

May 2017 subject reports

English A Literature Time Zone 2

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 17	18 – 32	33 – 44	45 – 57	58 – 69	70 – 81	82 – 100

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 15	16 – 29	30 – 41	42 – 55	56 – 67	68 – 80	81 – 100

Higher level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 17	18 – 21	22 – 25	26 – 30

The range and suitability of the work submitted

As usual, there was a very wide range of works. For the commentary, poems by known authors like Duffy, Heaney, Frost, Dickinson, Langston Hughes, Plath, Keats, Owen, Donne, and Atwood dominated. Others included selections from Eavan Boland, Theodore Roethke, Wallace Stevens, Eliot, Cummings, and Coleridge. The most popular fictional works used in the discussion included texts by Conrad, Shakespeare, the Bronte sisters, Hawthorne, Ondaatje, Alice Munro, Fitzgerald, Morrison, and Capote. Non-fiction texts included speeches by Martin Luther King and essays by Dillard, Woolf, Baldwin, and Foster Wallace.

Most of these works were suitable but T.S. Eliot and Cummings, in addition to very short poems by Dickinson, were mostly difficult.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A was generally handled well, especially by candidates who made specific and frequent references to the poem in support of their ideas. It was pleasing to note that many teachers had successfully discouraged students from dwelling on long and often irrelevant biographical details about the poet. Similarly, most successful commentaries were those that focused on the text itself. Candidates who concentrated on analyzing the extract but still linked it to the rest of the poem fared well too. Unfortunately, many teachers still insist on relating the poem to others by the same author yet this is no longer required by the criterion. The weakest performances either paraphrased the poem or made some speculative comments on it or used the poem to moralize about life today.

On Criterion B, candidates who concentrated on closely analyzing the use and effects of the poet's techniques in relation to the meaning of the poem did well. Such candidates treated the poem as a literary experience, responding to the features of the text in an interesting and personal manner. The more average commentaries analyzed the poet's choices and their contribution to the meaning of the poem but hardly offered personal insights into it. Weak candidates merely identified the techniques without analyzing their effects. Weaker commentaries simply paraphrased the poem and/or explained the poet's techniques.

On Criterion C, candidates who presented a coherent and deliberately organized analysis of the poem obtained very high marks. Some candidates' knowledge of literary terms was also very impressive. However, some teachers were very generous: they awarded high marks to commentaries that had an introduction and pertinent conclusion without paying due regard to the 'body' and focus of the commentary.

Criterion D was often handled well. Responses that showed intimate knowledge of the form and content of the work did well. Those which went further to provide insights into the work, appreciating the conventions of the genre and substantiating every point with specific examples from the work were even more successful. As stressed in last year's report, the teacher's questions play an important role here. Questions which are specific and open, with follow-up questions to the candidate's responses, help to raise the quality of the candidate's performance. However, many teachers did not treat the exercise as a discussion. They posed a question, let the student speak on in a monologue and - without engaging the candidate on their response - proceeded to the next question. Such interview-like sessions do little to enhance the quality of the candidate's response. Many teachers also tended to interject a lot, completing the candidate's answers and in some cases even advancing their own views on the work.

Criterion E is also greatly dependent on the teacher's questions. Teachers who had designed open-ended questions, requiring not just taught material but personal interpretation of the work as a literary text, contributed much to the quality of the candidate's answers (i.e. if the candidate knew and understood the work). Unfortunately, some questions even seemed to encourage speculation. Others treated the characters in works of fiction as these were real people.

Many candidates performed well on Criterion F, meeting the requirements of the assessment as a formal undertaking. However, many moderators observed that candidates (and even teachers) from some IB regions did not show enough awareness of this fact. They therefore used language informally (e.g. using many slang, fillers like “kinda of” and “like” very many times), sometimes excessively.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

It is important that students learn and understand the conventions of the genres they are studying. Secondly, candidates need to be taught how to analyze a poem closely, engage with its construction, and appreciate the effects of the poet’s techniques. Practicing such skills regularly is equally necessary. Further, and to quote one senior examiner, “another area to work on is to teach students to construct an effective argument around the core issues in the poem, while, at the same time, avoiding assertions that are not supported by the text.”

Similarly, teachers are urged to particularly consult the Subject Guide, the Teacher Support Material (TSM) and the Handbook of Procedures regularly. Doing so will ensure adhering to all the requirements for the oral examination. These include – but are not limited to - selecting suitable poems of appropriate lengths (20 - 30 lines), providing one or two guiding questions, conducting the exam in quiet surroundings, and asking helpful questions and observing the time limits for each of the parts of the oral exam.

It is also important for teachers to distinguish between an interview and a discussion. Q and A styles diminish the candidate’s chances of scoring high marks in the discussion. Questions like ‘What can you tell me about this work?’ or ‘Do you have anything to add?’ do not help the candidate at all in presenting an analytical and meaningful response. Questions, like ‘What would Willy Loman (in *Death of a Salesman*) feel in Trump’s America today?’ are hardly justified; nor do they enrich the candidate’s response.

Careful attention should also be paid to register. Teachers need to set good examples to their students in such formal settings as the oral examination.

Further comments

Most schools complied with the instructions. The exceptions included schools that either uploaded form 1/LIA (itself no longer required) instead of the poem or submitted inaudible recordings or the wrong poem or did all the above. Others still had candidates announce their school and individual registration and session numbers – which are no longer required.

Whereas majority of the poems/extracts were of the acceptable 20-30 lines, there were some much longer ones. Conversely, some poems were too short. In both cases, candidates were disadvantaged by this irregularity. Most of the candidates were asked subsequent questions, usually very helpful ones. In addition, most of the schools observed the timings of the two sections of the oral examination. In the discussion, most teachers had prepared lists of questions and used them to varying degrees of effectiveness.

Some moderators complained that some schools are still conducting the oral examination under inappropriate conditions: noise in the background, loud school announcements, the teacher's note-taking and so forth.

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 4	5 – 8	9 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 23	24 – 30

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range of poets seen followed the pattern of previous sessions, with Duffy, Bishop, Yeats, Dickinson, Owen and Heaney the most popular choices. Plath was less popular this time, but along with Wright, Hughes and Frost, was tackled by a minority of centres. Romantic poets, Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge, were occasionally offered. The choice of poem for discussion is crucial – some poems were simply too short to offer sufficient material or challenge. At the other extreme were the complete Duffy poems such as *The Diet*, which were too long to be reasonably discussed in 8 minutes. Candidates should also be careful not to treat some more accessible poems as a biographical puzzle to be pieced together, rather than as work of conscious art by a poet. This danger was seen most often in commentaries on Plath, Owen and Heaney.

Most of the drama extracts were from Shakespeare's tragedies, though a few centres did offer *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Tempest*. Extracts chosen were generally appropriate, if perhaps predictable, though each of the plays offers highly charged dramatic encounters, which might encourage candidates to consider the dramatic effects in more detail. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller were also chosen by a few centres.

