**Introduction**

The Examiners’ Report for the 2005 session expanded on a number of general observations. The report attempted to provide readers with information concerning various points of interest. In summary, part of the document

- underlined the two main aims of such a report
- explained how the marking of responses does not follow a prescriptive process but every effort is made to recognise and acknowledge all potentially valid answers on the unseen and set texts
- emphasised what is generally expected of candidates in the two papers
- listed specific shortcomings that tend to undermine the candidates’ performances

Readers of the 2006 English Literature report will find that these points have not been repeated in this document’s General Comments. This is not because they are not equally applicable to this year’s session. They are, and readers are kindly advised to revisit these points and take them ‘as read’.

**STATISTICAL DATA**

The tables below summarise the following information

- Distribution of Grades
- Averages for Paper 1 & 11A candidates
- Averages for Paper 1 & 11B candidates

### Distribution of Grades

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**PAPER 1**

**SECTION A**

**General Comments**

The candidates responded acceptably well to the poem. Candidates of different abilities understood – were in touch – with different levels of the text. The candidates with lower ability understood the first layer of meaning – that there was a girl sitting alone in a room while outside men were ‘dragging the lake’. Some read deeper and understood the stillness and silence of the room and the references to water, associated or contrasting with what was or was not going on. The best candidates had the insight to see that the detailed description of the room reveals anxiety and tension and that the references to water all lead to the lake.

The nature of the questions also tended to help the candidates to do well. For example, the first questions (as intended) were accessible to most and even the weaker candidates could obtain some marks. Most of the other questions were straightforward penalizing and rewarding candidates according to ability. The candidates’ answers reveal that there was not a single question that consistently functioned to undermine the candidates’
performance. As expected, a couple of questions were intended to be the dividing-line between the good and very good candidates.

Specific Comments

1. The majority of candidates answered this question correctly. Some ignored the fact that the question directed them to the first stanza and gave ‘table’ as one of the items when this is mentioned in the second stanza.

2. Most of the responses to this question were correct. Unfortunately, because candidates are used to underline ‘the [one] correct answer’ some failed to read the task properly and marked only one answer.

3. This question was also answered correctly by many candidates, which shows that they are being taught the basic mechanics of literary criticism. Some need to be reminded, however, that a simile comes in two parts and consequently need to mention both parts when asked to quote the figure of speech.

4. From this point onwards the questions became more probing and were meant to test the candidates’ appreciation of the meaning, sounds and connotation of words. The majority of candidates obviously understood the association of clock with time, but it was not enough to say ‘This shows that time was passing’ without making reference to the sense of slowness. A number of candidates did not know the meaning of the word ‘unwinding’ thinking there was no wind in the room.

5. The candidates’ responses to this question varied greatly. Some candidates failed to sense the apparent problem that Kitty had with the table. Other candidates grasped the negative relationship but then offered unsatisfactory ‘reasons’ why they assumed it to be so. There were a few candidates who were not only convinced of Kitty’s difficulty with the table surface but offered valid reasons for there conclusion.

6. Many candidates failed to give a sound answer to this question. They seem to find it difficult to relate the poetic device to the meaning of the poem. In fact, most of them just explained that it increases the tempo but failed to say why the poet does this. Too few brought out Kitty’s urgency to cover the table.

7. Many candidates explained the quote in their own words and said that it is alliteration. Sadly, too many, ignored the fact that they needed to suggest the effectiveness of the device, or gave very sketch answers like ‘from these sounds we visualise a clear image’. Some candidates confused ‘hearth’ with ‘heart’ and gave answers like ‘when it pumps and makes a noise’.

8. The question was answered correctly by most of the candidates, however, a good number thought that Kitty was the cat or failed to focus on the first and third stanza.

9. This was not an easy question and it was encouraging to see that a good number of candidates gave answers that deserved at least a mark. Many mentioned the idea that there was inactivity inside and activity outside, which is not exactly what the answer should be (these were probably conditioned by the previous question on activity and inactivity). Only a small number actually demonstrated an awareness of activity on both sides and the poet’s deliberate intention of shifting the reader’s attention to the lake.

