

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

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Tystysgrif Gyffredinol Addysg Uwchradd

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

SUMMER 2006

ENGLISH & ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Statistical Information

GCSE

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

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

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

Annual Statistical Report

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

ENGLISH

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2006

- 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 in the vast majority of centres the administrative aspects were completed in an exemplary and professional fashion. Class lists were generally included in the package of folders and many centres were kind enough to include less well-known resource material. Plastic folders and other complicated packaging are happily almost a thing of the past and many centres have now sensibly adopted treasury tags as the most efficient way of keep a single candidate's work together. Occasionally it was necessary to ask centres for more samples where there was an insufficient number of folders from each teacher. Most centres sent three folders per teacher which is appropriate.

Some aspects of administration still cause concern.

- The 'Moderator' column on the E1/EL1 sample marksheet is for the moderator's use. This year a number of centres used this column to note who had conducted the internal moderation. This information is helpful but should appear elsewhere.
- It is essential that the candidate's name appears on each piece of work and preferably on each page.
- At least one essay in either a single or dual folder must be handwritten.
- The coversheets must be signed by both the candidate and the teacher. In a ruling applying to all examination Boards, it is now established that if a coversheet is unsigned by the candidate and there is no very convincing reason for this, the candidate will lose all his/her marks.

- It is fairly rare for teachers incorrectly to give 'split' marks for Reading and Literature pieces but sadly it still happens.
- To ensure that the administrative aspects are completed appropriately, centres are encouraged to use the checklist sent out with the coursework sample materials. This checklist is available on the WJEC website.

Assignments

English folder: Wales Version

Welsh Relevance and Different Cultures

This option in the Specification has a loyal but small following. Poetry rather than drama was almost always chosen to cover the Welsh Relevance aspect and a good range of poets was represented, chief among whom were Dylan Thomas, Gillian Clarke and RS Thomas. Tasks were all well focused and allowed the candidates to investigate the verse thoroughly. When the Welsh Relevance aspect was covered by drama, *Under Milk Wood* was the most popular text though some centres are beginning to investigate Emlyn Williams' plays. Otherwise the drama chosen was almost always by Arthur Miller as it was last year. For more comments on Different Cultures poetry, see below.

English folder: England version

Task setting for the Shakespeare part of the folder has become increasingly refined over the last two or three years and the majority of centres now set tasks on a specific scene or pair of scenes. *Romeo and Juliet* is the most popular play with Act 1 Scene I and Act 1 Scene v being frequently chosen for close study. This is wholly appropriate though it is helpful to the candidates if the tasks make them look outside the chosen scene. Thus an assignment like 'How does Shakespeare create tensions and establish themes in Act 1 Scene I of *Romeo and Juliet*? Show how these tensions and themes are developed in a scene later in the play.' allows greater scope for the candidates. Other tasks on this play include attributing blame for the death of the protagonists and character studies. Both of these approaches can become rather general if they are not linked back closely to the text. Assignments on dramatic function are more demanding and well suited to able candidates.

Some interesting tasks were set on other plays:

- How does the 'play extempore' (Act 2 Scene iv) bring into focus the relationship between Hal and Falstaff and why is it important in the play as a whole? (*Henry IV Part 1*).
- Analyse Mark Antony's performance in the forum scene (Act 3 Scene ii) and show how it relates to the play as a whole. (*Julius Caesar*)
- How does Iago cultivate the image of honesty? (*Othello*)
- How does Shakespeare show us different aspects of Henry V as man and king?
- Through a close examination of the text, explain the dramatic purpose of Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban in *The Tempest*?

- Does Shakespeare want us to be sympathetic to any of the characters in *The Merchant of Venice*?
- Compare the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick with the one between Claudio and Hero. (*Much Ado About Nothing*)
- How does Shakespeare establish Richard III's evil character in the opening scene of the play?

Obviously care needs to be taken when setting some of these tasks. The more general of them, like the one on *Othello*, are very demanding and perhaps best suited to the more able candidates.

Occasionally centres set tasks which were wholly inappropriate. 'Write about a few key moments in the play.' and 'The language Shakespeare puts into the mouths of his characters tells us much about their personalities. Discuss.' do not aid candidates to gain high marks. Both tasks are vague and disabling. I feel it is wise if centres also avoid tasks which encourage the candidates to 'direct' a scene since this inevitably leads to responses based on lighting changes and stage movement rather than a study of the text.

Different Cultures Poetry

In past reports, I have commented on the unsuitability of some poetry. It was pleasing to see this year that my views regarding *Unrelated Incidents* had been heeded and fewer centres were using this poem. I think that Agard's *Half Caste* like Leonard's poem, offers little for the candidate to work on and it was sad to see candidates struggling to find something to say about what is essentially a very thin poem. Text choices in this section of the folder remain for the most part very limited and when more adventure was shown it was obvious that the candidates responded with enthusiasm. This year I was acutely aware that responses to the Pre-1914 poetry in the Literature folder were generally stronger and I think this must have something to do with the quality of verse chosen.

Since the Different Cultures poetry will appear as Post -1914 poetry in the Specification A Literature folder, it is sensible to ensure that a comparative aspect is built into the task. This means that there needs to be a clear thematic link between the poems chosen. However, to make this thematic link the central strand within the task can be very limiting. Thus a task like 'Compare how Alvi (*Presents from my Aunt*) and Bhatt (*Search for my Tongue*) investigate their views of culture.' may not do the candidates any favours since it does not encourage them to investigate the verse as literature in its own right before drawing comparisons based on theme, content, style, viewpoint and mood. The simple task 'Compare and contrast' will allow candidates to do everything they need to gain high marks. Care must be taken that the task does actually require comparison if it is to stand as one of the comparative pieces in the Literature folder. 'Mid Term Break (Heaney) and *Poem at 39* (Walker) both look back at childhood. How do they do this?' is a task which does not require the candidates to make any comparison at all. I repeat my comments from previous reports that comparing two poems by the same poet generally makes comparison of style very difficult and that only one of the poems in this section of the folder needs to be from a different culture. This opens up the possibility of some interesting combinations. Happily very few centres now require their candidates to attempt a three-way comparison.

There was evidence in some centres that the rather narrow range normally encountered had been abandoned in favour of some promising material. Below I have listed some possible combinations.

Tempo (Lauris Edmond)/*Catrin* (Gillian Clarke)
 **Coming Home* (Curtis D. Bennett)/*The Man He Killed* (Hardy)
 **The River Merchant's Wife* Anon. (Translated from the Chinese by Ezra Pound)/*A Woman to her Lover* (Christina Walsh)
The Label Emigrant (Bertolt Brecht)/*Refugee Blues* (WH Auden)
For my lover returning to his wife (Anne Sexton)/*Adultery* (Carol Ann Duffy) (NB This poem contains strong language.)
Storm on the Island (Seamus Heaney)/*Wind* (Ted Hughes) or *Patrolling Barnegat* (Whitman)
For my daughter, Yansan Yashoda (John Agard)/*Prayer before Birth* (Louis MacNeice)
The Other Woman (Liz Lochhead)/*Manwatching* (Georgia Garrett)
Act of Union (Heaney)/*Morning Song* (Plath)
Early Purges (Heaney)/*Mort aux Chats* (Porter)
 **I wouldn't thank you for a Valentine* (Lochhead)/*Sonnet 130* (Shakespeare)
 **Still I Rise* (Maya Angelou)/*Cousin Kate* (Rossetti)
The Surfer (Judith Wright)/*Storm on the Island* (Heaney)
 **Do not ask of me, My Love* (Faiz)/ *If thou must love me (Sonnet XIV)* (Elizabeth Barrett Browning)
Easter 1916 (Yeats)/ *Requiem for the Croppies* (Heaney)
Blackberry Picking (Heaney)/*Stealing Peas* (Gillian Clarke)
Do Not Go Gentle into that Goodnight (Thomas)/*Mid-Term Break* (Heaney)

The asterisked combinations will also suit the Pre-1914 section of the Literature folder. Copies of virtually all these poems are available on the Internet.

Narrative/expressive Writing

Happily fewer centres used the highly structured plan for 'The Assassin' this year after my comments in last year's report. This teaching aid generally resulted in formulaic responses which showed little of the individual 'voice' of the candidate. It is worth repeating that it is in this section of the folder that the candidate should be given guided freedom to write as they wish and this year as in the past there was much good expressive and autobiographical work. Very short descriptive writing was less successful. At band three and above, the criteria for assessment require that the work be 'sustained'. It is very difficult, therefore, to give a high mark to work only three-quarters of a side long. For many candidates the sentence structure, punctuation and spelling aspects remain a problem as they do in the examinations. When assessments were generous, it was generally because this aspect of the mark had been inflated.

Analytic/persuasive Writing

While the first Writing task is generally well done, there are still problems in the Analytic/persuasive section, not the least of which is plagiarism. I repeat my plea to centres not to set tasks where candidates can easily download and use material. Sometimes such downloading is credited as 'research' but more often than not whole essays are made up of bits and pieces of others' work. This is especially the case when candidate write about the 'big' issues of abortion, vivisection, euthanasia, fox hunting and capital punishment.

The key consideration in setting tasks for this section of the folder is audience. Work without a clear specified audience simply cannot meet the criteria for assessment as printed in the Specifications for GCSE *English*. Thus candidates who were asked to write an analysis of an advertisement, were not fulfilling the requirements of this section of the folder since essentially this task is a Reading rather than a Writing exercise. Of course, such analysis is valuable preparation for Paper 2 Section A. Reviews are perfectly acceptable but centres need to be aware that such material is easily available on the Internet. Similarly leaflets advertising places or concerning one of the 'big' issues noted above allow rather too much opportunity for plagiarism. As I have commented in the past, the best approach is to choose a local issue to engage the candidates' skills. One of the most successful I saw this year was based on the public debate regarding the building of a skateboard park adjacent to a primary school. Candidates were invited to write letters for and against the proposal adopting different personas and styles for each letter.

English Literature

Pre-1914 poetry

As I noted above, candidates produced better poetry analyses in this section and I believe this is because they were generally dealing with more demanding verse. The domination of the Blake/Wordsworth London poems, Browning's monologues, the Owen /Tennyson combination (*Dulce et Decorum Est* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*) and the McAuley/Rossetti linking (*The Seduction* and *Cousin Kate*) is rapidly disappearing and there was some interesting new verse on display. As with the Post 1914 and Different Cultures poetry, I think candidates achieve most when they analyse each poem separately before moving on to comparison.

Lengthy biographical introductions still figure in some candidates' work and they are no more necessary here than they are elsewhere in the Reading/Literature parts of the folders. They are often simply copied from teacher notes or taken straight from Bitesize or a similar website and of course, since more often than not the writing is not the candidate's, there is the danger of penalisation for plagiarism. Such material is important as an introduction to the study of a writer but it is not assessed and does not need to appear in the essays. As I have commented in past reports and insets, only background information that is directly relevant to the theme and content of a piece of literature is necessary. Happily occasions when candidates count lines and make (very often inaccurate) analyses of rhyme schemes are becoming less frequent. However, image spotting remains a replacement for analysis in many candidates' work. Centres are reminded that only one of the poems needs to be Pre-1914.

I saw a number of (to me) new combinations this year.

Strange Meeting (Owen)/*The Man he Killed* (Hardy)

To His Coy Mistress (Marvell)/*Valentine* (Duffy) or *To His Mistress Going to Bed* (Donne) or *A Woman to her Lover* (Christina Walsh)

First Love (Clare) or *The Ruined Maid* (Hardy)/*The Seduction* (McAuley)

**My Last Duchess* (Browning)/*Salome* (Duffy)

The Burial of an Infant (Vaughan)/*The Dying Child* (Clare)

I wake and feel the fell of dark (Hopkins)/*Thou hast made me and shall thy work decay?* (Donne)

Cherry Ripe (Campion)/*Sonnet 106* (Shakespeare)
**London* (Blake)/*Preludes* (TS Eliot)
**Uphill* (Christina Rossetti)/ *The Road Not Taken* (Frost)
**Sonnet 130* (Shakespeare)/*Ann Hathaway* (Duffy)
**My Heart is Like a Withered Nut* (Caroline Norton)/*Cousin Kate* (Rossetti)

The asterisked combinations are also suitable for the Post-1914 section of the Literature folder. Copies of virtually all these poems are available on the Internet.

Prose

The vast majority of candidates cover Post 1914 prose in the examination so virtually all work in this section of the folder is based on Pre-1914 novels and short stories. In last year's report I highlighted the fact that many tasks set for this section of the folder were leading the candidates to rely heavily on plot summary. I am pleased to report that this year many more assignments contained the word 'How' thus leading the candidates towards the consideration of language.

Tasks on long novels tended to be focused on one or two areas of text (e.g. the opening of *Great Expectations* or *Jane Eyre*) reflecting the approach taken in the Shakespeare section of the folder. It is still true that some tasks lead the candidates away from the study of the text into summary or unrelated issues. For example, an essay entitled 'What do you learn from *Pride and Prejudice* about the society of the time?' is likely to produce answers which have only a fleeting and tenuous link to the text. Similarly 'What are the typical features of a Conan Doyle story?' will lead to generalisation. Some tasks were excessively large. 'How does *Jane Eyre* display gothic features?' for example would require the candidates to be fully conversant with the characteristics of the genre as well the book in its entirety. Similarly, an evaluation of the characters of Bathsheba's lovers in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is perhaps a little ambitious though a good task for testing able candidates. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is becoming more popular ('How does Walpole create a sense of terror?') as is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* though there was a large number of plagiarised answers on this text.

