

Classical Societies and Cultures GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students satisfactorily completed the tasks set, but there were few really outstanding responses. Comparing two prescribed texts was not a problem this year.

Students should actively read and highlight the assessment criteria before attempting the answer, since all responses are marked according to the criteria. Too often marks were lost on otherwise good papers from a failure to address specific criteria, e.g. Criteria 2 (techniques) and 3 (importance of the passage to the work as a whole) of Part A, and Criteria 4 (socio-historical contexts) and 5 (developments/differences between works) of part B. For example, most students wrote well about *ideas* from the passage, but less well about the *techniques*, particularly those students writing on literature. Some students spent unnecessary time on the *historical context* in Part A, then neglected to mention it in Part B, or spent time giving the *context* of the passage at the beginning of the response instead of giving it more naturally as they addressed Criterion 3 (importance of the passage).

Students tended to include only two works in the discussion of developments and differences in the essay. There is an imbalance in a response that compares two works of art (given that the art *texts* are twelve or so pieces), to one comparing two works of literature. Better art questions were able to refer to trends evident in several works of art, rather than a simple comparison of two.

There were few pre-prepared responses, although some students did not address the *keywords* in the question asked, with a consequent lack of relevance (and thus ability to score well on Criteria 1 and 6). Students should be reminded that their preparation of texts to write on in the examination is only part of the task – choosing the *correct question which suits their preparation* is essential, as is the task of *answering a specific question*, rather than a re-hashed pre-prepared response, or an everything-I-know-about one. Some students spent a lot of time on context questions, and neglected the essay – a reminder of the need to balance time equally between Parts A and B.

Part A

Most popular Greek text was *Antigone*, followed by *Iliad*/sculpture/*Clouds*/Thucydides.

Most popular Roman text was *Aeneid*, followed by wall-painting, Tacitus and Thyestes, with very few Horace responses.

Students need to utilise the passage itself, and use this as a basis for discussion. Some responses tended to discuss the author's **usual** techniques, even though these were not present in the passage. A few responses simply retold the story. The best used the passage to support points made with *direct reference to the passage*. Some responses, especially with *Antigone*, gave a *general* discussion of issues and ideas in the work with little reference to the passage – evidence, perhaps of a 'literature' style response.

For Criterion 1, the ideas specific to the passage, the quotes to support points made, and the knowledge of historical context if appropriate, were rewarded. For Criterion 2, the techniques were handled less well this year. For students writing on literature, this is harder, but still needs to be addressed. For Criterion 3, more successful responses were able to make specific comments about the importance of the passage, and/or could make references to other parts of the same text, e.g. the character portrayal of Creon in the passage as a reasonable leader, which prefigures his punishment of Antigone and Polynices, and leads inevitably to his downfall.

Part B

The most popular essays were 6, 4, and 9, followed by 1 and 10.

Attention needs to be paid to the essay questions, focusing on the *keywords* in the question, choosing the best texts to discuss relevant to the question, and constructing an argument. Many essays simply 'ran' with the words, e.g. 'war', without constructing a relevant argument. More successful students chose *texts appropriate to the topic*, then discussed the ways in which war brought out the best and/or the worst in some characters. Similarly, 'Women always suffer more than men' brought out a welter of suffering women from classical texts, without the discussion invited by the question of how much in comparison *men* suffer in war.

Students need to be cautioned on using *too many texts* for comparison – these responses tend to be superficial and/or list-like. Conversely, the use of art works (12 works each for Roman and Greek) should include more than two for comparison to get a proper evaluation of the developments and differences in style.

Students should be reminded to check the criteria for marking before answering the question. In particular, Criterion 4 (relationship of works to their socio-historic/artistic contexts) tended to be either handled very superficially or not at all.

Criterion 1 Development of a relevant argument and/or response

Students should *read* the topic, *select* the suitable text/s, pay attention to the *key words*. The most successful responses sustained a relevant argument throughout the essay, with progressive conclusions related back to the topic.

Criterion 2 Knowledge of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works

Criterion 3 Analysis of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works

More successful responses were less descriptive/narrative, discussing the features of the works which were relevant to the topic, and analysing how the artists/authors emphasised certain ideas or aesthetic qualities.

Criterion 4 Evaluation of the relationship of the works to their socio-historical/artistic contexts

This was the least well-handled criterion. It may be a good idea for students to start off with the *date of the text*, as this would more easily lead to a discussion of the contemporary relevant socio- historical events. Some texts and questions more obviously refer to this criterion (e.g. *Crito*, Thucydides), but students should be reminded that all criteria carry equal weight, and therefore must be addressed in the response. More successful responses discussed how the contemporary climate affected or was reflected in the works discussed.