Prose passages were very much in the minority. Orwell and Dillard were popular choices with a very few centres choosing Achebe, Dickens, Austen and Capote. More unusual choices in this session were Martin Luther King's speeches, often handled well by candidates, Edward Said's *Out of Place* and Cormack McCarthy's *The Road*.

Centres are reminded that the number of extracts to be chosen is laid down in the guidelines (to be found in both the Language A: Literature guide and the Handbook of Procedures) for determining the different extracts to be prepared for candidates. Centres should also ensure all Part 2 works are used equally.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Most candidates had reasonable knowledge of the text and often some understanding of the significance of the chosen extract. Biographical, historical or social context is rarely a helpful starting point for the commentary and some candidates spend up to 5 minutes on this sort of preamble before turning to the actual extract before them. Weaker commentaries were characterised by paraphrase and generalisation, though often lively and engaged. Other candidates developed this approach somewhat by judicious reference to the passage, but rarely offered an interpretation of the meaning or the concerns.

Better candidates started from a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of the passage and used this as the framework around which the exploration of the methods and their effects was constructed, enabling them to develop a cogent and at times complex interpretation of the work.

Criterion B

Candidates were often able to list literary features and give examples of them from their extract. Much less common was the ability to analyse the effects of these features or to consider why the writer might have chosen them. Nearly all commentaries would be improved by some recognition of the stylistic devices appropriate to the work's genre – the poetic form of a sonnet and the fluctuating rhythms for example – and crucially offer an exploration of the possible effects of these devices. Candidates tackling Shakespeare for example would do well to consider the dramatic effects of the passage in front of them on an audience in a theatre. Too often analysis of style was limited to points about language and imagery, with little apparent awareness of the importance of identifying the narrative voice in prose passages or in a poem. The best commentaries were able to blend the analysis of style into their interpretation of the meaning and significance of the passage, moving into the wider text briefly and appropriately as a means of illuminating their points on the actual passage. Most impressive of all were those few commentaries which developed beyond this approach into seeing multiple possibilities of meaning across a range of possible viewers.

Criterion C

Many commentaries adopted a linear approach to structuring the commentary, though a minority chose stylistic features or thematic concerns, as a suitable framework. These alternative approaches however need careful handling as often large parts of the passage are not discussed in sufficient detail or more commonly the links between what can appear to be somewhat arbitrary choices are not fully realised. More successful commentaries often start from a central thesis or proposition about the passage, linked if appropriate to the wider text, which expounds what the candidate sees as the central significance of the passage.

Nearly all commentaries do remain focussed on the task and the passage at least for some of the commentary and many candidates are able to integrate textual references appropriately. Teachers should be prepared to intervene at about the 8-minute point in order to allow sufficient time for the subsequent questioning.

Criterion D

Nearly all candidates use a more or less appropriate register and are able to express their ideas clearly and coherently, in usually accurate language. Weaker commentaries in this regard tend to be couched in a too casual, often rather colloquial, tone, but these are rare. Better commentaries are often quite precise in the choice of language and use nuanced, complex patterns of expression through which to develop the interpretation and the analysis.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Many of the recommendations previously offered are still apposite, on the evidence of this session, in terms of how well candidates understand the nature of the task, a critical commentary on a work of literature, and how prepared they are in terms of the candidate's experience of oral work. Regular practice at preparing and delivering a commentary seems essential in order to help more anxious candidates deal with the inevitable nerves.

Candidates do need to be able to recognise some of the limitations and the opportunities derived from the genre itself and be comfortable with discussing for example, poetic form, dramatic effects and narrative structure and voice, when looking at poetry, drama and prose. This is in addition to the work obviously already undertaken on features such as language, figures of speech and characterisation.

Candidates also need to have a clear structure in mind before starting their commentary and a structure which is linked to the purpose of the commentary, which in turn should derive from the perceived significance of the given passage. Regular practice in achieving this in the preparation/reading time again seems an essential step in developing these necessary skills.

Finally, some candidates do need more guidance on choosing appropriate and meaningful contexts to include within the commentary. An accurate and detailed summary of Owen's war service is of little value to the candidate when compared to establishing a strong thesis and developed interpretation of the particular poem in front of them.

Further comments

Centres should ensure the practical side of the examination is right. A few candidates still are interrupted by tannoys, mobile phones or human intrusion, with a consequent loss of concentration and focus.

Passages should be line numbered, free from typos and clearly set out on the page.

Guiding questions should adhere to the guidelines set out in the guidance and should be open and clear and designed to support the candidate's preparation.

All candidates must be asked subsequent questions and these should be aimed at the gaps in the candidate's coverage of the passage, rather than pre-determined. Candidates should be interrupted if necessary to allow time for these questions.

Higher and standard level Written Assignment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15	16 – 18	19 -20	21 – 25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Key areas of concern remain the levels of achievement in criteria A and C.

Text choice is one of the elements behind a successful Written Assignment. Choosing a work simply because it is short, when it may present real challenges to some students, is a continuing problem, as is the use of dense and demanding works which may be a teacher's favourite. Candidates write best on texts with which they can engage and feel they really understand. When using a selection of poems or short stories centres should remember that the work is the whole collection and that some sort of nod must be made towards this if there is to be a very good mark in Criterion B.

Students submitted assignments on a wide range of suitable texts and topics. While most had at least some focus on literary aspects of their chosen work too many did not. The old familiar works by Ibsen, Camus and Garcia Marquez appeared frequently with works like *Brodeck's Report*, *Kafka on the Shore* and *Paradise of the Blind* among others, adding some diversity and energy to this year's entry. Examiners noted a lot of essays hovering around 1200 words: these were often limited in their critical analysis and depth of investigation.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

There was some evidence that candidates' (or rather, perhaps, their teachers') understanding of this is improving. However, too many simply discussed the text, characterisation or symbolism - or asserted directly that their understanding had been increased by the orals without showing how this was so. Some used the Reflective Statement as an abstract or preamble to the essay itself. Teachers should be prepared to intervene to prevent ideas such as 'Ibsen came from Norway where everyone was unhappily married' and 'Everyone in the West believes all Iranians are terrorists' from flourishing. Most candidates kept within the word limit for the RS. Most seemed to have drafted their statements immediately after the orals, but some had clearly drafted them considerably later with focus only on the contextual idea most relevant to the chosen essay topic; it was not always easy to assess the extent to which understanding had developed. Some candidates barely touched on cultural and contextual elements in the Reflective Statement while demonstrating a clear grasp of these in the essay, where they attract no marks. Introductory and concluding comments waste words. Candidates should try to make three distinct points, show their significance and then move on.

Criterion B.

There was generally adequate knowledge and understanding of the texts, but few candidates showed any real insight in an over-arching interpretation of what all the detail amassed added up to. It was evident that some candidates had not really understood such works as *The Outsider*. Perhaps teachers are just determined or otherwise constrained to carry on with teaching the same works when only a few of the top candidates in the group are likely to grasp them well enough to write well about them.

