English A: language and literature

Timezone 1

To protect the integrity of the assessments, increasing use is being made of examination variants. By using variants of the same examination, candidates in one part of the world will not always be responding to the same examination content as candidates in other parts of the world. A rigorous process is applied to ensure that the content across all variants is comparable in terms of difficulty and syllabus coverage. In addition, measures are taken during the standardisation and grade awarding processes to ensure that the final grade awarded to candidates is comparable.

Contents

Grade boundaries

Higher level overall

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 12	13 - 25	26 - 39	40 - 53	54 - 65	66 - 79	80 - 100

Standard level overall

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 10	11 – 22	23 – 35	36 – 50	51 – 64	65 – 78	79 - 100

Higher level essay

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 9	10 - 12	13 - 14	15 - 17	18 - 20

Internal assessment

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 6	7 - 12	13 - 18	19 - 23	24 - 28	29 - 33	34 - 40

Higher level paper one

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 16	17 - 21	22 - 26	27 - 31	32 - 40

Standard level paper one

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 7	8 - 10	11 - 13	14 - 16	17 - 20

Paper two

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 8	9 - 13	14 - 17	18 - 22	23 - 30

Higher level essay

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Whilst many candidates submitted essays on an interesting, varied and appropriate range of literary works, the following points should be remembered about essays on non-literary bodies of work:

- A body of work must be drawn from non-literary texts. A collection of shorter literary texts (e.g., poems, short stories) is defined as a work. A set of song-lyrics by the same writer does not constitute a body of work, but a work. A set of speeches by a writer on the Prescribed reading list similarly does not constitute a body of work, but a work.
- A body of work should be the work of a single author, for example the work of one particular advertising agency or advertisements for a single product.

Reference should be made to a work or body of work as a whole; however, it is not necessary to write about all the texts studied within a work or body of work. An essay referencing many shorter texts is unlikely to contain enough detail to support a developed line of inquiry. The candidate should use their judgement to select an appropriate number of texts, which may vary depending on the text type, the complexity and length. The minimum number of texts within a work or body of work that an essay should refer to is two: a higher level essay should not be on only one text as it would then be unlikely to have as broad a focus as the component aims to have. The texts identified should be discussed in detail and include an analysis of how representative they are of the work or body of work as a whole.

Whilst comparisons may be drawn between two short texts by the same author taken from the work or body of work studied, the essay should not compare two bodies of work or two works by different authors.

Candidates are reminded that the higher level essay and the extended essay require a different approach. The higher level essay is developed from a work or body of work studied in depth as part of the language A: language and literature course. The EE is a research paper in which the candidate develops the essay as a result of personal engagement with the stimulus material.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

- Some works and bodies of work were selected that did not have sufficient quality or merit from which to develop a detailed academic essay. At times this led to an inappropriate approach, for example a contextual, historical or biographical narrative, rather than a focused analysis of the body of work studied.
- A "persuasive interpretation" requires candidates to select, analyse and comment on specific features of the work which relate to and support the chosen line of inquiry.
- An essay achieving the highest marks demonstrates that the candidate is able to move beyond description and summary to produce convincing and well supported analysis firmly rooted in the chosen line of inquiry.

Criterion B

- Simply listing a number of features found in the work- simile, metaphor, narrative viewpoint etc. is not enough for the higher marks to be awarded. Due consideration needs to be given to how these features develop the work studied and relate to the line of inquiry.

- Developing a line of inquiry around a single literary technique, for example "How does the author use metaphor in this work?" or around a limited section of a longer work or body of work leads to a very narrow, commentary-like, focus that is unlikely to allow a candidate to access the upper mark range for this criterion.
- Candidates must demonstrate understanding of the conventions and nature of the text-type chosen. For example, in fiction, first person point of view must not be confused with third person point of view; first person narrative fiction must not be mistaken for autobiographical non-fiction.
- If a candidate is writing about a graphic text, then the visual images as well as the written text must be addressed- many essays about texts such as Maus or Persepolis did not incorporate any analysis of the visual images. A narrow focus on the linguistic mode will not do the texts justice.
- When writing about audio-visual texts such as films, TV shows or advertisements the candidate must address the implications of this type of text. Due consideration needs to be given to aspects such as: *mise en scène*, lighting, sound effects, camera angles, characterisation and dialogue as appropriate in relation to the chosen line of inquiry.
- The best essays correctly identify a range of authorial choices in relation to the work or body of work as a whole, analyse the effects created, and develop a coherent argument which connects these to the chosen focus.

