

November 2017 subject reports

English A: Literature

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 17	18 – 31	32 – 44	45 – 56	57 – 69	70 – 80	81 - 100

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 15	16 – 29	30 – 41	42 – 54	55 – 67	68 – 79	80 - 100

Higher level Internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 17	18 – 21	22 – 25	26 - 30

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The November 17 session was characterized by a number of interesting and engaging works that complimented the purposes of the IOC. For the commentary, Gwen Harwood and Carol Ann Duffy were the most popular but WB Yeats also featured strongly along with Wilfred Owen, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney. Similarly, the discussion part of the exam was dominated by Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, but Austen's *Pride*

and Prejudice, Tim Winton's *Cloud Street*, also featured. The most popular non-fiction works examined were essays by George Orwell, Martin Luther King and Joan Didion.

Most extracts were carefully chosen and respected the constraints of the exam. Extracts that were too long or too short (less than 20 lines, more than 30) did tend to disadvantage the students but were a rarity in this session. Similarly, the most effective discussion questions were those which evolved naturally and spontaneously and allowed the candidates to show personal engagement and originality. Most candidates this session benefitted from carefully worded and relevant guiding, follow up and discussion questions.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A:

Candidates who engaged with the poem authentically through careful interpretation and close analysis confirmed a personal engagement and enjoyment and therefore tended to perform better overall. These candidates were able to deliver convincing commentaries that celebrated the relationship between thought, feeling, structure and meaning persuasively and were able to articulate the subtleties and complexities of the given poem with confidence. There was no denying that these candidates not only know the material (knowledge) well but had found it personally meaningful (understanding) and could therefore deliver commentaries that suggested "ownership" of the material rather than mere reiteration of points made in class.

However, some candidates did rely on summary, description and paraphrasing, and while the tendency to organize commentaries around biographical details is less common than in the past, there were in some cases a heavy reliance on analysis and insights from websites rather than engaging the extract with the intent of finding personal meaning and relevance. One strategy that seemed to prevail was the opening statement that seemed pre-learned and/or hackneyed. In many cases, these canned introductions were delivered with confidence only to be abandoned when the consequent analysis lapsed into description and paraphrasing.

Criterion B:

While in some cases there was the tendency to list off elements, there were many candidates who were able to elaborate on the meaningful relationship between poetic devices and meaning. There were some delightful commentaries where candidates elaborated on the relationship between poetic intent and reader with poetic devices serving as a mediating element. Some candidates were under the impression that successful analysis comes from listing as many poetic devices as possible with very little attempt to establish links to the thought and feeling of the poem or even provide relevant examples. This often resulted in a broad, superficial effort that lacked effective focus.

While many candidates were able to explore the impact of specific poetic devices with some detail and originality many candidates did deliver some rather generalized or vague interpretation of the effects of poetic devices. For example, some candidates did not appreciate the difference between symbol and motif, the significance of the persona in poetry, how tone is created or the difference between tone, atmosphere and mood. The point perhaps is not to list off a poetic device menu but to rather explore with detail and with an original eye the impact of

those devices deemed most meaningful to the candidate and most respectful to the focus of their analysis.

Criterion C

The two most popular organizing strategies were the linear approach and the conventional approach. While both are perfectly acceptable, candidates need to be aware that applying a ready-made formula isn't effective in the least. Effective linear structures were characterized by a clearly stated organizing principle, effective transitions, a respect for the progression of meaning and a noticeable lack of repetition. Similarly, there were those that relied on the more popular structure in which specific conventions served as the organizing principle. These commentaries established meaningful and relevant links between the conventions and were able to comment on their cumulative effect rather than merely listing them off in a disjointed and fragmented manner.

The line by line description/paraphrase is never effective.

Criterion D

Candidates who fared well on this criterion not only confirmed knowledge of narrative structure, action/plot, characters and themes but were able to tease out the interrelationships and engaged with the specifics of the text such as the mediating effect of setting or how some narratives can challenge the authority of the reader. Thoughtful questions that tasked an awareness of the contrived nature of a work of fiction/ non-fiction were more productive, whereas weaker responses came from questioning that tended to ask students to view characters and their conflicts "as real." Candidates who recognized the role of the writing in creating meaning and who showed a measured respect for the culture and context of a work and how this impacts language were able to respond more persuasively.

Unfortunately for some candidates, they were confronted with some rather abstruse or vague questions that did not respect the intent of the text or were focused on subjective likes and dislikes. Poorly conceived questions can sound the keynote of the discussion and unnerve even those well-prepared candidates. Questions such as this are counterproductive and don't allow candidates to show knowledge or understanding but tend to overwhelm and lend themselves to irrelevance.

Criterion E

Those candidates who found themselves in a discussion rather than an interview tended to do better on this criterion. In many cases, there was a sense of genuine engagement between teacher and student as a respectful back and forth evolved organically. In the more successful discussions, a question would lead into a precise, relevant and detailed response that would in turn serve as inspiration for the next question and so the discussion would develop.

While learning quotes verbatim isn't an effective strategy and can result in students prising them into the discussion at all costs, those candidates who could provide relevant examples from the texts and more impressively relied on them to confirm how plot, character and themes

progressed in the work ultimately delivered responses that had more depth. Well integrated examples and quotes were a lot more effective than personal anecdote and subjective opinions.

Criterion F

Most candidates were not only able to communicate their ideas cogently and clearly but incorporated appropriate terminology that complimented the analysis. However, colloquial idiom was relied on in some instances: “Hamlet is crazy” or “Daisy is type A” and while this level of language might be tolerated in class discussions it should be avoided during an exam situation where a formal register and appropriate language are the expectation.

Effective use of command terms and transitions gave the commentary and subsequent discussion a sophisticated and confirmed appropriate analysis.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers should take care to read the instructions in the Handbook of Procedures for the preparation, delivery and conduct during the exam. There are clear instructions in the IB Guide on extract length, appropriate guiding questions and recommended discussion questions if teachers are unclear. There are several forums that support teachers in preparation for the IOC/Discussion (Teacher Support Material, workshops, online resources, course books) that can be relied upon and offer varied and very useful strategies and support.

As one moderator clearly and candidly put it “there is simply no substitute for knowing the material well.” This was clear in those candidates who had been taught to develop strategies and skills that allowed for personal and authentic engagement.