There is still a tendency in some Specification A centres to require candidates to attempt a third comparison in this section of the folder. This is not necessary if the two poetry essays are true comparisons. It seems burdensome to give candidates this extra work. In Specification B no comparison is required in coursework.

Assessments

To ensure parity of assessment through a centre, ideally one person should be responsible for looking at all the folders. It was noticeable this year that when folders had been distributed around a department with all concerned adjudicating on another teacher's assessments, the almost inevitable result was a confusion of standards. Thus errors tended to be compounded rather than corrected. Of course, for training purposes such an approach is wholly appropriate but a final standard does need to be established by one member of staff. Having said that, most centres are to be congratulated on reaching reliable rank orders and assessments. Anybody who has ever tried to achieve this in a large centre will appreciate how difficult this is and how much work it involves. My thanks to all those centres that made the moderator's part in the process simple and straightforward.

As in the past, generosity was the main reason for the scaling of a centre's marks. This was usually the result of inappropriately high marks given for the SSPS aspect in the Writing tasks and brief thin work being over-rewarded. On occasion, claims were made on behalf of the candidate suggesting that they had achieved the criteria when the evidence of the work proved otherwise.

A number of centres took the opportunity to assess some of the Reading/Literature work through an oral assignment. This is permitted by the Specifications but when such a route is taken the teacher involved has to write a clear and full justification for the mark awarded. There was considerable variance this year in the standard of such justifications which ranged from the totally inappropriate brief comment 'Shows insight when talking about the play' to full and detailed explanations for the mark awarded. I have instructed moderators to request more information from a centre if they feel that the justification for a mark is inadequate. Understandably we are worried when the oral assessment is not in line with marks in the rest of the folder. Since assessment in the Reading and Literature tasks is not concerned with the SSPS aspect, one would expect most candidates to be able to write about a text as well as they can talk about it. The nature of the task may be slightly different but the skills shown must measure up to the criteria for assessment for the mark awarded.

A number of candidates were caught using material that was not their own. I would once again encourage teachers to be constantly vigilant for malpractice. Analytic/persuasive writing is most prone to this type of dishonesty and as I have stressed above and in the past, setting tasks which make such cheating difficult or impossible will help the situation. The whole future of coursework has been threatened as a result of the perceived extent of plagiarism. The use of writing frames also caused some problems especially when the frames were over-prescriptive. When a moderator sees from different candidates two pieces of work that appear to be identical then the first thought is that one of them has copied the work of the other. If investigation shows that the whole class's work is the same then the inevitable result is that all the candidates will suffer. Thus they will have lost marks as a result of an over zealous approach from their teacher. This is to be regretted.

Such rather negative comments must not detract from the clear honesty of most candidates. The coursework samples prove just how much solid work is done in centres and I believe that candidates owe a debt of gratitude to their teachers who clearly do an excellent job often under adverse conditions.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Administration

In a vast majority of cases, the administrative tasks – both the overall picture through the E3 forms, and the more specific individual records – are completed in a thorough, professional and prompt manner. The mainstay of the Speaking and Listening administration - the E3 form, which outlines three tasks covering the three contexts – generally gives a good flavour of the work being done in schools and colleges. Similarly, much of the record keeping is exemplary, and is an area which is continuing to develop in a very positive way. Many teachers are keen to showcase their methods, which are often aimed at raising the profile of this element of the English course. However, there are some areas within the administration that still give concern.

- Some centres had failed to receive information concerning advisory visits: it appears this had not been passed on by the Examinations Officer.
- On a small number of occasions, moderators arrived at a centre to be told their visit was not expected. Lack of communication within departments was often the cause here. This subsequently caused problems with re-arranging the visit within the appropriate time-scale.
- Some centres need to be reminded of the need for a good environment for the visit to take place, so that candidates can give of their best. Too often, it seems that this is relegated to the last available room, suggesting a lack of real appreciation of the importance of the visit on the part of the management. This year, moderators reported having to be perched on stools in a Food Technology room, contending with a loud washing machine that no-one appeared able to turn off; moving from one room to another at change of lesson; and coping with a relatively large group in a room too small for easy access.
- In some centres, moderators were expected to assess groups of candidates within the normal classroom situation, with the rest of the class present – and not always behaving in an appropriate manner. This may work with some classes, but can seriously disadvantage both candidates and teachers in the assessment process.
- In far too many centres, full records for the whole department were not available for the moderator. These are required, and a number of additional visits will be made next year as a result.
- A small number of centres seem resistant to developing records that go beyond a mark in a mark book.

Assignments

There were many well-chosen tasks in evidence, with fewer examples of candidates struggling with excessive amounts of reading. Most centres had planned well for the day, although there were isolated cases of a teacher 'trying something new' with disastrous results. The format for the session often began with a 'warm-up' starter activity, which moved on to focused tasks, leading to general discussion and a time for reflection at the end. Deciding on set timings for each activity also allows the session to proceed at a good pace and avoids lapses into silence.

Although a large number of centres ensure that all the candidates are involved all of the time in the session, there are still cases where candidates are whirled in to perform in front of the moderator and teacher, or where groups 'do their piece' while the remaining candidates look on. It is important that candidates are seen to be involved in all contexts – although obviously time will limit the number of individual presentations used. It is expected that questions might arise from an individual presentation – at least one moderator reported that candidates were taken aback that questions should be asked after a presentation was given.

It is also clear that conscious efforts are being made to teach Speaking and Listening skills, which is often addressed from the beginning of KS3. This includes basic listening, turn taking, responding to specific questions, and paralinguistics, for example.

Some examples of successful tasks seen by moderators are:

- Personal accounts for the individual presentation – a candidate speaking about his escape from Kosovo was particularly moving.
- Speaking about a treasured possession for the individual piece – this from an adult class. This provoked a much more spontaneous response than the 'prepared talk'.
- Each of the members of the group promotes their sporting hero. Discussion follows to reach a consensus on which hero/heroine is the best.
- A book club style interview with a well-known author. The example seen was with J. K. Rowling – and done in a very 'tongue in cheek' manner!
- Group discussion concerning whether the candidates' school should be promoted as an appropriate destination for Prince William's offspring!
- Group discussion of a 'disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' letter on the subject of teenagers.
- Task based on the mystery of the Marie Celeste which involved two candidates in the hot seat as a possible stowaway and the Captain of the *Dei Gratia*; an individual presentation giving views about possible solutions to the mystery and group discussion arising from the material presented. This was also material used as stimulus for a piece of written coursework.
- Group discussion on the perception of women in today's society.
- Group discussion on teenage curfews.
- A public meeting – with candidates in role – on a controversial local town issue.
- Discussion of a school funding issue, with candidates in role as teacher, councillor, heads of department etc. (This was with able candidates).
- Paired role-play of characters from *An Inspector Calls* – again, using more able candidates.
- Role-play group discussion over a local issue of the homeless.

Assessment

It was pleasing to note that the criteria were referred to consistently during visits, with just one or two exceptions. Assessments were generally consistent between moderator and teacher, although anomalies do occur when preconceptions concerning past performance colour judgement on the day. There were concerns raised that in a few centres, the assessment revolved around three occasions only, with no opportunity for candidates to improve or even replace a missed assessment. Also, some centres were not using assessment for the three separate contexts to provide the summative assessment, but just the three best performances.

There were also concerns raised over the 'fast tracking' of Year 10 pupils. Those seen by moderators often simply did not have the experience, the range, the maturity or the sophistication to access higher level skills in speaking and listening at this stage.

Moderation within centres is still the thorny issue it has been for the last few years. There is no consistency between centres concerning what is provided in terms of time and support.

Despite this, moderators have, as always, been full of praise for the work seen in the vast majority of centres, which can range from units for the highly disruptive through to independent schools in the rolling countryside. In almost all cases, speaking and listening is seen as an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

FOUNDATION TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

PAPER ONE

Section A

This year's passage, from a Penelope Lively short story, tells the tale of Jenny, a housewife struggling with domestic chaos, being forced by her husband to employ additional help in the form of Mrs Porch, who sweeps into the house, transforming it in a matter of days into an ordered, sparkling home. All seems perfect until it becomes clear that Mrs Porch is a thief, regularly stealing money from Jenny's purse. The attraction of the passage lay in its straightforward narrative, interesting characters and relationships and the way in which the unfolding situation was resolved in the final lines. Almost all candidates were able to understand what happened, though it was only the most careful readers who were able to pursue some of the subtleties of the narrative.

A1

This first question asked candidates to explore the characters of Henry, Jenny's wife, and the way he treated her in the opening 18 lines of the passage. This was a very familiar type of question on character and well-prepared candidates knew that the mixture of sensible comment and inference linked to textual evidence would bring good rewards. It was also exactly the kind of question where methodical tracking of the text meant candidates could accumulate marks easily. From the opening lines it becomes clear that Henry wants the situation in the house improved and some candidates noted that his opening words, "You'll have to get some help" are a command and are repeated in line 4. This immediately suggested to some his determination to get his own way, and a number of candidates also saw in his next comment, "I'm tired of this mess," a rather selfish, perhaps dominating character. This seemed to be confirmed by the way he dismisses Jenny's concern about a home-help, when he "brushed that objection aside with a snort." By this point in the passage, good candidates already had plenty to say about Henry and his treatment of Jenny. Most were prepared to say that Henry was a bit of a bully, some said he always got his way, or controlled Jenny, or never listened to her views or concerns, while others felt he was simply rude or dismissive of her. There was lots of evidence to support these assertions, though weaker candidates often drifted from the question into unnecessary considerations about Jenny or how Henry should behave.

As candidates read on, more perceptive readers noticed a slight difference in his treatment of Jenny, talking to her "more kindly" and suggesting whoever was employed "could do the worst chores". Many candidates commented on this apparently more considerate side to his nature but others saw this as just another part of his persuasive technique, noting that whilst this appeared to be the comment of a more thoughtful husband, his other comment, "Give you time for the rest", suggested a sexist view of his wife's role. This appeared to be confirmed when Jenny seems comforted by the thought that she could "make nicer food" for him and have his "ironed shirts ready and available". Many commented critically on Henry's apparent expectation that it was Jenny's job to keep the house neat and tidy and that he appeared to have no role in this. For those who felt there was a nicer, kinder side to Henry, the final lines of the section seemed to once again confirm his less pleasant side when he tells her in a very patronising way how to place an advertisement in a shop window. It was common for candidates to conclude at this point that he treated her like a child or that he talked down to her, especially as he spoke slowly to her and was not going to repeat himself.

In tackling this question, most candidates were able to make simple inferences linked to the text and thus score in the 5-7 mark range and candidates who were able to confidently probe a range of attitudes and aspects of his character moved into the upper mark range. Those who did this most successfully tended to avoid the 'broad brush' overview statement at the start of their response but instead tracked the text through the lines carefully, making appropriate selections of quotations to support their views.

A2

Good marks on this question were achieved by the accumulation of evidence from the passage, showing how Jenny's reaction to Mrs Porch changed over time. Again, the question called for careful reading of the text but good marks could be achieved by location of evidence. It was clear that whilst weaker readers gained marks for the early lines of this section of the passage, they often struggled to sustain their focus on the question, sometimes resorting to unselective copying or spending as much time on Mrs Porch as on Jenny.

At the start of Jenny's relationship with Mrs Porch, she is clearly uneasy, unsure how to behave with the confident applicant who is never lost for words. She is confused and nervous at the first meeting, embarrassed and perhaps shy. Many sensibly quoted the line, "Jenny, confused, found herself blushing and talking too much", sometimes with a little exploration before noting that she then warmed to Mrs Porch and relaxed as they toured the house. Perhaps she feels intimidated again when Mrs Porch begins tidying in the kitchen and she tells her not to; certainly she is embarrassed and maybe ashamed about the state of three-year old Emma's bedroom and windows, so much so that she begins picking up clothes. However, she seems re-assured by Mrs Porch's attitude and comment and is delighted that she could begin work the next week. Careful candidates had already accumulated a number of marks, noting these different reactions from Jenny. It is clear that Jenny is excited by the changes Mrs Porch brings - she is so efficient the house is transformed. Not only does Jenny believe the relationship with Mrs Porch is good, she also appreciates Mrs Porch's work and organisation. Her earlier anxieties are forgotten as she now trusts Mrs Porch entirely with her money and she views her as an indispensable part of the household, at one point calling her an angel. Although this was not a difficult question, candidates had to keep the focus of their work on "Jenny's reaction" and avoid slipping into a mere re-telling of the story.