Criterion C

- The higher level essay is a formal, academic task. It should be developed in paragraphs and should not include bullet points within the essay.
- The essay requires an introduction, in which the work or body of work focused upon, the line of inquiry and the thesis are established. Clarity at this point contributes significantly to an effective structure throughout the essay.
- The essay requires a conclusion, which is linked to the thesis and line of inquiry.
- An essay which is significantly below the expected word count is likely to lack sufficient depth and development to achieve the upper mark range and is therefore self-penalising.
- An essay that exceeds the word count is problematic as the examiner will not read beyond 1500 words and the conclusion may, therefore, not be considered. This will impact the marks for this criterion.
- The essay should be clearly linked to, and closely focused on, the development of one well-defined line of inquiry which is relevant and appropriate to the chosen work or body of work. Where this is not the case, the essay is unlikely to achieve the upper mark bands.
- References to the work or body of work should be effectively integrated into the essay.

Criterion D

- As the higher level essay is developed over time, the expectation is that the candidate will proof-read and edit their work, correcting spelling, grammar and punctuation errors.
- The spell checker should be used with caution. The candidate is responsible for verifying the suggestions provided, including adjustments to the titles of works, the names of characters and common homophones.
- A formal academic register is expected for this task. It is not appropriate to use colloquial language (except in quotations), abbreviations, short-hand expressions (such as found in phone texts), or bullet points.
- The best essays are technically accurate, although not necessarily faultless. Precise and effective language supports the effective communication of the line of inquiry.

International Baccalaureate
Baccalauréat International
Bachillerato Internacional

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Ensure that the work or body of work chosen has sufficient academic merit to serve as the basis for a formal essay.
- Teachers are encouraged to consider the full range of text types and literary works available, not just familiar classics drawn from the traditional literary canon.
- Selecting and formulating an effective line of inquiry is likely to lead to a more successful essay. In contrast, an ill-defined, broad line of inquiry is likely to lead to a weaker essay.
- The key concepts, whilst a helpful guideline from which to develop a line of inquiry, are only a starting point. An essay which takes as its line of inquiry a title such as "Transformation", without narrowing the focus to the scope of the particular work or body of work, is unlikely to lead to a focused essay.
- A very narrow focus may not allow the candidate to demonstrate knowledge of the work or body of work as a whole; this task should not be approached as if it were a detailed commentary on a section of a work or body of work, such as a single short poem, or song lyric.
- The higher level essay must not have a sociological, historical, political or philosophical focus. For examples of appropriate or inappropriate lines of inquiry please consult the higher level essay section of the teacher support material.
- A word count is a requirement for this task.
- Referencing should be consistent, using one of the recognised referencing styles.

Further comments

- Some imaginative and interesting works and bodies of work – including, for example, song-lyrics, contemporary literary and non-literary texts, murals, and public information campaigns - led to original, interesting and refreshing essays in which the candidate was able to demonstrate high personal engagement and persuasive interpretation.
- Hyperlinks in uploaded assessment material are not accessible to examiners, it is therefore helpful to include advertisements, song lyrics or more unusual poems in an appendix. Where it is not possible to include texts as an appendix, clear references should be provided to allow an examiner to access the material.
- When writing about cartoons, graphic novels, specific advertisements or films, etc. it is helpful to embed panels/texts/stills being analysed within the body of the essay.
- Secondary sources are not a requirement, but, when used to support and develop the line of inquiry, they should be of an academic nature: quotations from SparkNotes, Shmoop, Lit charts, etc. are not appropriate.