Accordingly, effective teaching strategies should encourage a sense of “ownership” or “agency” on behalf of the student so that they can confidently and persuasively engage with any extract or discussion question that is posed. Exposing students to various texts for close analysis throughout the course has always been beneficial as well as encouraging students to engage in careful analysis, interpretation and evaluation of a text. The focus of teaching should be on how language creates meaning, the use of literary, linguistics and theatrical techniques, the relationship between different conventions and how texts offer varying perspectives on human concerns.

Well-structured responses to a literary text should be encouraged with a focus on making links to literary elements and providing effective support. While there is always the tendency in Literature to relate to conflict, or “like” a character and use them as a springboard to discuss personal/political matters, students should be reminded that it is a testament to the artistry of the writer and the power of language that makes the conflict so relatable, the characters sympathetic and the whole text so very real.

Lastly, students should be reminded that they are participants in the discussion, not victims of an interrogation, and that teachers are there to nurture and inspire responses.

Further comments

This session was productive and engaging and many moderators were pleased with the quality of the work submitted. There were some examples of missing/incomplete documentation, inaudible or incomplete recordings and lackluster, superficial comments, but the overwhelming reaction was that teachers and students had worked hard to deliver well-prepared commentaries and discussions. On a final note, candidate details and the school code should be omitted from the recording since work is moderated anonymously.

Standard level Internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 4	5 – 8	9 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 19	20 – 23	24 - 30

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range of poets seen followed the pattern of previous sessions, with Duffy, Owen, Frost and Heaney the most popular choices. Plath was less popular this time, but along with Blake, Wright, Donne, Baxter and Hughes, was tackled by a minority of centres. It is important centres take care in choosing the poems for discussion – some poems were simply too short to offer sufficient material or challenge. At the other extreme were extracts from *The Waste Land* which were too long to be reasonably discussed in 8 minutes. Some poems are inherently more challenging to navigate in 8 minutes, such as Owen's *Spring Offensive*. Candidates should also be careful not to offer lengthy background detail which diverts attention away from the actual extract. This danger was seen most often in commentaries on Plath, Owen and Heaney.

As in previous sessions, most of the drama extracts were from Shakespeare's tragedies. Extracts chosen were generally appropriate and the plays offer highly charged dramatic encounters, which candidates should be encouraged to consider for the dramatic effects in more detail.

Prose passages were very much in the minority. Orwell, Coetzee and Dillard were popular choices with a few centres choosing Austen and Conrad. More unusual choices in this session were Narayan's short stories and Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*.

Centres are reminded that the number of extracts to be chosen is laid down in the guidelines (to be found in both the *Language A: Literature* guide and the *Handbook of Procedures*) for determining the different extracts to be prepared for candidates. Centres should also ensure all Part 2 works are used equally.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Nearly all candidates had a solid knowledge of their chosen text and were often able to place the extract in its appropriate context. This, it should be noted, is rarely historical, social or biographical, but is invariably textual. What is the significance of this passage to the work as a whole might be a good starting point for considering the context. Understanding was at times less secure for weaker candidates and seemed to extend to lengthy background detail which diverted candidates away from the actual extract. Better commentaries offered a considered, detailed and supported interpretation of the extract, although in a few cases this was not always linked to overall meaning or effects of the work.

Criterion B

In stronger responses, appreciation of features was often detailed and showed clear appreciation of the writer's choices. Less secure candidates tended to feature spot and not offer an analysis or appreciation of the effects under discussion. On the whole, more attention to how features contribute to overall intended effects (rather than just viewing features in isolation) would improve many commentaries, which too often offer a list of literary features, divorced from any consideration of the appropriate genre. It is also noticeable that candidates seem to have difficulty referring to devices and literary techniques when looking at passages from a novel – much more so than when given a poem to work with or a Shakespeare extract. With something like *The Great Gatsby*, for example, the richness of the language, the use of the unreliable narrator and the careful shaping of the narrative and dialogue are often overlooked by candidates, with a consequent limitation on the success of the commentary.

Criterion C

Some candidates set out their intended direction of travel at the start, and provided a clear structure to help them navigate their way through the commentary. In very good commentaries, this was often linked to the key significances of the extract in terms of the whole work. Many candidates though did not seem to have any plan at all and delivered either a line by line paraphrase, or took a rather haphazard approach. It would be useful for centres to guide candidates further in terms of how to plan their delivery, e.g. using a thematic approach or a range of ideas which lead to a sense of overall meaning in the extract, e.g. characterisation/setting/mood and tone. Many candidates however were able to keep the focus on the passage and to integrate some specific references effectively. As always, teachers must intervene at around the 8-minute mark, if necessary, to ensure there is sufficient time for subsequent questioning.

Criterion D

Some candidates spoke with great fluency and used a range of vocabulary to express their ideas cogently and clearly. Others were initially hampered by nerves and then eased in to the commentary. There were some commentaries where the register was too informal and colloquial, with others proving to be limited by vocabulary, either repetitively using the same phrases or seemingly unable to use more specific vocabulary for literary analysis.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

In this session, improving the structure of commentaries, as mentioned in Criterion C above, would be a significant help to guide candidates through their delivery. Too much background and peripheral detail should be avoided and a more cohesive overview of the work with some focus on the components that help to deliver ideas, would improve many commentaries.

Some candidates seemed to have trouble 'filling' the eight minutes with relevant commentary. The key to this is perhaps more practice, so they go into the exam comfortable with the feeling of the time available and also practice with the organization of the commentary.

Further comments

Teacher questions were sometimes directed at particular lines, making it hard to give the candidate credit for selecting appropriately from the extract. Conversely, some questions were so broad they threw the candidates completely. Such broad questions do not offer the candidate the specific help to address areas of weakness in the preceding commentary. Such questions are not linked to the assessment criteria and do not help the candidate improve their performance.

It is still the case that in some recordings, there was a lot of very distracting background noise – people talking, bells and telephones ringing. One candidate had to contend with an extremely loud clock chiming intrusively on two occasions during the examination. It is vital that a quiet space suitable for the delivery of the IOC is available for all candidates.

It would be helpful for ALL teachers to use line references on extracts and encourage candidates to refer to them in their commentary, which makes it easier for candidates to make the references they need to develop their ideas.

