



L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Examiners' Report
SEC English Literature

Main Session 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A.	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	2
B.	PAPER I	2
	Section A – Poetry	2
	General Comments	2
	Specific Comments	2
	Section B – Prose	4
	General Comments	4
	Specific Comments	5
C.	PAPER IIA.....	6
	Section A - Drama	6
	General Comments: PAPER IIA and PAPER IIB	6
	Specific Comments – PAPER IIA – Drama.....	7
	Section B - Poetry	11
	General Comments: PAPER IIA and PAPER IIB	11
	Section C - Prose	12
	General Comments: PAPER IIA and PAPER IIB	12
	Specific Comments – PAPER IIA - Prose	13
D.	PAPER II B.....	16
	Section A - Drama	16
	Specific Comments – PAPER IIB – Drama.....	16
	Section B: Poetry	19
	Specific comments – PAPER IIB – Poetry	19
	Section C: Prose	19
	Specific Comments – PAPER IIB – Prose.....	19

A. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Table 1 shows the distribution of grades for the Main 2024 session of the examination.

GRADE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	TOTAL
PAPER A	133	333	443	431	276	0	0	363	58	2037
PAPER B	0	0	0	127	102	94	63	337	263	986
TOTAL	133	333	443	558	378	94	63	700	321	3023
% OF TOTAL	4.4	11.0	14.7	18.5	12.5	3.1	2.1	23.2	10.6	100

Table 1: Distribution of grades for English Literature 2024 Main Session

B. PAPER I**Section A – Poetry**

This year's unseen poem - Perhaps the World Ends Here by Joy Harjo - is written as an extended metaphor in which the speaker compares the universal kitchen table to humanity, the sense of community and the cycle of life. Through the metaphor of the table, the reader embarks on a journey of collective emotions, where people gather to nurture life, dream, cry, laugh and give thanks. Being a contemporary poem, with allusions to uncertain times, it allowed candidates to provide their own interpretation. The use of the first-person plural "we" also facilitated the candidates' identification of themes, due to its creation of a sense of universality.

General Comments

Answers showed evidence that most candidates largely understood the poem. However, some answers showed a weakness in identifying and explaining the tactile images found in the poem, while the weaker answers showed evidence that the extended metaphor of the table was not fully grasped and that difficulties were encountered while identifying the themes of the poem. Nonetheless, the majority fared well in the last question where candidates were expected to comment on the symbolic meanings the table is given through the use of three metaphors of their choice.

Specific Comments*Question 1*

The majority of answers for this question were correct.

Question 2

Although the stronger answers correctly referred to the irregularity of the structure; the use of free verse; no fixed pattern for rhyme or rhythm; informal diction and a similarity to prose; the weaker answers showed a lack of understanding of the term 'contemporary poem.'

Question 3

In most cases, the answers were correct as they referred to the short sentences, the caesura, the bold opening statement and the use of the pronoun 'we'. However, some answers included quotations without a comment or else they included only one reason rather than two, as indicated in the question. Some of the weakest answers mentioned that the poet captured the reader's attention by trying to confuse them. Others mentioned how the poem is about eating habits or encouraging readers to eat at a kitchen table.

Question 4

The majority of answers remained on a superficial level and mentioned that the repeated use of 'we' includes the reader, the poet and all humanity. Very few answers went deeper and referred to the universality in the human experience or to the idea that the image of the table is universal.

Question 5

- a. i. Although several answers were valid and the correct tactile image "Babies teethe at the corners" was quoted, many other answers showed that the meaning of 'tactile' was not grasped.
 - ii. Similarly, most answers made a correct reference to "they scrape their knees under it", but there were a number of incorrect answers such as "we chase chickens or dogs away from it".
- b. It was noted that very few answers referred to the meaning of pain depicted in both tactile images, let alone to the metaphorical meaning of pain associated with growing up and the comfort found within family. Therefore, most answers were incorrect. The weakest answers exhibited evidence of being unable to perceive meaning conveyed by the images, mentioning, for example, that the table had bite marks on it, or pieces of it missing, showing how long the family had the table.

Question 6

- a. The majority of answers were correct with candidates referring to valid themes such as the cycle of life, birth and death, the struggles of life, growing up, the human experience, comfort experienced within one's family and so on. The weakest answers did not give a theme which is representative of the whole poem, but rather mentioned aspects which are expressed in parts of the poem. An example of this could be seen when answers mentioned 'childhood and birth', which is not reflected throughout the whole poem.
- b. The stronger answers explained each of the themes well by referring closely to the poem. Other answers explained one theme only and thus obtained half the mark. Some others quoted from the poem but did not contribute their own observation. The weakest answers were vague and showed that the poem was not grasped at all.

Question 7

- a. The majority of answers correctly identified the device used as personification.
- b. The strongest answers explained how the personification of dreams conveys the idea that dreams are passed on to the younger generation, and when dreams fail, families support their loved ones in building up their hopes again. However, some answers remained at a superficial level by giving the definition of personification and explaining that dreams are given life in the given lines. Some average answers ventured to discuss the importance of dreams and ambitions in one's life while others commented that dreams are personified in the poem to show parents passing on the dreams, they themselves did not manage to achieve to their children.

Question 8

- a. Most answers correctly referred to 'birth' and 'burial' and 'joy' and 'sorrow'.

- b. The strongest answers referred to the cycle of life and the brevity of life. The weakest answers provided a superficial paraphrasing of the given lines, such as mentioning that the poet's family has given birth on the table while someone else from their family has died on the same table.

Question 9

A considerable number of answers depicted a good understanding of the poem, such as those with references to the table as a symbol of comfort and shelter from outside woes '*a house in the rain/ an umbrella in the sun*'; to arguments - '*wars*' settled around a table; the table as a symbol of the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next '*we make men at it, we make women*' and the table as a symbol of human life, linking life and death '*The world begins at a kitchen table / The world will end at the kitchen table*'. However, the majority of answers were of an average level, where they correctly identified three different metaphors used in the poem and briefly commented on their use by linking them to the poem in its entirety, such as referring to the kitchen table as a symbol of new life, family or education. The weaker answers lifted a direct quotation of three different metaphors but stopped short of commenting on their meaning; while the weakest answers did not identify any metaphors as indicated in the rubric.

