

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH) US

Paper 0427/01

Paper 1: Set Texts

## Key messages

The following are necessary for success on this component:

- Detailed knowledge of the *whole* text.
- Relevance to the question. Candidates do need to be trained to read the question and to analyse it, looking for the key words and phrases on which to base their answer. A few minutes planning an answer before beginning is time well spent.
- Focus on the extract in the passage-based questions and particularly on the language of the passage. Narrative or descriptive run-through is not sufficient. Successful answers will analyse and explore the writer's method, not merely through language and imagery but also through structure, theme, and characterisation as appropriate.
- A well structured and developed argument.
- Detailed support by way of well chosen quotation or close echoes of the text.

## General comments

Very few candidates were entered for this paper on this occasion. Candidates appeared to be more familiar with the requirements of the paper in terms of the number and type of questions to answer than in the previous examination series. While there were fewer rubric infringements, in general the work exhibited limitations in depth and detail noted in the report on the June 2013 examination.

The texts covered were *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Our Town*, both selections of poetry, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Member of the Wedding* and *The Color Purple*. There were no attempts at empathic questions. The passage-based questions were more popular than the essays, probably because the passages were printed on the paper.

Generally the poetry answers were very brief and showed little understanding of the poems. As in the June examination series, there was a strong sense that most of the candidates might have been seeing them for the first time. Though some of the poems might superficially appear to be straightforward, candidates do need help in looking for underlying meanings and in analysing how the words and images work.

Because of the very small number of entries it is not possible to make appropriate general comment on each question. Instead, some general comments follow on what is needed for gaining higher marks.

Success in this paper depends upon achievement of all the assessment objectives (AOs). At a basic level, AO1, candidates should be able to demonstrate thorough knowledge of the texts they have been studying. This means that they should have read their texts several times, and that they should not be entirely dependent on the Internet or published notes or on a movie version. They need to have a sense of the context of the passage-based questions and, even if they are not asked to refer outside the passage, they should be able to communicate, even indirectly, that they have a sense of the way it fits into the whole text. It also means that in the general essay questions they should be able to range widely through the text, selecting relevant material and creating a clear and supported argument. In the general essay questions (marked †) it is not sufficient to rely on the information to be gleaned from passages printed on the paper; lack of knowledge of the whole text usually reveals itself very quickly. Candidates have the texts in the examination room and should be able to go straight to a relevant reference or quotation if needed and they will only be able to do this if they know the texts thoroughly. The empathic questions also require detailed knowledge and understanding of the character and of the moment specified as well as an attempt to create a convincing voice.

Answers which go beyond this basic level of knowledge to begin to explore the writers' intentions and the way in which particular texts deal with universal issues and matters of human concern will move up the scale of achievement. In other words, answers will be differentiated by the extent to which they are able to see beneath surface meanings (AO2). Closely connected with this will be the ability to construct a reasoned and developed argument.

AO3 refers to the need for candidates to appreciate the ways in which writers use 'language structure and form' to 'create and shape meanings and effects'. Answers will not achieve marks beyond Band 4 unless there is evidence in their answers of some critical skills. It is obvious that the study of poetry will necessitate exploration of imagery and language and that candidates will need to be able to comment on the effects created by a specific word choice, but this also appertains to prose and drama texts and, in the passage-based questions particularly, candidates need to have a sense of the writer at work. It is very important that candidates have a sense of drama texts in performance, not merely as words on a page. Some essential considerations are the ways in which the writers create character through dialogue, build up to climactic moments and juxtapose different scenes in order to create effects.

The paper also requires a 'sensitive and informed personal response' (AO4). The key word here is 'informed', meaning supported or supportable from the text. All the questions ask for a personal response in some way or other. It may be direct: 'What are your feelings about?' 'Do you think that...?' or indirect: 'Explore...', 'memorable', 'striking', 'vivid'. Basically, there are no templates for perfect answers. If a candidate is able to give a response that s/he can defend by arguing the case relevantly and with detailed support, then it is acceptable. It is always a pleasure to read answers that convey enjoyment and engagement with the texts studied not only through a general emotional reaction (e.g. 'this makes me very sad' or 'I find this very beautiful') but through a strong understanding and knowledge of the texts.

It follows that on this paper, candidates cannot achieve high marks by writing just a few lines. All questions require extended responses of several well constructed paragraphs. Good practice is to think of five or six points in response to a question and to construct a brief plan before starting to write. Each point should be expanded upon and supported with evidence from the text either by close reference or quotation. Each point should then be linked to the one following so that there is a developed argument. There is no need for general 'cosmetic' introductions and conclusions, which can be time wasting and lead to repetition.

Finally, one of the benefits of studying for this paper is that it trains candidates in the life skill of being able to form an opinion and to be able to construct a convincing argument in three pieces of continuous writing. The questions are open and cannot be addressed satisfactorily with brief answers. Candidates need plenty of classroom discussion and essay practice, possibly by reference to past papers, in preparation for the examination.