Higher and standard level Written Assignment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15	16 – 18	19 – 20	21 - 25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

All examiners reported a mostly positive experience of assessing these Reflective Statements and Written Assignments. It was extremely rare to have to cap marks in Criterion B, because

the chosen work did not come from the Prescribed Literature in Translation list. There was a general sense that many schools are conducting effective Interactive Orals, leading to sound Reflective Statements. The range of works studied tended to conform to patterns observed from previous years, although there are always some teachers who make fresh and interesting choices that clearly engage students. It was also evident that teachers are developing some highly suitable Supervised Writing prompts, as topics tended to be more literary. Topics that are not appropriate or too wide to be treated effectively in 1500 words are probably the most frequently recurring problems. Although, inevitably, a large number of candidates will score marks in the middle range, this session saw a significant number of high scoring performances, with written work that was engaging, critical, well-argued and insightful. On the other hand, a number of candidates relied heavily on views that were most probably gleaned from easily accessible internet sources. This is both disappointing and dangerous, if the secondary source is not acknowledged. Care must be taken to ensure academic honesty at every stage of the process.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Reflective Statement

It is pleasing to report that there is some improvement in the handling of this component, but also frustrating that more candidates are not able to receive the full three marks available in this criterion. The best Reflective Statements do not waste valuable words on general introductions and conclusions, but launch immediately into a reflection on how the factual content of the Interactive Oral focused on the key elements of culture and context that helped them gain a better understanding of the text itself. Speculations that are vague and unsubstantiated do little to gain credit here. When all the information is derived from the text itself, it is not normally possible to award full marks. RS that focus exclusively on the content of the text or treat the RS as a preamble to do the WA will not score highly. There are a number of approaches that lead to success here, but choosing three distinct points from the IO and demonstrating how they helped further greater insight into the text tends to make it easy for the examiner to reward this approach with the full three marks. It is still somewhat worrying when the material delivered in the Interactive Oral is obviously incorrect or inappropriate and teachers need to intervene to correct misapprehensions; we frequently read that texts which take place in 19th century mainland Europe are Victorian. Reflective Statements that exceed 400 words automatically lose one mark in this criterion. Those which are under 300 words do not usually cover enough ground in sufficient detail to merit the higher marks.

B: Knowledge and Understanding.

Most candidates demonstrated quite good knowledge and understanding of their chosen text (marks below a 3 were relatively rare), but few seemed able to convey perceptive insight into the chosen topic as related to the work as a whole: the best candidates were able to select precise and pertinent (often with a good degree of independence and originality) detail to support a sustained and thoughtful interpretation of the work. It is essential that the topic chosen is literary in nature, that all claims are supported by evidence from the text (whether quoted or paraphrased) and that the evidence is placed in context. Developing knowledge into a convincing analysis and interpretation of the work is key to success in this criterion. The prompt

for B reminds us that the topic has to be used to show knowledge and understanding of the chosen **work**; candidates who have studied a collection of poems or short stories should consider that a commentary on one poem seems unlikely to be able to do that very well. If the focus of the WA is to be a single poem or short story, it would be wise to encourage candidates to acknowledge the wider body of the writer's work, at least in the introduction and conclusion. The topic must also be sufficiently focused to be treated effectively in a response of this length. The strongest performances here were often quite narrowly specific in their range, allowing for extensive use of detailed support that led to convincing critical analysis.

C: Appreciation of Writers' choices

Unfortunately, this remains the criterion which seems to cause the most problems. When a suitable choice of topic has been made (often expressed as 'How does writer x use literary element y...?'), performance in both Criteria B and C tends to be in the upper range. While the majority of candidates wrote in such a way as to make it clear that they are aware there is a writer at work, many said very little indeed about the **significant** choices made by writers whatever the chosen genre (and genre itself is often sadly neglected by candidates). Quotations are still too often used for purely narrative purposes, leading to an approach that is more descriptive than analytical. In many cases quotations are still far too lengthy; these often obscure the actual point being made (as if the critical component is self-evident) and do little to foster an effectively developing argument. The most successful candidates select details that are both concise and precise, developing their analysis in a cogent manner that clearly acknowledges that these are likely to be a result of deliberate choices made by the author in constructing the text. Their argument is unlikely to rely heavily on sound effects that may simply be artefacts of translation.

D: Organisation and Development

Candidates tend to perform at a satisfactory level in this criterion, having sufficient skill in structuring an essay. Introductions which fail to identify the topic, wandering away from the stated subject and poor paragraphing are pitfalls to be avoided here. Conclusions which simply re-state the main points made are not as effective as those which relate the conclusions reached to the wider concerns of the work as a whole. Attention needs to be paid to connecting paragraphs with transitional statements that are both meaningful and coherent. Arguments which reveal contradictions suggest poor planning and execution. Failing to write 1200 words is likely to have a negative consequence in this criterion; the few that exceed the 1500 word upper limit incur a marking penalty. Judicious editing could easily rectify the latter case. To do well in this criterion there needs to be a strong sense of a logically developing argument, using effective textual evidence to support the claims made. Those candidates who have been taught the necessary technical skills of integrating and modifying quotations are at an advantage here.

E: Language

Language was generally clear, with at least an adequate degree of accuracy. Carelessness, poor proofreading and too informal a register are all detrimental to success in this criterion. There are still a number of candidates who seem to write with an artificial degree of sophistication, presumably meant to imitate literary critics they have been exposed to in their course of study. This often leads to some incorrect diction choices or the use of language that

is contextually inappropriate, thus obscuring their communication of ideas. There are also a pleasing number of candidates who write with clarity, precision and concision.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Ensure that all candidates have access to the assessment criteria
- Share successful exemplar work as useful models to help candidates see what needs to be done
- Guide students to focus the Interactive Oral on relevant elements of culture and context
- Devise Supervised Writing prompts that focus on literary elements of the texts
- Discuss chosen topics with candidates before the writing process starts
- Encourage candidates to find supporting evidence that is pertinent and precise
- Teach the skills of modifying and integrating quotations
- Provide feedback on the draft WA that will help candidates to construct tighter arguments that focus on the choices writers have made
- Stress the need for careful checking and editing of the final written pieces

Further comments

Teachers and students should be reminded that the written work submitted should be double spaced (or at least 1.5). This makes it easier to read and for examiners to insert annotations and comments. As all work is assessed anonymously, candidate names, school names and session numbers should not appear on the uploaded document. It is most helpful if both the Reflective Statement and Written Assignment include a separate word count for each (not a total word count for both components). Please remember that the WA must be based on one text only and that the only legitimate choices are those which appear on the Prescribed Literature in Translation list (PLT). The RS and WA submitted must be on the same text. It is not a pleasant experience for examiners to have to award reduced or capped marks for issues which ought to have been resolved before submission. Please ensure that students give a title to their Written Assignment and that the RS and WA are clearly distinct on the uploaded version; it makes most sense for the RS to come before the WA.