A3

Asking for a character's thoughts and feelings has been a familiar question across both tiers and rather than ask a further separate question on the writer's craft and technique, it seemed appropriate to link it to the way Jenny's feelings changed over these lines. Where candidates had heeded advice given in previous reports and in Inset session regarding this type of question, their responses often had sentences beginning, "Jenny feels / thinks...". Good responses showed how Jenny gradually moved from a concern that she had less money than usual, to a growing realisation that Mrs Porch may be stealing from her. Her feelings of increasing anxiety are shown when she refuses to allow Mrs Porch to pay the bread man, fearing more money will be taken. Weaker candidates merely re-told the story rather than focus on Jenny's thoughts and feelings and ignored completely the 'how' part of the question. However, more focused responses tracked Jenny's changing feelings, often using the text in noting that she felt, "a little thud of shock" and then becomes "ill and shaky" when Mrs Porch is around. Some candidates also commented on the sense of betrayal that Jenny felt. The writer shows Jenny's anxiety and emotion in the way she behaves and talks and the best responses selected and commented on these details well: she responds to Mrs Porch in a 'strangled' voice and gets up 'hastily, spilling the baby's milk'. When Mrs Porch goes to take the purse, Jenny cries out, 'shrilly' and leaves the room, 'hastily'. Other candidates recognized

that the use of capitals on 'LEAVE IT' and the exclamation mark on 'No!' also indicated the anger or emotion in Jenny's voice. Where there was some probing and commenting on specific words or features, examiners were instructed to reward generously. This was a demanding question, requiring candidates to balance the two elements, and whilst most were able to make a creditable attempt at Jenny's thoughts and feelings, it was only the more able candidates who pushed into the top mark band as they linked the more demanding considerations of the writer's technique to the tracking of Jenny's changing feelings.

A4

The use of the diary/empathetic response is one that often works well as it allows real exploration of a character's attitude, as well as showing the candidate's ability to select what is important. The decision to focus only on the events in lines 53-83 also meant candidates could focus on the key events of one day in depth. Sadly, some weaker candidates ignored this instruction and tried to cover the events of the whole text, usually with very limited success. Where candidates tackled the task correctly, responses usually fell into one of three categories: those who thought Mrs Porch had not stolen the money at all; those who were fairly sure that Mrs Porch had been stealing but were not quite sure how the situation had been resolved; and those who saw clearly that Jenny had been driven into a compromise, compensating the theft of the money with the improved state of the house. The most able, in drawing on the final sentences of the passage, also explored Jenny's feelings in accepting that her money would continue to be taken. Where candidates had arrived at the wrong conclusion, it was possible to give some credit for the way they had explored Jenny's feelings in the early lines of this section, but their mis-reading limited opportunities for greater reward. Many candidates who understood the situation captured Jenny's ambivalent attitude towards Mrs Porch well, showing outrage at harbouring a thief but balanced by the recognition of domestic harmony that her arrival had brought. Where there was a clarity of understanding about the events and how Jenny responded, examiners were encouraged to reward positively, although the top marks tended to be achieved by those who could, in addition, explore and comment on the compromise seen in Jenny's final comment. As on previous occasions where such questions had been used, this proved to be an effective discriminator, allowing the most careful readers to gain high marks by showing good understanding of situation and character, and there were many perceptive, impressive responses seen by examiners.

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

Many candidates find descriptive writing demanding, although in recent years there have been signs that focused work in schools and the messages contained in these reports and in Inset sessions have brought about improvements. In this year's responses, there was evidence of able candidates trying to mould their approach into a series of 'snapshots' that focused on particular moments before, during and after the sporting or musical event rather than simply writing a complete account of the whole event.

In these better pieces, the attention given to individuals was greater and at times extended attention on a particular athlete or musician was built up over a number of sentences. Many candidates chose to write about a 'big' event, frequently the final of a football, rugby or athletics match and there were many variations on they way England gloriously snatched victory in the final minute of this year's world cup final! However, often more effective as a choice for description was the 'smaller' event such as the school sports day, where it seemed to be easier to focus attention on individuals; I read one particularly enjoyable piece where much of the description was simply devoted to the headmistress trying to organise a race for squabbling juniors. Similarly, the best responses for those tackling the musical event were often those that simply took a few 'snapshots' during the event. Here, the attention given to a particular musician or member of the audience often resulted in good detail where the picture was built up over a number of sentences. The school concert was also frequently a good vehicle for those able to show an eye for detail and I read a number where the attention on both those performing and the watching, doting parents made for an enjoyable read. Others who chose the rock concert often tried hard to capture the atmosphere of excitement and anticipation among the audience as the appearance of idols drew near and in one or two pieces, the description of events in the 'mosh pit' left me feeling very old indeed!

There were inevitably still those candidates who simply wrote a first person account of their visit to a sporting event or musical event and still a depressing number of short responses that could gain little reward but many candidates were able to show that they understood the difference between narrative and descriptive writing and some showed an impressive ability to focus on small, but telling, details.

B2

(a) On the Run.

This was a popular choice, most writing in the first person and with many candidates casting themselves as innocent victims caught up in someone else's crime. Sometimes, weaker writers found it difficult to backtrack to show how the events had led to them being on the run. These writers also found it difficult to build detail and so the tales often became overly event-driven, with improbable chases and near-capture, simply making for long, rather than good, narratives. Where the narratives worked well, they often had a simple, strong plot, a focus on the description of the situation and a good, strong conclusion.

(b) Write about a time when you felt ashamed of yourself.

This title worked well for candidates who used or embellished their own experiences in tales that were tightly time-limited and had just a few characters. Many of the anecdotes involved family or friends and this perhaps made it easier to give the writing a clarity and realism sometimes lacking in other choices. Where these tales worked best, they had a simple story line and moved neatly towards the outcome, most concluding with a statement of sincere regret that the writer had been drawn into the events in the first place.

(c) The Journey of a Lifetime.

As in the case of the Higher Tier candidates, many of the pieces were autobiographical and whilst many chose journeys to interesting places, other candidates chose to be more ambitious in scope, one candidate I saw choosing 'life' as their journey and another choosing 'birth.' Opting for ambition carries its own risk and sometimes candidates struggled for coherence where organisation and planning were lacking. In other cases, simply opting for scope was not a substitute for good writing and the round-the-world journey I read that was

little more than a mention of a list of places visited around the globe was much less interesting than the journey to school to collect her GCSE results that one candidate wrote about. Often, simple ideas were the best as they conveyed the realism of ordinary life.

(d) Continue the following: 'Everyone said you should never go back but I could not resist...'

This seemed to become for many the 'haunted house/forest' option and those who chose to treat it as such rarely did themselves any favours, with both plot, setting and events sometimes so weak and formulaic that good writing was often in short supply. Many simply ignored the opening for the story and weak writers were usually quickly in trouble, injecting corpses and ghosts into thin tales of parallel worlds. Much stronger responses came from those candidates who genuinely built tales around the idea of a return to a past or a place they had left. One of the successful pieces I read was the tale that led up to the narrator returning to a firework he thought had gone out; it was a simple but dramatic piece of writing that worked very well indeed...and with not a ghost or headless monster in sight!

(e) An Unforgettable Moment.

Candidates who chose this option saw that it gave them limitless scope, and as it also had the virtue of being focused on a single event or moment, there were rich opportunities for close detail, rather than a string of events. Personal triumphs and tragedies formed the bulk of these responses, along with the joys and pain of family life; many were written with disarming honesty and charm. For teachers, using these final two options as a way of teaching writing in the examination might prove useful, as they often seemed to represent the strongest and the weakest of the writing seen in this year's examination.

PAPER TWO

The two texts seemed to work well together, partly because of the way in which the newspaper seemed to engage candidates' interest. The amount of reading candidates had to undertake was also rather less than in previous years and there were one or two ways in which the questions were framed that were intended to make it clearer to candidates about exactly what was required of them.

A1

This first question has become one for which candidates are increasingly well prepared and the instances of full page responses rather than bullet points or lists, are happily now much more rare, though they do still exist. Most candidates now seem clear that this test of location and selection gives them an opportunity to get their examination paper off to a good start and the decision to focus the question on just the opening three paragraphs meant that only those determined to ignore every help offered, slipped up badly. The details of how Fauja Singh prepares for marathons were not difficult to find and most candidates scored well. There were examples of unselective copying, sometimes chunks of text beyond the opening paragraphs but where candidates used bullet points, they usually quickly accumulated good marks.

A2

This question was perhaps the most difficult on the paper on which to achieve the highest marks, since it required the ability to analyse the article in some detail. The bullet points in the question were intended to offer some structure for a response as well as being a kind of checklist for the candidate in terms of coverage.

The point has been made many times in previous reports that candidates can expect little reward for merely stating such views as: "the headlines are big and bold, try to engage the reader's interest and make you want to read on", yet this seemed a familiar start to many candidates' responses. Too few were prepared to say anything about the actual wording of the headline, although some did pick up the link between the 'distance' of a marathon and some talked of the suggestion of an endurance test. Many recognised that the introduction gave a little detail about the runner, Fauja Singh, but only the more able seemed to focus on the man's age as being anything unusual; some were simply unimpressed by his slow time! Some went on to talk about the picture, with comments that ranged from its size and position to those who explored the picture of this old man running on his local streets.

As candidates moved into the text, it became clear to examiners that the key divide was between those candidates who could select information and material that made the article interesting and the more able candidates who were prepared to make some attempt to explore how and why such information was interesting. Weaker readers tended to repeat the information given in A1 but failed to push into the rest of the article. Most candidates, however, could select some interesting details, though I was often surprised that Fauja Singh's age seemed to be of only passing interest to some; instead they would focus on his diet or spend a paragraph on the man's family history. Candidates immediately began to push towards the higher mark band if they expressed surprise that a marathon could be attempted by someone so old - which was clearly Anne Johnson's views - and having established this, it followed that completing six such runs in four years was also worth focusing on, especially as two of these had been completed abroad, unusual enough for anyone in their eighties or nineties. Because the article had been built around the achievement of such an old man, almost all of the facts and information about him were interesting and could gain reward: that he was a marathon record holder; he raised money for others and was sponsored by Adidas; his history as a runner, especially his limited understanding of marathons when he began running; and his intensely competitive nature were all worthy of focus, but more able candidates consciously tried to link these details to how this engaged them.

The best responses constantly used the contrast between Fauja Singh's age and what he did as their reference point. Some managed to explore and comment on the way the article included his trainer's thoughts and opinions or Anne Johnson's own surprise as she watched him train; some also recognised that the rhetorical question about exercise and old age was a way of engaging the reader. Many candidates were able to gain marks in the 5-7 mark band but only those prepared and able to address the issue of 'how' moved into the upper band.

A3

By contrast to the previous question, this was relatively simple in that what was required was 'search and find' technique, and providing candidates kept a clear sense of the sequence of events, it was not difficult to gain good marks. Some weaker candidates ignored the instruction to organise their answer in three paragraphs and often presented a jumble of information but most saw that the three-paragraph approach helped them organise their response. Dealing with the 'before' and 'after' sections of the text were relatively simple as they covered only a small proportion of the whole text and to gain good marks candidates had to sequence Parris's changing feelings during the race. Many candidates were able to see that before the race, Parris feels 'nervy' and miserable at the prospect of running, he wishes he hadn't entered at all and is determined never to participate again.

Once he is running, he feels more positive, even surprised at his fast pace. His feelings change when he gets a stitch and, although determined, he wonders if he would even finish the race. His feelings change wildly from over-confidence to despair and he feels too old to race. However, his feelings improve as he realises his stitch has disappeared and he runs with renewed feelings of optimism, especially as he was pleased to see other runners dropping out. He feels fine as he reaches the Isle of Dogs and feels as though nothing can stop him finishing strongly. He feels the stories of 'hitting the wall' were just fiction but when it happens to him he feels 'ready to drop' and talks of the last part of the race feeling like 'torture.'

When he finishes the race he feels good inside and that he has done better than he might have expected but concludes with the thought that he will never race again. Close tracking was the key to success here and many candidates organised themselves well.

A4

As with Higher Tier candidates, this type of question, involving cross-referencing across the two texts, is always demanding, although recent exam papers have shown that the use of bullet points has helped candidates to focus attention on the key areas. Because of the nature of the this year's texts, it was possible to construct a question where specific comparisons could be made about the two runners, rather than requiring evaluative and analytical comparisons.

The five points of comparison allowed careful readers to achieve good marks. Most correctly identified that Fauja Singh was 93 and Matthew Parris was 36 and that they had respectively run 6 and 5 marathons each. Some candidates lacked care in identifying the runners' best times and selected the time too vaguely (for example, "about six hours") or incorrectly. Candidates could gain marks for simply saying both runners were very competitive in their attitude to other runners, though some dealt with each runner separately, recognising that Matthew Parris was unsympathetic to those runners who dropped out of the race and that Fauja Singh loved to beat runners younger than himself. Most candidates correctly noted that Matthew Parris would not run in marathons again but too many said that Fauja Singh would keep running, rather than correctly seeing that he hoped to make a one-off comeback in 2009. This was a question that required close reading rather than a long response and some candidates wrote at unnecessary length. However, it proved to be a good discriminator that showed more able readers accumulating good marks.

Section B

B1

This year candidates on both tiers tackled the same two writing tasks and comments in the Higher Tier report apply equally here. There has perhaps been a view that tackling an informal letter has been a rather easier option than the more formal letter, and whilst to some extent this may be true, considerations of tone and situation, particularly in creating and developing the writer/reader relationship, require just as much care as considerations of content. Also, some examiners reported that some candidates still seemed unclear about the conventions of an informal letter, in some cases even omitting to say who the letter was to or from.

