

Literature in English (920)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

85 candidates sat for this subject in 2011 and 78.82% of them passed at principal level.

The percentage for each grade is as follows:

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
Percentage	17.65	7.06	8.23	22.35	10.59	5.88	7.06	2.36	4.70	1.18	12.94

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

PAPER 920/1 (SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER BRITISH WRITERS)

General comments

The majority of candidates showed fair knowledge of the texts. However, some candidates showed a superficial understanding. They tended to summarise without answering the questions. Candidates displayed an almost complete lack of knowledge about the texts. This became clear when, in several instances, candidates used context questions and critical appreciation questions as their basis for answering the essay questions. The most preferred texts, based on number and quality of answers, were *Hamlet*, *Jane Eyre* and Keats' poetry. This is because these are particularly well-known texts, with a lot of critical material available from libraries and the Internet. *Hamlet* is a more complex play than *As You Like It* but in some ways easier to deal with because *As You Like It* deals so much with ideas of irony, disguise, and so on, which are more difficult to teach and absorb. Keats as a romantic poet is easier than Hardy, who borders on the modern and deals with a country and lifestyle unfamiliar to most Malaysian candidates. Keats' references to life, death, memory, immortality, etc. seem more accessible. *Jane Eyre* is fundamentally a love story, and will therefore strike a chord more readily than the satirical *Brave New World*.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A

Question 1

- (a) This question requires candidates to identify Hamlet's feelings in the passage given and how these feelings are expressed. Candidates should, therefore, identify Hamlet's feelings correctly and then show literary devices (imagery and diction) that bring out these emotions. Most candidates were able to identify the emotions. Only a few candidates were really able to tie the emotions to diction and imagery.
- (b) This question requires candidates to give a personal opinion on whether Hamlet's feelings are justified and then give reasons for their opinion. Few candidates answered this question because of the need for a personal opinion. Answers tended to be rather vague and general. Candidates needed to clearly

state what Hamlet's feelings are (tired of life and the world, shocked and disappointed by his mother's actions, disgusted with his world, heartbroken, alone), and then state if they are justified. Most would agree – it is difficult to disagree with this question. They needed to pick up on specifics such as Hamlet's suicidal thoughts, the images which show him to be disgusted with Denmark and the court, the comparisons which show his father to be Hyperion and Hercules (unlike Claudius and himself), the insulting words used in relation to Gertrude, etc, to demonstrate his feelings. In order to show justification for his feelings they could talk about his deep sense of loss, his loss of faith in his mother, the seeming 'wrongness' of what Gertrude and Claudius have done.

Question 2

- (a) This question requires candidates to link literary elements to the creation of drama in the excerpt. Candidates should be able to identify the correct tone and diction and provide the examples of the use of logic and argument with close reference to the excerpt given. What makes the excerpt dramatic is the dialogue form – reflects actual conversation between two people. There are no long speeches. There is also the contrast between the 'courtly' fool Touchstone, who considers himself superior, and the simple but dignified Corin. Touchstone's false consciousness of superiority, contrasted with Corin's real dignity, creates comedy. There is also drama in the absurd arguments Touchstone creates, saying that Corin is 'damned' because of his lack of courtly manners.
- (b) Candidates are required to do a character analysis of Touchstone and Corin, and then note the differences between them. Candidates should be able to identify and analyse the characters of Touchstone and Corin as seen in the passage correctly and contrast the two characters with close reference to the passage. Touchstone is puffed up with vanity because of his courtly connection, and looks down on Corin, the lowly shepherd. However, candidates should be able to point out their true characters. They should look at the overblown language Touchstone uses, and his faulty logic (you have no manners, so you are wicked, so you are condemned to hell); they can contrast this with the dignified simplicity of Corin's declaration that he earns what he eats and gets what he wears. Touchstone's language is a poor imitation of courtly language. Corin's is simple, as befits his status, and there is balance in the sentence structure of his last speech, showing his own dignity and balance. Touchstone calls Corin's arguments shallow, but it is actually he who is shallow.