Higher level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 8	9 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 15	16 - 20

General comments

Sheridan Blau, in his work *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers*¹ and in follow up lectures, argued that productive discussion of literary works consists of two core components: moving from small group to larger group discussion and focusing discussion around an authentic textual problem. Blau further defines an authentic textual problem as focusing on passages or lines that have “puzzled most readers..., either because they are difficult to interpret or difficult to understand psychologically or morally.” Obviously, the nature of independent exam conditions prevents group discussion but the nature of commentary on an unseen passage does seem aligned to locating productive and challenging problems within texts. Indeed, this is fundamentally what distinguishes literary commentary from a more basic comprehension task.

Unfortunately, one consistent challenge of the assessment task for students is to embrace puzzling elements of texts in favor of more tidy readings that often seek to avoid difficulty. In other words, candidates can demonstrate a tendency to see Paper 1 as more of a comprehension exercise—can one uncover *about what the text is?*—rather than an intellectual grappling with authentic, productive textual problems. Both of the options in this exam session presented plenty of puzzling lines just as they resisted easy understanding or clear, larger purpose and candidates who were comfortable with the work as engaging with productive textual problems seemed to have an advantage. While, clearly, the majority of students have a strong grasp of the requirements of the commentary and can be reasonably successful with the assessment task, this same understanding of the task seemed also to lead students more toward papers that *sound like* commentary as much as engage in authentic and independent conversation with the texts. Students, in such circumstances, seem so intent on producing a commentary that they think we want to read that their own reading can be sacrificed in the process. In such scripts, candidates may be meeting the intention of the marking criteria but in a manner that ultimately reads as hollow, inauthentic and forced.

Arguably, close and independent analysis of an unseen text represents one of the more difficult challenges for students. Certainly there are a number of candidates who are clearly engaged with the work, even demonstrating genuine interest and enthusiasm in their engagements with these new texts. This November session included many good to excellent commentaries overall and evidence that there is clearly attention being given to literary devices within texts as well as structuring an overall commentary response. Further, the very great majority of candidates revealed little trouble in at least gleaning a reasonable level of literal understanding with both the prose and the poetry options and most appear both comfortable and confident in moving beyond literal events to engage the texts toward further ends. Though, as the paragraph above suggests, there remains evidence that students are approaching unseen texts with ready-made recipes, there are also very many candidates who are clearly approaching the

¹ Blau, Sheridan. *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers*. Heinemann, 2003.

task with open minds and an agility that the assessment task most truly aims to encourage (and to which we, as teachers, must continue to push).

Toward this end, examiners this session spent considerable energy looking to reward the thinking of candidates. By this, we attempted to be sensitive to candidates' engagement with texts even when there could be a lack of precision with naming, identification and/or terminology. We looked to recognize the *process* of commentary (reading, thinking, noting authentic interpretive problems in the texts, grappling, extending, etc.) and not just commentary as a set *product*.

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

As has been the case for many sessions, sustained close reading *as literature* is sometimes a struggle. Candidates often tend to focus on personal and/or limited associations with isolated terms or phrases and develop entirely new constructs that are out of context from literary purpose and literary intention. These tend to result in "over-readings," finding far more than, if reinserted, would be sustained by original texts.

There continue to be issues with appropriate integration of a consideration of literary features. Literary features were noted by the very great majority of candidates who have clearly been taught to look for them. Unfortunately, they were often noting these devices as more of an aside that as an integrated component of a sophisticated reading. This would create a kind of "disconnect" between an interpretation of the text and an awareness of the use of many literary devices. At its weakest, this resulted in a listing or noting of devices only, the result of which is something masquerading as analysis only.

By extension, it is important to treat significant features only. Candidates can spend too much time and energy on marginal devices that really do not have much significance. Examiners are always forgiving and accepting of features that candidates highlight but spending time and energy discussing questionable devices does take candidates away from richer readings with a more effectively integrated appreciation of features. This tendency suggests, once more, that candidates can be searching out features as an add-on or "at all costs" rather than as part of the analytical work required with commentary.

Candidates also continue to struggle with some organizing principles. Several examiners commented on the need for stronger introductions and conclusions that were clearly related to the texts (rather than generic and vague filler that could be used with virtually any work) as well as the need for developing a coherent and logical argument. Even in sometimes good commentaries, a challenge for candidates is to have all points unified toward a singular purpose. Isolated paragraphs could offer a sense of cohesiveness as a stand-alone point but this would only be one of a series of stand-alone cohesive points. What is still sometimes missing is a developing/developed argument that is clear and sustained throughout the entire commentary work.

Related to the above is the problem of using literary features as the organizing principal for structuring responses (again, over the idea of a developed line of argument). It can be helpful

for candidates to have approaches in mind for structuring responses but when commentaries are organized around identifying literary features, work tends to be mechanistic and misses the more authentically engaged readings asked of candidates in this assessment task. In such cases, for instance, a candidate may well have spent a paragraph on setting, another on character, a third on action, etc. but still failed to provide a compelling interpretation or evidence of a developed argument. With the current rubrics, organization is focusing on cohesive, unified and convincing lines of reasoning or argument. While there are plenty of commentaries that feature a recognizable paragraphing structure, the strongest works demonstrate an argument that develops and strengthens rather than more simply offer clearly siloed units of material.

Unsupported assertion and not considering the significance of points, however, is the big challenge encountered over and over. This tends to result in more simple narration, summary and paraphrase which should be avoided.

Via the teacher comment forms, several teachers joined some examiners in noting the apparent value of contextual knowledge in offering readings during this session. However, while the number of students who understand the poem to refer to Hong Kong or the prose as a passage in a post-colonial work was very, very small, there was opportunity to—as mentioned above—find authentic textual problems. Again, examiners were not looking for deep contextual awareness and understanding in providing a definitive reading but candidates willing to read with an openness to possibilities over certainties.

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

Candidates, on the whole, demonstrated a sound ability to uncover the basic scenarios or plots and to trace the course of any “action” whether physical, intellectual or emotional. The willingness to slowly read and uncover effect in both the prose and poem were strongly demonstrated by most. This basic understanding, then, became the springboard for more interesting and nuanced interpretations.

Most candidates did convey an ability to construct a response and convey ideas with appropriate language. Candidates were clearly competent and comfortable with writing about literature using an appropriate register and a sense of organization and logic. Many examiners commented on the high level of both language and writing in general.

Candidates also demonstrated awareness of commentary as an assessment task. There was a sense of familiarity with approaching the assignment and attempting to develop a response suitably appropriate in detailed focus.