Foundation Tier candidates had relevant reading material upon which to draw and many used this sensibly in giving advice and opinions about training and diet; some pursued the issue of sponsorship whilst others spent time discussing suitable attire or costumes the participant might wish to consider. There were, unfortunately, some very short, limited responses that lacked any real understanding of the task. There were also those responses that struggled to establish any sense of relationship with the intended recipient of the letter. Where candidates tackled the task with some success, that sense of relationship had been quickly established and frequently I saw scripts where examiners had commented on the 'supportive/encouraging' tone that had been adopted, where the reader would have recognised the interest, admiration and perhaps the astonishment of the writer and these letters often tried to cover a range of content, sometimes with suggestions, usually with a positive tone, though there were also many examples where the writer's concern for the welfare of the friend or relative was handled well. Less successful attempts sometimes adopted the wrong tone that could be viewed as patronising, smug or simply unpleasant and there was a thin line between those who showed concern and those who slipped into a lecturing mode. It was perfectly acceptable for candidates to invent situations that had led normally sedentary individuals to participate in such a punishing event and there were some good examples of humorous irony but this approach needed care and not all writers could handle this well.

B2

This final writing task was of a fairly predictable type, asking candidates to offer an objective and informative guide book entry about a place they knew well. Some candidates interpreted the task wrongly and there were some very weak pieces that were more like a poster than anything else. These candidates often struggled to select appropriate places and lacked an understanding of the kinds of places that visitors would choose for a day trip or a holiday. This made it very difficult to develop their writing very far: a pupil referral unit and a shop were two examples that I came across. Others selected more appropriate places but struggled with audience and purpose, producing more of a promotional article, taking on the role, for example, of the owner of a caravan site or a town's tourism officer.

Where candidates were clearer about the task, many chose their home towns or places they knew well, both home and abroad. It was then the selection of material that was important and for this, candidates had to have an understanding of the needs of their intended readers. Too many guides talked of the numerous restaurants and hotels to visit without ever mentioning a single one by name or location and at the other extreme, some included a long list of shops and fast food places, which I imagine would be a feature of almost every town. Most candidates were able to single out features specific to the place they had chosen, though some seemed to forget the purpose of the guide, by discussing less-relevant aspects like the town's different schools and their GCSE pass rates.

The best pieces tried to consider what would be attractive and interesting to the visitor by reviewing places of interest for the young, the more mature, families, those who enjoyed sporting or walking activities and what the nightlife was like. They included warnings about where to avoid, when parking was most difficult and where admission charges applied. These pieces managed to combine the positive aspects of a place with the less desirable elements and often these were neatly woven together to produce well organised and informative guides that would have been genuinely appreciated by a visitor.

HIGHER TIER WRITTEN PAPERS

PAPER ONE

Section A

This story by Arthur C. Clarke had a powerful and dramatic plot and its concern with the effects of climate change was certainly topical. The story seemed to engage the interest of most of the candidates, particularly those who did understand it clearly, and they certainly wrote about it at considerable length. I hope it offered something for the invigilators too.

However, the science fiction genre can present candidates with some difficulties as it takes them into unfamiliar worlds where things are not as they might expect. Those who are neither willing nor able to read carefully can find themselves exposed and this passage did discriminate effectively. Given the current interest in environmental issues, and the popularity of a particular type of film and television programme, it was surprising that a number of candidates seemed unaware of what a glacier is and some seemed to be convinced that the glaciers were some sort of tribe, presumably advancing from somewhere in the north.

A1

This question asked the candidates simply to find evidence which showed that the setting of the story was London in a future very different from what we know now. The stem of the question made it clear that the setting of the story was London in the future so the key word here was 'different' and the candidates were simply searching for evidence which showed that things were indeed different from now. Some candidates wanted to look for evidence that this was the future, demonstrating that they had not read the question carefully.

Some explanation of the points in the text was perhaps sensible but really the essence of the question was just to assemble the evidence in a methodical and coherent way. For example, the mention of 'thick furs' and 'freezing air' in the first paragraph clearly suggested that there had been dramatic climate change. It was possible to argue that the quiet and stillness were unusual and the reference to the strange silence confirmed that this was a much-changed future. The mention of 'men returning to England' clearly implied that the city had been 'abandoned', as did the reference to 'the last helicopters' leaving from Hyde Park twenty years earlier.

The cause of this abandonment was obviously dramatic climate change and the idea of men 'blasting through ice and snow' confirmed that this was a very different future. The mention of 'the Dust' also hinted at the reason for this change and some candidates suggested 'apocalyptic' change. I was very impressed by that! The collapse of the dome of St Paul's because of the weight of snow was an obvious detail to select and some also saw the significance of the Professor only leaving the university building through 'sheer necessity.' The professor had also been able to collect everything he needed from the shops, but only because the vast supplies of stock had been left in 'the final exodus.' One candidate assured me, quite rightly, that in normal circumstances this would be considered theft.

Most candidates did see that the city of London had been deserted and that the reason for this was a new ice age caused by 'the Dust'.

A2

This was a very familiar type of question and the best answers were methodical, tackling the text in a clear sequence. It is important for candidates to 'position' themselves sensibly when answering any question and this type requires use of 'third-person'. A lot of sentences should begin with 'he is feeling' or 'he is thinking', not least as a way of staying focused on the question. It is also worth pointing out that 'what he does' is not the answer to this question but it is evidence which can be used to infer what he is thinking or feeling. For example, 'he takes a revolver' is not really an answer to the question but it does show that he is feeling apprehensive and thinks he should be prepared for the possibility of meeting 'packs of starving dogs'. The best answers had an overview of the situation and grasped that the 'nervous' Professor was taking this risky journey because his hopes of human contact had been revived by the noises he had heard.

As he sets off, the glare of the sun hurts his eyes. However, the Professor thinks that his journey is surprisingly easy and he thinks about previous difficulties. However, he is aware of the dangers of 'falling snow and dagger-like icicles', which is why he keeps away from the houses. When he reaches the shop, he is probably pleased or relieved to find the room unaltered but the empty tins lead him to think about the 'lonely hours' that he had spent trying to make radio contact. This was a key moment for many candidates as many of them failed to see that the Professor was remembering the past and previous attempts to make contact with the outside world. He is 'patient' but wonders if this attempt will be similarly futile and his hopes, which had obviously prompted this attempt, begin to fade when the radio remains as silent as the city. He tries to console himself and be positive by thinking that his theory was neither proved nor disproved.

As he begins the journey home, he thinks about, and analyses, the noise he is hearing and he thinks it could be an atomic bomb. He feels more hopeful and optimistic as he thinks he could be right.

The key to answering this question successfully was 'tracking' and tackling the text in a methodical way. The difficulty for many candidates was in keeping a sense of sequence and chronology. Many could not sort out what the Professor was feeling 'now', as opposed to his memories of the past, and they did not read carefully enough to maintain a clear sense of progression. It was tricky but the best answers tracked the ebb and flow of hope.

A3

It is not easy to analyse the craft of the writer but this type of question is predictable and candidates should be prepared for it. The question involved a relatively short section of the story and encouraged the candidates to show their skills in close reading. The better answers focused very clearly on the detail of the text and looked closely at the content, the language and the structure of the narrative. A 'professional' vocabulary can be a way of avoiding clumsy explanations but merely spotting literary devices, or indeed identifying the parts of speech, is simply 'formulaic', the last refuge of the desperate. To be distracted by a vain search for alliteration or short sentences when an elderly academic is being pursued through the streets of London by a polar bear seemed perverse. Lists of words are not particularly helpful and quotation is best used in short phrases, or even individual words, which are integrated into the response.

At its simplest, the writer makes this situation tense and dramatic by describing the Professor being pursued by one of the most dangerous predators on earth. However, the best answers worked their way through the text in a logical manner, exploring what happens and looking at specific words and phrases in a clear effort to say how the writer was trying to create tension and drama.

The writer immediately suggests a sense of drama and danger with the statement that the Professor's 'momentary pause almost cost him his life.' This creates suspense and the reader is left to guess the exact nature of the threat to the Professor's life. The situation is dramatic but the writer withholds information by stating that 'something huge and white' appears 'suddenly' out of a side street. The terrifying nature of what he is facing leaves the Professor experiencing 'paralysis' as his mind refuses to accept the reality of what he sees. This is intriguing but also a clear indication of the danger he is facing. He 'fumbles desperately' for his revolver, showing his panic and sense of urgency, but the weapon is described as 'futile' against this threat. Some candidates pointed out that this must have been some threat to make a firearm useless. The writer then reveals what some readers may have guessed but the polar bear is also described as 'huge', which clearly adds to the sense of menace. The Professor drops his belongings and runs from this awesome predator. The word 'floundering' suggests his fear and desperation, and anyone who has read the Foundation Tier Paper 2 from 2003 would have no doubt that flight is the only option if you are confronted by a polar bear!

The narrative then uses the 'classic' elements of the chase to build tension and drama. Safety, in the form of the entrance to the Underground station, is only a few feet away but the Professor's fear is shown in the fact that he cannot hear his pursuer and is therefore unaware of how close the bear is. The temptation to look back is described as 'intolerable' and the drama is heightened in a very obvious way when 'for one frightful moment' the gates resist his 'numbed fingers'. The action and the language combine to make this a tense moment but then the gates 'reluctantly' open and he forces his way. The narrow escape is the stuff of many a thriller! The bear is described as 'monstrous' to emphasise the threat it poses and the way it rears in 'baffled fury' shows that it is a very menacing creature. It 'slashes' at the fallen rucksack in frustration and the violence of the language deliberately conveys the animal's anger. The Professor is 'shaken' by the encounter with the polar bear and it takes him three hours to make his cautious way home.

Those candidates who followed the sequence of events carefully could score very well on this question and many of them did just that.

A4

This question tested the candidates' understanding of the narrative and they needed to provide a summary of the plot as the story moved to its dramatic conclusion. The best answers were selective but showed a clear grasp of the way the story was constructed.

In this final section of the story Professor Millward realises that the animals of the North are migrating south as he sees reindeer being pursued by a pack of wolves. He hears sounds of 'deadly conflict' in the night and, mistakenly as it turns out, he concludes that only Man could be responsible for the animals' migration. He feels the strain of waiting but he remains convinced that rescue is close. The noise is a 'roar', which 'thunders' and is described as being like a 'clash of mighty armies.' The writer gives a clue when the Professor has 'a mad, dreadful thought' of mountains moving. The uncertainty continues, as he can see nothing except the 'stubborn snow'.

As he scans the horizon one morning, the Professor grasps the truth and realises that the 'forgotten enemy' has finally conquered the last defences. The 'deadly glitter' is now visible on 'the doomed hills' and at last he understands the sound he has heard for so long. The final paragraph confirms that the glaciers have returned in triumph. Those who knew what a glacier is had no difficulty with this but some were totally perplexed, while others were evasive.

This question also asked for a personal response to the ending of the story. Some candidates claimed that they had seen what was coming before the Professor but for most the ending provided an unexpected twist. They saw that the writer builds suspense and cleverly conceals the truth until the final sentence. The most perceptive understood the technique the writer was using but others remained in the dark. The details of the story do prepare the reader for something dramatic, or even shocking, but the reader is only given the Professor's mistaken interpretation of what he is hearing and seeing. Everything slots into place in this story and for most it was a satisfying end to the narrative. Some claimed that it was an anti-climax because it was 'only' a glacier and they dismissed this natural force as if it were no more significant than the arrival of a train from Newcastle. Too many candidates wanted to claim that the ending was 'a cliff-hanger' but really the only unanswered question was the fate of the Professor and some did express a sense of sympathy as his hopes were crushed. Some candidates argued that the moral of the tale was a stark warning about human irresponsibility towards the environment, and some of them were quite passionate in making their case.

Section B

B1

This writing task offered some choice this year and it did offer some scope for all candidates. Sporting events could range from the World Cup final (most predictions sadly wrong) or the Grand National to the sack race at Sports Day in the local primary school. Similarly, a musical event could be everything from a performance in a major venue to something in a local hall or school.

The weaknesses in this type of writing have been mentioned in these reports many times over the years. However, more candidates do seem to be getting the message that this is not an opportunity to write a short narrative and the secret of success is to describe the scene rather than write an account of the whole event. The techniques of good descriptive writing are more evident in the candidates' responses and, although there is still work to be done, there are some encouraging signs. Some answers offered an account of an event, or even a match report, but there were many very good 'snapshots' of particular moments.

B2

This selection of titles deliberately followed a familiar pattern and offered opportunities to write fiction or about personal experiences. Three of these titles could be used as the starting point for autobiographical writing and personal experience is usually the best option for most candidates, not least because the framework of a narrative is already there. Of course, there are some who simply transcend all the conventional wisdom about what works in examination conditions and produce work of quite remarkable imagination. However, I have said before that it is easier to develop character and engage the reader if a narrative is not just a breathless succession of events. Too many 'action' stories are clearly based on the mistaken premise that the higher the body count the better the story. The best writers are often those who make a lot out of a little.