Question 3

- (a) Candidates are required to look at how diction and imagery are deployed to bring out a certain atmosphere. Answers given by candidates tended to be very broad and general, without enough detail on literary elements. They could look at the description of the fire – small flames, faint cracklings, so the fire is cosy and not threatening. The crackling sounds like 'whispers of household gods' – this gives the impression that they are watched over and taken care of. There is also the very peaceful, harmonious picture of one brother quietly working, while the other has a nap. The emphasis is on quietness and calm and harmony before the brothers face death.
- (b) This question requires candidates to look at how the poet reveals his emotions which he does subtly and indirectly. Candidates should be able to draw out the tender affection and concern that the poet shows towards his brother as reflected in the poem. There are some instances where he is more direct in discussing his feelings – referring to 'fraternal souls', which implies connectedness and caring; the fact that he 'rejoices' in the quiet calmness with which Tom's birthday has passed. He wants to spend many more such quiet evenings together with his brother – a clear indication of his feelings towards him. This quiet joy is slightly undermined by the final reference to impending death, but the main emotion is still love and quiet contentment.

Question 4

- (a) Candidates are required to first identify the theme and meaning of the poem and identify the sound and structure that help to clarify the meaning in the poem. Candidates should be able to describe the structure of the verses and the meaning of each line. In this poem Hardy contrasts the happiness of a family in their day-to-day lives, with the reminder of potential death, destruction, passing of years. In talking about structure, candidates should note how each stanza begins with a happy scene (singing together, gardening, having breakfast in the sun, moving house) but ends with a reminder of impending doom – sick leaves falling, storm-birds, rotten roses, rain erasing names for gravestones. In terms of sound, the repetition of “Ah, no: the years O!” with its long vowel sounds emphasises coming sorrow. Also, the length of the last line of each stanza tends to lend more weight to the premonition of sadness.
- (b) Candidates must analyse the significance of time to this poem, before looking at how the poet discusses it. Time is significant because it will bring sorrow (death/suffering) to the happy family described in the poem. Hardy describes happy moments, always focusing on short, specific moments (singing in the evening, having breakfast, etc.) and contrasts this with the idea of “years” – the years outweigh the moments. Although the family lives in the moment, the speaker seems unable to stop the idea of the coming years from intruding. Time will take away their happiness.

Question 5

- (a) Candidates are required to analyse Jane’s character as a child based on her actions and reactions to her aunt. Some responses were oddly judgmental, suggesting that Jane should not speak like this because she is a child. Some candidates were able to note her passion. On the whole, responses were adequate but not insightful.
- (b) Candidates who answered this question tended to just summarise the argument, without looking deeper into how the arguments revealed Jane and Mrs Reed’s way of thinking. Candidates should be able to contrast the two attitudes displayed here. Jane demands recognition of her suffering and her passions; she wants to be acknowledged as an individual with feelings, who needs kindness and attention. She also criticises her aunt for being so blind to her children’s faults, and indeed ultimately for having brought them up badly. Mrs. Reed, however, is unable to accept what Jane says because she has fixed ideas of how children should look and behave. She does not understand Jane’s character and misreads her temperament as ‘bad’ and ‘deceitful’ – probably because she does not know how to handle Jane’s passion. Bronte is contrasting two very different notions of what children should be.

Question 6

- (a) Candidates are required to analyse Bernard’s character and show how the author makes his character clear to readers. Candidates should note that he sees ‘derision’ in the eyes of those around him. He suffers from a sense of being pursued and (potentially) persecuted: he moves as if trying to run from unseen enemies. Clearly, he is nervous and lacks confidence. Words like ‘timid’, ‘humiliated’, ‘suffer’ show his lack of confidence. His behaviour towards others (‘arrogant’, ‘offensive’) also shows this.
- (b) This question requires candidates to analyse the kind of world Bernard lives in using the information from the excerpt. The question seeks to assess candidates’ ability in making inference about the world of *Brave New World*. Candidates, however, should confine themselves to interpreting elements found in the excerpt.