Most candidates supplied some textual support in their essays. When such support is given completely free of any context from within the text then its usefulness is limited. Examiners reported incorrect interpretations or dubious claims made on the basis of inaccurate detail: the Written Assignment is a honed piece of writing and basic errors about characters, events and places do not impress.

Topic choices were not always appropriate. A focus comparing some aspect of a text with the writer's background/experience is not helpful and leads to the inclusion of much material that belongs in the RS.

Criterion C:

When students have been appropriately directed, they can write well about literary features in their selected works, but some failed to mention techniques in any way; candidates need more guidance in selecting a topic which invites a high level of achievement in C. Many who wrote on graphic novels neglected to consider the visual features of their chosen work and few discussed anything beyond dialogue in speech bubbles and possibly the voice over, leaving most other features of the genre undisturbed. There were studies of Ibsen's works that focused almost entirely on how the play divulges social and 'Victorian' mores rather than its dramatic features. Gender studies pervade other texts, such as *Blood Wedding*. Structure was rarely considered, voice even less often; character, plot and diction were more frequently discussed. Two fashionable terms this session were 'foil' (only sometimes correctly understood) and 'juxtaposition', often used to mean 'contrast'.

Criterion D:

Far too many candidates exceeded the 1500 word limit. Careful editing should make it easy to lose unnecessary words – thereby often improving the chance of a high mark in Criterion E, thanks to a generally crisper style. Some candidates failed to include a title. Sometimes the scope of the assignment was made clear in the introduction, but in a handful of cases it was not. The organization and development of the essay hinges on the choice and precision of the chosen direction or title of the essay. A good essay has a clear line of argument: many might have begun with appropriate references to the work, but the literary focus, sense of direction and development of ideas were not always sustained. Another common fault was the use of brief quotations with no indication of their context and it was unclear whether the citation supported the point at issue. Lengthy quotation can interrupt the flow of an argument: candidates should select the briefest quotation possible, identifying the key words which create the effect under discussion, and try to incorporate those quotations more seamlessly into the structure of their own sentences.

Criterion E:

While the language used in most assignments was reasonably clear, there was evidence that editing programs are not very frequently used by students. These can improve the presentation and readability of ideas and, if nothing more, spelling. Some students write well, some have not had the training to do so and some lack the drive to work at the presentation of their ideas in clear and conventional English. Examiners recognize that some are struggling to write in an unfamiliar language, entered in Language A English through factors beyond their or their teachers' control. Basic failings such as the use of contractions and avoidable errors such as the misspelling of characters' names or referring to a play as a novel are easily corrected and should be. Use of a chatty, inappropriate register was too often noted by examiners.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Name, centre, candidate and session number should not appear on the essays but word counts are a requirement. The cover sheet completed by candidates is not seen by the examiner, so titles and words counts **MUST** appear on the work itself.

Teachers should read Subject Reports, from the current year and also some previous ones, to see the recurrence of the same problems and perhaps make some changes in their practice. There is so much information on the OCC for this very purpose that it is always disappointing to see it so obviously underused or overlooked.

This is intended to be a polished piece: teach the relevant skills. These include making precise and detailed references to the text; placing textual references and quotations in their context and embedding them effectively; the inclusion of meaningful analysis of techniques, and taking care with the accuracy, paragraphing and register of their written English. All such skills will feed into the quality of attainment in other components.

Provide guidance on writing the Reflective Statement and the Written Assignment guided by the assessment criteria. Students need some clear direction about the suitability of essay topics which can be covered in detail within the prescribed word limit. They need to know what analysis is and why it is important.

Devise Supervised Writing prompts which direct students to critical analysis of the literary aspect of the texts, avoiding topics which are simply "A Critical Analysis of x text".

Teach the conventions relevant to the different genres more explicitly. Ensure that literary features, and their names, are understood, not just deployed. A question/title which includes the author's name is more likely to direct a student's thoughts towards criterion C.

Remind students that unless they have an extremely succinct style writing the minimum recommended number of words in the essay will not be in their best interests if they want a good mark.

Further comments

Make the candidates aware of the penalties for exceeding the word limit.

Make the candidates aware of the key words and the expectations in each criterion.

Higher level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 14	15 – 17	18 – 20

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates.

A significant number of candidates had difficulty commenting on the prose or poem in its entirety, considering it as whole, and expressing a clear thesis / line or argument. Most were able to make some sense of their chosen text, but it must be born in mind that coverage of the whole passage is to be expected. Lack of this leads to misunderstanding and unconvincing readings of parts of both the poem and, especially, the prose.

Criterion A. Understanding and Interpretation:

As ever, weaker candidates resorted to paraphrasing, particularly with the poem. In a few instances, students fixed upon a formulaic interpretation that they were attempting to force the passage to fit, often deciding on an interpretation early on through picking up one or two unconsidered references, and then stubbornly avoiding any re-thinking.

Some candidates did not sufficiently substantiate their interpretation with textual details.

Criterion B. Literary Features

Time and again examiners noted that candidates identified features and have a good knowledge of literary devices, but could not move beyond general assertion and into analysis of their effects. Spotting literary devices and conventions, or quoting from the passage, is not in itself analysis.

Commentaries on the poem often scored only modestly under Criterion B because candidates failed to consider the poem as a poem, bearing in mind its form. A frequent examiner comment at the end of a poem commentary was words to the effect that there was 'little sense of the text as a poem.'

There still seems to be a difficulty for candidates in differentiating between tone, atmosphere or mood.

Pointlessness comments such as "The writer uses diction and/or punctuation" were too often seen.

Criterion D. Use of Language

Some misused basic literary terminology such as symbol, allusion, personification (often used where anthropomorphism was meant), oxymoron, theme, simile (so often spelt 'similie') or metaphor.

Examiners have commented that they lost count of the times candidates paired 'one and 'their', as in 'The poem is about how one must discover their style'.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared.

Fewer commentaries this session were mechanical, treating stylistic features and the meaning of the passage/poem as if they were different entities, and this is good. Also, more candidates used an organizational pattern that does not echo the time flow of the extract; while a linear reading can work well, such an approach means that the extract is controlling the candidate rather than the other way round. Most candidates were able to identify the main concerns of the text, the better commentaries displaying impressive insight and perceptiveness.

Criterion C. Presentation

One examiner noted that on the whole there was more clarity in introductory and concluding paragraphs than in previous sessions, and often a better thread of argument linking the two. In general, candidates demonstrated good and coherent organization of ideas. Few wrote too-brief commentaries.

Just as the discussion of meaning should arise from a careful reading of the entire poem or passage, so too should the organisation of the commentary arise from the demands of the passage. There is continuing evidence that fewer candidates are using a previously taught or prepared pattern/template, which is encouraging. However, it is clear that a few centres are still teaching a rigid 'one size fits all' approach.

D. Use of Language

Use of language has improved and most candidates were able to express their ideas clearly. Examiners are encouraged to reward good syntax even when writing errors such as spelling are present.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions.