Section B – Prose

The extract selected for this session's unseen prose section is taken from Anthony Trollope's satirical novel, *The Way We Live Now*. Inspired by the financial scandals of the early 1870s, Trollope's masterpiece delves into themes of greed, corruption, and the power of money, which are well presented in the selected extract. In addition, through the characters of Marie and Madame Melmotte, the extract conveys Trollope's deep insight and sensitivity to the inner conflicts of his female characters. Marie's father, Melmotte, is a villainous financier who exerts pressure on his daughter to sign a document that will allow him to avail himself of her money, which he had originally put in her name, on the pretext that the family was on the verge of bankruptcy. However, Marie fights back for what is rightfully hers. Indeed, the extract is a brilliant set piece which showcases the mental duel between the two main characters. It dramatically depicts what goes on in the characters' minds and the various changes that influence their decision making. Candidates were expected to answer questions related to theme, atmosphere, characterisation and literary devices used, by referring closely to the text.

General Comments

It is clear that the majority of the candidates sitting for this year's session had no problem with understanding the text presented. However, one must point out that only a small number of the candidates' responses have shown critical engagement with the text. Other attempts show a considerable lack in analytic skills and were only able to respond to the text at comprehension level.

The strongest responses showed the ability to carefully follow the instructions given for each question. These responses were crisply relevant to the rubric for each question and showed that candidates could not only understand the content of the prose passage, but also respond to it analytically and critically whilst making careful use of evidence from the excerpt to back up their arguments. A sense of empathy was transmitted through some of the answers with reference to use of expressions such as '*gaslighting*' and '*guilt-tripping*'.

Average responses managed to answer those questions which were simpler, such as those requiring lifting a quotation or writing a short answer, and therefore which required less commentary than those which were

more complex. Average responses managed to attain some marks in the higher-order questions towards the end of the exercise yet did not present deep enough answers to reach higher marks.

Weaker responses failed to answer several questions which were pitched at lower and higher levels of difficulty. As in previous years, several candidates left blank responses in this section. A disconcerting trend which was noticed this year was for candidates to copy parts of the prose passage in the lines provided for writing responses, without any consideration for the rubric of the question.

Specific Comments

Question 1

The majority of answers were correct. However, a considerable number, mainly from the paper B option, selected the incorrect statement 'Marie and her mother'.

Question 2

Most of the responses presented for this question were valid. Stronger responses managed to identify a theme such as 'rebellion', 'family conflict' and 'patriarchal family' and backed it up with solid evidence from the text, which was analytical and not a paraphrase of the extract. A minority of responses managed to identify a valid theme for the passage yet failed to back up this through reference to the text or provided a vague reference without aptly linking it to the theme. Weaker responses presented invalid themes. It is advisable to consider that a theme needs to pervade a significant part of the passage and not merely focus on single lines in the passage. A very small minority of candidates did not answer this question.

Question 3

Stronger responses to this question followed the rubric carefully and provided two valid examples of repetition and an explanation of how they convey the different approaches to the argument. A tendency noted in weaker responses was for parts of the text which were not examples of repetition to be presented as evidence of Melmotte or Marie's approach to the argument. The writer's use of repetition was a key component of this question and needed to be treated as such. Some other responses contained valid quotations yet no explanation. A point on how these convey the approaches was needed to secure higher marks. A further tendency noted here was for responses to only focus on Melmotte or Marie, yet both characters' approaches needed to be considered for this question.

Question 4

- a. A significant proportion of responses identified the correct literary device used here.
- b. While most responses successfully commented on the effectiveness of this figure of speech, the weaker responses interpreted the phrase literally, showing a lack of understanding on how to interpret meaning conveyed by this literary device.

Question 5

- a. The majority of responses to this part of the question identified the correct quotations which contained visual imagery. Weaker responses showed evidence that they had not understood the concept of visual image. It is worth noting that several responses contained commentary on these images, yet the question specifically instructed candidates to quote, not comment. In certain responses a tendency was also observed whereby the responses did not contain the full quotation.

- b. There were very few responses which adequately commented on the beast-like description of Melmotte whose reaction creates a palpable atmosphere of fear, violence and tension. A number of answers typically stated 'Melmotte was angry and then he calmed down.' Furthermore, a significant number of responses, merely commented on different aspects of the visual images from (5a), completely neglecting to relate these to the atmosphere of the passage. Other responses commented that there is a tense atmosphere in the passage yet did not delve into how this is connected to the images, nor did they comment on how the different images contribute differently to the atmosphere.

Question 6

A considerable number of responses commented on how insignificant Madame Melmotte's role in the family is, with some adding that she only speaks three times in the passage and these instances are always to show compliance with Melmotte's dictates. However, a substantial number of responses were rather weak as they failed to make close reference to her utterances and merely presented a general commentary on her character. A significant number of responses contained judgement about Madame Melmotte's behaviour and personal opinions about what she should or should not have done, yet this was irrelevant to the task at hand. Closer attention needed to be paid to the rubric of the question as specific reference to her utterances was necessary for higher marks to be attained.

Question 7

Overall, the responses to this question were weak, with very few responses managing to comment on the fact that the third person narration is a running commentary of the machinations inside Melmotte's head while the direct speech provides a contrast within the context of the passage. A highly significant number of responses did not comment on the use of third person narration and direct speech, but paraphrased the lines mentioned in the question without referring to the narrative techniques mentioned in the rubric.

Question 8

A number of excellent responses provided a detailed analysis of content, style and diction in relation to how they contribute to the idea of a game, using diction such as 'tactics', 'strategies' and 'battle of wits.' Average responses to this question mentioned some of the key points pertaining to this image and made some good arguments. A recurring trend in average responses was how they did not fully explore the image of a game as a literary device, but rather paraphrased the different points made by Melmotte and Marie. Weaker responses failed to comment on how the element of a game is brought out in the passage. Several of these responses contained simple summaries of the passage, and in some concerning cases, contained copied chunks of the text.