As already mentioned, most candidates were able to glean a reasonable level of overall understanding of both the prose passage and the poem. There seemed to be quite strong engagement with both options and students did well exploring the texts and even trying to extend their thinking. Though occasionally problematic with regard to integration, literary devices are overtly considered by the great majority of candidates.

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

Prose commentary: Of candidates who selected the prose passage, most understood that this was a first-person recount of a past encounter and appreciated some of the ways a sense of threat and consequent fear were created. Stronger candidates considered the impact of this being a retrospective narration and explored the ways the change in perspective from child to adult shape their understanding of the situation.

Although “made of moon shadows” prompted various interpretations (most candidate seemed to miss the great likelihood of a Caucasian man but described—as perhaps a slightly telling argument for the need for post-colonial literatures—a dark-skinned antagonist), most candidates were able to comment on the characterization of the man and grasped that this suggested mystery and otherness of some kind in relation to the narrator and Alusani.

Most candidates grasped the central situation being recounted but many were confused by the closing reference to “filling cages with souls of children.” This could lead candidates astray with exaggerated tensions toward a more simplistic good versus evil or even some sort of “slasher” texts where big teeth are for grinding children more simply, the stranger is—literally—part donkey, eggs are poisoned and those really are children in birds’ feathers. This Hansel-and-Gretel-cum-Cinderella-cum-Pinocchio reading tended to distort scripts such that tension was lost (it is all bad) and that, also perhaps ironically, the true brutality suggested in the final lines might not be considered in meaningful ways. Only the more successful commentaries were prepared to consider the impact of our not knowing what actually happened that day, especially to Alusani.

Unfortunately, some candidates would recognize the more complex tension but—perhaps out of deep desire for meaning—tended toward vague generalizations such as so-called themes involving mystery, intrigue, curiosity or “causes a reader to question ‘why.’” While the candidates above saw too much horror, these candidates saw too little. Often, this same collective seemed not to know what to do with the final metaphor of the passage.

As a result, examiners did reward scripts that focused their analyses on the tone or atmosphere. Common responses will notice a change from something more curious to something more ominous. What the “everything that started then” is was something we tended to accommodate pretty widely in spite of, perhaps, a common preference among examiners for deeper consideration. Even, then, if candidates failed to explore much of the possibilities of what really began, if they did a good job seeing the tensions, examiners were willing to reward.

More precise discussions of time, realization and loss (innocence, culture, freedom) were not always so common.

Poetry commentary: Of candidates who selected the poem, most candidates grasped the broad situation, of the speaker going on a journey to a place which was once home. More challenging was precise geography and time, whether physical or emotional.

Despite this confusion about precise geographical place, the poem did seem to speak to many candidates something of journey, home, place and return (whether literal, mythical or other)

memory and time which was a positive even in the absence of some contextual awareness of Hong Kong, etc., which was by no means necessary for an appreciation of the poem. While many grasped the presence of these larger ideas, precisely what was being articulated about them could prove problematic with some confusion, too, about the precise interplay of past and present and the direction and time of travel. On some level, candidates were stronger in analyzing some of the features (color, imagery scale) and ideas of movement than offering an interpretation of purpose or impact. Interpretation could frequently “wander” from the detail of the poem or become exaggerated. Ideas such as urbanization or industrialization as destructive, for instance, could often consume a candidate that might prevent consideration of what the speaker might “know”/ “has changed”/ “can no longer see.” However, what informed examiners was the driving force of a response. In cases where candidates’ responses consisted of an overall architecture that consistently moved toward considerations of the manifest ideas of place, memory and time in the poem (in any number of ways from memory and loss to change to its impossibility and mythical connotation), side detours (for instance, a paragraph on the destruction of environment or refugee crises) were not seen as detracting unduly from overall understanding. Where the architecture of a script relied more on discrete understandings, however, (e.g. refugees, then environmental degradation, then change over time, or even just one of these foci), examiners tended to find that while we might be able to reward appreciation of choices, we could not reward overall understanding and interpretation as highly. While the term “architecture” might suggest a better fit in criterion C (and there certainly is overlap), we really meant whether there tended to be evidence of a cohesive link to the manifest thought and feeling explored in the poem rather than ideas prompted by isolated parts of it.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Commentary is meant to be an authentic engagement with literature that provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their intellectual agility with reading texts. Being taught to produce products that *sound like* commentary or literary criticism is rarely effective.
- Better commentaries always make sense and convey interpretations of the works that are heart-felt rather than forced. In some cases, this can be enhanced by focusing initially on the literal events/plot aspects and then searching for those strange moments before jumping immediately to more figurative intentions.
- Assist students in “relaxing” about producing *the meaning* of a text. Candidates can seem to stifle their own reading in an effort to produce a product they feel is expected of them when the goal of Paper 1 is to encourage independent reading and engagement of works.
- The best advice for teachers to help facilitate these skills is to expose students to a wide variety of texts and to work with more authentic experiences in working through unknown texts independently.
- Good commentaries incorporate a consideration of literary features as part of their larger reading/interpretation rather than as additional, supplementary material or as the

organizing principal for a response. Good commentaries include personal voice. Structure is something we all teach, but candidates should be encouraged to explore independently. Set—frequently in the form of mnemonics, abbreviations or acronyms of some sort—often stymie student work as much as support it.

- Terms and phrases should be meaningful to candidates. The use of features like tone, image and motif, especially, need to be treated precisely. Candidates need to understand what it actually means to “symbolize” or “be a theme” and this needs to be demonstrated in commentary. Further, if a candidate chooses to argue for “lexical field” or “blank verse,” they should reveal genuine understanding; terminology alone is not worthy of reward.
- Fluent, good quality writing does make a difference. Even candidates who were not able to extend the quality of their analysis were, with at least some level of general understanding, able to earn solid marks overall with good work in both organization and the use of language.
- Purpose/effect/significance always needs to be considered.
- Analysis needs to be precise. Support needs careful and considered elaboration. Even ideas assumed to be self-evident should not be treated as such and need to be “proven” with specific textual referencing and elaborate explanation as to both how and why it is used.
- Larger interpretations need to be supported by the larger text. Candidates should be encouraged to “plug their interpretations back into the text” in order to verify that they are still reasonable and not merely associative. An interpretation based on a single word, line or element/aspect will likely not reinsert very easily and might then be reexamined. Avoid considering possibilities of what might have been or what might later be (i.e. avoid hypothetical considerations outside of the context of the work).
- Avoid narration.
- Teach students to plan responses. Candidates who seek to write as much as possible and think via their writing are not always successful with their responses. Strong commentaries should convey a clear line of reasoning, argument and development.
- Introductions and conclusions that are meaningful and meaningfully connected to the works are valuable. A ready-made or hyperbolic introduction and simple repetition as conclusion is neither helpful nor helpful in developing an argument.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

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

General comments

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

There was quite a lot of misreading evident in both poetry and prose, but particularly the former. Some candidates seemed uncertain about how to approach unseen texts. It would therefore be helpful for candidates to be taught cohesive reading; that is, reading where every element counts and contributes to meaning. Some candidates concentrated on the potter and his art, thus missing the central analogy of relationships and their need for repair. Thus problems seemed to arise from insecure reading, which then had a ripple effect in terms of interpretation and analysis.

