



GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students seem to have understood the requirements of the 2006 examination well. Again this year there were a number of very good responses to the examination. These demonstrated evidence of close reading and students' awareness of how language is used and to what effect. Excellent students were able to develop an interpretation based on thorough analysis and a complex understanding of the text as a whole and they showed an implicit appreciation of how views and values may be suggested in a text.

While there were fewer incomplete or very poor responses, some were decidedly mediocre. Often these were very short, sometimes only a little over one page in length. Although there is no set minimum word length, it is very difficult to address all the criteria in such a brief response. These usually indicated a lack of detailed knowledge and understanding of the text.

Of particular concern to assessors was the failure of some students to develop a response based on the passages provided. Often their responses were articulate and informed, showing a good general understanding of the text, but reference to the passage(s) was either virtually non-existent or very superficial. In such responses, the passages(s) given did not provide a basis for the discussion as is required. In any examination there is a fundamental expectation that students address the task and the Literature examination is no exception.

Students who told the story or simply listed the major themes of the text, rather than providing a critical analysis and interpretation of the set passage(s), were unable to satisfactorily address the criteria and could not be rewarded.

Criterion 3, 'Understanding of how views and values may be suggested in the text' was a new requirement for the examination in 2006, and was generally adequately addressed. Responses that showed a real understanding of a text indicated an understanding of the views and values represented. Some students, however, digressed for too long on discussing how the historical context may have influenced the construction of the text and were often inaccurate. According to some students, Jane Austen wrote in the Victorian era, the Three Sisters lived during both the French and Russian Revolutions and the Donne responses often entailed a lengthy discussion of the Renaissance.

Interpretations need to be plausible and supported from the text and this was not always the case. Some phrases in the passages were simply not understood; for example, in *King Lear* 'a dog's obeyed in office' was often misunderstood, as was Lear's reference to his hand smelling of 'mortality', which was often confused with 'morality'. In *The Children's Bach* responses, some students were unsure as to the identity of 'she' in passage two, and both Vicki and Elizabeth were erroneously suggested. There is no evidence in Harwood's poem, *The Sea Anemones*, that the persona is a sleep-deprived mother of a new born who has committed infanticide, as was sometimes suggested, or that she was grieving the deaths of her whole family. Again, plays were sometimes referred to as novels, as was *Shark Net*, which was also, on at least one occasion, described as a play.

Students should try to write a fluent response. Some wrote a basic paragraph on passage 1 and then, without any sense of connection, moved to passage 2 and then again to passage 3. Responses are expected to be both coherent and to provide a detailed interpretation. Good students were able to move smoothly and logically among and between the passages.

Students should be aware that poor spelling and handwriting are not penalised. However, if the assessor is unable to read parts of a response, this will affect the mark given. Also, the ability to write expressively and coherently and to present an interpretation is a criterion. Poor and inaccurate expression will therefore limit the ability of students to convey their ideas to the reader.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	4	5	7	9	13	14	14	10	8	5	4	2	1	12.9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	7	9	13	12	12	9	8	5	4	2	1	12.4



Novels

By far the most popular text on the paper was *The Great Gatsby*, and students who chose this text produced a range of responses. Weaker responses tended to get caught up in the American Dream and to retell the story. Many students chose not to discuss passage 3 or use it in any way. There were, as in previous years, many excellent responses on *Heart of Darkness* and it was good to see students looking closely at Conrad's ambiguous evocation of the natural world. *Sense and Sensibility* was quite popular but many students fell back on a fairly simplistic comparison of the merits of Elinor and Marianne and few noted the humour in passage 3. There were some excellent responses on *The Children's Bach* – a range of students seemed to relate well to this text. Passage 1 allowed for a detailed exploration of the Fox bunker and encouraged students to look at the revelation of the characters. Less popular were *Ragtime* and *Bel Canto*, but there were some excellent responses on both texts. There were very few responses on *Howards End*, *The Hamilton Case* or *Washington Square*, although there were some very good responses on each of these.