10. Two observations may be made re the candidates’ response to this question. As expected, a number of candidates could make references to some images but completely ignored the relationship between these images and the total meaning of the poem. It is saddening to see candidates persisting in not attempting to go beyond the literal level. Having said this, it
must be pointed out that an increasing percentage (though less than the desired number) of candidates are demonstrating awareness that they can be in touch with a literary text and they are conscious of the effectiveness of the devices employed by the writer. Even if the candidates’ final assumptions are incorrect, their efforts cannot be ignored.

SECTION B

General Comments

The selected prose text seems to have been well within the grasp of most of the candidates. The responses also indicate that the candidates were able to ‘feel’ aspects of the text beyond the narrative. This is clearly indicated in the quality of the answers given. It is, at times, frustrating to see that a candidate has understood the text; given a good number of valid responses and then fails in some questions through carelessness, pressure, lack of focus etc. Generally one can be satisfied with the range of answers this task provided.

Specific Comments

1. The majority of responses to this question were correct, however, there were ‘too many’ candidates who were apparently confused by the change in person in some parts of the text.

2. Most candidates gave appropriate quotations which were related to the four different senses. Sometimes, what made the answer incorrect was the fact that the candidate gave a partial quotation. At other times, it was surprising to find that candidates gave quotations in relation to a sense that was incorrect but would have been appropriate to another sense.

3. A very high percentage of candidates were not precise in their answer. They failed to refer to Julia’s emotions. It was clear in the question that the phrases referred to how Julia was feeling therefore a response like ‘it’s so dark that the sunlight cannot penetrate the path’ could not be accepted as an explanation for ‘the memory of the sun behind her’.

4. A good number of candidates made reference to the fast pace created by the author through the short answers. Fewer managed to point out both the rising tension and the fast rhythm created by the abruptness of the sentences. Disappointingly, (as questions on the effectiveness of short lines in poetry or short sentences in prose have repeatedly appeared in the paper) too many candidates failed to see the connection between the short sentences and the fast pace.

5. While a disappointing number of candidates failed to see the effectiveness of the short sentences in the previous task, most of the candidates did well in identifying the devices that make the quarrel between Julia and Stephen more realistic. Many candidates rightly mentioned the use of direct speech and others added that words like ‘pig’, ‘cry baby’ and ‘I hate you’ gave a more vivid picture of the argument. The escalation of the argument in such a short period of time was noticed by very few candidates.

6. The answers to this question were generally correct. Candidates identified the figure of speech as a personification. Others were less precise stating that the figure of speech was a metaphor. A few insisted that that it was alliteration (possibly because of the repetitive use of [t] in the sentence). Although, maybe one might agree that alliteration exists in the sentence, it does not add anything on any level to the understanding of the words. Consequently this answer could not be accepted.

7. Many of the candidates recognised the significance of the excitement in the children but often omitted any reference to the rapid action involved; however, the major flaw was in those candidates who focused on the movement of the fish and ignored the children’s actions altogether.
8 A good number of candidates gave good interpretations of this simile. The idea of the machine brings to mind the rapid, continuous breath of the fish. It also seems to add to the mystery surrounding the fish – it is almost mechanical and unreal. Some students merely gave a reproduction of the simile in other words – ‘the simile is effective as it compares the breathing of the fish to a machine going up and down’. Answers like these do not give a fresh insight into the meaning and therefore should be avoided. Some answers were incorrect because the candidates imagined the fish had enough room, often referring to the ‘pool’ as ‘pond’, where it could move up and down. It was apparent that these candidates were not aware the movement was limited to the fish’s stomach.

9 A good number of candidates answered the question correctly not limiting their response to identifying the various literary devices employed but also commented on their effective use as a whole. Obviously, there were those candidates who simply gave the right quotes but did not explain anything or much. Some answers, once again, revealed that fact that some candidates do not always read questions well before answering them. The question clearly indicated which paragraph the candidates should focus on but this was completely disregarded by some.