SECTION B

Question 7

- (a) This question covers some of the more basic ideas in Hamlet. Candidates must first identify the characters and describe what they are doing; purely factual answers are required. Candidates should be able to identify the speaker correctly and should also be clear about the exact situation characters are in.
- (b) Candidates are required to identify the ironies the passage and how the the dialogue between Rosalind and Orlando in the passage is typical of their interactions with each other in the rest of the play. Candidates should be aware of the complexities of the situation between Rosalind and Orlando in order to successfully answer this question i.e. to show the irony of Rosalind trying to 'cure' Orlando of his love for her, while really being in love with him. Candidates need to be very familiar with the text, especially the scenes between Rosalind and Orlando.

Question 8

- (a) This question requires candidates to show that men in the play are the ones who take action, while the women are passive and tend to be dominated and controlled by male will. There were many instances of candidates answering one part of the question but not the other.
- (b) Candidates are required to analyse Celia's role in the play. Celia is closely connected to the corrupt court – her father is the one who has thrown Rosalind and her father out. The fact that she stays with Rosalind shows her loyalty and love to her cousin, but also shows that she is not like the rest of her father's court. This implies that it is not purely evil and corrupt. Also, she plays a part in 'saving' Oliver and helping him to become a better person.

SECTION C

Question 9

- (a) Candidates are required to trace the development in Keats' thoughts about change and mortality. Several candidates seemed to forget about looking at the idea of 'calm acceptance'. Only a few were insightful enough to show that this balance between desire to escape and calm acceptance is present in the earlier odes as well.
- (b) Candidates who answered this question did not go much further than describing some female figures in Keats' work, without deeper analysis. Candidates are required to look at the different types of women Keats has described. There is, for example, the virginal, virtuous beauty of Madeline in *The Eve of St Agnes*; this is quite different from the enchantress in *La Belle Dame*, who lures men to their destruction by making them fall in love with her and forget everything else. In *Isabella*, the beautiful young girl is unable to forget her murdered lover. There seems to be a difference between innocent young girls and more experienced older seductress types. Candidates might note that these women can be seen as representations of poetry, either enchanting or seducing the hapless young poet.

Question 10

- (a) Candidates are required to identify Hardy's way of anchoring his bleak outlook within a very down-to-earth, realistic atmosphere of country fold, everyday life and nature. Most candidates failed to address the second part of the question properly and spoke of realism in rather broad and generalised ways such as 'it is realistic to say that war is destructive'.

- (b) Candidates are required to show how, through ordinary people and events, Hardy comes to profound understandings or emotions. However, candidates tended to take the word 'extraordinary' too literally; they generally did not manage to show how ordinary things led to extraordinary or 'deep' understanding.

SECTION D

Question 11

- (a) This question requires candidates to look at factual aspects of Jane's teaching career and the emotional (turmoil with Rochester, spiritual satisfaction at Morton, unease with St. John). Many candidates mixed up Lowood, Thornfield and Morton. Many candidates also did not address the emotional aspect of the experience.
- (b) Candidates are required to look at all the relationships which could potentially end in marriage – Blanche-Rochester, Rochester-Jane, Jane-St. John, Rosamund-St. John, even Bertha-Rochester. They then needed to analyse the good and bad points and why eventually the Jane-Rochester union will work. Most candidates focused entirely on Jane and Rochester, though some did include a consideration of Jane and St. John.

Question 12

- (a) Candidates who answered this question tended to show the defects of both worlds, without addressing the idea that this is actually a problem in the novel – that Huxley does not provide another path. Candidates needed to discuss these aspects of both worlds, showing that life in Utopia is insane, and that it is primitive in the Indian village. They also need to discuss whether there is any other (more positive) way of seeing these two alternatives. Finally, they need to decide whether they agree with the statement – that the Savage only has two choices, and both choices are bad. That is, Huxley offers no other (better) option. They might agree that there are no other options, but they do not necessarily have to agree that the options create a 'serious defect'. They might, for example, feel that an Indian village, though primitive, at least offers room for development, unlike the controlled and calibrated Utopia.
- (b) This question requires candidates to show how machinery and medicine dominate this world, supposedly to provide 'happiness'. Candidates need to look at examples of machinery, medicine and happiness as they appear in Utopia. Thus, they can look at how the inhabitants of Utopia are created, how machines are used in every aspect of life, how Soma is used to create 'happiness'. Candidates could have questioned the definition of happiness, asking if a state induced by a drug, specifically in order to keep the populace under control, is a good thing.