C. PAPER IIA

Section A - Drama

General Comments: PAPER IIA and PAPER IIB

Overall, candidates fared similarly to previous years. The vast majority of candidates chose to write about Miller's *A View from the Bridge* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As in previous years, an over-reliance on the use of paraphrasing was noted in many responses, with this negatively affecting the results obtained by candidates. Whilst the majority of responses showed that candidates were well prepared in relation to textual knowledge, i.e. knowledge about the events which take place in the text, an overall struggle to

connect this knowledge to the questions was presented. In general, outstanding or excellent results were awarded to candidates who were able to connect their knowledge of the text to the question well via the means of in-depth argumentation and close reference to the text. Average scores were awarded to those who were able to present arguments yet were unable to back these up as effectively as those who made crisp use of evidence in their responses. Evidence of the lack of ability to respond personally and critically was also a weakness in average responses. Cohesion was also noted as being an area of weakness in this year's responses. It is worth noting that, whilst writing skills are mainly assessed in the English Language SEC examination, cohesive and well-structured writing are also essential to higher performance in the English Literature exam given the impact this has on the intelligibility and quality of one's response to the question. Lower marks were awarded to those responses which presented poor knowledge of the text, were unable to form arguments, or were written in a level of English which was completely inept for the purposes of this examination.

As a general remark, the quality of the responses presented for Option B of the examination was considerably weaker than those presented in Paper IIA and when compared to Paper IIB of previous years. A handful of responses were deemed to be of excellent quality. The latter showed evidence of the ability to present convincing arguments and make satisfactory use of evidence to back these arguments up. Average responses contained some relevant points yet were lacking in terms of close reference to the relevant texts. Whilst some references were present, more was needed for the responses to be enhanced. Weaker responses consisted of summaries of the plots or contained serious inaccuracies which showed evidence of a lack of textual knowledge. Concerningly, several papers were left blank or contained ridiculous responses which were evident of hardly any preparation for this examination at all. A further concern which was widely perceptible in this paper was the overall low level of writing proficiency. It is imperative that candidates hone their writing skills in such a way which allows them to convey their arguments and ideas confidently and convincingly.

Specific Comments – PAPER IIA – Drama

Question 1

Question 1 was the most popular question chosen for *Twelfth Night*, although the text itself was less popular than other options in the syllabus.

- a. The majority of candidates who chose this question managed to contextualize it successfully. Stronger responses were more detailed and focused on specific parts of the gobbet and contextualized these parts well, whilst less successful responses mentioned Orsino's characterization, but failed to place these events in the wider context of the play.
- b. Whilst most responses to this question provided some relevant commentary on Orsino's state of mind, a recurring issue was a lack of close reference to the given extract.
- c. The majority of responses to this question were able to comment on Orsino's unrequited love for Olivia which is depicted in the extract. Weaker responses focused on this and failed to comment on how this is seen in different parts of the play, which could include the love triangle which develops between Orsino, Olivia, and Viola/ Cesario. Stronger responses mentioned the aforementioned love triangle, along with other instances of unrequited love which involve minor characters. A recurring issue for this question was a lack of commentary, as a tendency to paraphrase the events surrounding the characters was noted.

Question 2

The responses which tackled this question were mostly satisfactory. Stronger responses presented convincing arguments regarding how certain characters in the play take advantage of other characters' foolishness and the effects this has. Weaker responses paraphrased parts of the play where characters' foolishness is taken advantage of yet failed to provide analytic commentary. A recurring issue with this question was that not all responses followed the rubric carefully, especially the part where responses were meant to focus on TWO characters. Whilst it is understandable that other characters would need to be mentioned, several responses needed clearer signposting and better focus on the rubric of the question.

Question 3

This question was the least popular one with regards to *Twelfth Night*. Weaker responses were limited to judging certain characters, such as Orsino, for being selfish, whilst also paraphrasing parts of the text which may convey this selfishness. Stronger responses carefully presented arguments, evidence, and commentary on this theme.

Question 4

Question 4 was the most popular choice amongst candidates who chose *The Merchant of Venice*. Overall, however, this play was less popular than other options available on the syllabus.

- a. Many responses commented on the immediate circumstances of this extract with success. Stronger responses addressed all aspects of the circumstances surrounding this part of the play. Weaker responses neglected key parts of the circumstances, such as Portia's role in Antonio's defence. Candidates are encouraged to be more thorough when tackling gobbet questions.
- b. Whilst the majority of responses made some valid points, more depth was required for this question. The overall use of evidence for this question was weak, especially when considering that the extract was readily available. Stronger responses made use of evidence from the extract and linked it to other parts of the play, whilst weaker responses described Antonio but failed to make use of evidence.
- c. The responses to this section needed more depth overall. Stronger responses took a stance on whether Shylock received a fair hearing and made use of evidence from the extract and other parts of the play to make convincing arguments. Weaker responses limited their answers to either paraphrasing this scene or arguing that Shylock did not receive a fair hearing due to his religion. Whilst this point was valid, more depth and commentary were needed for higher marks to be awarded in several scripts.

Question 5

This question was considerably less popular than Question 4. Stronger responses presented convincing arguments about the portrayal of several female characters, such as Portia, Nerissa, and Jessica, and discussed how they are portrayed in light of the Elizabethan context and gender norms of the time, as well as in relation to one another. Weaker responses paraphrased key events surrounding these characters yet failed to provide analytic commentary in relation to their portrayal.

Question 6

This question was less popular than both of the above. The stronger responses presented arguments regarding how the characters' romantic/ friendly relationships overcome various obstacles; although,

several responses were rather weak in that they were simply summaries of the events surrounding love and failed to comment on the challenges conquered through love.

Question 7

Overall, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was a very popular choice amongst candidates and a significant number of candidates chose question 7.