PAPER 11A

General Comments

With a few exceptions, most candidates seem to have a good knowledge of the texts. However, many answers are, unfortunately, still lacking in a personal response, quotations and close reference to the text. Many candidates have a tendency to fall in the ‘narration trap’. They simply narrate a synopsis of the plot without any regard to the question.

Too many essays are characterised by a lack of structure – with no introduction, paragraphs or conclusion. Often, when there is an introduction, it is inappropriate to the set question. For example, in an essay on Romeo and Juliet one finds introductions that are merely eulogistic comments about Shakespeare. Such introductions are completely irrelevant to the essay and do not function as introductions but are simply randomly attached first paragraphs.

Specific Comments

DRAMA

1,2 and 3 There were no responses to these questions.

4 A considerable number of candidates chose to answer this question. The greater majority of those attempting this questions had no difficulty identify Friar Lawrence as the speaker, however many got the circumstances wrong. Very few mentioned that the quote was part of a soliloquy by the Friar and many assumed that the speech is uttered to Juliet or Romeo. Many thought that the speech occurs when Juliet goes to the Friar to ask for help when she does not want to marry Paris. Part ‘b’ was probably the best answered. Candidates pointed out Friar Lawrence’s knowledge of herbs and many were able to refer to the contrasting qualities of plants as a metaphor of the contrasting qualities in man. Most candidates failed in the third part of their answer. They did not point out the dualistic nature intrinsic in humans and in life and how most of the conflicts in the play stem from this dual nature. Most students described what happened in the main conflicts in the play at a summary level.

5 This question was more popular than the previous one. The love relationship was generally not adequately analysed or seen against the backdrop of other forms of love. Many insisted that Romeo and Juliet’s relationship was nothing deeper than just physical attraction and
pointed out that this relationship happened too quickly for it to have any depth beyond infatuation. These students then failed to prove their argument in light of the later developments of the play.

6 This was the most answered question from this section. Many candidates gave good answers referring to different circumstances like the quick decision to get married, Friar Lawrence's immediate acceptance to marry the two lovers, Juliet's quick decision to swallow the potion and Romeo's rush to buy the poison and eventually commit suicide. Some answers, as usual, degenerated into narration of one incident after the other.

7 Most of the answers to this question were disappointing since they lacked the most important element – candidates were unable to write about those elements in the play that make it universal.

8 Only one candidate answered this question – his/her response was acceptable.

9 The responses to this question were generally valid. There were no exceptionally good essays; however, the points made by those candidates attempting this question were valid.

10 Only a handful of candidates answered this question. Those who gave an answer usually supported their points with good examples from the text. This was appreciated and acknowledged by the markers. These essays would have been greatly improved had one or two quotes been use to back arguments.

11 Very few candidates answered this question. As with the previous question, the answers included good examples to support the points made. Similarly, these essays clearly lack quotes.

12 Just two candidates answered this question. They correctly focused on Tom’s sense of entrapment in his family life. Both essays were generally valid.

13 Many of the answers given were valid. They pointed out exactly how Jim used the mountain as a way of escaping from his harsh reality. His obsession with his mother was pointed out and the final tearing up of the poster indicating how Jim comes to terms with a good existence with the Wellands and away from his mother.

14 Most answers were valid but had a tendency to be narrative texts. Sometimes candidates demonstrate an inability to filter out the information they have and being well prepared for the examination they simply unburden themselves of all the information indiscriminately. It is a pity that, when candidates have so much knowledge about the text they have studied, they manifest an inability to use this knowledge effectively.

15 Some very good answers were given to this question. Most candidates who chose this question either focused on loneliness and friendship or kindness and cruelty. Good examples were given from both texts. A few candidates insisted in answering about all the contrasts provided in the question which either reflects they did not understand the question or possibly did not have much to say about one set of contrasts. This kind of answer was penalised.
POETRY
1, 2 and 3 Please note that comments on the candidates’ performance in Poetry in Paper 11A and 11B are at the end of this report.