(a) The Fugitive

This was quite a popular choice and there were a lot of 'Hollywood-style' escapes and pursuits, some of which were handled very well indeed. However, my favourites were the 'child' fugitives who were escaping bedtime and desperately trying to avoid the clutches of their parents. I saw several of these and they were invariably good, particularly so when they managed to conceal exactly who the fugitive was. In one memorable piece, an apparently hardened criminal turned out to be a little boy hiding under the stairs.

(b) Write about a time when you felt ashamed of yourself.

This really was an opportunity and many candidates realised that it gave them a lot of scope. I have no idea how many of these shameful incidents were true but there were opportunities for comedy here and the able candidates realise that a little falsehood can certainly add to the entertainment. However, there were some obviously sincere responses too and they often worked very well indeed. Perhaps the reason this worked as well as it did was that it seemed to push the candidates towards an anecdotal response, which they could handle in the time, and space, available.

(c) The Journey of a Lifetime.

The focus of this title was intended to be on a memorable journey but some candidates chose to write about their destination and that was perfectly acceptable. It was possible to treat this title imaginatively but most were autobiographical. Some journeys were memorable simply because of the destination involved and, to be fair, I was treated to some exotic locations and interesting accounts of holidays or visits.

Some candidates, perhaps unwisely, chose to write about journeys which ended in their demise, usually as an aeroplane crashed in spectacular fashion. Presumably these answers had been written from beyond the grave.

My personal favourites were those where an increasingly ill-tempered teenager found herself, or himself, trapped in a car with parents, brothers and sisters for many hours as they travelled to a holiday destination. The answers I saw were often very amusing and captured the dynamics of family life very well indeed.

(d) Continue the following: 'Everyone said you should never go back but I could not resist...'

This was the most difficult option and it could be a trap for the unwary. The title suggested that returning to somewhere or someone should be the focus of the narrative but many simply ignored that and set off with a story which had little or nothing to do with the opening. This was also the title which attracted those who wanted to write about their utterly improbable visits to haunted or abandoned houses. I have also come to realise that any story which is set in a forest is likely to end in disaster for all concerned, not least the author.

Openings are helpful in that they can provide a way in for some candidates but they have to be treated with care and they are not there simply to be ignored. It is very important to think out a narrative and have a clear sense of direction before opting for this type of response.

(e) An Unforgettable Moment.

Able candidates are often the ones who choose wisely in this part of the examination and I was struck by the number of very accomplished writers who immediately saw that this title gave them as much scope as they could possibly want. It was very much the popular option for the gifted and talented.

Some of the best responses took their inspiration from the triumphs and tragedies of childhood and many featured either births or deaths.

PAPER 2

It has been several years since George Orwell made an appearance in Section A of Paper 2 but his well-known piece about Sheffield was a good contrast with the leaflet which was clearly presenting the city in a very different, and much more positive, light.

Those candidates who had been entered appropriately for the Higher Tier seemed to respond well to this material and if Paper 1 was a searching test of their reading skills, this paper gave them every opportunity to show what they could do.

A1

There was a lot of textual detail in the opening section of the Orwell passage from which the candidates could draw inferences. The careful readers noticed that the answer was supposed to be based on the opening twenty one lines and this was an attempt to help them by restricting the amount of text on which they had to base their answers.

The overview was obvious enough here and there was little room for argument with the basic proposition that Orwell presented the fair city of Sheffield as a dreadful place. However, there were plenty of detailed impressions too and most candidates understood that they had to link the textual evidence to the inferences. The question simply asked for supporting evidence and there were no distractions in the wording of the question itself.

A methodical approach worked well here and most immediately picked up the reference to Sheffield as 'the ugliest town in the world'. The inference was obvious – it is a very ugly place – and the ironic comment that the inhabitants would 'very likely' make that claim for it was also used as support. Orwell also suggests that Sheffield has very few decent buildings and claims that for a place with a population of half a million it has 'fewer decent buildings than the average East Anglian village'. The smell was the next obvious point to make and he uses an exclamation about 'the stench' and, again ironically, observes that the only thing which replaces the smell of sulphur is the smell of gas.

The city is presented as polluted and the river is described as 'bright yellow with some chemical or other.' Orwell gives the clear impression that Sheffield is heavily industrialised by using the anecdote about the number of chimneys and the smoke-filled atmosphere is indicated by the sardonic comment that the rest of the chimneys are obscured by smoke. The landscape is presented as unattractive with 'frightful' wasteground and Orwell also contrasts northern 'squalor' unfavourably with London. The impression that it is really horrible is reinforced by a series of details which include the litter, the gaunt, small houses blackened by smoke and the endless chimneys fading into a blackish haze. The 'hideous' houses and the railway embankment made of slag added to the picture of a hellish environment. The only impression to contradict this nightmarish vision in any way was the admission that at night it has a 'sinister magnificence'. Some candidates noticed the strange beauty in the 'rosy' smoke,

the flames and the 'fiery serpents of iron' but the able candidates saw that this imagery also had strong connotations of hell. The word 'sinister' maintained the impression of something evil and scary. Indeed it was almost Miltonic in its effect. The noise was perhaps less fascinating but it was part of the picture of Sheffield the final impression was of an industrial hell.

This was not a difficult question and it was possible to gain credit with a systematic approach. The best answers, as usual, had a clarity and coherence which separated them from less assured responses.

A2

This question opened up the debate about the North/South divide but it was really a form of 'search and find' and all that was required was a close look at a relatively short piece of text. Some may have found it difficult to resist the provocation here but it was important to stay focused on the passage and the question rather than allow regional loyalties to surface.

The best answers had a clear and logical structure but the details were not really difficult to find. For example, according to Orwell, industry in the north is ugly, it is dirty and it is polluting. He claims it is 'an awful chaos' of 'blackness and belching chimneys' and it is old, located in 'gaunt barracks'. In contrast, he claims that industry in the south is 'almost attractive'. It is modern, clean and surrounded by lawns and flowers. Industry in the south is described as 'concrete, glass and steel' and 'glittering white'.

He explains these differences by suggesting that industry does not have to be ugly and in the south it is not. He claims that industry in the north was built before modern methods of construction or smoke-abatement and he goes on to argue that the 'chaos' resulted because everyone was simply interested in making money and therefore showed no concern for the environment or for people. More provocatively perhaps, he also claimed that the ugliness of the north's industry was a consequence of the people's complacency, or even their perversity. He alleged that people in the north have got used to squalor and indeed accept it. He even went so far as to claim that that they like the polluted air and prefer it to the 'tasteless' atmosphere of somewhere like Cornwall.

The weaker answers had little or no coherence but most handled this question well enough and the best disentangled the text very effectively.

A3

The analysis of persuasive technique is predictable in this paper and the main problem for many candidates was making an appropriate selection and knowing where to put the emphasis. Perhaps the first point to make is that the question asked how the leaflet tried to attract visitors to Sheffield. It did not ask why someone might want to pick up the leaflet. Better answers look at specific detail within an overview of the persuasive technique and high marks could be achieved by making a sensible selection of specific points. However, too many still seek refuge in the vague generalisations about how eye-catching or easy to read a text can be, despite the repeated warnings over the years. Most candidates would be well advised to think about what is said, how it is said and which persuasive techniques they can identify.

The difficulty with leaflets is perhaps knowing exactly where to start as they do not have the obvious sequence of a prose text, or even a newspaper or magazine article. However, the bullet points were offered as a way of approaching this question and the omission of presentation was deliberate. In the past, too many candidates have got bogged down in peripheral issues such as use of fonts or bullet points or text boxes and I did not wish to encourage this kind of approach.

The pictures were an obvious place to start and they showed attractive images of Sheffield. The physical environment of the city included modern, futuristic buildings and some impressively grand buildings from the past. There was a lot of greenery in the pictures and also an emphasis on the retail, sporting and social life of the city. The pictures showed activities taking place by day and by night to emphasise the range of what the city had to offer and, inevitably, all of the people seemed to be having a good time.

The leaflet mentioned cultural attractions such as museums and art galleries and also the 'remarkable' industrial heritage. The attractiveness of the city was stressed in the section about gardens and open spaces and the statistics of parks and woodlands were clearly intended to attract the visitor to a 'green and pleasant' city. The variety of retail opportunities was also emphasised in the leaflet and particular mention was made of Meadowhall, 'one of Europe's largest shopping malls', with its 270 shops. Sheffield presents itself as a city of architectural beauty in this leaflet and it also claims to have a very wide range of nightlife on offer, including 'world class' theatre and music as well as bars and restaurants. The sporting facilities are described as among the 'best' in the UK. Many attractions are free, there is a modern transport system and there is something for all of the family.

The language of the leaflet was predictably positive and seductive and it was easy to spot examples of this kind of vocabulary. None of these leaflets ever suggests that the place it is promoting is 'average' and the use of superlatives and words such as 'wonderful', 'acclaimed', 'magnificent' and 'enviable' were obvious attempts to attract the visitor. The Peace Gardens, we are told, are 'stylish' while Meadowhall is a 'shopper's paradise'. Direct address, exclamations and rhetorical questions were all part of the persuasive technique but the better answers gave examples and tried to say why they might be part of the attempt to attract visitors.

The overall impression was of a lively city which could 'boast' a rich variety of attractions. The people are described as friendly and the city, an impressive mix of the old and the new, apparently offers plenty to do and see for everyone. It presents itself as having a very pleasant environment and setting where the visitor is 'spoilt for choice'.

I have sometimes had sympathy in the past with those candidates who were clearly struggling to understand why anyone would wish to visit a particular 'attraction'. However, this leaflet was not the most difficult to analyse and many candidates could see very clearly how it was trying to pull in the visitors. I particularly enjoyed the rather indignant comment from one rather prim young lady who understood but did not really approve of the way that 'semi-naked' young woman was 'flaunting herself' in one of the pictures.

A4

Cross-referencing is a requirement but it has proved far from easy and over the years it has been an area where many candidates have really struggled. This question was quite predictable in asking for comparison of the two texts but the instruction to organise the answer into three paragraphs, each with a clear heading, was an attempt to give the candidates a sense of structure. Too often in the past, the answers have been rambling and

unfocused and this has also created difficulties for the examiners who have had to disentangle a shapeless mass of material. However, those candidates who followed the suggested method for answering this question were in position to do themselves a lot of good here and many took the opportunity they had been given.

The first bullet point asked for comparison of the impressions given by the two texts of the buildings of Sheffield. Orwell suggested that there were 'few decent buildings' and that the houses were small and blackened by smoke while the factories were old and ugly. The leaflet, on the other hand, used visual images to suggest that the modern buildings were innovative and futuristic in design with lots of glass and space. The older buildings looked imposing and impressively grand. More obviously, the leaflet talked about 'beautiful architecture' which was 'not to be missed'. Some very sharp candidates made the excellent point that the very same buildings which Orwell denounced as 'ugly' are now presented as part of a 'remarkable industrial heritage'.

Orwell gave the impression that the environment of Sheffield had been scarred almost beyond redemption and he painted a picture of polluted air and water, industrial squalor and a frightful, blackened wasteland. The impression he gave was of an industrial hell. The leaflet could scarcely have been more different. It shows an environment which is clean and green with many parks and open spaces, featuring modern shopping, leisure and cultural facilities. Specifically, the leaflet claims that Sheffield is 'England's greenest city' and gives impressive statistics for woods and parks.

The impressions of the people of Sheffield were also very different. Orwell suggested people who were rather insular with narrow horizons. He also implied that they were proud, even arrogant, in a rather perverse way, accepting and delighting in the ugliness and pollution of their city. There were some northern stereotypes at work here from the old Etonian! The leaflet suggested that the people were friendly and welcoming (another stereotype perhaps) and the pictures showed young, lively people engaged in sporting and 'social' activities.

Section B

B1

In some ways this was an obvious writing task and it allowed the candidates to write truthfully about a place they knew well. Many chose their home towns and cities but they did not have to do this and some opted for tourist locations they had visited either in Britain or abroad.

The key to this question was understanding the purpose and audience of the task. This was not meant to be a promotional leaflet of the kind they had used in Section A. This task was aimed at visitors but it was supposed to provide an objective and informative guide. Some candidates struggled to find the right approach and tried, often rather desperately, to 'sell' places which were the most unlikely of tourist destinations. The abrupt transition to criticism at the end of an essentially promotional leaflet produced some rather strange effects.

It was quite acceptable to write in flattering terms, and indeed to be very serious, in approaching this task. Most answers were reasonably informative and the better answers provided specific details about their chosen place, including recommendations about things to visit and places to eat and drink. However, some candidates took the opportunity to provide the unvarnished truth and to show their sense of irony. Some of these responses were an absolute delight and showed real understanding of audience and purpose.

I hoped this question would give the candidates plenty of scope to show what they could do and it did allow the able to show their sophistication.

B2

The informal letter allows the candidates to write in a natural style and, although some overdo the informality, it does not present them with the difficulties which many encounter in a more formal context. It was perfectly sensible to include some gossip in this type of letter but there was also a job to be done and the letter did have a purpose. The real purpose of the letter was to express opinions and, as always, the best responses had a clear sense of what they wanted to say on the subject.