PAPER 920/2 (NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH)

General comments

The majority of candidates choose to answer at least one out of four questions on *Wide Sargasso Sea* and/or *Kehinde*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* especially, is clearly a preferred text among the candidates in spite of its complex structure and storyline. The candidates were knowledgeable and well prepared and were generally able to provide good answers. However, the candidates did not fare as well with the short stories and poetry questions from the *Spirit of the Keris* anthology, doing comparatively poorly on poetry compared to short stories. Candidates were generally able to contextualise their responses to the passage-based questions in

Section A within the broader textual frame. Most candidates managed their time effectively. There were however, some candidates who ran out of time as could be seen in the short/brief answers given for the last question chosen from either Section B or C; and there were others who were not able to provide full answers to the four questions of their choice in the time given. The main area of weakness is linked to the candidates' imprecise focus on the specific demands of the question. There were also candidates who did not follow the instructions specified regarding the selection of questions to answer according to the three sections.

Comments on individual questions

SECTION A

Question 1

- (a) This question requires candidates to examine the narrator's response to his surroundings. The candidate is supposed to demonstrate the narrator's sense of distance and detachment from his surroundings, by making close reference to the excerpt provided. The majority of the candidates who attempted this question were unable to understand the scope of the term "examine" and were therefore not able to go beyond a superficial retelling of the story.
- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss the significance of the bicycle to the narrator. Answers given by candidates mainly involved a superficial retelling of the content of the short story. Candidates should meaningfully engage with the narrator and the significance of the loss of his bicycle. They should see the bicycle as a symbolic link through which the narrator tries but fails to connect to his surroundings.

Question 2

- (a) This question requires candidates to discuss the persona's response towards an eclipse, based on the poem provided. Candidates should connect the two settings and different time frames (i.e. the past and the present) to the two different responses from the persona and exploit the differences in relationships and culture shown in the poem.
- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss the significance of the different images used to depict the eclipse. Candidates must be able to identify a number of different images utilised in the poem to depict the eclipse and discuss the significance of the images to the poem's meaning in general i.e. the contrast between good and evil, light and dark, the importance of fighting evil.

Question 3

- (a) This question requires candidates to discuss the ways the persona draws similarities among the people of the East, using an array of stereotyped images and parallels. These images and parallels are built around the social, cultural and economic conditions of the society he is describing.
- (b) This question requires candidates to examine the persona's perception of the social, cultural and economic practices among the people mentioned in the poem. Candidates should highlight the persona's negative point of view by identifying the unattractive features (through the use of imagery) of the society he is describing.

Question 4

- (a) This question requires candidates to highlight the manner in which the incompatibility between the two characters is presented in the excerpt provided by comparing and contrasting their reactions to

their surroundings. Candidates were able to correctly contextualise the excerpt, and a close analysis of the excerpt was competently done with reference to well chosen details from the text, to show the incompatibility between the two characters.

- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss how the narrator's responses to nature and the physical landscape reveal his state of mind. Candidates were able to correctly contextualise the excerpt, and a close analysis of the excerpt was competently done with reference to well chosen details from the text. Candidates were able to show that the narrator's responses to his surroundings revealed his thoughts and feelings of confusion, displacement and alienation.