Criterion 5 Understanding of developments and/or differences between the works

This could have been handled better. Many students decide on their comparative texts, then talk about them *in turn*, hopefully relating their discussion to the essay topic. Comparison between the texts, then, is not automatic. More successful responses used the language of comparison – ‘however’, ‘on the other hand’, ‘in contrast to’, ‘similarly’ and so on. The comparison was usually more pointed if it was done within the same paragraph, rather than when the works were discussed sequentially, when much of the actual comparison got lost.

Criterion 6 Use of relevant evidence to support an argument

The use of quotes was impressive here, or specific references to the works. Secondary sources where appropriately used were also a feature of some outstanding responses.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A:

Question 1 – Sophocles *Antigone*: Creon, lines 194–214. **Issues:** devotion to the city above all else; notion of political service; Zeus-divinity working with the city; the city=self; political loyalty above family/friend loyalty. **Significance:** Creon’s rationale which will bring him into conflict with Antigone later on; strong early statement which will be refuted later. **Techniques:** lyrical praise of city life (repetition of ‘city’, ‘country’); characterisation of Creon through his statements (‘whoever praises a friend ...’); evocation of Zeus like a prayer; metaphor of ship of state.

This was mostly handled well.

Question 2 – Homer *Iliad* Book 24: Thetis and Achilles, lines 120–240. **Issues:** maternal affection which humanises our picture of Achilles; his death is foreshadowed (cost of war); burial practices; obeying the gods. **Significance:** the decision to return Hektor’s body is made; return to civilised and controlled behaviour after the abandon caused by the death of Patroklos; normal life is re-instituted (the domestic practices of the camp: eating, sleeping, making love). **Techniques:** the bustle of normal camp life contrasted with the stillness and sorrow of Achilles; evocative poetry ‘flash of speed’; epithets ‘swift feet’, ‘silver-footed’; creation of affection ‘stroked him with her hand’; dialogue gives immediacy; epic technique of the repetition almost verbatim of the god’s message.

Students struggled to come up with many *techniques* here. Students, especially weaker ones, and especially with regards to literature (not art) responses may need more practice on how writers write/make us feel from their writing. This is particularly important with passages which may not be overloaded with more obvious techniques to write about.

Question 3 – Aristophanes *The Clouds*: Strepsiades and Pheidippides, lines 94–118. **Issues:** filial obedience; youthful extravagance; indoor philosophers (no outside military exercise for ‘white-faced’ scholars); Right vs Wrong and winning arguments through clever debate; education. **Significance:** introduces the idea of the Thinkery and winning arguments; shows the relationship between Pheidippides and Strepsiades; introduces the negative idea of philosophers. **Techniques:** Strepsiades’ ignorance is shown in his ridiculous misunderstanding of the Thinkery which his son deflates; comic exaggeration; comic inversion of the father/son roles (Pheidippides is clever and hesitant about the Thinkery, whereas Strepsiades is eager; Strepsiades begs before Pheidippides casual appeal to the gods ‘by Dionysos’ places us in comic mode; cites real figures Socrates and Chaerephon to make the link to real Athenian life; quick dialogue creates comic tone and also reveals Pheidippides’s lack of filial duty.

This was handled well.

Question 4 – Thucydides, Book 5:105. (Melian Dialogue). **Issues/Significance:** power=ruling ‘rule wherever one can’, the idea that if you have superior power you must conquer – Athenian empire and their arrogance; idea of justice vs Might=Right, the Malians former appeal to the gods because right is on their side, and the counter-argument of the Athenians that their superior power gives them right; honor in war: the Athenians dismiss the Malians idea of support from Sparta – in war there is no honor, only gain; moral problems of empire and power, that empire=expedient, not right behavior. **Techniques:** use of speeches, the formal use here in a dialogue; characterisation, here of Athenian arrogance, dismissive of ideas contrary to their own, that their beliefs=gods, natural law ‘merely acting in accordance with it’; Sophistic methods – Athenians defining ‘laws of nature’ provides little scope for disagreement.

Question 5 – *Delphic Charioteer*. Early Classical period – c.474 BC. **Still archaic elements:** draped figure; long unbroken folds; exaggerated, not realistic; column-like. Head – hair and ovoid shape. **Classical elements:** head angled slightly to right, left side more broadly modeled for correction; body twisted slightly to break away from column feel, pose easy asymmetry; feet – the naturalism of veins etc.; face – serene, no archaic smile, but no sense of strain of racing, restrained. **Typical of period:** does compare to Kritios Boy in angle of head/body – therefore early classical but draped figure – most males nude, while costume part of charioteer also makes it stand out; bronze statue vs marble of others.