- a. The majority of the responses provided were able to describe the circumstances surrounding the extract. Stronger responses were able to link the extract to prior events (such as Lady Macbeth's passing) as well as those which happened immediately after. Weaker responses limited their response to paraphrasing the events which take place in the extract. It is worth noting that describing circumstances does not mean that one should paraphrase the events which take place in the extract, but rather, should focus on the events surrounding the given passage. Whilst the soliloquy which Macbeth gives at the start of the extract is a key part of the text, some commentary on the messenger's message was also crucial in achieving higher marks given that this was part of the extract provided.
- b. Responses to this question were mixed, with most mentioning some valid points. A recurring issue among weaker responses was a lack of evidence used to make claims about the extract, despite this being readily available for use. Stronger responses presented careful analysis of the extract and made several valid points; whilst weaker responses were often limited to one point or a summary of the events which lead to this moment in the play. In the case of the latter, very few marks were awarded given that they were not part of the rubric of the question. A close analysis of the soliloquy was expected in this part of the question.
- c. Responses to this question were also mixed. Stronger responses provided critical comments on the witches' involvement in and responsibility for Macbeth's downfall, presenting careful comments which considered both the prophecy pertaining to Birnam Wood whilst also linking other parts of the play to this issue. Weaker responses paraphrased the events surrounding the prophecy pertaining to Birnam Wood and occasionally mentioned the other prophecies by the witches yet failed to provide analytic or critical commentary on these events. Overall, the responses needed to contain more argumentation and commentary, with less paraphrasing of the events involving the witches.

Question 8

This question was a very popular choice for candidates. Stronger responses presented intelligent arguments in relation to the topic and kept within the focus of the question. The most popular relationships for discussion were those between Macbeth and King Duncan, as well as between Macbeth and Banquo; although, some very interesting responses on Macbeth's relationships with his wife, the witches, and Macduff were mentioned. Average responses mentioned key parts of the text which were indicative of betrayal, yet lapsed in focus and required more analytical and critical commentary. These responses also, at times, lacked close reference to the text. Whilst the content of the responses was deemed relevant, better linking to the question was needed. Weaker responses mainly consisted of summaries of the key events between selected characters. In the weaker responses, it was also clear that the responses contained limited knowledge of the characters and their relationships, with some responses mixing up characters such as Duncan and Banquo, or Malcolm and Macduff. Several responses also misunderstood the part of the

question which says "in the light", with this being interpreted as a literal light rather than a linking phrase between the word "betrayal" and two relationships".

Question 9

This question was also a popular choice for candidates. Whilst a respectable amount of responses tackled the question relatively well, there was also a tendency to paraphrase. Stronger responses discussed how the injustices committed in the play lead the audience to feel a sense of justice at the end, with these responses also linking cultural knowledge of Shakespeare's era to this sense of justice. Average responses presented key parts of the text where injustice takes place and were able to present relevant arguments, although close reference and analytic commentary were lacking at times. More focus on the question was needed in those responses which attained average results. Weaker candidates paraphrased the key events in the play yet did not refer to the question. A trend which was noticed for this question was that responses frequently paraphrased the text (sometimes at excessive length) and then referred to the question in the conclusion. The question needed to be referred to throughout the response and not left as an after-thought to be mentioned in the concluding paragraph.

Question 10

Miller's *A View from the Bridge* was a very popular choice and a considerable number of candidates chose Question 10. Responses to this question were particularly concerning, with very few responses being awarded higher marks. An overall tendency to rely on contextual knowledge was noticed, with several responses only mentioning historical information related to post-World War Two migration patterns and labour issues in the U.S.A. These responses were heavily penalized given that they did not refer to the events which take place in the play at all. Similarly, several responses used this contextual knowledge as the base for their response and only referred to the text sparingly to back these points up. Successful responses reversed this pattern and presented arguments about how the text conveys these issues, keeping the text at the centre of their argument. Close references were also used in successful responses. This pattern has been noted in questions pertaining to other texts in previous years, such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, and it is highly worth reminding prospective candidates that it is adamant that the literary text chosen for study is to be kept at the core of their responses.

Question 11

This question was a very popular choice for candidates. Stronger responses discussed how Eddie's need to enforce his male authority leads to his downfall at the end of the play by referring to selected instances in this play and commenting on these critically. These responses presented appropriately linked arguments and made use of evidence carefully. Average responses to this question presented valid points yet lacked careful and critical comments. An issue which was present in these responses was a tendency to make points about the text yet not back these up through careful reference to the events in the play. A recurring example was the relationship between Eddie Carbone and his niece, Catherine. Several responses argued that Eddie has incestuous feelings for Catherine and, whilst this argument is plausible within the context of the play, evidence for it needed to be chosen and discussed very carefully. This lack of precise detail when it comes to argumentation did limit several responses from achieving the higher grades. Weaker responses to this question failed to present valid points and consisted of summaries of key scenes in the play. Several responses also mixed up the names of key characters, for example, Beatrice and Catherine.

Question 12

This question was a less popular choice for candidates when compared to the preceding two. Stronger responses presented valid arguments on how the bridge symbolizes opportunity for characters such as Marco and Rodolpho whilst also symbolizing conflict between different cultures and values. These responses were cohesive whilst also making careful use of evidence and commentary. Average responses presented valid points, yet lacked close reference to the text. At times, there was also a lack of reference to the question, with some responses focusing heavily on the idea of opportunity or conflict while neglecting to comment on the other in the same depth. Weaker responses failed to present cohesive arguments on the idea in the question, specifically ignoring the symbolism of the bridge. These responses mostly consisted of summaries of instances where characters spoke about opportunity or, more commonly, were at odds with each other.

Question 13

The questions about Hines and Stronach's *The Play of Kes* and Grant's *Fast* were among the least popular from the options available on the SEC literature syllabus. Out of the three questions offered, Question 13 was the most popular, whilst a handful of candidates chose to answer Questions 14 and 15. Most of the responses to this question were of average quality. The responses showed a good understanding of the events which take place in the text, with some valid commentary. More depth and close reference to the question, along with better signposting in the case of most responses, would have enhanced the quality of the responses presented here. A minority of the responses presented showed a limited understanding of the question or limited knowledge of the events which take place in the text.