Prose:

Most candidates picked up the contrast between the two settings in the prose. However, sometimes the two locations were conflated. Stronger candidates considered the ways in the presentation of the settings prepared the reader to accept the narrator's response to the encounter with the tiger. While most picked up on the contrasts between Bermondsey and the Ratcliffe Highway, relatively few picked up on the somewhat disturbing elements in the description of the birds, arguing effectively that this prepared readers for the reality of the situation the narrator faced.

Although the tiger was variously identified as a leopard, panther or just a big cat, most candidates grasped that the cat was more than an ordinary domesticated cat. Most appreciated the ways that the cat was described by the narrator and identified a disparity between the narrator's interpretation of the tiger and the reader's. A few were able with insight to articulate and explore the effects of this. Stronger candidates were also able to identify interjections by the narrator and examine the effects of these.

The majority commented on details such as "The Sun himself came down and walked on earth". Some spoke of the narrator being 'attacked' by the big cat - not quite the right word. Some considered that the narrator was eaten / dies. How does one tell a story after death?!

Most were able to identify the 'dream-like' or 'awed' tone of the narrator; stronger candidates were more precise in distinguishing specific tones and were able to appreciate the narrator's attitude and response to the tiger. Good candidates commented on imagery and similes such as the 'veins on a baby's head' simile and the choice of 'wasp'.

As ever, those who developed an interpretation from close textual analysis fared best.

Poem:

Most candidates grasped the central situation, although many missed the tone. Several ably teased out the complexity of the protagonist's internal and external worlds and the place of tension by explicitly, and relevantly, focusing on suspense, contrasts and shifts in tone.

Less successful candidates depended upon paraphrased approaches with some attention paid to method but little focus on the effects of language or presentation of the fire, context and family dynamics.

There was a fair amount of over-the-top interpretation of the woman as a stereotypical housewife / trapped housewife yearning to break out. This led to the pitfall of ascribing to her attributes and emotions at variance with those implied by the poet. There was much extended unsupported assertion about the woman as bound to the house and not allowed liberty by her husband (and the expectations of society). The mother's responsibility towards her family was sometimes exaggerated and sentimentalised.

Often candidates saw that the possible dullness of the woman's existence was enlivened by the excitement of the fire, but then frequently they went over the top suggesting that she wanted the fire or even started it deliberately, in order (a) to free herself from domestic routine or (b) to

claim the insurance money - or both. A fair number took a simplistic view that all the poem was suggesting was that women should do more with their lives. In more than one commentary the wife is flirting - or even having an affair - with the insurance man, the real cause of the husband's reaction. Others considered that the woman is materialistic because her first thoughts are for material things and not life, a lack of close reading overlooking that the woman chose to save the cat over the 'Photographs, toys or letters'. The fact that the cat has already lost eight lives convinced others how careless the mother must have been in the past, and that her carelessness over the toaster must have caused the fire. What is evidence? There was a fair amount of feminist, sociological and other over-reading concerning the mundane nature of the woman's life prior to the fire.

A few over-read the situation between the wife and husband, seeing him as 'abusive' towards her. More than one candidate assumed that the husband is a drug addict ('stony-faced')!

A good number referred to the events in the poem as 'a tragedy'/'tragic'. Is it? Nobody dies. In fact, there is a fair amount of humour in the poem which few perceived. The last stanza was generally understood, with most candidates identifying the resolve in the final two lines. A very few strong candidates related the last stanza back to the first, commenting on the humour of 'the treacherous toaster' and seeing how the woman's resolve had perhaps come to nothing since the incident was now a 'family joke'.

Most candidates were alert to the contrast of hot and cold and light and dark imagery and were able to write effectively on the fire and the emotion in the description. There were some excellent responses on the imagery used to demonstrate the woman's fascinated reaction to the fire.

Examiners noted discriminators which signalled a lack of close reading, for instance: writing of the woman's 'house/home being burnt down' - it was only the kitchen which had 'gone'; commenting that the woman lost all her possessions (where is that in the poem?); perhaps more understandable in an American context, taking the white border on line 3 as a white picket fence - but do white picket fences have 'cool blooms' (line 4)? A few ascribed the lack of rhyme to the poet wishing to make the structure chaotic, like fire. There was sometimes confusion over the fairly straightforward shift in tenses during the poem.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

It still may be that some centres specifically prepare candidates only for either the prose or (more often) the poem, which is educationally reductive and a pity.

Candidates should be encouraged to:

- organise ideas in a concise manner.
- recognise a possible plurality of approach, and the possibility of more than one interpretation, by using words such as 'it is possible that...' or 'one way of reading this is that...'. If you can come up with more than one possible interpretation, so much the better. Provided that readings are supported by textual reference then they are acceptable. Which means...

- ...avoid unsubstantiated claims or generalisations, putting emphasis on interpretation rooted in and supported by textual evidence.
- ensure that they first understand the passage on the literal level before moving on to the figurative. Many wild misreadings are prevented by careful attention to what is actually occurring in a passage.
- carefully study the Descriptors and their demands in preparation for the examination, and realize that all aspects covered by the criteria are important.
- develop an overview of the passage before starting to write; read (re-reading time is never wasted) – think - plan.
- absorb the whole passage before writing anything - the commentary must treat the entire passage or the entire poem.
- put down the pen and re-read the first paragraph after writing it. Is it a good overview of what the passage is saying and the means by which it is said?
- address the form of the passage - that is, consider the prose as a piece of prose and the poem as a poem.
- ensure that they understand the meaning of the words 'theme' (not every idea is a 'theme') and 'tone', both of which are frequently misused.
- always support comments by reference to the text, citing the line numbers when quoting anything of substance from the text.
- learn how to embed quotations, and how to cite verse - if quoting more than one line of continuous verse, insert slash marks at the end of lines to indicate an awareness of the verse form.
- if the gender of a narrator/persona is unclear, decide on the gender and stick to it, using the appropriate gender pronoun thereafter and thus avoiding the inappropriate use of 'their' and 'themselves' as a singular.
- write legibly - that which cannot be read, cannot be credited. This includes dotting 'i's and crossing 't's. Try deciphering the word 'inimical' when the dots are missing - the dots on the 'i's are there for a reason.
- aim for coherence and development in their commentaries with smooth transitions between paragraphs.

Candidates should be encouraged **not** to:

- say that the writer 'uses diction' or 'uses punctuation'. How else could they write? And understand that an analysis of diction consists of more than merely identifying the words used.
- refer to any unrhymed poetry as 'blank verse'. Only unrhymed iambic pentameter is blank verse. Thus *Blaze* is not written in blank verse.
- use the informal abbreviation 'quote' as a noun in formal writing. The noun is 'quotation'.
- use long quotations, which are usually mere padding.
- merely use line references instead of quoting
- write that enjambment/rhyme/etc. help the poem 'flow', which is almost meaningless.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 2	3 – 5	6 – 8	9 – 11	12 – 14	15 – 17	18 – 20

General comments

Examiners agreed that the paper was accessible and the old-fashioned language of the poem did not deter candidates. Indeed, more candidates selected the poem over the prose extract and candidates seemed to relish the challenges it offered. The topicality of the prose did not attract the number of entries one might have expected, possibly because it was open to a range of interpretations and therefore more difficult to pin down.