PROSE
1 Some very intelligent arguments have been put forth and many of the candidates who selected this question presented mature arguments in relation to ‘evil’ and the progressive degradation of the human condition. The candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the text and a good number supported their arguments with quotes or very close references. This added to essay quality.

2 The essays to this question were not, in general, of the calibre of those for Question 1. While it was clear that the candidates were well prepared on the text, the responses were rather generic and not really concentrated on the essay focus. Still, the candidates need to be commended for trying to avoid the narrative pitfall even in an essay that was slightly demanding.

3 Not a very popular book. Those who studied the text tended to give general answers that were valid but unimpressive. It was difficult for candidates to go out of point in this essay but the essay quality was quite bland.

4 The responses to Question 4 were not dissimilar to those of Question 3 in that they were mostly run of the mill, regurgitation of material. The majority obtained a narrow pass with only a few individuals deserving a good score.

5 Many candidates opted for this question. Most demonstrated a very good knowledge of the text and were able to highlight the short story features that contribute to the text being interesting. This ability was appreciated by the markers. One always gets a number of essays that simply narrate the story but these were not as numerous as markers have come to expect. A good percentage obtained a score of 12 and a group of candidates showed excellent essay quality deserving a score of 15.

6 The candidates opting for this question also performed well. Again the essays showed a good command of the text and a tendency to support arguments with specific references to the short story. These essays did, however, suffer from a lack of focus on the turning point and its effect in relation to the rest of the story. The ‘purpose’ was often omitted from the essays. Because of this recurring flaw in these essays, the candidates who opted for this question, while equally prepared, failed to really excel.

7 Not attempted.

8 Not attempted.

9 The majority of the essays were quite focused on the beginning and ending, and the change that came upon the narrator. However, very few succeeded in bringing out the deeper meaning of the word ‘tangible’ especially when most conclusions revealed a narrator who ultimately became convinced that ghosts do exist because he ‘saw’ one in the red room but could not touch it or feel it.

10 Not many high quality responses to this question. Admittedly the nature of the question was probably more demanding and most of the candidates drifted into narrating the short story. Some showed a deeper understanding of the word ‘queen’ and highlighted Rudy’s arrogance by contrasting his character with that of Maggie. These much better essays were deservedly awarded a score around 14.
PAPER 11B

General Comments

As expected, the criteria of assessment for essays in Paper 11B, differ from those for Paper 11A. One of the major allowances for essays in Paper 11B is that there is a higher degree of tolerance to narration. Essays demonstrating a good knowledge of the narrative of the text are acknowledged and awarded a pass. This would not be enough for Paper 11A candidates.

In spite of this, the average mark for Paper 11B candidates remains nearly 2 marks inferior to that of Paper 11A candidates. The main reason for this is the greater range of flaws present in the responses of Paper 11B candidates. Too many 11B candidates leave essays out, misunderstand essay questions, attempt all questions on a text (rather than choose one question), demonstrate lack of basic knowledge of the text, confuse names, events, etc., or simply have very poor writing skills.

Specific Comments

DRAMA

1 Only a couple of candidates answered this question. The essays were weak and were hardly concerned with the religious nature of Henry’s character.

2 Not attempted.

3 Only one candidate attempted this question. The response showed the candidate unconscious of the different forms of disguise in the drama.

4 Many candidates attempted this question. The greater majority were mainly concerned with presenting an indiscriminate summary of the plot without actually pinpointing what the factors that lead to the tragedy were. The few that did attempt to answer the question properly were mainly concerned with the family feud and Fate (mostly referred to as Faith). The flaws of the protagonists tended to be completely ignored.

5 One would have imagined this question to be more taxing that the previous on the candidates. Surprisingly, the candidates offered a number of interesting responses managing to identify the different roles of the nurse as mother, friend, comic and ultimately an opposing force to Juliet’s insistent love for Romeo. Many pointed out that Juliet was, herself, a substitute daughter for the nurse whose own daughter would have been Juliet’s age had she not died when the girl was still a child. A very acceptable response by the candidates.