Question 14

Most of the responses to this question were of average to below-average quality. Several responses presented summaries of the plot which, while showing adequate knowledge of the events which take place, failed to address the question. There was an overall lack of reference to the part of the question which required the responses to deal with the consequences of popularity. The responses needed to contain more reference to the question as they were limited in terms of focus.

Question 15

Very few candidates chose to answer this question. In the handful of responses which were presented for examination, the quality was mostly below average. Responses were mainly summaries of the plots, some of which contained inaccuracies. There was limited discussion and argumentation in relation to the theme which was meant to be discussed.

Section B - Poetry

General Comments: PAPER IIA and PAPER IIB

The essays in this section varied from poor to excellent. The poorest essays offered only a superficial outline of each poem, while the outstanding ones included arguments supported by relevant and accurate quotations, as well as personal and critical responses to the poems.

In Paper IIA, the essays varied from outstanding to quite poor. The stronger essays thoroughly analysed the effect of various poetic devices, while focussing on the rubric's expectations. In contrast, the weaker essays demonstrated a superficial knowledge of the poems, included inaccurate quotations, and provided only a

brief synopsis of each poem. Additionally, it was noted that some candidates used the poets' first name instead of their surname, a practice that should be avoided in formal and academic writing.

The overall performance in Paper IIB was quite poor. A significant number of candidates omitted the poetry section entirely, and others wrote barely five lines in response to the question of their choice. Additionally, a considerable number of candidates demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the poems they selected, either confusing the content of the poems or writing about something entirely different from the poem's subject and theme. However, in a few cases, candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the text, while attempting their personal response. These candidates performed quite well.

Question 1

This question was the second most popular choice, with some excellent examples highlighting the effectiveness of various literary devices in expressing the speakers' awe at the impact of time on beauty and power. However, weaker essays merely narrated each poem, failing to meet the rubric's expectations. Additionally, these essays lacked close references, and when quotations were included, these were often inaccurate or sometimes even made up.

Question 2

This was the least chosen question, with most displaying a superficial understanding of each text. Some candidates misunderstood the word "fears" in the rubric, and their writing addressed the fearsome aspect of man rather than nature. In the poem *Wind*, several essays showed poor knowledge of the poem's subject, with some confusing the poet with John Masefield. Furthermore, many candidates overlooked the effect of the literary devices used in the poems to convey the fear or fascination which nature evokes in humans. On a positive note, some introductions were engaging as they directly addressed the rubric's expectations in a way that relates to contemporary issues.

Question 3

Most candidates chose this title and their essays ranged from poor to excellent. The stronger essays even compared the bullying aspects of the personas in the poems, incorporating both personal and critical responses. Unfortunately, many candidates, despite showing a very good knowledge of the poems, simply narrated the content and overlooked the poetic devices used to highlight the theme of bullying. It was observed that quotes were often presented in isolation rather than integrated into the sentences, which made the writing feel mechanical and suggested difficulty in articulating their thoughts. Some candidates lost marks due to deviating from what was expected in the rubric as they focussed on the relationship between the persona and their parents instead of the persona and their bullies.

Section C - Prose

General Comments: PAPER IIA and PAPER IIB

The most popular texts selected in Paper IIA were Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, followed by Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* and Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful*. There was very little work on Dahl and just a few answers on Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

In this session, there were a number of excellent essays. The scripts in the top tier mark range demonstrated exceptional writing with sophisticated and insightful analysis of the chosen prose text/s. Overall, the best essays were the ones on *Animal Farm*. Nonetheless, many answers came across as unimpressive and insipid.

Questions should be read thoroughly before the answer is attempted. In this way, superfluous mistakes can be avoided. It is also advisable to write the essay number in the margin provided to show clearly which question is being answered. Candidates are encouraged to structure their essays properly. A valid introduction gives the essay a solid foundation and helps candidates assert greater control over their work, while a succinct conclusion sums it up flawlessly. Paragraphing is essential to a proper essay. A number of essays were written as one whole chunk which devalues all effort and the content itself, while long winding sentences dampen the flow of the task. Long quotations almost always need to be followed by extended analysis. Full citations from the novels/short stories can sabotage the work if simply added just for the sake of it. Candidates are discouraged from simply paraphrasing a piece of work or parts of the novel or story. They need to be reminded that the scope of the exam is to showcase their ability at writing a coherent literary essay about a prescribed prose text, in response to the set rubric.

There were several instances in Paper IIB in which the question in the Prose section was not attempted, while there were a few cases where all the questions in the section were answered superficially or illegibly. The majority of answered questions in Paper IIB were on *Animal Farm* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. However, a good number of essays in Option B fell way below the required length and as a result, the discussion put forth was not developed to the full. Essays were not always coherent and easy to follow simply because candidates failed to plan and structure their work. As aforementioned, essays must be structured in paragraphs. The use of linking words and correct punctuation is strongly recommended. Paraphrasing should be avoided as much as possible and instead, candidates should engage more in personal response.

Specific Comments – PAPER IIA - Prose

Question 1

This question was attempted by a handful of candidates. Some responses were irrelevant while the rest were superficial and inaccurate.

Question 2

Similarly, this question was attempted by very few candidates and most of the responses were irrelevant.

Question 3

This question was also attempted by very few candidates and the responses were considered below the required standard.

Question 4

This was the most prevalent choice where essays focused on the foreshadowing and setting of the two stories. A valid point worth mentioning is that in general, the content was valid and more analytical rather than a regurgitation of the story. The better essays focused on the suspense created by Dahl in both stories, with *The Landlady* being the force majeure between the two where the candidates were clearly prepared on content. On a negative note, some essays mentioned only one story and thus were penalised for this.