Internal assessment

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The global issue is an integral part of the oral and must be formulated correctly. Fields of inquiry were mistaken for the global issue. Whilst centres may look to fields of inquiry for guidance, the field of inquiry topics are intended as starting points. Candidates must derive a more specific global issue.

For some candidates, the global issue selected was too broad, for example, 'gender inequality'. More successful issues are more specific or well-defined such as 'gender inequality in education'.

The global issue must be suitable for both the literary work and the non-literary body of work. Some candidates chose global issues that were linked to literary devices or themes, and then struggled to discuss their non-literary body of work in terms of this issue. In some cases, an extract did not have any relevance, or enough relevance, to the global issue that was chosen. The global issue must originate from the work and body of work.

Many candidates chose to form a global issue linked to current affairs. This often resulted in candidates offering their opinions about the issue itself and led to them moving too far away from their chosen extracts, work and body of work.

Some of the non-literary choices showed a failure in the understanding of what constitutes a body of work, or some candidates failed to mention a body of work. For their non-literary body of work, candidates are required to use a non-literary extract (for example a cartoon) and then connect their study of this to a series of non-literary texts by the same author or producer (for example, other cartoons created by the cartoonist). Candidates often failed to explore the body of work and would talk about the non-literary extract in isolation.

The extracts should be a continuous piece of text — candidates cannot put together a collection of different sections taken from different points in the work or body of work.

For candidates selecting films or genres such as television commercials, centres should be advised of the need to provide a transcript (where there is dialogue used in the chosen extract), and several accompanying still images.

Music videos often proved to be problematic choices for some candidates. Many candidates selected music videos for their non-literary body of work; however, they would often forget to analyse the multimodal aspects of this genre and instead focus only on the lyrics of the song featured in the video. The high-scoring students were those who were able to analyse and evaluate the *mise en scène*, camera angles, the interplay between the lyrics and visuals or the visuals and sound, genre conventions, intertextuality, etc.

Balance between extracts, work and body of work was an issue for many candidates. There was a tendency for the literary extract to be favoured over the non-literary extract. Even when candidates did manage to achieve a balance between both extracts, examiners often noted an imbalance in the discussion of the wider literary work and the body of work.

Most candidates started their orals with a clear introduction. The most effective introductions are those that are one minute or less. The introduction needs to state the global issue and introduce the extracts, work and body of work. Some students chose to spend several minutes outlining contextual information

about the authors or statistics/facts about the global issue. This is not necessary and takes up valuable time.

The five-minute section devoted to teacher questioning can be a valuable way of raising a candidate's marks in criteria A and B. Therefore, teachers should try to avoid using pre-planned or generic questions. The most effective questions are those that respond to the oral and address areas that could be improved. For example, a teacher who notices that, in the first 10 minutes, the candidate has failed to explore enough of the body of work, should then ask questions to draw out further knowledge of this. The least effective questions were those that asked candidates to repeat what had already been said, or to reflect on personal opinions such as: why did you choose this issue? Is this relevant to your life? Such questions tend to lead into generalised discussion away from the extracts, work and body of work.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Candidates were stronger in their understanding and demonstration of knowledge but not always as strong in their demonstration of personal interpretation. High-scoring candidates are those who try to explore their own interpretations rather than simply describe their extracts or discuss the literal meaning. The most successful candidates are those who can consistently link their knowledge, understanding and personal interpretation to the global issue in the two extracts and the work and body of work. Weaker orals often lose sight of the global issue or try to tackle too many different topics in relation to their global issue.

Candidates often displayed a more confident understanding of their literary extract. They did not always display the same level of knowledge of the non-literary extract.

Candidates were often more confident with using references from the two extracts. The high-scoring orals were those that displayed an ability to fully explore and reference other moments from the work and body of work rather than making just general comments such as 'this can be seen again in the end of the novel.'

High-scoring candidates demonstrate that they can select references and quotations judiciously to support their discussion of their global issue.