Question 6 – Virgil *Aeneid* Book IV lines 352–386. Mercury visits Aeneas. **Issues/Significance:** characterisation of Aeneas, ‘pietas’, sense of duty, patriotism, as father of Ascanius, Trojan people, future city of Rome, as soldier, leader; his resolve, stoicism, toughness, also his humanity, capacity for love. These qualities undermined by the trappings of luxury and excess – ‘yellow jasper’, lust for Dido. Aeneas as forbear of the Julian line and Augustus; the cost of empire – what Aeneas has to give up in order for him to complete his divine mission, the pathos of losing one wife and longing in vain for another, the ‘sweet life’ he leaves behind; the Dido/Aeneas episode as a comment on the recent Antony/Cleopatra/Augustus episode, and parallels with scope for discussion of differing values, Augustan propaganda etc.; Carthage vs Rome enmity; Rome’s greatness. **Techniques:** the device of using Mercury to jolt Aeneas from his lethargy; the language at the start of the passage – the corruption suggested by the gold, ‘tame husband’; the rhetorical figures of the speech, the whole of which is an appeal to Aeneas’ ‘pietas’; the imagery of the last few lines, the ‘awakening’ of Aeneas.

Question 7 – Seneca *Thyestes* line 885–901. Atreus. **Issues/Significance:** revenge – the need and love of it in the characterisation here of Atreus; excessiveness – Atreus has gone too far, his lust for revenge is extreme and obsessive. **Techniques:** Atreus’ language self-absorbed, extreme and arrogant; imagery – darkness and light; monologue – reveals his mood, exhilaration.

Question 8 – Tacitus *Annals* XIV. 38–9 (Boudiccan revolt) **Issues/Significance:** questions provincial/imperial administration generally, especially the powers of ex-slaves; oblique references to Nero, his character and leadership style, his reliance on incompetent or corrupt advisers, and his distance from the events under investigation, the lack of ‘soldierly advice or influence; contrast between Polyclitus vs Suetonius exemplifying contrasting Roman beliefs and values, tradition vs change etc; admiration by Tacitus of the rebels as representing these ‘old’ Roman beliefs, but scorn for Suetonius’ successor for ‘not provoking the enemy’ typical of Tacitus ‘having it both ways’. **Techniques:** authorial comment; epigrammatic style; rhetorical style, drama, emotion, strong contrasts, different moral types, characterisations of the various people here.

Question 9 – Horace *Odes* I.37 (Cleopatra ode). **Issues/presentation:** celebrates the victory of **Octavian** over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium 31 BC, and the suicide of Cleopatra a year later, Octavian’s triumph in Rome a year after that; this dislocation of time unified in the poem by the figure of the queen, and the joyous tone used; Horace as client of Augustus – spokesperson/apologist?; students could discuss the personal gratitude felt by Horace with Augustus’ need for propaganda – refer to Ode 6, and reference to Agrippa; significance of Octavian’s victory – the need for the poet to build up Cleopatra as a foe worthy to be overcome by Octavian, because of her ability to win such devotion in her followers, including Antony; the courage of her stand also a feature of the poem; Roman stereotyping of women, foreigners, monarchs, the East – ‘polluted’, ‘evil debauchees’, Cleopatra ‘her mind swimming in Mareotic’.

The language used rich and interesting – the demonising of the queen, but also the characterisation of Octavian; similes emphasising swiftness; images of chasing, hunting, catching, taming; the use of the name ‘Caesar’, mention of Italy (Augustus has saved not only Rome but the whole country and Empire); the wine serves as a typically Horatian motif, but also expresses the relief felt that the troubles were over, and the truly Roman feeling of it being the *right time* to celebrate – pietas again.

Question 10 – *Chiron teaching Achilles to play the lyre*. **Treatment:** the centaur is helpful, kind face. Achilles is innocent, youthful. Contrasts between these two, and of light/shade, young/old, centaur/human. **Typical:** mythological scene; bland (usually more colour); in a frame, panels; the use of the *Doryphoros* as a model for some of the statues; the treatment of perspective; *tromp l’oeil* effects.

The following is a list of some common errors to avoid:

‘Athens’ ‘Greece’ ‘Thebes’ mixed up – especially in *Trojan Women*; similarly ‘Athenians’ for ‘Greeks’ in *Iliad*, and vice versa for *Trojan Women*; *Trojan Women* ‘written just after the Trojan War’; the play *Crito*; the overuse, or lack of understanding of some Greek terms – students need to use terms sparingly, and to emphasise or explain points, not merely to impress; the misuse of the term ‘pietas’ to describe Greek characters – it is primarily a Roman term; Zeus/ Jupiter mixed up.