps the more popular.

As on the Higher Tier, it was good to see a greater number of candidates answering on Silas Marner. As with *Pride and Prejudice*, the quality of many of these responses suggested they may have been from people transferred from the Higher Tier. Thoughts on Godfrey were understandably judgemental, with more sympathy for Nancy, and, although the extract may have led candidates to Q.4(c), more chose to write about Eppie and Silas, a relationship which is, of course, so central to the novel.

Candidates answering on *To Kill A Mockingbird* found plenty to say about Jem and Scout and their rivalry in the extract, and enjoyed writing as Aunt Alexandra in Q.5(b), with many capturing her voice and attitude with some skill. The trial question worked well, with those who used the bullet points, as always, doing the best. It was particularly gratifying to see how many made the connection between the outcome of the trial and the novel's ending.

The extract question in Section A is often the best in Foundation papers, in particular, and more so with *Of Mice and Men* than other texts, for some reason, and this year was no exception, with candidates producing very detailed, (sometimes longer than the essay, rather unfortunately!) enthusiastic, and empathetic responses, sometimes revisiting their initial emotional response. Those scoring nine or ten had picked up on details such as George's shaking hand, his shivering, sitting stiffly, the throwing away of the gun, and Lennie's innocence and so on, and the very best wrote sensitively about the use of noise, although a few thought the voices George was listening to were in his head. One examiner said that he felt that "by the end that short passage had been picked absolutely clean" - which is a tried and tested way to achieve high marks. As on the Higher Tier, a number of

candidates in Q.6(b) were confused as to who Slim is, although they could still garner credit for the knowledge of the text they displayed. Others, however, showed not only amazingly detailed knowledge of the text, but produced a convincing interpretation of Slim's character. It is worth pointing out that many candidates are apparently unaware of the time scheme of the novel, and seem to think that the events took place over some months - perhaps the film is again responsible for this misconception. The bullet points proved facilitating in Q.6(c), and it was only the most wilful who neglected them to write about mice and men (with cheese as the dream of the former, apparently).

Candidates relished discussing Shelter's psychotic behaviour in the extract from *Stone Cold*. The best appreciated his black humour and sardonic wit. Weaker responses were underdeveloped, or, on some occasions, not clear about who Shelter is (pretty fundamental, you would think!) The bullet points on both essays were helpful in aiding candidates to produce balanced responses. With Q.7(c), as is always the case, the best responses paid due attention to the conclusion of the novel: with *Stone Cold* there is always a tendency for candidates to neglect the later stages of the novel for some reason, and with the question this year, some focused on Link's early days in London, without discussing the stage of the novel set in Bradford or the final encounter with Shelter. Those who chose to write about Gail wrote with knowledge, and, sometimes, anger at what they perceived as her betrayal of Link, although others appreciated how she helped Link, not least in the capture of Shelter.

Anita and Me is still only studied by a relatively select few on this tier, but elicits good responses. There were empathetic comments on Meena's feelings in the extract, with the best addressing Syal's vivid language. The essays on Meena's growing up revealed candidates' detailed knowledge of the text, and incidents chosen included Mr. Ormerod's shop, the fair and Nanima's arrival - with some, impressively, (on account of it not being in the film!), discussing Meena's stay in hospital. More on the Foundation Tier were prepared to take on Sam Lowbridge, and, whilst some condemned him outright, others had a more subtle response, seeing him through Meena's eyes.

Section B

Very few study *Under Milk Wood*, but most who did so found something to say about the extract, although some stayed at the level of reorganisation. The character question had about an equal take up with that on the dreams, and candidates were able to show their knowledge of the play, although this could often be more detailed.

A View From The Bridge, on the other hand, is probably as popular on Foundation as it is on the Higher Tier. There was much intelligent reading of the subtext of the extract, particularly of Eddie, aided by sound and detailed use of the stage directions. The best answers to Q.10(b) combined detail and empathy for Rodolfo, with the bullet points well used in the responses scoring most highly. The bullet points were also helpful for those choosing to write on Eddie's culpability, with some using the final ("anything else you think important") to talk about Alfieri. Only the weaker candidates resorted to simple narrative - most get so involved with the events of the play and the behaviour of the characters that they discuss these points, almost despite themselves!

