

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH 9153/01

NOVEMBER 2012

## PAPER 1

### GENERAL COMMENTS

Most of the candidates did not do well this year. There was notably a fair distribution of candidates who attempted the poetry question (Question 1), the question on the appreciation of a drama text (Question 2) and the question on comparing and contrasting poems (Question 4). The question on appreciating a prose passage (Question 3) was generally avoided by many candidates. Those who settled for poetry questions in most cases failed to critically read the poems. Often candidates concentrated on paraphrasing the meaning of poems and ignored the integral part of exploring style and how it functions to bring out meanings. One is tempted to think that candidates were more exposed to poetry and drama, if one judges by how the prose passage was ignored. There is need for teachers to expose candidates to all the three genres. Candidates should not settle for poetry simply because they are shorter texts. The texts might be shorter but condensed. Prose and drama passages are longer but often very accessible.

Candidates need to be advised that poetry requires sharp skills of close reading to avoid misreading them as was the usual problem of candidates. Marks are not got by how much one writes but by what one writes, so candidates need to be advised to take their time reading closely before they impulsively start writing for they fail to connect related parts of the same text. Some candidates often failed to demonstrate connections between the content and style. They would write on the content in one part of the essay and then turn to catalogue poetic devices in the other part of the essay. Some explored nonexistent literary terms obviously drilled in class but not there in the text before them.

## COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

### Question 1

Though the question was the most popular one, the majority of candidates performed dismally. What is worrying is that the subject matter of the poem which is the quest for gender equality is a topical issue which should not have posed challenges. A number of candidates misread the poem. They read the word “brother” which opens the poem as meaning brother in its everyday use. They then concluded that, the poem is about brothers speaking to each other.

Once a candidate misreads a text, it becomes difficult to make sense of the subject and explore the effectiveness of the style because the two are inseparable.

The starting point for teachers is to understand what form means and teach this to candidates because once one knows that the poem is an ode, sonnet, allegory, ballad or other forms, it makes it easy to perceive how the poetic devices used bring out meaning. Aspects of a poem that one should discuss include form, structure (both external and internal structure of a poem), tone and imagery. These have to be explored whether explicitly asked for or not because they are integral aspects which enable a poem to communicate meaning. When a question requires a candidate to pay attention to “the poet’s diction, form and attitude, it does not mean one should write about these three aspects only. The question is saying that there are aspects of diction, form and attitude that should be attended to in order for one to fully explore and appreciate/understand the poem. As mentioned earlier, it is not possible for one to analyze a poem fully without having talked about its tone, imagery and other aspects of language which enable a poem to communicate meaning.

While teachers might rightly have taught about how some poetic devices work in a poem to bring out meaning, that does not mean candidates should hunt for alliteration, rhyme, oxymoron, repetition and onomatopoeia in every poem. At this level, the examination requires skills of close reading, analysis, synthesis and evaluation and not just paraphrasing and listing down all remembered literary terms.

## Question 2

In terms of popularity, this was the most popular question but poorly done. Few candidates scored high marks. Most candidates' marks were below 10 out of 25. The drama text was straight forward and the question was direct. The major challenge was failure to demonstrate how the text was generated. Candidates simply paraphrased the extract without focusing on the devices used by the playwright and their effectiveness. Though the majority of candidates understood the passage, they failed to engage it stylistically. There were detailed stage directions which candidates should have fully explored. When candidates write on drama, they should highlight how it engages and involves the audience. The question to address is, how does the audience get involved, how would they react to the action on stage? Candidates are expected to also explore the development of characters in relation to themes and demonstrate the extent of success that this has been achieved or how this has not been achieved.

### **Question 3**

Few candidates answered question 3. This was a difficult question for candidates both because of the nature of the question and the discursive nature of the passage. Candidates were unprepared for this type of a question. Teachers are urged to develop their approach and fully prepare candidates on any type of question on prose appreciation. Centres often prepare for the examination by studying the nature of past examination questions and a slight twist often throws candidates who are not fully equipped off the mark. The passage is discursive and presented. A number of narrative methods and stylistic devices were employed to critique the concept of boldness and to expose and to expose human frailties. The presentation was achieved by developing a logical argument through archaic language, aphorism, use of illustrations, balanced sentences, humor, discourse markers and persuasion. All genres should be fully taught to cater for all candidates. Some candidates are comfortable with prose passages as opposed to poetry and drama which could be the teacher's favourite genres.

### **Question 4**

This was the second most popular question. Few candidates scored above half at most of the examination centres. The poems were fairly accessible and the majority of candidates' managed to access the meaning of the poems but failed to engage them stylistically. The tendency was to simply narrate or paraphrase the poems without engaging them stylistically. The question required candidates to establish points of similarities and also to demonstrate how the poems differ and not to produce two unrelated summaries of the poems written under question 4. Usually the compare and contrast question tempts candidates because of the text's accessibility but the question requires more than a demonstration of basic comprehension of content and requires candidates to be able to establish connections.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Expose candidates to all genres because different candidates have different capabilities.
- Higher order skills of critical evaluation and analysis which score high marks were evidently non-existent in the token answers made by most candidates. Teachers are urged to look for these skills when marking candidates' daily exercises in order to bridge the existing gap between school based assessment and the final public examination.

- A mere catalogue of literary terms evidently forced in the answers does not score. Where candidates were able to pick and identify literacy terms in passages, their purpose and effect or function to bring out meaning often was not demonstrated. Teachers are urged to address this problem.
- Content and style cannot be separated. Candidates are always expected to demonstrate how style is used to bring out meaning and not to write on “answer” on content which is unrelated to the other one on style.
- Teachers are urged to find out what constitute A,B,C,D,E grade answers: grade descriptors, for they would assist them in preparing candidates for the examinations.