Another difficulty was keeping too close to a surface, literal reading, and not venturing into interpretation at all. There was a tendency to feature-spot literary devices but a failure to see their purpose in the text as a whole.

The poetry proved the more popular choice. It was better answered than the prose on the whole, but difficulties arose in both questions. For example, the analogy of the cup and human relationships in *The Joins* was not always elicited. The structure of the poem also proved difficult insofar as candidates offered very little in the way of interpretation. Only one candidate noticed the haiku-like structure of each stanza. Very few offered pertinent interpretations of the image of “webbing between forefinger and thumb”.

In the prose, the inherent sadness was sometimes missed, as was the mother's suicide, and the irony of the apparently romantic description of the coal town by night. Few candidates commented on the fact that the town is described at night, an important contributor to tone. In addition, the naïveté of the narrator in accepting the doctor's version of events and possible reasons for it escaped attention.

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

Candidates gave due consideration to the guiding questions and demonstrated a clear awareness of literary terminology. Many showed a good understanding of connotation of words such as “tentative” and “sprinkled” in the poem. Some drew attention to the placing of specific diction such as the use of “repair” at the end of line 8. The conversational and inclusive tone was also well-noted.

In the prose, good candidates understood the impact of the opening sentence “They're all dead now”. They made links between it and the isolated, industrialised town of New Waterford. They

recognised the predominance of black and white images, such as the black house dress and the white wood frame of the house.

There was some good close reading and careful consideration of ideas within both poetry and prose. Such candidates also used references to support ideas and these tended to be precise and well-chosen. Most candidates managed their time carefully, enabling them to consider the whole extract, even if detail was sometimes a little thin. They seemed to be aware of the focus of the examination as a literary analysis and offered interpretations that were mostly at least adequate. Candidates were, for the most part, able to structure an essay effectively. The inclusion of a plan would help to focus the response to a greater degree.

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

Criterion A: Understanding and Interpretation (Poem)

In order to achieve a good grade, candidates must score well on Criterion A, understanding and interpretation. This is crucial. Many candidates do well on Criteria C and D, scoring 4, even 5, but a mark of 2 or 3 on A creates a disparity.

To show good understanding, candidates must demonstrate a clear, relevant, detailed and comprehensive reading of the ideas within the poem. No stone should be left unturned. Nothing should be glossed over. All statements should be supported by a precise textual reference. For example, the use of “we” and “us” should indicate that two people are involved, also that the reader may be included. The position of “repair” at the end of line 8 creates emphasis on the theme and value of healing “the wounded edges”. To score well, the analogy of the broken cup and “shattered” relationships must be noted and explored. The last two stanzas stress the increase in value of a repaired relationship.

Some answers reflected a literal approach about mending pottery. Others explored layers of meaning and realised the symbolism of the broken cup which was then restored, and links with relationships. Some explored the intricacies of these ideas and moved away somewhat from close analysis. However, there were some excellent discussions about form and structure, the use of figurative language and the voice of the poem. Comments on versification were often precise and perceptive. The metaphor most often missed was the use of “gold” and its implication for adding value to the relationships.

Criterion A: Understanding and Interpretation (Prose)

Fewer candidates seemed to choose this option. However, there were many very good responses. More able candidates considered the use of the narrative voice and gave reasons for its apparent dispassionate re-telling of the family's woes. Setting was carefully considered and the use of metallic imagery – pewter, silver, as well as coal, emphasising the significance of the mine and apparent wealth it generated. These features were contrasted starkly with the lack of human life flourishing in the pictures. Only some understood the mother's true cause of death, but most gathered the impact of the tragic, sudden loss of three members of the family. The father was sometimes considered carefully, other times ignored, but better answers

considered him as a sort of mother substitute and someone kindly enough to let the child braid his hair, as a fond reminder of how the mother had once braided the children's hair.

Weaker candidates struggled a little to make sense of the relevance of the setting, though many saw the significance of the graveyard and the opening line of the text as foreshadowing events. There was confusion over the events surrounding the mother; some thought her death was to do with her burdensome work in the kitchen and the lack of women's rights.

Criterion B: Appreciation of the writer's choices (Poem)

This criterion evaluates the extent to which candidates can discuss stylistic effects and devices and their contribution to meaning. Some candidates actually achieve a higher score here by virtue of spending more time on these and showing clear appreciation of their effects, but sometimes at the expense of a cohesive reading of the poem's content. It can of course work in reverse, that content is explored at the expense of discussion of the writer's choices.

The majority of candidates understood the extended metaphor and the link to relationships. Most were able to discuss their ideas quite thoughtfully as they developed the discussion through the poem. There were some thoughtful responses to the final stanza although many struggled to make a clear comment on the effect.

In summary, there was evidence of good, close reading in the case of the poetry resulting in clear understanding of the images and the link between *kintsugi* and human relationships, the importance of the care taken to repair both cup and relationships and the "value added" in both cases.

Criterion B: Appreciation of the writer's choices (Prose)

Many candidates either treated the descriptive setting as separate to the whole or ignored it in their analysis virtually completely. Few were able to draw any relationship to the story as a whole. A few picked up on "the sighing sea" as reflective of the sadness that ensues, but few candidates could select further parallels to comment on. There was a handful of more effective essays which analysed the rich imagery and with some thought commented on its irony as well as linking the tone to the remainder of the extract.

Some candidates made reasonable interpretations of the narrator's detached tone, but there were some misinterpretations of the tone of the speaker as being cold or uncaring.

Very few picked up on the suicide of the mother or any link to the children's deaths, or the ethnicity of the mother.

On the credit side some recognised the cinematic technique of zooming in from a wide to a narrow perspective of the individuals in the family.