Criterion B

Many candidates demonstrate a secure analysis of authorial choices in the literary extract. Whilst the analysis of the non-literary extract and body of work is improving, candidates are still hesitant to analyse multimodal texts and the authorial choices associated with these (especially for text-types such as news articles, music videos and films). They will often revert to merely describing the content of the still images rather than using evaluation or analysis.

Examiners also noted that candidates who chose news reports, speeches or opinion articles for their non-literary body of work would often refer to the subject content or ideas expressed rather than analyse how specific authorial choices such as lexical choices, tone, punctuation etc. work to convey the ideas and meaning. Candidates should be reminded to analyse and explore the choices made by the author and the effect of these choices rather than only looking at opinions or ideas conveyed.

Criterion C

Examiners are open to the possibility of a range of structural approaches; however, balance is the key issue within their chosen structure. The balance of time was the main issue for a lot of candidates- particularly a

lack of attention given to the work and body of work. High-scoring candidates are those who balance their time to discuss the four parts required of this oral: extract 1, extract 2, work and body of work.

Not all candidates plan the cohesion of their oral. High-scoring candidates indicate the sections of the oral clearly and it becomes evident that they have planned how to transition between sections. The most effective candidates are those who guide the listener seamlessly through with effective connections. Weaker candidates tend to make very abrupt jumps between extracts and work/body of work.

Most candidates end with a short conclusion. The most effective are no longer than a minute. Weaker candidates often start their conclusion around the 7- or 8-minute mark and fail to maximise their ten minutes. Weaker candidates sometimes resort to informal statements such as, 'that's all I've got to say,' and such endings makes it clear that the final part of the oral's structure was not well-planned.

Criterion D

In most orals, the language used is usually accurate and appropriate. It is the variation of language choices, syntax, and variation of rhetorical devices that will signal to the examiner that a candidate deserves higher marks.

Several students are memorising their oral. This can often lead to a rushed delivery. The most effective orals are those that maintain an appropriate register, yet sound natural and engaging rather than overly rehearsed. When candidates do rely on memorisation, it can often produce a stark contrast between the main body of the talk and the language used in the 5-minute teacher questioning section. Examiners do expect to hear some differentiation between these two sections; however, memorisation will often lead to an obvious difference. Some candidates rely too heavily on their ten bullet points and read these out. This is not an effective style of delivery and can often lead to candidates finishing too soon.

Teachers might also want to consider that certain questions can sometimes lead to informal answers, and so they may wish to think about how they phrase their questions. Questions that prompt personal opinions such as: 'so, which text is your favourite?' often lead to informal and colloquial answers which rarely add anything to the oral.

Candidates should be confident with the language connected to their global issue and they should be able to use the language associated with this issue. In some cases, candidates struggle to use words connected to their issue in the correct context, and candidates should be encouraged to work on their fluency with some of the terminology they know that they want to use.

One of the most difficult aspects of criterion D is the use of rhetorical and stylistic devices. Not as many candidates adopt the subtle and trickier aspects of style such as changes in tone and stress etc. Candidates should be aware of the listener and work on trying to engage and interest their audience.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

When creating their ten bullet points, candidates could consider trying to include reminders about their links and transitions rather than just bullet points about the content.

When preparing for their oral, encourage candidates to evaluate their balance and note down how much time was devoted to the four parts: the two extracts, the work and body of work. This should be equal.

Teachers should also consider the importance of the teacher questioning section and should practise the formulation of questions that respond to the oral rather than using pre-planned or generic questions.

Ensure that candidates feel as confident when analysing their non-literary bodies of work as they do with their literary works and approaches.

Candidates will benefit from lessons that show them how to formulate a well-defined and clear global issue that is not too general. Help candidates to understand that the global issue comes from the texts themselves and cannot be formed to fit around the texts.

Further comments

Teachers and candidates should have a confident understanding of what constitutes a body of work for the non-literary part of the oral. They should make use of the IB's teacher support material, subject reports and the Subject Guide.