Question 5

This was not a popular question. Very few attempted it and the essays were bland and quite unimpressive. There was very little analysis compared to the avid storytelling, and most essays were too short. *Parson's Pleasure* offered more possibilities for the majority of candidates who opted for this question. *The Great*

automatic Grammatizator was skimmed upon and any related commentary was mostly superficial. A couple of essays focused only on *Parson's Pleasure* with no reference to the second story.

Question 6

This was the least popular question and the chosen stories were in their majority inappropriate choices. Very few managed to assemble the significant points required into a valid answer. Some candidates might have found it more challenging to sift through which stories are best suited for the theme of good versus evil. The preferred stories were *Neck*, *Way up to Heaven* and *Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat*. The typical characteristics of the submitted essays revolved around the element of one character getting revenge rather than having good win over evil. A number of candidates offered a basic narrative with little personal response.

Question 7

Candidates who opted for this question offered a reasonable analysis and the scores were relatively fair. Candidates showed a good grounding of the novel and mentioned at least three valid points on how Benjamin is a valuable character in the novel and discussed them appropriately. Among the most evident aspects, essays mentioned the shrewdness of the character who sadly chooses to bypass the chance to make things right and which parallels a society that shuns away from responsibility. In general, the candidates knew their quotes well enough. The introduction and the conclusion were central in offering a significant outcome to some of the essays.

Question 8

This question attracted a good number of candidates into answering it as it was very straightforward. The majority of answers were basically valid but not necessarily impressive. In fact, two of the three most palpable characters in Orwell's novel were analysed well enough by only a few. There was very little creativity as most answers followed a similar format and narrative. Very few essays managed to provide a mature analysis.

Question 9

This was by far the most popular question that attracted the attention of the candidates. Although the question in itself was quite straightforward, a few answers did not quite get it right. In fact, the 'trusting nature' of the animals was interpreted in different grammatical terms, that of the animals' trust in nature. As a result, such answers were quite imbalanced and unfocused because the attention was exclusively on how the animals, namely the ones in the lower ranks, allow natural disasters to wreak havoc in the farm. This resulted in the content being irrelevant or superficial. On the other hand, the majority offered a sound analysis through various episodes showing the foolish behaviour of the animals and how the pigs profited from it all, and the unavoidable dismantling of the utopian dream. Essays were expected to mention aspects showing fear and gullibility. There were a few good essays constructed on robust arguments rooted in insightful analysis.

Question 10

This was an unpopular question with candidates. Although the importance of productions was made quite clear in some essays, the rest were mostly written at face value with little interpretation or reference to Bruno's powerful imagination. For some, Hitler was the puppeteer while Father became a Nazi because of childhood dress ups. This clearly was not the target set by the question. The better answers did mention the

fact that Bruno built his own stories on the elements he came across into enough detail. All in all, most questions offered a valid answer but few managed a good score.

Question 11

This was a popular question amongst candidates. Most essays showed detailed knowledge of the novel and the themes of hunger and brutality, and the better answers were particularly equipped with a set of accurate quotations. However, a good number of answers bordered on the constant narrative and life of the Jews under the Nazis in a wider context. Some essays failed to discuss the theme with close reference to the novel. The answer had to be rooted in its literary context rather than developed on generic historical events.

Question 12

This was quite a popular question but only a few candidates managed to write a good essay which juggled the two characters as seen with Bruno's eyes. They are very similar yet Bruno is biased and sees his Father in a positive light. This question offers several points from the novel which could be linked to the question. However, the majority of entries were quite incoherent and the structure was imbalanced – it either went into too much detail on the similarities, or it focused entirely on the differences. The majority of answers were not able to engage thoughtfully and precisely with the topics raised in the question.

Question 13

Only a small number of candidates answering on Private Peaceful attempted this question. Generally speaking, the answers were valid but also rather limited. Candidates focused on different episodes which show loss of innocence, namely Tommo's experience in the trenches, the family dynamics and Father's death. Very few candidates offered detailed responses which deserved a high mark.

Question 14

This was the least popular question for this text. The maternal love portrayed by Mollie and Mother was depicted in various forms and on several levels in the majority of essays. The most common factor was the faithful recalling of Mother's stamina, selflessness, love and sacrifice that affected the whole family. In general, the essays discussed Mollie and her motherly affection with less intensity. The high-flyers managed to combine the best episodes for both characters with authentic analysis.

Question 15

This was the most popular of the three questions. Most essays were made up of narration, showing insufficient skilful analysis. The top two characters were Mother and Charlie. A few answers included Father specifically because he sacrifices his life to save Tommo. Many salient points pertinent to the theme were left out. The stronger answers included relevant quotes and were able to balance argument with engagement.

Question 16

The focus of this question was the strong influence of Sade's parents on her character. It was quite a popular question and in itself, offered a safe interpretation for the majority of candidates who attempted it. The better essays were able to formulate enough evidence to support their arguments and included at least three points such as Father's dedication to his principles namely, telling the truth, and mother's proverbs and teachings. The usual urge to narrate was evident in a number of essays, which offered a weak analysis and

an unimpressive commentary. Unfortunately, the less successful answers had an ambiguous content which showed no reference whatsoever to the novel.

Question 17

This question was not the natural selection for the majority of candidates and few attempted it. The question specifically asked for ways in which deception is key to the novel. The better responses laced in the relevant quotes to support their arguments. The basic essays were valid and fluent but contained very little discussion. Nevertheless, the set question was generally kept in focus.

Question 18

This was not a celebrated choice and very few attempted it. Out of all these, even fewer responses managed to delve into the prominent points which showed reference to the authorities' indifference towards the children in London. Some focused on the Brass Buttons back in Nigeria and omitted any related episodes in England. As a result, these few essays failed to provide any compelling and valid content.