Criterion C: Organization (Prose and Poetry)

To score well on this criterion, ideas must be presented in a coherent sequence and demonstrate a logical progression. Each new thought builds on the previous one and there should be no repetition.

Some candidates did very well on this criterion and supported their ideas with pertinent textual reference. Others, perhaps because of time pressures, rushed into their discussion without planning, or conversely, stayed very close to the text without offering any analysis or reflection.

A problem also noted was that some candidates imposed an interpretation on the extracts, thereby omitting some elements which did not fit this interpretation. This may have been the result of hurried reading. For example, some thought that the prose extract was a critique of industrialisation.

Understandably, many candidates chose to structure their responses by following the ideas in the poem. This approach was satisfactory provided they had first read the poem at least twice and had a clear view of the way in which it develops.

Criterion D: Language (Prose and Poetry)

This criterion offers weaker candidates the chance to improve their scores. Many can write well but their ideas are not always pertinent.

A wide range of achievement was noted in this criterion, but low marks were rare. To score well, candidates should have a reasonable mastery of grammatical structures. For example, they should know that each sentence must have a clear subject and a finite verb, and that these should agree in number. The sentence should also be punctuated correctly. The sentences should then be formed into paragraphs which demonstrate some cohesion of ideas, and ideally, paragraphs should be linked. Many candidates use “furthermore” with some effect, but “however” is often a stumbling block to accuracy.

Many candidates write with admirable fluency and variety. Their work evinces a quiet authority and their command of an appropriate academic register enables them to score a mark of 5.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Structuring essays is always something worth revisiting. Structures that work less well are purely chronological leading to the need to repeat points unnecessarily, or by a format which leads to a paragraph on content, a paragraph on structure, a paragraph on language and so on, with little linking across the essay. The best structures use the guiding questions as the focus and interweave analysis of language and structure with the response to the question focus.

It is important to remind candidates to read the whole text for commentary and consider it as an integrated piece. Paragraphs, or stanzas are not isolated individually from the rest. Ideas at the beginning, for example, will be connected to or reflected in some way to the whole and the interpretation needs to take account of this.

Higher level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 11	12 – 14	15 – 17	18 – 20	21 - 25

General comments

In general, examiners felt that candidates were well prepared for the demands of the examination paper and had a good understanding of how to critically approach texts. Candidates showed strong knowledge of the works studied and most candidates expressed themselves in clear, well-written and purposefully organized essays. At the same time, some of the weaknesses noticed by examiners point to some larger issues related to the study of works of literature during the course of the Diploma Program. Examiners frequently noted the following: knowledge of texts but uncertain understanding, the use of tangential “prepared” or standard responses, and a lack of focus on the question or parts of the question. The various areas of strength in successful papers and areas for growth in weaker papers, perhaps point to larger disciplinary issues. Very successful candidates seemed able to closely focus on the question, provide context for the elements of the work under discussion, and were able to see their works in the fresh light of an interesting question. Some of the best understanding seems to be shown when the works are a vehicle for approaching the interesting problem of the question rather than as the sole focus of the response. In a sense, the questions on the paper should be seen as an opportunity to discuss literary problems (using texts that are well-known and well-understood by the candidates) rather than as an opportunity to show how much the candidates “know” about a work. Past subject reports have recommended “shaking up” the book list and using less-frequently studied works. While this suggestion is sometimes criticized as being a complaint of bored examiners, it is actually a recommendation that might allow students to see that their job isn’t to memorize works, critical approaches and standard views in order to present them on the exam (in a way that is forced to a question), but to approach texts in a fresh way, build their own understandings of them, build an understanding of the key concepts and modes of inquiry in literary study, and then demonstrate this broader understanding in the exam. While any text can allow a student to push to this kind of understanding and many candidates were very successful using quite familiar works (see below), sometimes a new text may help students to see that they should bring their own thinking to bear in relation to both the questions and the works. A candidate thinking, “I must mention the lampshade” in *A Streetcar Named Desire* or “don’t forget to discuss “The American Dream” in *The Great Gatsby*,” may be starting the examination at a disadvantage. Ultimately, paper 2 is a test of facility with the methods of the discipline, the ability to recognize and respond to disciplinary issues (through having been exposed to like issues) as opposed to a test of subject matter.

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

As mentioned above, the candidates were well prepared for the demands of the paper, even if at times responses indicated some lack of understanding of works. The key areas of difficulty, then, that seemed to make candidates stumble, were the following:

- Inattention to the question or to both parts of a question. Candidates, for example, may have identified barriers in question three, but were unable to discuss their importance to the “progress or impact of a work.”
- Using a pre-packaged response to answer a question. An example would be the following thesis: “Both McEwan’s *Atonement* and Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* explore the theme of love as the narrators relate a tale of disappointment and regret. These books are about falling in love and losing love and show us many motifs.” Many essays give the sense of being rehearsed responses alluding to the question as an afterthought.
- Lacking a coherent argument. Many candidates seem to launch too quickly into an essay that either has not considered the subtleties of the question or that has not considered various elements of the works in order to devise a coherent (or beyond that, nuanced) response.

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

Many of the comments above are generated by examiners in response to not only seeing a wide variety of responses but to seeing a large number of competent responses that are juxtaposed to some excellent and, at times, inspiring work. Like all teachers, we wonder what it is that might help students write something that is considered and interesting, that walks us through an argument, and that understands the thoughts and feelings of a work. So, we should note that a large number of candidates are clearly and solidly well prepared for all areas of the examination. Most candidates answered appropriate questions in relation to the genre studied, showed adequate knowledge of the works, understood the need to compare and considered the generic conventions of the works. Candidates also have a clear understanding of the basics of organization. Almost every candidate at the very least offers an introduction, a body and a conclusion or some way to help us enter a response and follow the steps of an argument.

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

1. Weaker answers often focused on any kind of conflict between characters, with the merest nod (or not even that) towards ‘competing truths or beliefs’. There was a surprisingly widespread failure to focus meaningfully on ‘dramatic tension’: I suspect that many had not been introduced to the concept, or taught to recognize how it is triggered, its function, or how resolved.