Higher level and standard level paper one

General comments

In this third examination session of the new course, candidates seemed much better prepared for the demands of the guided textual analysis. The two texts on the examination were accessible and provided ample material for candidates' analyses. In the SL examination responses, it seemed that slightly more candidates tended to write about the infographic text, indicating more comfort with predominantly visual texts and more discomfort with predominantly linguistic texts or transcripts of spoken texts. In both the HL and SL examination responses, candidates achieved top marks in responses to both texts, but there seemed to be more top marks awarded for responses to the infographic text, further indicating better preparation for visual or multimodal texts.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Overall, the areas which appeared the most difficult for candidates were analysis and evaluation, as well as focus and organisation.

Regarding analysis and evaluation, candidates often listed, or feature-spotted, authorial choices but struggled to unpack their effects. Sometimes analysis and evaluation were conducted in isolation, as candidates did not consistently connect how authorial choices shape meaning to the point of entry. Weaker responses tended to be descriptive rather than analytical, or they provided general rather than specific effects of authorial choices. Candidates need to work on developing their analysis and evaluation and linking this development to their discussion of the point of entry.

Regarding focus and organisation, many candidates struggled to write a solid introductory paragraph with a clear thesis that made explicit reference to their point of entry. Weaker responses tended to exhibit a restating of the guiding question rather than establish a strong argument. This type of introduction often led to a discussion about the text in general rather than a guided textual analysis focused on a specific point of entry. Many candidates also struggled to use transitions or clear paragraphing. In general, candidates need to work on focusing and structuring their textual analysis.

While many candidates articulated a general interpretation of the texts, some candidates struggled to communicate their interpretations of implications. Some candidates could also work on using the appropriate register and style for an analytical piece, as well as using clear, effective, and carefully chosen language.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

In contrast to previous sessions of the new course (as of 2021), it seems that candidates were better prepared for the demands of the guided textual analysis. They appeared to have a better understanding of the requirements of the paper. Fewer HL candidates seemed to run out of time, evidenced by mostly completed responses to both texts. While some candidates continued to write irrelevant contextual information about the texts, many candidates seamlessly referred to the context in relation to or in support of their analysis. Compared to previous sessions, more candidates seemed to attempt responses focused on the guiding question, and these responses were generally more successful than the ones with

International Baccalaureate
Baccalauréat International
Bachillerato Internacional

original points of entry. However, some stronger responses demonstrated that candidates successfully established their own point of entry and accordingly focused and developed their responses.

The area in which candidates appeared the most prepared was understanding and interpretation. Most candidates understood the literal meaning of the texts, and some candidates insightfully wrote about the nuances of the texts.

In terms of analysis and evaluation, many candidates fared better on the predominantly visual text. Generally, candidates seemed better prepared to write about visual features than linguistic features. Several candidates even evaluated some of the subtleties of how the visual features shape meaning. Many candidates seemed prepared to identify authorial choices, and many referred to the three rhetorical pillars of pathos, logos, and ethos.

Many candidates wrote adequate responses in terms of focus and organisation, as well as in language. Most candidates showed an awareness of how to structure their response. Generally, responses included an introduction, body, and conclusion. Compared to previous sessions, more conclusions seemed to avoid mere summary. Most candidates employed an appropriate vocabulary, register, and style.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Text 1

Generally, the responses to the podcast text were weaker than the responses to the infographic text. Most candidates did not seem prepared for a text type that was a written transcript of a spoken text. The authorial choices were linguistic and aural, and hence perhaps more subtle. While many candidates could identify some of the textual features, few analysed and evaluated them perceptively. Many candidates seemed to summarise the text rather than analyse it. The candidates who did analyse the text tended to discuss the authority (credibility/ethos) of the speakers and the contextual relevance of the topic of empathy. The stronger responses exhibited some clever discussions about the emotive effects of the diction, as well as the shifts in tone and purpose. Many candidates struggled to use the appropriate terminology of listener, speaker, etc. Since empathy is closely linked to the attributes in the IB Learner Profile, many candidates understood the concept and were able to interpret some implications of the text. Some candidates, however, wrote about the general concept of empathy rather than how this concept is presented in the text. The guiding question offered a clear point of entry, so most candidates used it to focus their analysis.