Plays

King Lear was a very popular choice and produced a range of responses, some of which were excellent. It was encouraging to see students developing an interpretation of the text. Some weaker responses, however, displayed a disturbing lack of understanding, especially of Lear's speech in passage 3. *Three Sisters* was quite popular but it was a pity that many students ignored passage 3, which offered opportunities to discuss the poignancy of this scene. Students who knew the play well could then have discussed Tuzenbakh's speech about the dead tree, which immediately followed the selected extract. *The Women of Troy* produced some excellent responses and many students developed a discussion of the differing views of Hecabe and Andromache, while others looked more closely at Helen's reply to Hecabe. The ways in which views and values were suggested in the passage(s) were handled well. The other play texts were less popular, although Honour and Measure for Measure saw some sophisticated responses. In general, students seemed more aware of the plays as plays, often referring to stage directions and dramatic features.

Short Stories

Carver was the popular choice and, although there were some good responses, many were very brief. Weaker students tended to summarise the stories and should have remembered that they needed to provide evidence of close reading and analysis of textual details and features, and more discussion of the text as a whole. There were some very good *Dubliners* responses in which students were able to analyse the language closely in a way rarely attempted with the Carver stories. There were only a few responses on the Astley stories.

Other Literature

Again, the only really popular text in this section was *The Shark Net*, on which there was a number of responses, including several very good ones. The selected passages provided for responses on the social world of Perth, on Robert's family and his personal guilt and even on Eric Cooke, so that there was a pleasing variety of responses which often reflected students' engagement with this text.

Poetry

Harwood's poetry was by far the most commonly selected text in this section and there were many excellent and perceptive responses. Poetry enables students to focus very closely on language. While the shorter extracts probably seemed more manageable for weaker students, there were still some very weak responses and some implausible and unsupported interpretations. Harwood's views and values were well addressed. There were fewer, although sophisticated, responses on *The Fact of a Doorframe*. The responses on Judith Wright's poetry were generally good although some on *Woman to Man* read like a biology manual. Students could also have explored the word 'company' in greater detail to add depth to their responses on *The Company of Lovers*. The poems of Donne and Auden elicited responses from students of mixed ability. A greater focus on the language of Donne, rather than a laboured explanation of the meaning, would have been advisable. There were very few responses on the Adamson or Kinsella poems.

Student Examples

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Weaker students often persisted in listing the themes of a text in their introductions and limited their responses accordingly, which often led them to ignore significantly the passage(s) given. The majority of students commenced their response with some sort of general, possibly prepared, introduction, before launching into a discussion of the passage(s). This seems to provide some sort of security for the student, but it is advisable to bring something from the passages into the introduction and to use the introduction to lay the foundation for an interpretation that will be



developed through the passages. Strong students often used their introduction to show an awareness of how views and values were suggested in the passage(s).

The following are examples of excellent starts to responses.

Gwen Harwood shows an appreciation for those who find purpose in life. In her poems 'the Sea Anemones' and 'Nightfall' her three characters 'walk' with purpose as they contemplate 'memories' and 'peace'. By contrast, her idle Mother in 'In the Park' 'sits' at a loss 'aimless' and dissatisfied. Harwood recognises that 'Time's long promised land' will not be reached by those who do not sacrifice and 'take this long walk' for another's sake. In much of Harwood's poetry this walk is akin to a spiritual journey which all must take in life. Those who take this walk are the ones that Harwood 'exalts'.

The overt decadence of post-war America, caught in the clutches of the jazz age and a seemingly endless round of glitzy parties, is exemplified by Fitzgerald in the languid and vacuous characters of Daisy and Jordan and the brutality and manipulation of the hulking Tom. Through his tale of thwarted love, Fitzgerald conveys the perfunctory but immoral lifestyle of his contemporaries that led to the moral decay of the American Dream.

Other students preferred to start with a specific reference to a passage, sometimes continuing to base their response very largely on this passage but making some, less detailed, references to the other passages and to the text as a whole.

'You see how this world goes'. Shakespeare's King Lear charts the suffering of Lear and Gloucester and their path to the realisation of the importance of the natural order of the world which they so often have overlooked. Their respective afflictions of madness and blindness prompt them to form conclusions of the arbitrary nature of justice and its apparent absence in the play.

'Roxane Coss shook his hand...in the future she would sing and he would play'. Through 'Bel Canto' Patchett explores the needs and gifts of human beings. She argues that music is vital to create communication between people and to transcend the barriers between them. She also demonstrates that unusual situations can cause transformations in people and give them the opportunities they would not have had otherwise.

Elinor's strict adherence to social strictures and rationality renders her unable to divulge her feelings unlike her sister. However, as Passage 2 clearly illustrates, the fact that Elinor is reserved does not mean that this paradigm of sense does not feel pain or suffering.