The session was notable for the apparent absence of really good responses in this component. Also notable was a remarkable deterioration in handwriting, to the extent that some scripts were virtually indecipherable and took hours, without exaggeration, to read.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

The poem

Many candidates could chart the change of attitude to the bat quite convincingly, but a significant number were unable to detect the reason for this. It is triggered by pity, compassion or the maternal instinct aroused on seeing and recognising a living, vulnerable creature in pain.

Some candidates failed to examine the use of rhyming couplets and their effects. Other omissions included the change in the number of lines in stanza three, which expressed the poet's emotional confusion. The last stanza was frequently overlooked, though some candidates saw the four rhymes as imparting a sense of closure and even serenity.

There are still candidates who recognise literary devices and terms – and indeed know a number of the less commonly used ones but who do not analyse their effects. For example, “chestnut down’s” rich colour gives a whole new dimension to the poet’s perception. “O a little one that clings” produced different interpretations but candidates all picked up on maternity, sometimes the bat’s but more often the poet’s.

The prose

Two differing views of the teacher emerged, one sympathetic to her aim of introducing new ways of thinking and challenging the constraints of “vocabulary drills, comprehension questions and recitation” and the other unsympathetic to her resort to sarcasm and authoritarianism (“What’s your name, young lady ?”) Also to her lying to the class about 6x11 and making up

her theory to cover herself. There was some difficulty in picking up on the contrast between the spontaneity of playground life, nature and the constraints of the classroom.

Details such as “magician style” and “blue-tinted glasses” single her out as different, even exotic. Another positive is the fact that she has the class' attention – “We were all waiting” and “We looked back at her”.

There were some odd interpretations of “monkey bars”, some candidates thinking that the school was next to a zoo.

Many candidates tackled the question of humour with varying degrees of success.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Many candidates read the poem carefully and showed an engaging concern for detail. They were aware, for example, of the nuances in stanza three, where Pitter is both horrified and moved, and the use of half-rhyme to express this conflict.

Most candidates are aware of the need to shape their responses and many used the 'linear' format to do this, examining the poem stanza by stanza. The use of questions was noticeable as a framing mechanism.

In the case of the prose, candidates' careful inferential reading meant that they picked up on Ms. Ferenczi's boredom and that of the class, and how she seized her opportunity to enliven the lesson with “a jolly smile breaking across her face.” Responses were well-focused and interpretations largely relevant.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Criterion A

Understanding was generally good of the poem, with the exception of the recognition of the moment which triggers the change of attitude. In the case of the prose, analysis of humour proved quite challenging.

Criterion B

Again interpretation was generally sound, but there is still a tendency among some candidates to impose an interpretation at the outset which may lead to irrelevances.

Criterion C

Coherence is key here. Responses should show some development through paragraphing, rather than a narrative account. “Tell me how you read this poem” is a useful guiding principle.

Criterion D

Language use is generally good, with the exception of the errors mentioned in the following section.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Much good practice is in evidence. However, where language is concerned, and criterion D, the misuse or omission of the possessive apostrophe is common and an annoyance. “Its” is a possessive adjective, as in “its fur”; “it’s” is an abbreviation of “it is”.

Please teach the agreement of subject and verb; “The speaker’s attitude starts to change through *his/her* (not *their*) encounter...”

Please teach closer analysis of imagery and advise candidates to read the text closely.

Discourage the imposition of a theory, for example, “the poem is about racism”.

Higher level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 25

General comments

A number of examiners commented on the generally good standard of paper 2 responses this session. There were some encouraging signs in the performance of this batch of candidates and, although as usual the areas which appeared difficult and those where candidates seem to be well prepared are separately reported on, it was more than usually difficult to separate these: strengths were often closely allied to weaknesses.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Several reports in recent years have drawn attention to candidates’ failure to pay attention to the conventions of their chosen genre. There was evidence this session that candidates are paying more attention to this crucial element in the paper 2 requirements, both with poetry and prose fiction. Drama, however, remains the genre where many candidates fail to exhibit this awareness, and continue to write about a dramatic plot as though it were a set of real events, and characters as though they were real people rather than textual constructs. Candidates

would frequently refer to an important element in a dramatic plot (particularly to offstage occurrences in responses to question 1) without any sense of how the audience is made aware of it.

Though there was evidence this session of generally good use of the texts, there seems to be an increasing tendency to write in a kind of referential shorthand, omitting any context which will make sense of an entire text before focusing on a particular detail. The candidate who begins an essay with ‘When Stanley rapes Blanche, the audience . . .’ may be relying on the (correct) assumption that the examiner will know what is being referred to; but without setting such a detail within the context of the broader plot or narrative, however briefly, the candidate is likely to construct an uneven argument and fail fully to show knowledge and understanding of the work in question. Though most candidates did attempt some measure of comparison of their texts, transitions from one text to another were sometimes inadequately managed, the transition being marked simply by ‘similarly’ or some such connective word or phrase, without an attempt to define more closely the point of comparison.

Perhaps the most easily remediable shortcoming was a failure to maintain clear focus on the whole of the question: so many answers engaged, perhaps fully and perceptively, with one element in a question, such as (to take just one of many examples) ‘the techniques used to reveal information about character or situation that is not shown on stage’ but then had little to say about ‘the significance of this information’. As one examiner put it, many candidates struggled to keep hold of the question as they progressed through their thoughts, especially when the question involved several parts.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Candidates generally used their knowledge of the texts well, grounding their arguments in textual detail. There was less use of ‘floating quotations’ unconnected to the argument, though these still appeared more frequently in answers on poetry. There was a genuine attempt in most responses to compare texts – with varying degrees of skill – and the texts chosen usually offered a reasonable opportunity for such comparison: there were few who had to struggle to sustain a comparison between plays as disparate as (say) *Waiting for Godot* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Few attempted to cover three or four texts, thereby limiting the amount of detail and development which could be achieved with any one text, though here again, poetry was the one genre where several candidates tried to spread their analysis too thinly over too many writers and too many poems. There were very few responses with so little command of English as to question the wisdom of the candidate attempting a Higher Level examination in Literature, though there was the usual crop of common or careless errors and poorly constructed sentences.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

As usual drama was the most popular genre followed by novel and short story, with poetry not far behind. Once again there were too few answers on prose other than fiction to enable any confident generalizations on questions 10, 11 and 12.

1. Most who answered this well went straight to information about a past situation or the past experience of a character, or an absent character, usually conveyed through dialogue, perhaps reinforced through other dramatic means (such as the polka music in *A Streetcar Named Desire*). Others seemed determined to bring in a whole range of dramatic techniques, whether relevant or not; while some broadened the terms of the question to include any implicit information about character or situation, whether or not this was shown on stage.

