

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0396/01

Composition

GENERAL COMMENTS

As usual, there was a wide range of performance: at the top of the range, there were impressive and mature responses in both categories of the paper with candidates displaying sophisticated and appropriate understanding of style and conventions, supported by strong technical accuracy.

Accuracy is an important prerequisite for this paper and this needs to be borne in mind. Some candidates at the lower end of the range under-achieve because technical errors impede communication of ideas; matters such as subject-verb agreement and consistent use of tenses often seem to be forgotten in the process of planning and writing. Other candidates underachieve because they do not meet the minimum rubric requirement of producing a minimum of 600 words for each response and, thus, lose unnecessary marks. This is a point that cannot be stressed too much.

There were some thoughtful and imaginative interpretations of the first section of the paper combined with some very effective and informed ideas in relation to the second. Where candidates planned their work, there were some proficient and enjoyable pieces to read; however, some candidates seem to omit the need for planning so that narrative work in particular can seem to meander with no real thread or direction.

Time management was, on the whole, effective and rubric infringement was not strongly in evidence.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Section A: Narrative/Descriptive/Imaginative Writing

- 1 This title was generally well answered; the question managed to elicit a vast range of experiences that would arouse a sense of mystery and suspense. The more effective responses managed to hold the sense of mystery till the very end, describing chilling scenes with great detail. Such responses had a well-developed sense of structure that kept the reader guessing until the end, avoiding the horror story/movie genre by focusing on creating a tense atmosphere and an effective climax. Less successful answers tended to rely on an outpouring of material with little sense of planning or artistic control.
- 2 Effective answers were quite imaginative and particularly successful when there was a strong sense of either a specific historical period or a futuristic world. A sci-fi approach was adopted by a number of candidates and this approach worked well in the main. Other effective answers took an unusual approach to the question to produce highly imaginative material: for example, one response explored a protagonist's obsession with timekeeping.
- 3 Creative answers made good use of pointed contrasts between idyllic settings and dystopian ones, paying detailed attention to the differences between them; such answers made stylistic and imaginative use of imagery too. Less effective answers failed to differentiate the two locations and described the same place at different times or seasons. There tended to be, in some of these responses, a little too much reliance on 'set piece' descriptive writing which was not always convincing: the more effective answers emerged when a specific river was held in mind.
- 4 There were many entertaining responses here. Many responses made the most of the opportunity to describe and develop diverse types of characters, producing zest and imagination in their work. The title evoked some of the most impressive answers on the paper because candidates with flair

and insight responded to it accordingly. Less effective answers had the characters meet each other, showing lack of planning and proper examination of the question's premises.

Section B: Discursive/Argumentative Writing

- 5 This question was answered well on the whole. Many candidates had an interestingly wide-ranging knowledge of the background to the topic and used exemplification and argument cleverly in their work. There was a strong sense of engagement with the material. There were many mature and thought-provoking answers, combined with passionate ideas, showing that this was perhaps a question close to the hearts of a number of candidates. Less effective answers tended to interpret the question as one about war in general.
- 6 This proved to be a popular choice of question, with many candidates displaying a strong ability to argue both sides of the case, though some seemed to assume that teachers work relatively short days! The best compositions argued well for both sides and these were very successful indeed: mature, knowledgeable and passionate, manipulating a number of rhetorical devices to persuade their audience. Less effective answers tended to produce unequal halves to the title.
- 7 The more successful answers showed a convincing build-up of an argument for one of the three issues, with good use of real-life examples in a personal and wider context. Much personal wisdom and courage was in evidence which made these answers inspiring reading. Less effective answers tended to ramble a little, only making a decisive conclusion at the end of the answer, thereby lacking clear manipulation of persuasive techniques.
- 8 This was not such a popular title. Those who did attempt it produced some informed and perceptive responses, arguing persuasively that teenagers have certain inalienable rights. Effective answers also considered future rights as well.