I understand that the candidates have to think quickly in an examination but some of the approaches to this letter were not well judged and it was important to get the tone right. Some created 'situations' of absurd doom and gloom where the terminally ill were improbably entering themselves for the marathon and others gave advice in a hectoring or patronising way. Those who thought for a moment realised that concerns could be expressed and serious advice could be given but it needed a lightness of touch and a sense of relationship. Some of the letters would have destroyed any friendship and it was necessary to be tactful and pleasant and to judge the situation sensibly. The easy option was simply to be friendly and encouraging, expressing surprise and admiration for the 'mad' friend or relative who was taking on the challenge of the marathon. Some of these answers were effortlessly appropriate and far more successful than those which delivered a dismal lecture about the dire consequences of running twenty six miles.

However, the really good responses to this question were those which had the courage, and the confidence in the relationship, to allow a sense of humour to emerge. There were some witty, mischievous answers and they provided some real entertainment. That said, it was only the very able who could handle this successfully.

I would simply like to conclude by thanking all of the people – teachers, examiners and candidates – who contribute so much to making this examination work as well as it does.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2006

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SPECIFICATION A

Once more, candidates of all abilities impressed examiners with their detailed knowledge and understanding of their set texts and their engaged responses in all three sections of the examination. It was particularly heartening to see how messages about successful exam techniques from reports such as this one, and INSET meetings, have filtered through to candidates.

With that in mind, here are some key messages from this year's examination. Firstly, the point about candidates needing to be absolutely clear about what they need to do in the examination needs to be reiterated, as there are still instances of rubric infringements with candidates seeming not to know their way around the paper, and consequently bravely attempting to answer on texts they've never encountered before - and sometimes, it has to be said, doing rather well: *Pride and Prejudice*, in particular, worked quite well as an unseen this year! Nevertheless, candidates are clearly at a disadvantage if they cannot turn to their specified set texts at the start of the exam, and the more experience they have of handling "real" papers prior to the exam, the better. Secondly, significant numbers of candidates neglect the endings of novels and plays, even when what happens there is pertinent to the question being asked. So, for example, there were answers on Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men* which never mentioned her death, or on Ginger in *Stone Cold* which failed to cover his capture by Shelter, or on *Blood Brothers* without addressing the deaths of the twins. Practice in planning questions would probably be beneficial here; whilst few candidates write plans in the exam, and, indeed, those who do so are not necessarily at an advantage, as they can take up too much time, preparatory work in the run up to the exam discussing what would be appropriate areas to cover is time well spent, giving candidates the confidence to write well balanced responses. This sort of practice may also serve to discourage candidates from over-using the extract in their response to the extended writing, which occasionally happened again this year. Finally, a rather worrying trend is the extent of reliance some candidates place on video or filmed versions of the text. Whilst use of videos and films is a very useful aid to study, candidates need to be aware of where the film stops and the text begins. Those candidates who have been encouraged to look at filmed versions critically often use this knowledge to good effect, but others make reference to events or interpretations of characters drawn wholly from sources other than the written text.

On a positive note, particularly noticeable areas of improvement this year were a clearer focus on the questions asked; more specific, and detailed, reference to the text in the advice to an actor type questions, and less arid device spotting, especially in the poetry responses.

HIGHER TIER

As ever, *Of Mice and Men* was the most popular text by far in Section A, followed by *To Kill a Mockingbird*. *Pride and Prejudice* had a very successful first year, however, and it was a delight to see really engaged responses on the novel from the whole ability range on this tier. *Stone Cold* seemed to have been studied by rather fewer candidates at this level this year, although there were still some very perceptive responses of the highest quality. The other prose texts all elicited interesting and well informed responses. In Section B, differences in choices of texts are not quite as marked as in Section A. *An Inspector Calls* is the front runner, followed by *A View From The Bridge*, and *Blood Brothers* seemed to be studied by more able candidates more often than in previous years, perhaps. Of the Shakespeare texts, *The Merchant of Venice* seemed more frequently studied this year, perhaps as a result of the recent film, and the introduction of *Othello* seemed particularly successful, candidates responding well to its themes and characters. *Romeo and Juliet*, of course, continues to be popular, as does *Hobson's Choice*, whilst *Under Milk Wood* is more of a minority choice.

Section A

As always, more candidates answered on *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* than had studied it, as became evident when responses to Q.1(b) wrote about Momma, as revealed in the extract, rather than on Mother Dear. The extract was rich in detail, however, and there were some thoughtful discussions of the mood and atmosphere. The best responses tracked through, exploring not only its imagery, but also its use of dialogue. Q.1(b) was the more frequently chosen essay option, with the best appreciating the strengths of Mother Dear, as well as her shortcomings, and the way both are presented by her daughter. There were interesting selections of challenges in Q.1(c), however, including the rape and its after effects, and Maya's determination to get a job as a "conductorette".

The extract from *Pride and Prejudice* elicited strong responses, with clear appreciation of how Austen uses the contrast between Darcy and Bingley, and the readers' already well established sympathy with Elizabeth, to influence our view. Some, validly, made a case for Mr. Darcy being reserved, whilst others were very severe in their criticism of him (one described him as "abominably rude") and empathised strongly with Elizabeth. The essay on marriage was by far the more popular choice, having probably been anticipated, and there were wide ranging and intelligent discussions of the various marriages in the novel. There were, however, some well observed Mr. Bennets in Q.2(b), most capturing a convincing voice, although one did refer to the "hassle" of marrying off his daughters!

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha continues to work well for its relatively small number of aficionados; candidates do seem to enjoy this novel, and responded to the extract with sensitivity, and, often, with insight into Doyle's style. The best answers went right to the end of the extract, noting its cyclical structure, whilst most were able to discuss the effects of the staccato sentences and the focus on Paddy's feelings in the second paragraph. Those who chose Q.3(b) were able to write about the brothers' relationship and how it develops and changes. Those who went on to examine how we experience everything through Paddy's eyes, and explored the author's use of language in expressing this, reaped the benefits. Candidates who chose Q.3(c) used the bullet points to shape what were often detailed and thoughtful responses.

Although *Silas Marner* is a relatively minority choice of novel, it still works well, and not just for the most able candidates. Some were as deceived by William Dane's duplicity as the members of the church, taking his words at face value, but those who knew the text well, and read the extract closely, showed their sensitivity towards Silas Marner, and condemned Dane's behaviour towards him. Less successful answers stayed at the level of paraphrase and empathy. Plenty of empathy was also evident in answers to Q.4(b), and apt parts of the text were focused on, although Silas's voice proved rather elusive to some. With the "importance to the novel/play as a whole" type of question, a sensible approach is to consider the impact the character has on the plot, their interaction with other characters, and how they may bring out any of the themes of the novel/play. Some answering on Dolly Winthrop in Q.4(c) failed to see her as anything more than another villager, and therefore limited their responses. Others, perhaps those with a more assured grasp of the text, saw her significance as a support to Silas, mother-figure to Eppie, and exemplification of some of Eliot's theories about country people.

To Kill A Mockingbird is studied by candidates of all abilities, and it is a text which works well at different levels. The best answers on the extract were from candidates who had read it closely, and highlighted apt detail, such as Jem's speech and behaviour, the description of the dog (although there was some confusion about exactly who or what Tim Johnson is!) and Cal "holding her skirt and apron above her knees", although some didn't see the significance of her going to the front door. With *all* extracts, time spent quickly skimming the text in order to highlight key words and phrases, from beginning to end, is time well spent. On the same theme, some responses to Q.5(b) were rather unfocused, and dealt with key episodes at the beginning of the novel at the expense of those later on. Having said that, there were also many sensitive and thorough discussions of the relationship between Jem and Scout. Responses to Q.5(c) varied from essays on Boo, to astute considerations of the Radleys' place in Maycomb, and the novel. A significant number of candidates were under the misapprehension that the Radleys are a black family, although there didn't seem to be as much confusion over Scout's gender as in previous years.

Of Mice and Men continues to be tremendously popular, and also elicits strong responses across the ability range. Most remarked on the father/son relationship between George and Lennie, as shown in Q.6(a), and the best explored the detail of Lennie's "craftiness" in manipulating George, or appearing to do so: many commented on George's secret enjoyment of the dream. Those candidates who went the extra mile, and discussed George's final comment with insight were usually those who achieved the highest marks. Distribution between the two essay options was fairly even. Some discussions of Curley's wife were extremely condemnatory, bordering on misogynistic, but more were balanced and thoughtful. The introduction of the concept of to what extent she could be blamed allowed for evaluation, and there were many well constructed and balanced arguments. One candidate wrote, "Lennie was just like a bomb waiting for someone to set it ticking. Curley's wife was just a detonator." The second essay choice also allowed for a range of responses: writing about lonely characters could get candidates so far, but to achieve the highest marks, candidates needed to go further, and many did so, considering the novel's setting and symbolism, such as the one who noted, commenting on the name, Soledad, "It's as if the place is cursed. Everyone who goes there is condemned to loneliness".

Stone Cold can elicit analytical responses of the highest quality, but this year did not seem as popular with this level of candidate. Nevertheless, those who focused closely on the detail of the extract and analysed the effectiveness of Link's direct address, and Swindells' language choices, were able to produce thoughtful and sensitive answers. For Q.7(b) all felt confident discussing Ginger as Link's guide and mentor, but the better responses showed their understanding of how he was also instrumental in Shelter's arrest at the end of the novel.

Although there have been questions on titles in the past, that on the title, *Stone Cold* appeared to take candidates by surprise, so responses to it gave the impression of candidates thinking on their feet; they were therefore fresh and interesting, but tended to be underdeveloped. Most related the "stone coldness" to sleeping on the streets; some went on to consider the coldness of passers by, while some went on to relate it to the character of Shelter, and even the coldness of death.

The extract from *Anita and Me* seemed unfamiliar to some candidates, but it was so rich in atmospheric detail that even if they could not contextualise it, they could still show appreciation of the creation of mood and atmosphere, and there were some intelligent and analytical responses. The best answers on Meena's father were detailed and evaluative, drawing on an overview of the whole text, and included references to his life in India, his relationship with his wife and children, and his struggle to fit into English society whilst retaining a sense of his own identity. Less successful responses focused on a few incidents, usually from the earlier parts of the novel. For Q.8(c), all could recall some details about Tollington and its inhabitants, but the best looked also at the theme of change and how that is mirrored by events in and around the village.

Section B

Although *Under Milk Wood* is the least frequently studied play, it elicits some excellent responses. Most saw the humour in the extract, although some took Butcher Beynon at his word and were appalled by his practice. A more frequent misreading was thinking Lily was the Beynons' daughter (from her saying, "Yes, mum,"). There were some spirited discussions of the women in responses to Q.9(b), many dividing them into 'pro-life' and 'anti-life'. Fewer attempted Q.9(c), but those who did so wrote perceptively about the use of the 'voices', the songs, the children, the injunctions to "listen", "look", and "come closer", for example.

A View From The Bridge continues to be very popular, and successful, at every level. There was plenty to write about in the extract, and the best used the dialogue (including that of Beatrice), and Miller's very detailed and useful stage directions to support their discussions of Eddie and Catherine. It was surprising that a significant number of candidates did not appreciate the significance of the reference to 'Madonna', and there were some imaginative suggestions as to what it may imply - "international superstar", "a very sexy singer at that time", "someone that has a lot of money", and so on. It was quite common for candidates to infer that it showed a sexual attraction, which indicated a level of misunderstanding. Some candidates also made much of the phallic imagery of the cigar, although a more convincing interpretation here made connections with films of that era, and the romantic connotations of lighting a cigar or cigarette. Sometimes candidates got so carried away with such details, that they neglected the rest of the extract - balance is all! Responses to Q.10(b) were either very dependent on narrative, which is fine as far as it goes, but makes access to the higher grades less likely, or probing and evaluative, with the reasons for her changes considered perceptively. End of text-itis struck here, too - a full answer would surely address Catherine's behaviour at the end of the play? The question on Mr. Alfieri in Q.10(c) was a rather more popular choice, perhaps because it allowed candidates to draw on their knowledge of past questions on themes. Responses here were thoughtful and well informed, discussing Alfieri as a character, as well as a dramatic device.

The 'blockbuster' on this tier is *An Inspector Calls*, which seemed to be more popular, if anything, this year. The extract gave plenty of opportunity for candidates to focus on the Inspector's speech and behaviour. Some candidates were not as selective as they could have been, however, (again, taking time to think how to select from the *whole* of the extract paid dividends) and gave up before the crucial last speech, which was a pity. As usual, Priestley's

stage directions provided a rich seam for mining! The empathy question, as Sheila, for Q.11(b) was very popular, and very well done, on the whole (even by the candidate who said thoughtfully, "Fire, blood and anguish. It must be the tripling technique that has had such an effect on me.") With Q.11(c), some relied too heavily on the extract (a temptation that must be fought: unless directed otherwise, candidates should be prepared to write about the whole text in their extended writing.) The best answers were thoughtful and comprehensive, addressing the significance of the doorbell signalling the Inspector's arrival, conflict between characters, the photo, use of lighting, and so on. Some were very narrative driven, and seemed to forget (or didn't fully understand) about the tension demanded by the question.

The Merchant of Venice seemed more popular this year (the frequent references to the Jews' red caps suggested that the recent film may have been a draw). There was confident discussion of how different audiences may view Shylock, and the language was addressed with some success. Some charitably thought that Shylock was wanting to do Antonio a favour, but most appreciated his more complex motivation. Understandably, Q.12(b) was the overwhelming favourite. A few (as with *An Inspector Calls*) were over-reliant on the extract, and penalised themselves thereby, but most showed an intelligent overview of the play. Hardly any attempted Q.12(c), and those who did so tended to stick to retelling what happens there.