6 This question was also chosen by many candidates. Answers mainly focused on the love between Romeo and Juliet as an example of true love and the relationship between Romeo and Rosaline as false love. This limited the essay as there are many other forms of love that are evident in the play. Disappointingly, very few candidates showed an awareness that these other forms of love could have been included in their response to this question.

7 The few responses to this question were disappointing. The candidates waded through their answer and never really showed an understanding of the task at hand. Candidates had no idea of those elements in the play that make it universal. It should be noted that another essay in this examination asked candidates to write about the universality of a text. Even in that case markers noticed the inability of candidates to write about this aspect of a text.

8 Only one candidate attempted this question. The reasons forwarded were valid and expression of ideas was acceptable.
9 Very few candidates attempted this question. The essays were generally good except for one candidate whose response was too sketchy to even comment about.

10 Not attempted.

11 Not attempted.

12 Not attempted.

13 The question was attempted by a good number of candidates. The majority of the essays showed a good knowledge of the play. A good number of essays had correct close references to the play. An equally good number of essays lacked focus and the writers were not concerned with how the Wellands treated Jim.

14 The candidates who attempted this question were definitely conscious of the difficulties of living it rough. It was also obvious, from the essays; that the writers empathise with children who experience such hardships. The essays argued that Mariza had to become tougher in order to face the streets of Brazil. Unfortunately, a good number of essays lacked backing by close reference to the text.

15 A good number of candidates gave valid answers to this question. They could write well about the mothers in the two plays. Too many essays of candidates, however, suffered from poor or very sketchy writing, misinterpretation of the phrase ‘each of the mothers’, writing about one of the mothers and off-the-cuff arguments rather than through close reference to the texts. Finally, what should not have been a difficult task was not handled so well by the candidates.

**POETRY**

1, 2 and 3 Please note that comments on the candidates’ performance in Poetry in Paper 11A and 11B are at the end of this report.

**PROSE**

1 Candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the text but also manifested an inability to be flexible when it comes to providing their own answer to a question. Among the most popular characters were Jack and Simon. Rather than making reference to the question, the essays were generally a brief summary of the boys’ actions and behaviour. The phrase ‘qualities of human nature’ was not prominent in the answers but somehow embedded within the description of the characters in focus.

2 The meeting of ‘Simon with the Lord of the Flies’ was the preferred choice and the essays reflected sufficient knowledge of the text, even though the encounter was treated most superficially. On the other hand, those essays concerning the meeting between ‘Sam and Eric and the Beast from the Air’ revealed a poor knowledge of the moment in discussion, at times with no recollection of the ‘Beast from the Air’ at all. Some even confused the incident with the boys’ warning to Ralph towards the end of the novel.

3 Some candidates attempting this and the next question showed absolutely no knowledge of the text at all. A few other candidates showed a good knowledge of the text but provided narrative responses which could not be awarded a very high score.

4 As stated above, some candidates attempting this question showed very poor or no knowledge of the novel. In spite of it being a simple question, most of the candidates provided very basic sketchy answers. Could this have been a mismatch between the text and the candidates attempting to study it?
5 The responses to this question varied greatly. Among these were those which gave a brief narration of the events of the story; these often omitted Sonny’s birth and therefore there was no reference to the consequence /change in the child-father relationship. Many candidates ignored the quote and did not talk about how father is related to Santa Claus, or how the relationship between father and son develops for the better. However, there were also essays which led to quite a detailed analysis of the child’s point of view and the psychological implications.

6 This was the lesser popular of the two questions set on this text. The essays revealed a limited knowledge of the text and were riddled with inaccuracies in names and sequencing of events. The essays generally failed to really underscore the comparison between Alice and the grandfather’s favourite pigeon. Some (not one or two) showed absolutely no knowledge of the story and invented their own. The rather poor performance by candidates in this story was unexpected since, in previous years, candidates gave the impression that this was a favourite short story which candidates had a good understanding of.