Text 2

Generally, the responses to the infographic text were stronger than the responses to the podcast text. Most candidates seemed at least somewhat well-versed in analysing visual and multimodal features, particularly aspects such as colour and the connotations of the piggy bank image. However, because there were so many obvious features, some candidates identified a large quantity, but the quality of the depth of their evaluation suffered. Some candidates perceptively interpreted some of the text's implications through a critical lens, commenting on the ways in which the infographic manipulates its audiences. Insightful comments often included a critical reading of the vague textual references to "science," interpreting these statements as appealing to less-educated audiences. Most candidates were familiar with the channel for the text type, a website, and many were able to comment on this context of publication in relation to the point of entry. While many candidates used the guiding question to focus their responses, some candidates seemed fazed by the contextual nature of the "audience" aspect of the

question, which detracted from their focus on the actual text. Some candidates struggled to write about both the interplay of text and images and the appeal to a range of audiences.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

To improve understanding and interpretation, it is advisable to build a general understanding of implications that may arise in various text types and to ensure that candidates are prepared for a variety of text types. Predominantly linguistic texts may include transcripts of a spoken text such as a speech, an interview, a podcast, etc. In addition, candidates should be exposed to a variety of guiding questions to practise deconstructing what the questions are asking.

To improve analysis and evaluation, teachers are advised to teach, model, and practise techniques to deepen the analysis and evaluation of authorial choices. Many candidates limited their responses by focusing solely on pathos, ethos, and logos; this approach often led to general evaluation. To help deepen candidates' unpacking of authorial choices, they could be given the opportunity to deconstruct examples of general and perceptive analyses, and practise how to unpack the general effects into a more perceptive evaluation.

To improve focus and organisation, teachers are advised to give candidates the opportunity to practise structuring analyses. It may be helpful to model and practise writing outlines or plans. Candidates are advised to work on writing clear introductions, which establish the focus in a thesis statement. There is no need for a hook at the beginning of an academic analysis. It is also advisable that candidates work on writing clear topic sentences that align with the thesis and use sophisticated transitions to connect ideas between paragraphs. For writing to be less repetitive and mundane and more original and thoughtful, candidates should focus their paragraphs on topics that enhance their argument and that are supported by the author's choices. It is also important to work on cohesion within paragraphs, keeping them focused with internal transitions between ideas. Lastly, candidates are advised to work on writing concluding paragraphs that are not a repetitive afterthought or summary. Teachers are advised to model and practise how to close an argument, perhaps zooming out to larger implications or offering a final profound point that clinches the argument.

To improve language, candidates should have the opportunity to develop a more sophisticated, academic, and subject-specific vocabulary, for example, by writing lists of formal synonyms for informal words and phrases to help candidates express themselves in a more appropriate register.

Paper two

General comments

The merging of levels and the Literature and Language and literature papers did not seem to have any negative effect on candidate performance, and it was rare to see Language and literature candidates using a non-literary text for example. However, the use of pre-prepared essays which candidates shoehorned, though "crowbarred" was the term used by one examiner, into the question they selected with generally unsatisfactory results was highlighted by a number of examiners as a significant concern.

The overall impression of student performance was mixed and while it was clear the majority of candidates had diligently prepared for the assessment and been well supported by careful and creative teaching; responses where candidates showed an ability to develop a well substantiated reading of their works in relation to the question and how this might be compared and contrasted with the other work selected were not common. Almost all examiners recognised that candidates made an attempt to compare and contrast, particularly with regard to the content of the works they were discussing. However, they also identified that fulfilling this requirement in a way that showed insight and which could be seen as persuasive proved to be a real challenge for candidates. To address this, examiners highlighted the importance of schools and candidates selecting appropriate works to use in this assessment and for teachers to work with candidates to develop ways of integrating the different areas in each of criteria A and B, possibly using comparison and contrast as a unifying element.