An Inspector Calls is increasingly popular on the Foundation Tier. All candidates had strong opinions on Sheila, with many providing quite a subtle reading of her conflicting emotions, particularly in relation to Gerald. As on the Higher Tier, there are quite a few Sheila haters out there! With the advice to Mrs. Birling question, it was good to see that candidates are more prepared for this type of question than has been the case in the past, and there are fewer "stand up straight" type of responses, with most candidates getting very involved in expressing their opinions, supported by detail from the text. The best considered the character's relationships with others, and her lack of self awareness, with weaker responses either simply re-telling the story, or writing in general terms, with little textual support. The

question on the Inspector was also popular; some found him difficult to write about, owing to his larger than life nature, whilst others felt comfortable in discussing his different approaches with different characters, and the best addressing his possible symbolism and significance.

With the first question on *The Merchant of Venice*, those who appreciated the context of the extract found plenty to say on the characters, although a few were confused as to who knew what, and some were unsure about exactly who Bassanio was. Q.12(c) was the more favoured of the two essay questions, with characters who hate (usually Shylock, often Antonio, and sometimes others) written about with some assurance. The few who answered on Antonio made valid points, and showed knowledge of relevant parts of the text.

Candidates who answer on *Romeo and Juliet* at this level are, perhaps, even more dependent on the Luhrmann version of the play (which seems to have superseded all others) than on the Higher Tier, and many found the extract a bit of a challenge, not going beyond general empathy for Juliet. Some choosing to advise the actor playing Romeo were also film dependent, but made relevant points about his character nevertheless. The fights at the beginning and between Mercutio and Tybalt were the more frequent choices, although the reference to arguments in the question led to some discussing Act 3, Scene 5, which worked well too.

All grasped the context of the extract from *Othello*, and could make some comment on it, although, as with all the Shakespeare plays, there is, particularly at this level, a reluctance to address detail. The character of Othello proved a more popular choice than Cassio for the essays. In both cases, the bullet points were evidently helpful.

The extract from *Hobson's Choice* elicited very engaged responses, with, again, those candidates who paid close attention to the stage directions doing well, and most having plenty to say about Maggie and Ada, the latter getting a lot of sympathy, as did Willie. Both Q.15(b) and Q.15(c) were done well, with Willie and Hobson proving the most popular choices in (b), and some detailed and perceptive tracking of key points in the relationship in (c).

There were some very touching responses to the extract from *Blood Brothers*, with candidates getting really involved in the floundering relationship portrayed there. Some responses were engaged but underdeveloped, with those who tracked through and read closely doing the best. The very best discussed the significance of the narrator's description of Linda and her final line in the extract. There was a range of responses to the question on Mrs. Lyons. Some neglected the ending of the play, some were emotive and thin on textual detail, some weaker ones confused her with Mrs. Johnstone, and some tended to re-tell the story, but some wrote a reasoned and thoughtful discussion, backed up by reference to the text. With the question on social class, although there were some strong answers, exploring the cultural and social differences between the characters and the impact of these, others were more simplistic, with comments not going much beyond who had the more toys. Some astute responses on this tier, saw the connections between class and power, and picked up on Mickey's anguished "I could have been him!".

Section C

A colleague described Grace Nichols' *Roller-Skaters* as "the most warmly received poem I've ever marked", and many candidates commented on their delight and surprise that poetry so relevant to their own lives had ever been written, although some couldn't quite believe their eyes, and thought it must have some sort of health and safety message! Boys, in particular, relished showing off their expertise (it's not a wheely, apparently, according to some!) and most picked up on the bird imagery and the significance of the final line. Some explored the themes of freedom, youth, and growing up with sensitivity, and, unlike on the

Higher Tier, candidates seem to feel less compunction to "spot" features, which makes for genuinely engaged and fresh responses - although one did point out that if you hold the poem on its side it actually does look like a roller skate!

This remark from a candidate provides a fitting conclusion: "I think this poem is the best I have ever read because it fills me with smiles and happiness" - not a bad comment at the end of a long examination!

So, once again, examiners were impressed by the quality of responses from the whole range of candidates - all credit to those candidates, and to those involved who got them to such a state of confidence.