7 Not attempted.

8 Not attempted.

9 Not many candidates attempted this question and those who did were not entirely accurate in relating the events as they occur in the text. It was obvious that a cluster of candidates were reproducing teachers’ notes as their essays had similar if not identical introductions. In general, the responses failed to expand on the notion why they think ‘everybody fears them [the women]’.

10 This was the more popular question among those candidates who prepared this text. The choice often fell on either the narrator of ‘The Red Room’ or Billy Weaver in ‘The Landlady’. The candidates demonstrated a good attempt at trying to keep the narrative in the first person and focusing on the feelings and thought process of the character. In the early years of the SEC English Literature examination this kind of question used to produce very poor answers. Over the years the candidates have demonstrated a gradual improvement in this kind of response. This is encouraging.

POETRY

The good choice of options candidates have in answering the different questions in the Poetry section renders the particular focus of each question in this section less important than the kind of focus determined and expected by the questions in the Drama and Prose sections of the paper. In essence, the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates’ responses generally have to do more with the actual task of writing an essay on one or two poems than with the particular poem/s in discussion. Strangely enough, while 11A candidates offer better responses than 11B candidates, certain traits are common and the observations below are not particular to one group of candidates but applicable to both even if to different degrees.

For this reason, it was decided to present the observations expressed by the markers re the candidates’ performance in Poetry as a general list rather than specific to the particular questions. The list does not follow any order of importance and prospective candidates would do well to understand the observations forwarded by the markers.

- The number of candidates sitting for Paper 11A has increased suggesting that candidates are prepared to take on a stronger challenge. This has, amongst other things, resulted in an improvement in the percentage of candidates from the whole population, attempting to and generally succeeding; in writing Poetry essays of a superior quality/that satisfy the stricter assessment criteria. This is a credit to the candidates and all those involved in preparing candidates for the examination.
• There is a very marked difference in the quality of the essays generally offered by 11A and 11B candidates. The second group seem to have assumed that writing two sketchy short paragraphs on two poems is enough. Often answers tend to be very superficial including, what seems to be, some vague recollection of what the poem is about rather than evidence of study. Candidates need to understand that this quality of work is well below the expected standard particularly given the good choice candidates have always had in this section.

• The better/best essays are reasonably long, well-structured with relevant critical comments supported by apt quotations or close reference to the poem. Such ‘ideal’ essays are not rare. Markers often find three or four page essays that not only demonstrate an excellent command of the poem/s but are a pleasure to read. It should be stated, however, that length is not, in itself, a virtue and marks are not awarded in proportion to length. Cohesion and coherence in a 2 page essay are more appreciated than six pages of rambling artificially linked quotations and paraphrasing.

• The choice of poems to write about in the examination can be a determining factor in the success or otherwise of the candidates. Sometimes a poem with a light vein and sense of humour may be a good choice for a lesson (as should be) but prove difficult to write a really good essay about in an examination. Humour is one of the most difficult human aspects to write about; there is nothing worse than explaining a joke. Candidates need to choose the right poems to write about in the examination. It may seem a clever move to study a very short poem as preparation for the examination but it is likely to prove extremely difficult to write a critical essay on the theme or imagery of such a poem. On the other hand, when candidates are writing about longish poems, they need to be selective. It is a waste of time and energy to give long detailed summaries of the poems – even if these include a number of quotations.

• While quotations enrich the essay, candidates need to understand that these are not the be all and end all of a poetry essay. Often, markers find essays where the greater majority of the text is quotations with a couple of joining sentences in between the quotes. Such an effort cannot be considered as an essay and even if the quotes are correct the effort cannot be awarded a pass.

• While it is important for students to learn the names of a few literary devices that are in common use, there is no need for them to learn the difficult technical terms, very often without understanding their effective use. Instead of using words or phrases such as ‘hypallage, auditory images, olfactory images, gustatory images, kinetic images, metonymy, Kennings’ very often misspelled, the candidates should explain, in simple English, the effect the poet is trying to achieve by using that particular word, phrase, image or poetic device and how it affects the reader. There are two words, however, that candidates need to understand really well – ‘theme’ and ‘image’.

Chairperson
Board of Examiners
September 2006