Many examiners saw the lack of an ability to compare and contrast beyond the obvious differences and similarities in plot and genre, as linked to the fact that significant numbers of candidates found interpretation difficult, leading to superficial and repetitive responses. This was particularly evident in the problems candidates seemed to find in selecting appropriate and relevant material from their works to support their arguments and examiner reports are peppered with comments on the fact that too often candidates asserted points without any attempt to support them with evidence. In addition to this it was clear that a number of students were memorising quotations, which is not necessary as part of this assessment. While, at times, these were impressively deployed in support of the student's argument in too many cases candidates had memorised quotations and were determined to use them, with scant regard for how they suited their argument. Tied to this haphazard memorization or assertion without support, is the tendency to launch into a response/interpretation without any sense of context within the work: what is going on? What is the work about? And, importantly, what is at stake?

The overall picture then is of candidates working hard to meet the challenges of a new assessment that while it offers them a rich range of opportunities to engage with and explore the works they have studied also demands thorough knowledge of the works and an ability to produce an imaginative interpretation that is supported by the analysis and evaluation of authorial choices and textual features. In addition to this both these areas are required to be compared and contrasted in a way that increases our insight into the meaning of the works. While this might appear a very demanding challenge, it is well within the grasp of candidates at this level and, in fact, simply draws on the knowledge and understanding of the text they should have developed in the course. Examiners have made a number of recommendations for further teaching that will support schools and teachers in reaching this goal in future sessions.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

The most expressed opinion from examiners was that candidates had difficulty responding to the question and often did not seem able to address the question at hand. This often created a lack of focus or a sense of weak understanding of the works. Many examiners also noted that it seemed as if many students had memorized responses or produced so many practice responses to other questions that during the exam session, they simply tried to force previous responses or memorized material into the response.

Examiners also noted that candidates struggled with criterion B, especially when it came to comparison and contrast of authorial choices. Overall, candidates tended to list basic literary features and to offer basic or dubious assertions as to their effects or importance. This related to a general problem with candidates often giving facts, quotations or features without an argument in relation to the question or a discussion of their significance.

Many students were spending time either stating or describing rather than trying to build a coherent argument.

Many candidates also struggled with use of language. While a lively and authentic voice often helps to communicate and sometimes overcomes problems with formal register, many informal and at times boldly inappropriate choices take away from effectiveness. Many candidates also struggle with precision. At the same time, it is important to note that it is not enough to simply add "challenging" vocabulary into the mix for the sake of trying to sound academic. Precision and clarity are often the keys in language choices.

At the lower end of performance, candidates frequently gave little sense of having read the works or little more than a basic familiarity with plot. Many candidates did not communicate a sense that these works of literature were somehow crafted works of art and that craft could affect meaning and reception.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Examiners consistently remarked that many candidates had at least an adequate knowledge and understanding of their works. In many cases, it was obvious that candidates had read a variety of works and approached important problems of the discipline in class. Overall, there was a general sense that candidates understood the task at hand and were ready to write a literary essay.

It was also heartening to see that many candidates were prepared to compare and contrast. In some ways, response to the question can often help a candidate in framing a comparison and certainly this helped some. But it was clear that candidates were prepared for the nature of the task.

Many candidates also had a handle on the basics of organizing an essay. One examiner noted that many candidates seemed to have had more practice writing effective introductions. Rather than having an unfocused opening (on the one hand) or an overly formulaic and artificial start, many essays took the reader by the hand and gave a sense of what was to come or what the candidate was thinking about the works in relation to the question.

At the top end, there were papers that were a true joy to read. It is often remarkable what candidates can produce in a timed examination without any resources at hand. It is also encouraging to see, throughout all of the papers, some genuinely interesting and personal responses that indicated engagement and concern. We should also add that there are many centres that may fall into a trap of pushing memorization

of quotations, canned responses to texts, or strict formulae for organization, but it is instructive to note that at these centres, the best candidates transcend these restraints, while the candidates who struggle may not reveal their own sense of the works and fall into the types of responses noted in the section above.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

In general, the questions were straightforward, if broad. Examiners were also instructed to give leeway for a number of different directions that candidates could take in relation to the questions. There were not any difficulties that called the marks into question.