SPECIFICATION B

The examination appeared to work well on both tiers and weaknesses from previous years seemed to have been addressed by centres and their candidates. There were very few rubric infringements this year and for the first time there appeared to be better performance on the prose essays where better selection of material and a willingness to approach both texts were healthy developments.

There still seem to be candidates who do not appear to have read the entire anthology prior to the exam and this is a worry. My biggest concern this year was the prose extract from *Niagara Falls All Over Again*. It was surprising that some candidates did not know that Mose was the story's narrator or know that Mose was male and that they wrote about Annie who was largely irrelevant to the task. At the marking conference, I urged examiners to ignore blunders about Mose's gender and to evaluate what was said about his relationship with Hattie and regard it as valid. Obviously a failure to understand or to have read the compulsory passage will have consequences. All I can do is remind teachers that the complete anthology needs to be studied for the examination. This failure could also be seen elsewhere on the paper though most candidates were able to avoid areas of ignorance or lack of preparation. However, it is extremely dangerous to question spot and second guess my intentions.

Section A

Q.1(a). This was a routine Specification B task featuring a relationship between two characters; Foundation candidates were given three bullet points to help focus their answer. Most candidates responded well; as soon as candidates made points about the relationship they were in fact commenting on sub textual issues. Most candidates discussed the nature and extent of Moses's dependence upon Hattie and were able to match Mose's actions to his thoughts; some candidates were able to note that Hattie also suffered in the exchange and were able to talk about childhood promises overtaken by growing up; some candidates still believe "vaudeville" to be a place. As always with extracts there is no need to go beyond the lines. Both Higher and Foundation candidates found the passage equally accessible.

Q.1(b). This task was handled well on both tiers. *The Rain Horse* was handled with rather more assurance this year. Candidates were able to select and track effectively the appropriate passages; often they added considerable commentary detailing the mounting anger or its intensity. They also commented on the effect of the weather, the landscape and their effects on anger with effective detailing of pathetic fallacy. I saw only two candidates who selected the horse as their chosen character; I was convinced this would be more popular and briefed examiners to accept the horse as a character. Those students who came with their prepared readings were often disadvantaged. The companion text was usually *The New Boy* and it provided plenty of examples of escalating anger; particularly pleasing were the explicitly comparative answers which detailed the similarities between the texts. Other stories appeared; *The Lesson* worked effectively especially for comparison; other texts were rather less successful. There still seem to be very few candidates who can focus on the topic (anger) and then proceed to show how two authors handle that issue in their stories. I think it is better to work through one story before moving to the second text; attempts to integrate prose comparisons produce a jumble.

Q.1(c). This task worked well on both tiers, albeit with rather more narration on Foundation. When the paper was set we agonised about the wisdom of specifying twenty lines but I can report that this was overwhelmingly successful. The bonus was that it helped candidates to select more effectively. There was not quite enough discussion of how/what the endings achieved. Most stories made an appearance though the most popular choices were *Snowdrops*, *The Lesson* and *Extraordinary Little Cough*. There were some candidates who tried unsuccessfully to recycle their work on the prose extract.

As I said above, I think this was the area of the exam paper which showed most improvement over previous years and I hope that this success will continue.

Section B

Q.2(a). "In Mrs. Tilscher's Class" has been in both anthologies but had never been specified before although it was a regular favourite in tasks relating to teachers. I worried that students might ignore the stem of the question and repeat earlier tasks focusing on teachers. This did not often happen but it was on this question that candidates found it most difficult to focus on the stem of the question. A large percentage of candidates were convinced that I asked a question about growing up and responded accordingly; another group decided that I wanted to know about progression through the education system from reception to sixth form and another distressingly large group decided that I had finally asked their favourite question on how the poet uses the senses in order to appeal to readers. Of course all of these imagined tasks took students away from the set task and students were much less successful on the specified poem than usual. Candidates were able to make some valid points about the opening verses but rarely coped with the ending and what it had to do with school.

Q.2(b). This task worked successfully on both tiers and nearly all candidates recognised the extended metaphor of a road representing life. They were able to show how the road in the text could symbolise opportunities/decisions that occur in life. They were much less successful in dealing with individual images in the poem like "the bolt of cloth" or the "kite tail".