Question 5

- (a) This question requires candidates to examine Kehinde's state of mind and plot the changes in her emotional states based the excerpt provided. Candidates were supposed to show that generally Kehinde is feeling alone and afraid; but is at the same time unconsciously reviewing the way she sees herself and others in the light of what transpired in the excerpt. Although the candidates appear to know the book quite well and were able to situate the excerpt, the answers provided tended to be superficial. Some candidates were not able to fully utilise or do a competent close analysis of the excerpt.
- (b) This question requires candidates to identify the key points in Kehinde's relationship with her Nigerian friends (their lack of support/empathy and Kehinde's sense of betrayal) and white colleagues (Kehinde's sense of isolation and the general lack of understanding among the white colleagues about who she is). Answers were generally adequate, with some candidates giving more focus to Kehinde's Nigerian friends; and less space given to her white colleagues.

SECTION B

Question 6

- (a) This question requires candidates to discuss how Malaysian writers use cultural symbols to depict inter-ethnic issues, with close reference to at least three short stories. The issues are related to a person's sense of identity. Candidates did not understand what is meant by the term "inter-ethnic" issue (e.g. as depicted in "Ibrahim Something") and instead wrote on how an object can be regarded as a cultural symbol of one particular ethnic community e.g. *nasi belauk* in "Mariah". Only some candidates were able to link the cultural symbols identified to how it depicts inter-ethnic issues/conflict within a character or among the ethnic groups.
- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss the depiction of different kinds of inheritance as shown in a minimum of three short stories of their choice. In general, the candidates were able to identify suitable stories and provide better answers compared to candidates choosing option 6 (a). Most candidates however, provided answers that depict material inheritance only, when they should identify and provide examples of other kinds of inheritance e.g. cultural, values and beliefs, etc.

Question 7

- (a) This question requires candidates to discuss how the poets incorporate ideas of national consciousness in their works, with close reference to at least three poems. Answers generally leaned to a "retelling" of the poems selected, instead of focussing on how the poets incorporated ideas of national consciousness in their poems.
- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss gender roles and/or relationships in at least three poems and show how they represent social expectations. As the question is quite open in terms of scope, there is a correspondingly wide range of acceptable answers. Some candidates discussed gender roles

and/or relationships; while some other candidates were able to link the differences and inequalities between the sexes to show how they represented social expectations.

SECTION C

Question 8

- (a) This question requires candidates to discuss Ezekiel's portrayal of human frailty, with close reference to at least three poems. Candidates should link human frailty to the depiction of humans as victims – of nature, man, society (social values, discrimination), etc. In general, candidates who answered this question did not understand the term “human frailty” and were also not able to make the connection to humans as victims.
- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss how the tone of Ezekiel's poems moves **between** despair and hope, with close reference to at least three poems. However, the candidates provided identified poems that show **movement from** despair **to** hope. Some candidates faced difficulty in doing a close reading of the poems and lacked the critical ability to plot and explain the changes in tone.

Question 9

- (a) This question requires candidates to discuss both the immediate and far-reaching implications the Coulibri fire have on Annette and Antoinette. The question is well signposted and candidates were generally able to show how the burning of Coulibri affected Annette and Antoinette physically, mentally as well as psychologically. Candidates gave equal focus to both Annette and Antoinette.
- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss how Antoinette's search for happiness appears doomed to fail and linking it to the structure of the story. Candidates provided a wide range of answers which includes Antoinette marrying for the wrong reasons, her sense of not belonging/alienation, etc; but the link to the structure of the story appears to be an afterthought. Candidates should be able to point that all the people that Antoinette cared for (e.g., mother, Tia and Rochester) eventually turned away from her. The cycle started when she was a child and continued into adulthood. In general, candidates were able to provide reasons why Antoinette's quest for happiness is doomed to fail. Only some candidates were able to link their points to the structure of the story.

Question 10

- (a) This question requires candidates to discuss the central theme of return with close reference to at least two characters. The majority of candidates who answered this question focussed on the physical and cultural aspects of “return”, when they should also include metaphorical return. The preferred choices of characters were Albert and Kehinde.
- (b) This question requires candidates to discuss the significance of the statement related to the issues of trust and distrust in the novel. Candidates limited their answer to the trust between married couples only i.e. Kehinde and Albert. They did not include a discussion on trust/distrust between friends, family members, employer-employee, etc. Candidates should discuss the significance of how trust is central to the chain of events, and determines the choices the characters make.