The best answers to the extract from *Romeo and Juliet* in Q.13(a) saw how the contributions of Romeo, Tybalt and Capulet all serve to create mood and atmosphere, and how the mood shifts so dramatically, often supporting this with confident analysis of the language. Again, it was well worth candidates going right to the end of the extract, in order to address Tybalt's final, menacing words. Candidates enjoyed adopting the voice of the nurse in Q.13(b), and ingeniously included quotations, as well as thoroughly engaging with her character. Only the very best captured the rather complex mix of love for Juliet, thoughtlessness and bawdiness, as well as her natural anxiety not to get on the wrong side of her employers. Q.13(c) presented more of a challenge, as the concept of fate seemed a completely new idea to a quite a few candidates (rather surprisingly). Those who did understand the reference to "star-crossed", however, usually explored the balance between fate and human error and so on with insight.

Othello made a very promising debut on the set text list. Candidates appreciated the context of the extract, and showed a clear understanding of how Iago works on Othello. There were plenty of opportunities to explore the language used, not least Othello's "I'll tear her all to pieces!" but this was not always done. The message that the 'advice to an actor' type question demands exploration of character rather than directorial notes seems to have got through, and this form of question elicits a fresher response than a more traditional character study, even though the material used will probably be very similar. There were some fascinating interpretations of Iago and his motives, or 'motiveless malignity'. Q.14(c) engaged candidates, too, and whilst most, understandably, sympathised with Desdemona, there were some really thoughtful responses, and quite a body of support for Emilia, in particular. One candidate argued that at least Desdemona had experienced real love, albeit of a destructive nature, so cast their vote for Emilia. One made interesting connections between the women: "In death we have both Desdemona and Emilia; in fruitless love we have both Emilia and Bianca; in bad choice of men we have Emilia and Bianca; in connection with Iago we have Desdemona and Emilia". With this sort of question, candidates may go straight into discussion of their chosen character, justifying and evaluating as they go, or may consider all the characters, then come to a conclusion. The quality of discussion, and apt supporting detail, is what counts.

Although it is not studied in huge numbers, *Hobson's Choice* elicits very fond responses from candidates, and they engaged well with the extract, making good use of the stage directions, as well as of the dialogue. Some neatly and astutely described Maggie as "the keen eye to detect his potentialities". Q.15(b) was the less popular of the essay choices, but it elicited perceptive responses to the character of Maggie, recognising that she's not just a tough and driven woman, but that, alongside her strength, there's a softer side to her, too. There were engaged responses to Hobson, too, with the best clearly addressing the 'how and why' of the question.

Blood Brothers seems to be increasing in popularity, and is studied by candidates throughout the ability range. The extract was discussed in detail, with all seeing how Mrs. Lyons manipulates Mrs. Johnstone, and uses the latter's superstition to her advantage. Some close readers suggested that the pauses in Mrs. Lyons' speech revealed that she was not quite as confident as she may at first appear, and went on to highlight how her actions show her desperation to keep Edward. In Q.16(b), candidates enjoyed adopting Linda's voice, and the best answers were not only detailed, but showed an understanding of her love for both brothers and consequent guilt. Once more, however, it was surprising how many responses stopped short, without mentioning the deaths of the twins. Q.16(c) was also a popular choice; again the better answers addressed the *whole* play, including Mrs. Johnstone's anguish at the end. The extract was perhaps influential in establishing sympathy for Mrs. Johnstone from the start, as there were some vehement condemnations of Mrs. Lyons in this essay, as well as in Q.16(a).

Section C

The poem, "In the Can", was accessible to the full range, while providing plenty of opportunities to access the highest grades. Some candidates completely missed the prompt about it being about life in a prison, but made valid alternative interpretations, and some less valid (particles in an aerosol can, 'waiting for release'); some assumed it must be autobiographical, so were surprised by Rosie Jackson's reference to page three of the tabloids - although there were some imaginative interpretations of this, too; topically (for the time when the exam was taken, some remarked on its "Big Brother effect"! Some got stuck on empathising, or answering at the level of personal response: the prisoner could only be allowed sympathy if they'd been wrongly convicted, was the principled stance taken by some. One astute comment, however, made the point that "It doesn't accuse the legal system of failing and this makes it more effective as the reader is forced to make their own conclusion." Those who worked at the imagery: the title, the fishbone, the geriatrics, the days like stitches (though some took these to be surgical stitches, so took it to represent pain), the sampler, the cricket bat made of matches, the scoring walls like a madman/totting up runs, and noted features such as the use of lists, the poem's cyclical structure and so on, were amply rewarded. Some noted the sonnet form, and discussed its appropriateness. The route to the highest grades is exploration of language and style, and those who focused on the fishbone image with some success, but neglected the rest, were effectively limiting their achievement. It may be worth reminding candidates that when using the PEE approach, the really crucial bit is the second E; some candidates seemed trapped in a three sentence structure ("The poet uses many references to time. It states, 'every hour another slow step towards freedom.' This shows how boring it is in prison."). The key to the highest grades is to develop the explanation bit more fully.

FOUNDATION TIER

Once again, there was some very impressive work on this tier. Candidates at all levels showed real engagement with the texts, together with detailed knowledge and a confidence in showing what they understood. In Section A, *Of Mice and Men* is still the forerunner, with the other prose texts coming quite a way behind. *Blood Brothers* and *A View from the Bridge* are probably the more popular choices in Section B. There is no hierarchy of texts, though, and responses were seen on every text; the questions "work" throughout the ability range.

Section A

As on the Higher Tier, some candidates answered on *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* because it was the first page they turned to, but, as ever, they usually did pretty well with the extract as an unseen. Some, who had read it, confused the context, and thought it was after Bailey had seen the dead body. In both such cases, however, candidates still showed awareness of the mood and atmosphere and were rewarded accordingly, and those who selected and discussed key details could get to C. Answers on Q.1(a) were divided between those who knew who Maya's mother was, and those who wrote on Momma, based on the extract. Those few who answered on Q.1(b) selected valid problems and showed some understanding of Maya.

Pride and Prejudice possibly works even better as an unseen than *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and certainly proved accessible for Foundation Tier candidates, some of whom, of course, had actually studied it! There were spirited responses to Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley in Q.2(a), and engaged "Mr. Bennets" in Q.2(b). It was interesting to see how Austen's style had been absorbed by better candidates. Q.2(c) also elicited sound responses, the marriages of Charlotte and Elizabeth being the most frequently chosen.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha is not often studied at this level, but when it is, it works well, the power of the story carrying candidates through its episodic structure. There were sensitive and empathetic responses to the extract. With Q.3(b), some struggled to find much to write about beyond the incident with the lighter fuel, though others went on to show how Paddy's behaviour towards Sinbad was affected by events around them. With any text, and, indeed, with all levels of ability, the ability to select a few key incidents from *throughout* the text will stand candidates in good stead.

There are not many candidates who study *Silas Marner* at this level, but those who do so fare well, the strength of the narrative and characterisation making it accessible, despite the relatively complex language. Although some were a bit muddled about exactly who was the guilty party in the extract (as on the Higher Tier) there was plenty of detail to be drawn on. The bullet points for both essays proved enabling for candidates. There were some sensitive Silases, and this option was more popular than the question on Dolly.

To Kill A Mockingbird is, perhaps, seen rather more on this tier than used to be the case. The question in Q.5(a) was successful in giving candidates a clear focus for their tracking through the extract, and those who did so systematically were amply rewarded; as on the Higher Tier, careful selection and thoroughness is the key. The best answers showed their appreciation of Cal's gradual change of tone, noted her increasing haste and the significance of her running to the Radley property. The essays were equally well done. Some candidates floundered a bit in their selection of key incidents involving Jem and Scout; the higher scoring responses usually drew on their knowledge of some of the following: Scout's first day at school, the impact of Jem's growing up, the trial, and the final attack on the children. With Q.5(c), candidates felt secure writing about the Boo games, but perhaps a little less so in exploring further into the text. As on the Higher Tier, some missed the ending of the novel.

With the extract from *Of Mice and Men*, most candidates showed a clear understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between Lennie and George. Quite a number of responses were refreshingly pragmatic: George had to break off as he needed to get on with making their supper! Some contextualised the extract, relating it to the ketchup incident, and Lennie's threat to go and live in the woods; the better responses also saw how George briefly fell under the spell of the story of the dream, broken by "Nuts!". There were engaged responses to Curley's wife, in Q.6(b), and the detailed knowledge on display in many responses was impressive. Weaker responses took Candy's view of her, but many sympathetically addressed her isolation and frustration. Some went on to link her to the themes of loneliness and unfulfilled dreams. The bullet points were well used in both essays, although some stuck on lonely characters, a case being made for them all at one time or another (although one candidate thought that Carlson wasn't lonely, as he had his gun). Better candidates addressed George's loneliness at the end. When focusing on the second and third bullet points, the influence of the film was often apparent, but many showed a sound and relevant knowledge of the historical context.

The language of *Stone Cold* gives ample opportunity for close reading and analysis, but candidates, particularly on the Foundation Tier, have a tendency to neglect the detail of the extract and launch into empathetic responses to the general situation of homelessness, and this is something to be guarded against. Q.7(b) was quite a popular choice; the key discriminator was the ability to discuss Ginger's importance to the plot, as well as his friendship with Link; many did see this, perhaps prompted by the final bullet point. Some, however, failed to see that he had much significance after his disappearance. For some reason, there were more responses written in the third person in Q.7(c), although credit could, of course, be given for knowledge shown. Some, who did write in the first person, saw Link as heartbroken by Gail's deception; some had him angry. The best answers, as always, showed their detailed knowledge of the whole text.

Anita and Me was quite a rare choice at this level this year, although responses suggested that candidates had really enjoyed it (even if some revealed a rather worrying over dependence on the film!). Many candidates who answered on the novel did use their close reading skills on the extract to good effect. For some reason, answers on Meena's father tended to be rather underdeveloped, despite the bullet points, whilst those on Tollington in Q.6(c) showed sound knowledge of the text and engagement with some of the colourful characters. It is important, however, that teaching of this text highlights the differences between the novel and the film.

Section B

Most candidates responded to the fun and slapstick of the extract from *Under Milk Wood*, although some missed its humour. Of the essays, Q.9(b) was the more popular choice, and those who answered on Q.9(c) found it a bit of a struggle, despite the bullet points.

A View From The Bridge works just as well on this tier as it does on the Higher, and, as on the Higher, candidates seem very engaged with the play. Good use is now made of the stage directions, and the best answers used these, as well as the dialogue, to show a sensitive appreciation of the characters. As on the Higher Tier, there were many misinterpretations of the Madonna reference. Better answers appreciated that the extract came from early in the play, when there are only hints about Eddie's feelings for Catherine; others saw sexual innuendo all over the place! The better answers on Catherine, in Q.10(b), considered her relationships with her aunt and uncle as well as with Rodolfo, although some got stuck on her attempts to gain independence through a job (probably as a result of the extract). There were some engaged responses to Q.10(c); Foundation Tier candidates can be less inhibited than those on the Higher Tier when attempting empathetic responses, and there were some sympathetic and well supported interpretations of Alfieri, with the best convincingly echoing his speech patterns.

An Inspector Calls is increasingly popular at this level of entry, and works very well. Candidates often wrote well on the extract, tracking through and noting the Inspector's control, and Eric's distress. The best dealt effectively with the stage directions as well as with the dialogue, and explored the implications of the Inspector's final speech. One candidate noted, "He never shouts but he's got the power to destroy them with his words". As on the Higher Tier, candidates seemed to really enjoy writing as Sheila, and showed a sound knowledge of the text (though the reference to a hat being the source of her jealousy still crops up, irksomely!). The best went right up to the second phone call at the end of the play. Most characters, apart, perhaps, for Edna, cropped up in answers to Q.11(c) At least one brave soul made a case for Sheila, citing her "shallow, crocodile tears". The more successful responses justified their choice by brief but relevant discussion of alternatives; a few appeared to be confused about the term "least".

Candidates were secure with the context from *The Merchant Of Venice*, but were, understandably, better discussing Shylock than Antonio. Some, astutely, noted that although sympathy may be felt for Shylock here, this soon changes. Hardly any candidates answered on Nerissa, but enjoyed writing about Shylock, using the bullet points to good effect.

Romeo and Juliet was a rather more popular choice of Shakespeare text on the Foundation Tier. Most candidates could make sensible comments about Romeo and Tybalt, and the best supported their judgements with evidence from the text. The empathy question on the Nurse was successful and popular, and sound use was made of the bullet points. It was quickly apparent which centres had focused on fate during study of the play; others struggled with the concept.

There were not many responses to *Othello* on this tier, but candidates who had studied the play found plenty to say about the characters of Othello and Iago, often showing an awareness of how their behaviour fits in with that in the rest of the play. Q.14(c) was the more popular option for the extended writing, and good knowledge of the text was evident in responses on the women. Answers on Q.14(b) tended to be underdeveloped. The injunction to focus on different parts of the play is intended to help candidates, but there is nothing to prevent them showing their knowledge of the character's behaviour in the play as a whole.