2. Many responses did not seem to grasp the concept of realistic or non-realistic presentation, and imagined that a play could be deemed realistic if the experience represented in it was somehow 'real'. Candidates often did best when examining non-realistic elements such as the 'memory' scenes in *Death of a Salesman* or the distinctive staging of Shaffer's *Equus*, and some of the very best answers took on board 'or a combination of the two', recognizing that a mixture of techniques is a feature of such plays as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Death of a Salesman*, or *The Birthday Party*.

3. There were some questionable choices of character in responses to this question (Stella in *Streetcar*, Nick and Honey in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*), while the few candidates who attempted to construct an argument using *Oleanna* highlighted the fact that not all questions are suited to all texts (particularly since *Oleanna* is a text very well suited to question 1. Most candidates, however, were able to make sensible choices of characters and to define their roles. 'Enduring impact' was a little more challenging, and only those candidates who deliberately took this on board scored really well.

4. Some answers revealed imperfect knowledge concerning the form of their chosen poems (on such matters as their metre or use of rhyme); and in some cases, once the form was identified (as sonnet, free verse etc.), the essay became simply a general commentary bearing little relation to its formal features. Many, however, proved able to make precise comments on specific uses of poetic form, the most successful often comparing a strict form (Donne was a popular choice) with a more free one.

5. This was the most popular poetry question by a large margin. Many answers offered vague and general commentary, with little specific reference to the question. However, there were some excellent responses: several candidates focused on a complexity of emotional response in such poems as Duffy's 'Havisham', or (to give one outstanding example) drew attention to the distinction between those Donne poems with a very direct emotional appeal (such as 'The Expiration') and those where emotional responses appear to be muted by the ingenuity of the poetic devices.

6. This was the least popular of the poetry questions. Those attempting it usually had some sense of what is meant by 'lyrical', and were able to choose poems which were appropriate to their argument, though few attempted an explicit definition of the concept. Few also responded

to the phrase 'to what extent', though there were exceptions, such as the response which compared the conventional lyricism of Keats's *To Autumn* to Plath's *Blackberrying*, that employs conventional lyrical elements only to subvert them.

7. This and the next question were equally popular in this section, and question 9 much less so. Most answers correctly identified the narrator or narrators of their chosen texts, even if their use of descriptive terminology (to distinguish, for example, between third person limited and omniscient) was not quite precise. Identifying the techniques used to enable readers to assess narrator liability was rather more of a challenge, but there were some very good answers on novels such as *Wuthering Heights*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Atonement*.

8. The first phrase of this question ('In some works of fiction') might have alerted candidates to the fact that not all works of fiction are equally appropriate to it. Some would deal confidently with one text (say *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), then struggle to write with equal conviction on *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the change the candidate dealt with would likely be the change in Offred's experience from her earlier life. This was arguably the only question in this section (and one of the few on the entire paper) where some texts might have made this a poor choice.

9. Probably a minority of candidates really addressed themselves to the precise terms of this question. Some responses offered what was in effect a plot summary, with passing references to characters' reactions. The best responses were those which focused precisely on how different characters within a text react to the same events and the significance of these reactions.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

In view of the encouraging signs of some improved performance in specific skills this session, it is perhaps most appropriate to focus on two general recommendations, both of which have appeared in one form or another in recent reports. The first is the necessity for candidates to enter the examination room with an open mind, ready to respond to whatever the examination paper offers. The second is the simple but all-important recommendation to scrutinize the questions closely.

With reference to the first of these, it is unfortunately the case that many responses appear partly or wholly to have been devised before the candidate enters the examination room. Instead of a thoughtful response to the question, the candidate will recite a litany of techniques, ideas or themes (of which the American dream or the opposition of appearance and reality seem to be particular favourites in essays on drama), with attempts (of varying success) to shift this material towards the question. Instead of a consideration of which literary conventions (apart from any which are explicitly mentioned in the question) will be most relevant to that topic, the introduction will often repeat the terms of the question and assert that these are evident in the author's use of (for example) 'characterisation, structure, language and imagery', and then fail to pursue some or all of these in the body of the response. It is understandable that some candidates may seek the security of approaching the examination with a number of learned ideas which can then be reproduced; but it is never likely to result in a better than mediocre or at the best adequate response to the question. Candidates will have become

familiar with carefully planned, highly structured work in preparation for their Written Assignment; but it need to be stressed, from the outset of their work on paper 2 texts, that here a quite different, more open approach is necessary to succeed. In the examination room, the first task is to decide which question or questions best suit the texts which have been studied. Some questions may suit some of a candidate's texts, not others: not all plays contain less prominent characters, not all works of fiction contain characters whose change or transformation is an important feature of the work. Hence it is essential to approach the examination able to answer with equal confidence on any of the four texts studied, and then carefully to choose the question, and the works best fitted to use in an answer.

With reference to the second, students should be aware that most paper 2 questions point to quite complex tasks, for the simple reason that candidates can only show their real worth if considerable demands are placed upon them. All questions can be answered in a partial sense, responding only to their most explicit elements. Thus (to take one example) many candidates responded to question 3, on 'less prominent characters' in plays, simply by citing certain characters and outlining their role in the plot. A more thoughtful response, however, might focus on what makes a character 'less prominent' (is it simply time spent onstage, or relation to the other characters, or role in the plot?); on their overall impact in the play; and how far their impact can be said to be 'enduring' (in their effect on the plot, or because of their relevance to a key idea or ideas?). These need to be seen, not as means to trip up the candidate who fails to respond to them, but as possibilities which can be exploited by those patient enough to think about and respond to the various implications of the question. There is an abundance of questions from past papers which can be used to develop the skill of reading questions comprehensively, and teachers can encourage students to mark up questions, by highlighting or underlining, in order to focus on all their key words and phrases.

Some of the other points made in previous sections imply their own particular recommendations. It is worth devoting attention both to the way a work is introduced into the discussion, and transitions in argument between one work and another. With regard to the former, students need to be guided towards supplying sufficient context for the detailed point being made, a sense of how it relates to the entire work, without lapsing into the lengthy and unnecessary narrative introductions found in some responses. Transitions in the argument between one text and another are an essential part of a well-crafted comparative essay. Since the comparison of two or more texts is a crucial part of the paper 2 requirements, it is worth exploring with students the purpose and effects of literary comparison. This should help them to see that comparison is not an arbitrary exercise, simply defining similarities and/or differences between works; but that a close look at how two works treat differently a common idea, technique or other element (whether it be styles of dramatic presentation, poetic lyricism, narrative reliability, or whatever else) is precisely what throws the distinctive features of those works into relief. So the comparison of two texts, and in particular the transition between them in the argument, should not be hurried over with the simple assertion that they are displaying similar ideas or techniques, but should also point towards any significant differences which can be developed in the body of the discussion.