Question 1

This was not a very popular question but when it was approached, candidates often found success. There were candidates who had difficulty making a case for the "unconventional" but even in cases where candidates seemed to point to quite ordinary sequences of events, if they suggested something novel, they were able to write a satisfying response. The most successful candidates had obviously spent time considering narrative structure in class.

Question 2

This was by far the most popular question on the exam paper. It was also a question where candidates were able to perform well. In some cases, candidates focused on the portrayal of the societies (as defined by the candidates themselves) within the works, while other candidates decided to show how the works were a representation of the author's society. Either approach worked with strong arguments and support. Candidates who neglected the key word "portray" tended to lapse into broad description of plot and struggled to perform well.

Question 3

This was a potentially challenging question, but candidates often handled it well. Once again, there were different acceptable ways of approaching this question. Some candidates chose to consider how the narrative point of view would affect the meaning/reader. The added benefit here (as in approaching question 1) is that candidates who took this approach almost automatically were considering authorial choices. The other approach was to think about the ways in which opinions or ideas expressed in the works might affect the reader. There were candidates here who offered convincing accounts of the lessons or controversial opinions that might influence readers.

Question 4

This was the second most popular question. While at first examiners were concerned that candidates could be confused about comparing and contrasting the ways authors contrast, candidates did not seem to have such difficulties. There were many useful responses to contrasting themes, images, characters, events, etc.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Examiners are very positive about the potential for this assessment to encourage genuine engagement with the complexity of literary works. A variety of recommendations were given for the teaching of future candidates.

Examiners start with the most obvious but also probably the most important: ensuring students have thorough knowledge and understanding of their works. This is a foundation of a successful response enabling for instance, students to select pertinent examples to support the interpretation made in relation to the question. This should go hand-in-hand with choosing works (or allowing candidates to choose works) that they will actually read and, perhaps, willingly re-read.

Examiners also recommended giving students opportunities to practise choosing an appropriate question for their works and avoiding the preparation of responses that lead to forcing the question to fit the response. Other recommendations included the importance of working in class to focus on the introduction to the essay, exploring the key ideas of the question and defining its terms appropriately and unpacking any key words. This will naturally encourage students to offer a carefully thought-out application of their knowledge and understanding of the works to the question and how in the light of that the works might be interpreted. Focus on the question itself can often hold the key to demonstrating strong, flexible understanding of a work as well as finding a foothold for interesting comparison and contrast.

In meeting the needs of criteria A and B examiners focused on the importance of supporting students in the development of appropriate skills in exploring comparison and contrast. Ideas included the use of visual strategies such as Venn diagrams and visual planning documents generally. In Criterion B specifically examiners stressed the importance of focusing on analysis over description and explication. For example, while students need to understand that plot is relevant, it does not need repeating for the benefit of the examiner and that the focus needs to be on how the plot was created using what devices and making what authorial choices and the effect this creates. This might also be used to refocus on literary devices and technical vocabulary generally. Fewer still contrasted these well.

In relation to criterion C the importance of specific instruction on how to structure an analysis that involves more than one text and of using effective transitions to show how the ideas are connected and how works are being compared and contrasted was stressed, avoiding for example, superficial comparison in topic sentences, such as starting the second paragraph with 'similarly' without really offering anything more.

Examiners also stressed the need for students to be taught the language of graphic works.

Related to this, candidates should be taught to be more attentive to genre in general. The choice of genre is, in a sense, an important authorial choice, and every genre has features that would be relevant in a discussion of the effects of authorial choices or in showing an in-depth understanding of a work.

In relation to use of language, examiners commented that students need guidance in using a formal register while at the same time avoiding "empty" words meant simply to sound "'academic' without providing any actual insight (the author uses a plethora of devices to bring out the profound meaning). Precision is often the key in word choice.

Rather than coming up with fixed or memorized interpretations of a work, students should be encouraged to be open and flexible. If they know their works well, they should be able to spend time 'experimenting' with a wide variety of questions and problems.