I was surprised how much less effective responses were on "The Old Road". Some candidates contented themselves with declaring one poem was about the future and the second poem was about the past. Again there was an unwillingness to confront specific imagery. I was dismayed by the fact that only two candidates noticed that the poems were sonnets and no one attempted to show how the poet used sonnet form and the advantages of using that form in these particular poems. Perhaps the whole notion of form might be considered at next year's INSET; certainly some of the worst responses are when students discuss form as an end in itself but usually this is in feature logging of figures of speech. The notion that form and meaning are inseparable in literature appears to be a lost idea which we ought to try to recover.

Q.2(c). This was probably the more popular question and it was invariably done well. As in the prose extract the moment that candidates begin to say things about the persona they are operating below the surface of the text. Candidates had lots of opinions about the thief in the poem and most are still willing to make the thief male. All the inferences about the character were effectively referenced and the poet's language was examined forensically. Originally, I wanted to use the word "persona" in my question and there is the possibility that the term might have clarified some minds on Higher Tier and probably caused some dismay on Foundation Tier.

Most candidates chose "Boy" as their companion poem; almost any other Duffy poem was successful with the exceptions of "Valentine" and "Miles Away" and here the difficulty was not in the poems but in candidates trying ineffectively to repeat last year's exam paper. If the focus remained on the speaker either poem could be used successfully. Candidates who tried to use material by other poets fell victim to the same problem in not concentrating upon the speaker in the poems.

Section C

Inevitably my comments on this section can only reflect what I have seen; Specification A provides a much more reliable account of choices and responses.

Until very late in the examining process I had seen no responses on *Under Milk Wood*. The responses I finally saw were not very successful. On Q.3(a) candidates seemed unhappy in the task with the bullet point about Captain Cat and the Voices encouraging some students to launch their prepared essays on narrators in the text. Q.3(b) was more successful but was again marked by lack of textual detail. I saw no Foundation responses.

A View From The Bridge was answered effectively on both tiers. There were some impressively voiced accounts from Rodolpho where candidates demonstrated a full knowledge of the text transmitted from inside the character's shoes. Candidates are responding well on both tiers to this type of task and they can empathise readily with the characters.

Q.4(b) was handled with equal assurance though there was evidence of the prepared answer on 'tragic hero' worryingly accompanied by all the Greek terminology in one case. Generally, candidates demonstrated an assured knowledge of the text but were sometimes less certain in reaching a conclusion.

Q.5(a) on *An Inspector Calls* seemed a less popular alternative in the scripts I saw. More candidates are moving towards the character study approach to this type of question and the best answers now demonstrate a greater textual knowledge. Using our 'dim actor' guideline, our poor thespian would certainly have found the majority of answers helpful.

Q.5(b) was popular but not without dangers for some candidates who could only respond by detailing what the Inspector discovered about each character. Invariably these narrative responses suffered from a lack of focus. The best candidates were able to discuss the Inspector in terms of his dramatic functions and to speculate helpfully on whether the character represented the authorial voice; they could discuss his entrances and exits from the play and see the Inspector as a morality figure. Others attempted to view the Inspector as a socialist hero against the wicked capitalists.

For the first time I saw answers on *Hobson's Choice*. The text was successfully handled on both tiers. On Q.9(a), perhaps the most frequent choice was Willie. Candidates were able to support their decisions with textual references but the scenes detailing Hobson's illness were seldom mentioned.

I sometimes felt that candidates were always attempting Q.9(b) whichever question they chose. The second task was done well though I felt that most candidates did not give Willie sufficient credit for his growing strength in the relationship.

I saw only Higher tier responses on *Blood Brothers* this year which was an interesting development. Candidates were able to write their character study of Mrs Lyons effectively though were generally less attentive to aspects of her presentation; I often wished for a little more precision of textual referencing.

Social class was well handled but as always some candidates preferred to respond to a task on superstition. The best answers were able to refer to specific parts of the play but I was surprised that often only the incident with the police visiting the respective homes was chosen.

As last year, I saw no Shakespeare apart from one candidate who clearly had not studied the play.

Last year I forgot to acknowledge the debt we owe to our authors in allowing us to use their material in our anthology and for that I apologise. I am convinced that the authors would be delighted to see the care and enthusiasm with which candidates respond to their texts. I also wish to thank everyone who prepared candidates for the examination.

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