Several examiners this session commented on some candidates' inconsistency in spelling or the adherence to rules: they might begin with the misspelling 'playwrite', only to spell it correctly in the next paragraph, or include apostrophes at one point and omit them the next. Other

common errors continue to be the misuse of it's (for its) and who's (for whose), and the misspellings of words such as such as receive and separate, while the misuse of 'reveal' as a noun appears to be a growing practice. Students need to be taught to build into their examination planning some time for reading through what they have written. A periodic scan of the response so far, or the paragraph just written, with attention to consistency of language, should also be accompanied by two questions: am I still on course to answer the question? which aspects of the question are still to be dealt with?

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 9	10 – 13	14 – 16	17 – 20	21 – 25

General comments

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

The following comment addresses more a difficulty with many of the responses than it does something in the requirements that proved difficult. It was with unusual frequency in this session that candidates simply ignored the question entirely. It has always been a recurring phenomenon that some candidates appeared to present a prepared response rather than create a fresh, personal response to a question. Even in these cases, candidates would generally attempt to integrate some of the terms of the question in that prepared response. However, this time a significant number of candidates simply indicated a question number at the beginning of the response and then completely forgot about it. Naturally candidates can end up with an adequate, if not strong, final mark even with a 1 or 0 in criterion B. One hopes that this tactic was not something of which candidates were made aware in their lessons.

Again, as in past years, responding directly and relevantly to the question in all its parts remains a challenge, even for those candidates (the majority) who attempted to address the question. Some questions are more straightforward than others. Candidates are potentially fortunate if the works they have studied suit themselves to the questions where decoding is relatively simple. In addition, terms need defining. A candidate can go a long way in shaping the question into a more comfortable personal direction by defining terms to fit the works about to be discussed.

Although, as mentioned above, the increased presence of literary device was to be applauded in general, examiners noted the reoccurrence of a pattern that does not suggest individual consideration of an author's style. Although not quoting directly, many candidates wrote something along the lines of "In the work the author uses imagery, diction, structure and setting

in order to (accomplish the task in the question) and does so by developing character, driving the plot and underlining the themes.” There is a lot in here that could be useful, and in many cases is necessary, in addressing a question. However, too often most of these devices and effects are not treated and certainly do not prepare the reader for the structure of the response that follows. They end up seeming perfunctory. Candidates almost always will discuss the characters and many will touch on the themes; but seldom do they address the advancement of the plot. Many will tell the plot. However, they will not show how the plot as a construct is advanced through the action and reaction (cause and effect) that “drives the plot forward”.

The logical organization of the response is a challenge for many and some form of planning is crucial. Those that set out the direction in the introduction and stick to it are surprisingly few. Another place where a sense of unity can be achieved is in the conclusion. A number of candidates appear to find their way while they are writing, bringing it all together at the end, not so much in a repetitive fashion but either in a way that develops during the course of writing the response or in a way that takes the response as presented and brings the conclusion to another level of insight. This is an examiner’s dream.

Still another place where a sense of direction can be developed is in the transition from one paragraph to the next. Most of the transitions that candidates use accomplish very little. ‘On the other hand’ does not make a lot of sense unless the reader is completely clear on the ‘on the one hand’ point. ‘Likewise’, ‘Contrarily’, ‘As opposed to’, ‘Moving on’, ‘As I said before’, ‘Meanwhile’, ‘Anyway’, ‘Next’ and ‘Interestingly’ (especially when the interesting point is not made clear as to why it is interesting) are among the many kinds of transitions that do not do the job on their own. A good transition points back to the central idea of the previous paragraph and connects it to the central idea of the paragraph to come. Transitions provide the opportunity not only to reassert the logic and direction of the response but also to address the element of comparison.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

It would be pleasing if one could report elements done well without a caveat; however, even in the areas in which candidates presented a strong showing, it may more helpful to show in what ways these strengths also could be further strengthened.

Almost without exception candidates showed more than familiarity with the works: 1) they showed adequate knowledge and at least a basic understanding of the works and 2) they presented a methodological approach to completing the task within the time frame of the examination. This combination of skills suggests both a conscientious delivery of, as well as a serious candidate involvement in, the programme. Even as candidates wrote of their texts in an informed way, too many also did not appear to understand the difference between generally accurate knowledge and detailed knowledge. The use of detailed references to the text as evidence of a potentially valid claim not only affects performance in criterion A, but it also plays a part in criteria B, C and D.

Responses placed more emphasis on criterion C than has been done in the past. This is something that was suggested in previous Subject Reports, and it is gratifying to see that

attention has been paid to this requirement. The most effective responses chose devices that worked in support of the question, with the question still being the focus on the response. However, it was also often noted that many responses amounted to a list of literary devices that may have appeared in the work but that the list, not the question, actually became the determining element of the structure of the response. In these cases, the overall argument itself was either lost or never appeared.

Opening the response with a brief summary of circumstances, characters and central ideas of each work to be addressed is not a bad idea. It is helpful in showing understanding of the larger ideas of the works in a way that may not be immediately related to the question about to be addressed. However, having done that, it would be even more effective to continue to relate the focus of the question back to one or more of those ideas in the course of the response, a fact that would unify the response, give a sense of direction completed and fulfill the need to show knowledge and understanding of the works not only in some detail but also in terms of their central impact. Responses without some sort of effective context can sometimes seem to hang in the air by themselves with nothing to anchor them to the larger ideas of the works. In addition, characters should not be introduced into a response without providing some form of identification.

The level of expression of the candidates was often very high: fluid, correct, expressive and even sometimes with a sense of the voice of the candidate him/herself. When this level of expression combines with knowledge and understanding of the works and dedication to the task, then the product is impressive and a joy to read.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Q1: The rub here often appeared to come with deciding what kinds of elements could be described as 'not shown on stage'. Does this mean things that happened as backstory or side-story (the implied unsuccessful date of Blanche and Mitch at the fair) or characters mentioned in the play but who do not appear (Mr. Wingfield, Allen Grey) or things that happen during the play but are not 'shown': i.e. they are 'heard'? Credit can be given to any of these approaches especially if the candidate defines them as not being 'shown on stage'.

Q2: A realistic and/or non-realistic presentation of a play or the presentation of a realistic and/or non-realistic situation within a play: here was where most of the confusion lay. The first approach (which is the one asked in the question) is challenging and tests a candidate in terms of his/her understanding of this stylistic technique of the playwright; the second is less challenging (and so more often opted for) and does not require knowledge of craft so much as whether what appears on stage is in some way recognizable, possible or believable. A fair number of candidates addressed the question as intended. Somewhat more candidates used the terms 'realistic' and 'non-realistic' to build a less relevant, but in other ways revealing, response, one that was not necessarily without merit. So across the board the results often involved a mark in criterion B that was frequently compensated for in part by achievements in producing a cohesive essay (criterion D), that showed knowledge and understanding of the works (criterion A) and that supported the response with references to the literary devices used by the writer (criterion C).