D. PAPER II B

Section A - Drama

Specific Comments – PAPER IIB – Drama

Question 1

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* proved to be less popular than other options available for this section. Responses to this question proved to be of average to below-average quality. Average responses presented ideas about how characters in the play suffer due to their love. Two very popular examples mentioned were Orsino and Olivia, being two of the main characters. An issue which was noticed in these responses was a lack of signposting; it is highly recommended that candidates organise their work carefully in a way which allows examiners to notice the explicit focus of their responses. Weaker responses to this question contained summaries of the issues surrounding the unrequited love between Orsino and Olivia yet failed to focus on how suffering is brought about in the text.

Question 2

This question was not very popular. In the handful of responses addressing it, a more specific focus on what Olivia and Viola have in common and what makes them different was needed. The few responses presented contained descriptions of events surrounding the two characters, yet very few responses managed to present a convincing comparison of the characters.

Question 3

This question also proved to be unpopular. In the handful of responses presented, candidates did manage to present some valid points regarding how the given themes are present in the play. More depth was expected across the board, even in the case of responses which were awarded moderately satisfactory marks. When writing about themes, it is imperative that the response is not simply limited to a summary of key events where one can find these themes, but rather, that the response contains analytic commentary on the events regarding how the theme is presented.

Question 4

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* also proved to be less popular than other available options. This question proved to be an unpopular choice for candidates. The responses presented were also of average to below-average quality. A few responses managed to comment on how certain unfortunate events, such as Shylock and Antonio's court case, managed to resolve themselves through the intervention of other, intelligent characters. Weaker responses summed up unfortunate events which take place in the play yet were lacking in commentary and depth.

Question 5

This question also proved to be unpopular. Responses to this question were mainly limited to describing the events surrounding the characters, yet more description and close reference to the text were needed. The instruction "describe" is not the same as "paraphrase", implying that responses still need to contain an element of argumentation and commentary.

Question 6

Responses to this question were of average to below-average quality. Several responses focused on the relationship between Antonio and Shylock with varying degrees of success when it comes to exploring the theme of conflict. As has been previously stated, responses needed to contain commentary on how conflict is brought about and not limit themselves to paraphrasing key parts of the text which may be relevant to the question.

Question 7

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was a popular choice for candidates in this exam. This question was the second most popular option for those candidates who chose *Macbeth*. Excellent responses, although few, managed to comment carefully on the events which take place in this scene, whilst linking it to the rest of the play to back up their arguments about Lady Macbeth's character. Average responses described what happens in this scene and presented some comments about what these reveal. Weaker responses, showed some knowledge of what happens in this scene, yet failed to comment carefully on what these events show about Lady Macbeth. There was a tendency for responses to contain excessive paraphrasing and repetition, combined with a lack of commentary.

Question 8

This question proved to be the most popular choice for candidates choosing to write about *Macbeth*. Excellent responses provided relevant arguments and made use of evidence to back up their arguments carefully. Average responses presented some valid points and referred to the text satisfactorily; however, a tendency to focus on the theme of power and neglect the aspect of its corrupting influence were noticed. Similarly, whilst reference to the text was made in the average responses, closer references were needed to enhance the content of these responses. Closer references are understood to be references to specific actions or words said during the course of the drama, rather than sweeping references to key events in the text. Weaker responses neglected the question entirely and presented summaries of the text. An overall lack of textual knowledge was evident in the responses where lower marks were awarded.

Question 9

This question was a less popular choice for those who chose this text. The better responses for this question presented valid points on how Malcolm and Macduff overcome Macbeth throughout the play, with some

even presenting critical comments on how this is done. Most of the responses for this question, however, were limited to paraphrasing the later parts of the text where Malcolm and Macduff appear. More careful and critical commentary was needed for higher marks to be awarded.

Question 10

Miller's *A View from the Bridge* proved to be a very popular choice for candidates taking this exam. All three questions had similar levels of popularity. The excellent responses presented for this question presented careful arguments about how the female characters, namely Beatrice and Catherine, are unable to change the events which take place in the play. Some responses chose to contradict the statement, especially with reference to Catherine. This kind of critical thinking is certainly laudable, especially considering that the arguments presented were well-defended. Average responses for this question mentioned some valid points, yet often limited themselves to paraphrasing. A tendency to also lose focus and comment on Eddie, rather than the female characters, was noticed. Whilst Eddie is certainly the main character in the play, he was not meant to be the focus of this essay and should have only been mentioned in connection with the main theme of the question. Weaker responses for this question contained inaccuracies, a very common one being mixing up Catherine and Beatrice's relations to Eddie. Similarly, several responses contained sweeping statements pertaining to Eddie and Catherine's relationship. Although it is suggested in the text that Eddie has sexual feelings for Catherine, claims made about this need to be carefully defended through reference to the text. A further issue which was identified in this question was that some responses opted to discuss the situations faced by women in the 1950's in the USA, without referring to the text. As has been previously stated, arguments need to emerge from the text and the text must be the central focus of any responses in English Literature. Presenting historical information without mentioning the text leads to heavy penalisation.

Question 12

This question was also a popular choice for candidates. Stronger responses presented arguments about how the chosen themes are presented in the text and made use of crucial parts of the text to back up their arguments, all the while making use of critical commentary and analysis. Average responses mentioned some valid points yet did not make very good use of close references to the text. In this specific question, a tendency to be incohesive and unorganized was noted. This is understandable given the broadness of the question; however, better organization is certainly needed when tackling questions with a broader scope.

Question 13

While Hines' and Stronach's *The Play of Kes* and Grant's *Kes* proved to be less popular than other drama texts, this question was the most popular. A tendency where responses simply paraphrased some of the scenes where these characters appear was noted. For higher marks to be awarded, responses needed to contain more careful commentary on the differences between these two characters. Very few responses were deemed to be of good quality.

Question 14

Responses to this question were rather limited. A tendency to paraphrase the main events which take place in the play was noted. More careful commentary and argumentation was needed on how this theme is brought out in the play.

Question 15

There were very few responses to this question. In the few that were presented, a tendency to paraphrase the plots of the plays was also noted. A handful of responses addressed the issue in the conclusion and, whilst this was considered during marking, it was not deemed satisfactory enough for high marks to be awarded.