Sometimes students used a concluding paragraph to make their understanding of the author's views and values explicit.

Hecabe's venomous anger in the final piece of prose from passage 3 is ultimately born from her own tragic losses and the unavoidable fact that now 'Troy is nothing'. Through this catastrophic set of circumstances for the Women of Troy, Euripedes ultimately criticises the practice of war and the heinous consequences that follow it.

Many students demonstrated the ability to work closely with the language of the text without falling back on a mechanical line-by-line paraphrase of it. However, others could only manage comments such as 'The poem is a sonnet but it doesn't rhyme', 'The lines rhyme in an abab cdcd pattern' or 'Edmund is saying a poem to Nature'. Students should try to explore why particular forms are used and to what effect.

The following responses demonstrated a real understanding of language use.

One of the first glimpses of colonialist Africa that we encounter in the novel is that of the man-of-war firing into the African coast and nothing summats their impotence further. Conrad's evocative and powerful language 'Her ensign dropped limp like a rag' and 'the muzzles of the long eight inch guns' portrays a masculine phallic reference which is then denigrated through the use of impotent words. The 'pop' and 'limp' and 'feeble screech' all imply a lack of power and control, emphasising Conrad's views throughout the novel, the 'pilgrims squirting lead' into the forest, their tiny impact on their environment.

Shakespeare portrays this exchange between 'the pernicious daughters' almost as a chorus, alike in their cruelty. Their language is no longer poetic and unctuous; Goneril and Regan move swiftly, as the use of prose indicates, and their remarks seem to follow those of each other. It gives a sense that these women work well together in their evil. Regan slides her comments into Goneril's and we are given the image of this cunning plan being a jigsaw, pieced together by a pair of rapacious 'pelican daughters'. The speed of their conversation is hastened by monosyllabic and plain language, creating an atmosphere of tension by which the audience is moved along, this eager rapidity shown in Regan's 'That's most certain, and with you; next month with us'.

The Fox's kitchen is very evocative of their values. The dim room with 'only one source of light' is likened to a burrow, indicating its appeal as a warm, safe and enclosed environment. This part of the house contrasts with Elizabeth's apartment in which 'there are no walls or rooms'. The image of the kitchen's 'corners stuffed with dry grass' demonstrates the insulation it offers its inhabitants and in the room the air 'shimmers with warmth'. In readiness for the shared meal, the 'large, wooden scarred' table holds 'a pile of bowls and a fistful of spoons'. Even the 'brown piano' is described as 'grinning', the atmosphere is revealed as a happy and inviting one and its presence is evidence off the Fox's valuing of music.



Capable students showed a thorough understanding of the features of a text, while weaker ones did not explore, for example, the use of irony in the third *Sense and Sensibility* passage, the metaphors underlying many texts, the plays on words, the changes of scenery in drama texts or the ways characters were juxtaposed.

The following example of student work shows a complex awareness of textual features.

The robust spirituality of Harwood's poetry is created through her fearless acceptance of life and death and the fact that time actually governs both 'The Sea Anemones' speaks of 'blood' and 'animals that must eat or die' in a bold acceptance of the true nature of what appear to be gentle 'flowers'. Such stark imagery is characteristic of Harwood's determination never to shy away from the truth; nothing in the world can survive without taking from things around it. In this way the anemones may be likened to the children in 'In the Park'.

This response continued later:

Harwood's love of freedom, of exploration, is demonstrated through the almost ironic picture of a woman, at one with life and death, nature, sea and sky, where black and white are no longer defined but grey and universal, forced into a sonnet form.

Other examples of close reading of textual features included the following.

Murray-Smith implies that Honor's name means 'dignity' 'decorum' and 'truth'. As Gus repeatedly pleads with Claudia to 'forget Honor', the audience, who cannot see the spelling difference in the spoken word, is forced to contemplate how Gus's leaving Honor may be equated with his abandonment of honour.

In passage 3 Mrs Jennings states that she 'tried to keep out of hearing' when Elinor was conversing with Colonel Brandon. The irony is that what she has managed to hear does not allow her to comprehend the situation, even though she states 'I could not help catching enough to understand his business'. Here Austen allows the reader to gain a greater sense of the proper codes of 19th century behaviour by offering a travesty or parody of it.