Hobson's Choice is another text regarded very warmly by those who study it, and is increasingly popular at this level. As with Miller, Russell and Priestley, Brighouse uses detailed stage directions, helpful to candidates as well as to actors, and those who paid close attention to them did well. Willie's timidity and fear, his vulnerability and Hobson's misreading of the situation brought strong reactions from candidates. Those choosing Q.15(b) revealed a sound knowledge of the play, with the best showing an awareness of themes and clear empathy. Again, candidates used the bullet points well to structure their responses. Discussions of Hobson in Q.15(c) showed a clear awareness of the development of Hobson's character. As is often the case, the final bullet point was, perhaps, not dealt with in as much detail as the others.

The extract from *Blood Brothers* certainly engaged candidates, who usually were highly critical of Mrs. Lyons, and equally strongly sympathetic to Mrs. Johnstone. The best discussed Mrs. Lyons' violent behaviour, and Mrs. Johnstone's confusion and fear, through close reading of the stage directions. As on the Higher Tier, there were some lovely responses to Q.16(b), with selection of apt detail the key discriminator. Some were rather limited in their references - a further example of how focus on several key episodes from throughout the text can be very useful as part of the preparation for the examination. There were plenty of opinions on Mrs. Johnstone, in Q.16(c) although some responses were over dependent on the extract as support for their judgements.

Section C

Souster's poem, "The Man Who Finds His Son Has Become A Thief", engaged candidates with its narrative thrust, and there were some movingly sensitive responses from candidates who knew all too well what it is to let down one's parents. One very empathetic response read, "It creates the mood of a quiet car ride home from the shopping centre, the way they can't look at each other, and also a broken bond between father and son". Another said, "As you read the poem you feel your stomach start to tense as you feel pity towards the father and even towards the son. It is hard enough to be disappointed about the actions of someone you love but it is even worse to know someone you love is disappointed in you". Some candidates interpreted the emotions described in the penultimate stanza as belonging to the boy, but could still get to C if they backed up their judgements with well selected detail. The ambiguous final two lines resulted in interesting speculations. The key to success with this poem (as usual) was close and careful reading. Some skimmed over the beginning so deduced that the scene was in a courtroom; some, however, engaged well with the content, and speculated that the "evidence" was on CCTV. Candidates working at C and above were usually those who focused on words and phrases such as "painfully", "tighten slowly around the neck", "the unmistakable odour of guilt", "poison", "unseen hand", and so on. An example of the quality of exploration of some responses is, "The poet uses the metaphor that guilt is like a liquid like venom perhaps, 'which seeps now into the mind and lays its poison.' This sounds like almost dying from a snake bite, but the snake bite is the boy stealing and the poison is the lies. This thought of death is enforced by 'the night, the darkness, anywhere to hide'."

So, this report gives a snapshot of the huge range of responses encountered by examiners, who time and again were impressed by the quality of candidates' knowledge, understanding, and engagement. Those currently debating candidates' responses, or lack of them, to English literature, could learn a lot from reading some of these scripts; they may well be reassured. Teachers and candidates can rightly be proud of their achievements.

SPECIFICATION B

Performance on both tiers seemed to be equally, or perhaps more, effective than last year. Candidates are at last beginning to pay attention to the stem of questions and INSET messages seem to be helping performance.

There are still issues about incomplete scripts but perhaps that will always be the case. It does remain vital that centres remind candidates that answers out of twenty usually need to be about twice the length of answers on extracts. A problem which has returned this year is the selection of material from the wrong genre where candidates replaced poetry/prose as they saw fit. In some cases this meant that examiners were forced to award no marks for particular answers. Candidates habitually muddle genres in their pieces but as examiners we can be tolerant of the slips of the pen. However, we cannot award marks where candidates offer no prose or no poetry in their examination papers; using one poem/one prose text allows credit for the appropriate text to be given but achievement is affected.

FOUNDATION TIER

Candidates worked with their usual efficiency on Q.1(a), the prose extract. Inevitably a minority of candidates ignored the word "narrator" as they approached the text while others lost focus on the bullet points and rather strayed from the narrator to consider other characters. The best answers showed a clear focus on the narrator and were able to infer impressions of him. There seemed a greater security in identifying the narrator with the occasional candidate convinced it was Little Cough. Sometimes the points made about the narrator were equally valid in these cases. The most bizarre response was the elevation of Charley to full character status and mysterious references to "Welsh". There were lots of answers where candidates misattributed the words of Jean and the narrator; it was disappointing that candidates did not check in their anthologies before they started their responses.

Q.1(b) presented few problems, being a very typical Specification B question. Generally candidates worked effectively on *Snowdrops* with either Miss Webster or the narrator being the focal point. There was a varied choice of second text with perhaps *The Lesson* being most popular. There were some excellent answers using *Bella Makes Life* where either Bella or JoeJoe provided useful illustrations. It was a pleasure to see candidates use the word "insecure" in relation to the prose extract.

Q.1(c) presented more difficulties. Careless candidates read the question as simply concerning the adult/child relationship and perhaps I ought to have repeated the word "struggling" in the guidance material, although it did appear in the first bullet point. This inevitably often meant answers suffered some lack of focus but the main difficulty was in choosing the most appropriate second text for comparison. It was perfectly possible for candidates to work successfully on *Snowdrops* but I was irritated by those who merely told me how wonderfully Miss Webster and the narrator related to each other. All candidates were alert to all aspects of the relationship between Miss Moore and Sylvia.

Q.2(a) presented fewer difficulties to candidates than last year's apparently more accessible poem. The bullet points seemed to aid candidates in approaching the poem although some candidates unhelpfully 'imported' material from other Harrison sonnets in order to develop the father/son relationship. It would be worth warning candidates against this; the selected poem/extract should be considered in isolation from other material. Some candidates were able to respond to the title of the poem and offer interpretations of its effect but it was apparent that many had never been made aware of the phrase "Queen's English". Others detailed what they thought was central to the relationship or offered opinions on the use of the dialect in the poem, sometimes as a structuring device and occasionally considered "the broken lines". It might be useful to remind candidates that the views expressed in the poems are often ambivalent or ambiguous.

Q.2(b) presented candidates with a totally open question where they could select the material and set their own agenda. Thankfully it was a minority of candidates who chose to repeat their mock exam or last year's paper! I enjoyed reading answers on "Boy", "Frost Greyface", "Sandman", "Long Distance" and "The Beautiful Lie". It was delightful to applaud the breadth of choice and certainly teachers are to be congratulated on their preparation of candidates. Again the bullet points were used to approach the poems and structure answers.

Q.2(c) was a very popular choice probably because it enabled candidates to use their favourite poem, "Valentine". "Miles Away" was recognised as a love poem, but rarely as a sonnet, and candidates usually preferred to attribute the absence to death. I did feel that there should have been greater willingness to discuss words and phrases in this poem. Candidates were more accomplished on "Valentine" and readings this year were much more alert to pain and suffering in the poem.

DRAMA

I have still not seen any Foundation Tier responses on *Under Milk Wood* which I think is a great shame.

On *A View From The Bridge* Foundation Tier candidates preferred the question on Catherine (Q.4(a)) and were well able to detail the changes and their causes.

I did not see any responses to Q.4(b).

On *An Inspector Calls*, Q.5(a) was certainly more popular, with candidates able to give detailed accounts of Sheila's role in the play and able to voice the character effectively. This question probably produced the highest level of responses most consistently and was relished by candidates.

Q.5(b) was tackled equally effectively with the majority of answers choosing either Mr. or Mrs. Birling as least deserving sympathy. One candidate gave Gerald the vitriol he deserves.

The only responses which I saw on this tier on Shakespeare were on *Romeo and Juliet*. I saw very few answers on Q.7(a) which surprised me. I thought that The Nurse would have provided candidates with the ideal persona through which to examine the play's events.

Some candidates were bemused by the word "fate" and were unable to structure their answers effectively which meant that they resorted to narration.

On *Blood Brothers* both questions were equally popular but the opportunity to voice the character of Linda produced more varied and successful answers and the bullet points provided a useful structure.

HIGHER TIER

As with the Foundation Tier, the standard of answers equalled and probably exceeded last year's performance.

Candidates had few problems with Q.1(a). They were able to examine the narrator without diversion and made numerous inferences about his behaviour which were usually precise and telling. As on Foundation Tier the narrator was sometimes wrongly identified as Little Cough. Another candidate added an extra layer of difficulty by confusing the narrator and the author of the piece.

Q.1(b) was the more popular choice. Candidates made intelligent choices of texts and characters though there is still often a problem of balancing the amount of writing on each text. *The Rain Horse*, *The Lesson*, *Niagara Falls All Over Again* all produced effective answers.

Q.1(c) was read, as it should be, with more accuracy on this tier. Work on *The Lesson* was usually of a high level and candidates often made skilled choices for their second text. There are still surprisingly few answers at the conceptual level where candidates attempt to focus on differences of authorial presentation of the chosen theme.

Q.2(a) proved a successful poem for candidates and the bullet points were certainly a success.

Candidates were able to: comment on and support with textual evidence the father/son relationship; to muse on the implications of the title but some candidates did not appear to recognise the phrase or its implications; to consider the use of dialect in response to the title; to comment effectively on words and phrases. Some more astute candidates remembered that this is a sonnet but only one attempted to illustrate how sonnet form helped to inform the content of the poem. Candidates on the C/D borderline or below wrongly assumed this bullet point was an invitation to repeat the content of the poem.

Q.1(b). I was surprised by how infrequently this question was chosen. When chosen this question was invariably done well with candidates finding a wealth of shocking material and being able to locate the reasons for it being shocking. Harrison's sonnets provided plenty of material but I was delighted to find candidates choosing "Boy", "The Beautiful Lie", "Frost Greyface" and "Sandman".

Candidates, and their teachers, were probably delighted by my decision to ask about love poems as it gave them the opportunity to write about their favourite poem, "Valentine". This question was overwhelmingly the popular choice and candidates were able to account for and explain the central metaphor in the poem. They were however much less accomplished when writing about "Miles Away". Few noticed that this is a sonnet and that might have provided a very useful structure for an answer. I wish candidates had attempted to comment on: "breathing the colour thought is before language"; "movements clearer than the words I have you say"; "you fix me with a look"; "until the calls of nightjars interrupt"; "was certain into memory" and "The stars are filming us for no one". Very late in the examining process I did find some candidates who attempted to comment on these phrases and one candidate who refreshingly mused whether the entire poem might be a reflection on the process of writing.

Once again I felt that a Duffy poem was capable of yielding so much more than candidates usually found.

DRAMA

Q.3(a) was the more successful question. Most candidates preferred to work through the range of female characters rather than attempt to consider a generic response. Candidates were able to make appropriate points about their chosen characters with varying degrees of textual specificity.

Q.3(b) was less popular but generally effectively answered. Candidates considered: the Two Voices; Captain Cat and his blindness; the use of dreams; descriptive language and its place in radio; the number of characters; the cyclical nature of the play.

Q.4(a) provided a wealth of opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the text though reasons for the changes were less developed.

Q.4(b) provided a range of opportunities for candidates. Most specified the dual nature of Alfieri as narrator and character with varying textual support; some were able to focus more closely on extracts involving Mr. Alfieri.

Q.5(a) was an extremely popular task. Responses were invariably well voiced and shrewd knowledge of the play and character were evident. There were some responses which showed less certain knowledge of Sheila's character.

Q.5(b) was perhaps a greater challenge to candidates. When it was done well candidates were able to refer closely to parts of the text and specify how Priestley had created and maintained tension. Answers included; the disruption of the meal; the lighting changes; the arrival of the Inspector and his presentation; the method of dealing separately with candidates; the final revelations and uncertainties. When done less well the above events were narrated and authorial intention was abandoned; sometimes the refrain "creates and develops tension" was appended hopefully.

Q.6(a) produced good responses. Candidates were able to understand or condemn Shylock, usually attempting to reach a balance. It was astonishing that some candidates neglected his trial?

Q.6(b). I saw no responses.

Q.7(a) produced few responses.

Q.7(b) was more popular. Candidates were able to range across the play and had no difficulty locating "fate" in the events of the play.

Q.8(a) produced some remarkable answers. Candidates demonstrated a remarkable knowledge of a difficult character in examination conditions. This year they seemed to find fewer difficulties in delivering the advice to the actor; probably a lot of preparation has gone into this task but it may well be that Iago does present peculiar difficulties for actors.

Q.8(b) produced excellent answers. Most candidates confined their answers to Desdemona but others managed to handle all three characters. Unsurprisingly, I saw no candidate who was brave enough to limit the answer to Emilia or Bianca. For me the work on *Othello* was the highlight of the drama section this year and centres have embraced this difficult text with great skill.

Q.9(a). I did not see any responses to Q.9(a).

Q.9(b) was the more popular choice. Candidates were able to explain, with detailed certainty, the changes in Hobson's attitude.

Q.10(a) provided the opportunity and structure for successful answers. Using Linda's voice really helped candidates to empathise with the character.

Q.10(b) produced effective answers. Candidates were able to work through the play and had no difficulties in showing their sympathy for Mrs Johnston but perhaps less success in showing how that sympathy had been created.

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