Q3: A fair amount of latitude was shown in accepting which characters qualified as minor characters by virtue of their being 'less prominent'. To no small extent this is just a matter of opinion. Therefore, such characters as Mitch (in *A Streetcar Named Desire*) or Ben (in *Death of a Salesman*) might be central characters to some, and not to others. Less emphasis in terms of evaluation of the response was placed on 'correctly' identifying minor characters than in showing their 'impact on action and/or ideas.' Again latitude needed to be shown here as many candidates discussed their impact on other characters, an approach which could be accepted since the second sentence in the prompt did not limit impact to action and/or ideas but opened the impact to other areas. The biggest problem, however, arose when the other characters that were impacted became the centre of discussion. Many students lost hold of the reins in this way and so lost focus on the 'less prominent' characters.

Q4: Those candidates trained in the structure of the poems studied did a good job here. Not only were they prepared to deal with such forms as were given in the prompt (sonnet, stanza, couplet), but they also were able to bring in other terms such as *terza rima* and ballad as well as forms such as internal structural elements. Few candidates attempted this question unless they were relatively secure in what was being asked. Although not many candidates attempted this question, those that did generally fared well.

Q5: This question was, by far, the most popular one in this genre category. It appeared to be a question that gave a certain amount of false hope in that 'emotional responses' seem to be more accessible for discussion than Petrarchan sonnets are, or so it would seem. Generally speaking, the works chosen for discussion lent themselves well to a potentially focused and relevant response. It is hard to find a poem without some sort of emotion being evoked. The problem too often lay in the failure of candidates to identify specifically which particular emotions are evoked. A typical response might describe the concerns of the poem and claim that the poem calls forth an emotional response in the persona and the reader, but would not name those emotions. Or, the emotional range was limited: sadness, happiness, joy, pity, excitement. States of mind began appearing as emotions: love, loss, concern. In many cases these do overlap, so credit was given when the argument presented terms that could be internalized especially if the presentation was well supported by specific reference to relevant details in the poem.

Q6: Examiners saw only a very limited number of responses to this question. However, it appeared that candidates who chose this question were prepared to present poems with both urban and pastoral settings. What fewer of them were prepared to do was to show how the ones chosen are 'lyrical', a term whose meaning usually went undefined so that the usual conclusion was that each poem under discussion was 'lyrical' by virtue of whatever devices the poet had used to present the setting.

Q7: Works such as *The Great Gatsby*, *A Handmaid's Tale* and *The Quiet American* appeared frequently here. Candidates had clear ideas of the reliability (especially the doubtful nature thereof) of the narrators discussed but were less able to identify techniques by which the relevant level of reliability was created. Most responses assumed that a first-person narrator was biased and thus unreliable. However, only a relatively few proceeded to identify ways in which the level of reliability was advanced or detracted from by reference to specifics within the text. Some candidates could point to lines in the text as evidence of narrator reliability but were

limited in their ability to identify this evidence as technique or to discuss the extent to which reliability exerted an impact on the texts (i.e. 'how far it matters').

Q8: This question was far and away the most popular one for this genre perhaps because it did not present a clear problem in decoding it. This quite straightforward element of character depiction is very likely something that had been addressed somewhere along the way in the study of these works. Consequently, there were few pitfalls here. Transitions and changes of many forms were addressed: states of mind, personal circumstances (wealth, health, level of success), attitudes, character. However, it was often hard to pinpoint exactly what the transformation was. It was often presented as a change that occurred over the entire plot instead of a clear identification of the change and then choosing specific events/moments in the novel that contributed to the change. The transformation also needed to be connected to the central ideas of each text as seldom does a character undergo significant change without greater import.

Q9: In response to this question, it was expected that candidates would discuss how more than one character reacted to the same event. In some cases, candidates discussed a variety of characters reacting to a variety of events. So often it was a matter of one character per event. Although this was not the expectation, it could be seen how the wording of the question could validate this approach. Consequently, responses in which candidates adopted a valid if unintended approach were accepted. That said, the result of this breadth of interpretation, while perhaps making the question more accessible, did not necessarily make the task of producing a quality response any easier. Sometimes 'events' were treated as conditions, like colonialism or a dystopian society. So instead of looking at an event in *Heart of Darkness* or *Things Fall Apart* for example, a candidate might discuss the reaction of a character (or in fewer cases, multiple characters) to the condition of tribalism, colonialism or the oppression of Gilead or Oceania.

Q10-12. There were no comments reported on these questions.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

There is much evidence to support the belief that many teachers are already following the suggestions below, however they are included here because there is still considerable room for improvement.

- Practice decoding questions including making working definitions of the terms of the question.
- Stress the importance of *details*. One examiner stated, "I used to give quizzes on details as a sort of game (i.e. the results didn't affect the students' grades). The students themselves would sometimes make up questions on details to quiz each other. At some point the additional question would be added, 'Why is this detail of some importance?' just to show that there is a possible reason why the writer included everything that s/he did in a work." Naturally there are some elements/quotations that every student would be well served to know as well, even if the candidate would also be well advised not to force it into a response if it does not fit.
- Mechanical weaknesses: here follows a series of relatively minor points in terms of the

overall evaluation of a response. However, they are such common errors that when a candidate does NOT commit them, that response immediately takes on a certain appeal. So it might be well worth the effort to invest in attending to these points.

- spelling: in the course of writing responses over a two-year period, the candidate must become aware of which words are likely to be misspelled. Teachers too are aware: separate, beginning, interest, through/thorough/though, occurred, referred, occurrence, successful, Tennessee...; each candidate collecting a personal list of commonly misspelled words might help;
 - possessives and plurals: especially its and it's;
 - 'fewer' in place of 'less' (i.e. fewer characters...); 'as if' in place of 'like' (he pretended as if it was his...); 'number' instead of 'amount' (an incredible number of instances...);
 - indicate titles with underlining or quotation marks, even after the first mention of the work; even when *The Importance of Being Earnest* is reduced to TIOBE;
 - 'playwright' not 'playwrite'; and 'play' not 'playwright' (yes, this is often done);
 - subject and verb agreement.
- Work on the creation of effective transitions.
 - Stress the element of comparison of texts throughout class discussions and on all responses written during the course. A large number of examiners commented on the limited abilities of candidates to engage in meaningful comparison of texts.
 - It is not very helpful to express a theme in a single word: i.e. love, war or gender. A theme is a stance on love, war or gender. For example: the power of love to restore faith, or war as a continuing trauma in one's life, or gender as a political power issue. When stated in this fashion, theme can go a long way to connecting with at least some of the central ideas of the works.
 - In light of the reported tendency to see more and more responses organized in terms of literary techniques (as was often the case with Question #5), candidates need to keep the terms of the question as the organizing factors and bring in the literary devices to show how the focus of the question and the understanding of the works are advanced by the literary techniques.
 - In spite of the number of years that the current programme has been in place, invalid texts continue to appear in the responses. Among those invalid choices include the works of these writers: Jean Rhys, J.D. Salinger, Henrik Ibsen, Ariel Dorfman and Amy Tan.