Section B: Poetry

Specific comments – PAPER IIB – Poetry

Question 1

This rubric was a popular choice among candidates. Those who performed well in this essay successfully focused on the emotions which the rubric expected to be addressed. Others merely provided a brief outline of each poem without addressing the specific requirements of the rubric. It was noted that the weakest essays showed difficulty to clearly express their knowledge or to provide a personal response. Additionally, a significant number of candidates attempted to enhance their writing with quotations, which were often inaccurate.

Question 2

Although the majority of candidates opted for this rubric, very few performed well in this task. A significant number provided only a very brief synopsis of *Not Waving but Drowning*, merely recounting what happened to the persona in the poem. While a good number mentioned the poem's metaphorical meaning, many others focused solely on its literal aspect. Additionally, some candidates appeared to select this rubric due to their familiarity with *My Parents Kept me from Children who were Rough*, neglecting the importance of the former poem or even failing to mention it. Once again, essays seemed to disregard the statement in the rubric, basing most of their writing on a brief outline of the poems, and neglecting to address how the poets effectively convey the impact on individuals experiencing the events depicted in each poem.

Question 3

Very few candidates opted for this rubric. The more convincing essays discussed poems such as *Dulce et Decorum est* and *The Discovery* and attempted to examine how the tense atmosphere is conveyed in each poem. A few candidates who chose to write about *Sea Fever*, failed to address this aspect, providing only a brief synopsis of the poem. A considerable number of candidates responded to this rubric by writing about *The Soldier*, completely overlooking the fact that the poem promotes war rather than brings out its tense and harsh reality.

Section C: Prose

Specific Comments – PAPER IIB – Prose

Question 1

Very few candidates opted to write about Mary Shelley's classic work and attempts were predominantly a very skimpy narration of the story.

Question 2.

The handful of responses which addressed this question were superficial write-ups containing irrelevant and inaccurate content.

Question 3

The few submitted scripts were irrelevant and inaccurate, except for one response, where the candidate critically analysed how social acceptance is much easier when appearances are favourable. The attempt, which was backed with several references to the novel, also contained a solid personal response.

Question 4

The entries were just a few, showing a valid, unimpressive write-up with accurate content but little personal response. These essays were below the required level because of limited writing.

Question 5

Although this was a very straightforward question, some entries were inaccurate and superficial. One answer incorporated the male character in *The Umbrella Man*, in the discussion; another answer included the mother of Katina as the young female character. Besides this weak conspicuous content, the rest of the scripts were weak and dismal. In their majority, the scripts offered a paraphrase in two short paragraphs, one for each character. None of the answers showed an understanding beyond the plot.

Question 6

Most essays were relevant and candidates did focus on two stories, as requested. The essays generally showed a fair knowledge of the plot and characters, and could therefore show how the true identities of the chosen characters unravel at the end. The most popular stories were *The Landlady* and *The Umbrella Man*. The average essay was repetitive and unexciting since it was mostly a paraphrase.

Question 7

The responses to this question were prevalent as there were many options to choose from. Although candidates showed good knowledge of the novella, the majority of essays indulged in unnecessary paraphrase which hindered personal response. A few essays contained full quotes of the commandments with hardly any related commentary. In general, though, most answers were focused and acceptable, and a few even submitted a longer response.

Question 8

Answers showed a fair understanding of the life lessons shown in the novel. Propaganda and lack of education were the points that were mentioned the most. Some candidates mentioned other points but the answer was watered down with focus on none. The few better essays expanded on a slightly deeper level.

Question 9

This was a straightforward question which exposed the popular characters of Boxer, the dogs and the sheep in enough light with most candidates. The essays were mostly focused, with Boxer and the dogs being the preferred two. Some essays proved their point with better analysis and relevant quotes. The weaker essays struggled in their ability to express themselves fluently. A couple of entries confused Boxer with Benjamin.

Question 10

In this question candidates were expected to bring forth the process which shows the changes in the relationship between the two siblings. The majority of candidates wrote a basic description of some aspects like the friendships they each had, their experience with the soldiers and with different family members and their outlook on unkindness. However, very few essays managed to make a memorable impression.

Question 11

In general, the answers were acceptable but quite repetitive and ordinary. Most managed to mention a number of aspects on human nature found in the story to support their answers. The most common versions included the strength of friendship and good and evil. The majority only mentioned these aspects in ordinary narrative with hardly any detailed analysis.

Question 12

This was by far the most popular of all three questions on this text. However, the answers were unfocused in the most part and the content was a patch work of weakly understood parts of the novel. Rather than referring to two incidents, the essays displayed a general summary on Shmuel's situation.

Question 13

Few candidates attempted this question. The responses were generally adequate and the roles of the two most popular choices - Grandma Wolf and the Colonel - were depicted faithfully but unimpressively. There were few scripts that showed a valid effort at analysis, and not just character knowledge.

Question 14

This was the least popular question as very few attempted to answer it. The essays presented their views on loyalty as it is portrayed in the novel. Although the answers showed a fair knowledge of the episodes, they were quite bland, made up mostly of paraphrase and basic comments.

Question 15

This was the most popular question. Candidates chose between Sergeant Hanley and the Colonel, as the major perpetrators and antagonists, and provided examples from the story. Big Joe, on the other hand, was the positive character that was chosen in all the scripts. The entries offered factual information, albeit with very little personal response.

Question 16

This question is quite straightforward but it might have appeared more complex as only a handful of candidates attempted it. The expected points were within easy reach and there were countless episodes worth exploring, however, answers were irrelevant.

Question 17

Most answers were acceptable but unfortunately some were too sketchy. Some candidates wrote about Sade and Femi and write-ups were mostly valid but unimpressive. The distinction between low achievers and high achievers is mostly always the expression of ideas, appropriate reference to text and essay structure.

Question 18

This question about injustice involved an analysis of themes rather than characters. Only a few candidates opted for it. The few submitted attempts were superficial, giving only a sketchy synopsis of the story.

Chairperson

Examination Panel 2024