2. The more popular of the drama questions, with candidates for the most part ignoring deceit as a device and simply focusing on the deceit or false impressions and their effect (an approach that was allowed by examiners and possible in terms of the question). A handful of responses explored the playwright employing deceit as a tool to intentionally create a false impression or as one candidate claimed, a 'dramatic red herring.'
3. This question evoked some thoughtful but also some convoluted responses (the latter the consequence of trying to force a prepackaged essay on, say, props or diction into the idea of barriers). Too few actually defined their terms and so often a 'symbolic barrier' became a generic obstacle. One memorable response explored the physical, almost claustrophobic, setting that surrounded the three characters in *Master Harold*, recreating the physical boundaries in their memory of the Jubilee Boarding house and again in their imagining of the ballroom competition. This was then compared to the stifling and confined setting of Stella and Stanley's apartment in 'Streetcar.' These physical 'walls' then morphed into cultural and emotional barrier- an example of a candidate looking at a question fresh on the day.
4. Though there was some difficulty with this question, many candidates were able to show strong knowledge of their works and the ways in which poets structure their works. The widespread tendency, though, was just to say 'Yes, and here are the images/snapshots used in these particular poems'. Some went further and looked at some poems with a developed narration or plot and other poems that work through images. But the real force of this question – whether the creation of images/snapshots is the basic structural principle of poems, even perhaps those that contain a narrative – was beyond the more than the most perceptive responses.
5. There was a broad range of ways to read this question, sticking to a strict definition of persona or considering persona in relation to the presumed voice of the poet. While some candidates saw this question as an opportunity to offer up lengthy biographical details of poets, others thoughtfully considered the ways in which a persona was created. Once again, the second part of the question ("in order to explore... his/her world") was comparatively neglected.
6. This question was relatively straightforward. At the same time, while candidates were able to find many examples of repetition, the more difficult aspect was constructing an argument in relation to how this repetition serves to reinforce or shape meaning. Candidates who made quick assertions in relation to effect were less successful than those who closely examined the instances of repetition in relation to the works as a whole.
7. This question led many to simply track a character's narrative (more descriptive than analytical) and without a sense of the 'initial lack of understanding.' At the same time, considering the right narrators or characters, many candidates were able to show an understanding of this kind of development in a narrative.
8. This was the least popular question in the section. Though there were some unconvincing arguments for the disturbing nature of certain elements of content or language in some works, there were other essays that developed interesting responses into works such as *Beloved*, *A Clockwork Orange* or *Slaughterhouse Five*.

9. This was a relatively straightforward question, though it did reveal some misunderstanding of the terms symbol and motif. Allowing for some leeway in these definitions, some candidates developed interesting arguments while others simply listed symbols along with quick, assertive statements in relation to their importance.

There were too few responses to questions 10, 11 and 12 to allow for general comment.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Based on the above comments, it is clear that students are being given the important basic skills for success and are learning how to approach works with a purpose. The following suggestions are more related to teaching for flexibility and inquiry:

- Encourage students to keep in mind that they are not “learning” a particular work per se, but are learning to think about literature and the problems of reading, interpretation and criticism.
- Push for diversity in text selection and try to ensure an appropriate challenge while still allowing for access.
- Allow for play with texts and variety in types of written responses to texts (personal journals, short responses, pastiche).
- While practicing reading and parsing questions may be important, the heart of the problem may be in somehow viewing a question as an interesting problem rather than as a “trick” or as a platform for the student’s demonstration of knowledge of a work.
- Avoid at all costs formulae for analysis (SCASI, SPECSLIMS, LIST, SLAPP, etc.). These tend to be too restrictive in commentary and misleading in approaching any text. There are two questions for candidates to ask themselves throughout the course: what problems do literary practitioners (professors, scholars, teachers, students, reviewers) concern themselves with (conceptual concerns such as representation, character building, form) and what problems does an individual text raise?
- Beware a strict organizational principle that may also limit students to broad statements and assertions rather than a developed consideration of subtleties.
- As a teacher, consider ways in which students can be moved from learning subject matter toward being familiarized with the way of thinking in literary studies and, in Theory of Knowledge fashion, towards considering *why* we approach texts and certain questions about texts in certain ways.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 10	11 – 13	14 – 17	18 – 20	21 – 25

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

In spite of the general high quality of the work presented in this session, there remain two areas where significant room for improvement can be noted: responding directly and fully to the question (Criterion B) and functionally integrating into the response the author's use of literary device, not only in dealing with the question but also in the overall impact of the work (Criterion C). Suggestions for possible improvement can be found later in this report.

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

This session has provided a great deal of evidence that many fine teachers and many dedicated candidates have been hard at work in preparation for this exercise. Seldom did a candidate appear who did not have at least reasonable understanding of the works and of the requirements of the tasks at hand. In the end, the results appeared more to be the reflection of the capabilities of the individual candidate than of identifiable pockets of weaknesses in any particular centre or genre. Candidates appear, by and large, to have given up the idea of attempting to deal with more than two major works or more than three poems. Overall that development has helped to improve the general quality of the responses in that fewer candidates appear to score lower than potentially deserved in Criterion A because the treatment of each work has been too thin.

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

Q1. It was not difficult to find characters in conflict, but the clash was more often reported as one of personalities, goals or values rather than expanding those approaches into some larger form that could be seen as 'truths or beliefs'. Even when the candidate called any of the above 'truths or beliefs', seldom were they specifically delineated. Still, the terms 'differences' and 'clashes' from the prompt did appear in contexts that often showed good knowledge and understanding of the plays, if somewhat incomplete treatments of the prompt itself. Too many responses simply made 'dramatic tension' the focus of the response regardless of the source of that tension.

Q2. This was the most popular question for this genre. Candidates demonstrated a wide range of possible relevant approaches to deceit and false impressions including unintended false impression and self-deceit. The sense of pretence and of the covering up of truths is so prevalent in so many of the works studied that at a certain point it appeared that some candidates began relying simply on a retelling of the plot during the narration of which the return to the question was often left aside.

Q3. The breadth of this prompt may have been part of its undoing, or perhaps the concept of an emotional or symbolic barrier was too ambiguous for candidates. Candidates found it difficult to keep focus on whatever claim concerning barriers had been made, *if* one had been made, in the introduction. Examiners quickly became aware of the quicksand-like dangers involved here and tried to extend a hand of rescue through tolerance in attempting to find credit where it could be given. This is naturally the case with all responses: examiners look for what is said, not what is not. This may have been especially the case here. This is not to say that some candidates did not do well. Those that adopted a relatively narrow focus and maintained that focus produced responses that needed no extended tolerance.

Q4. The most successful responses here generally came from those responses in which the candidate argued that a series of snapshots (usually illustrated by imagery) combined to create a narrative. This approach more or less covered the territory and gave candidates a number of directions for relevant discussion. Sometimes candidates also argued successfully for simply the snapshot or narrative approach although this required a more judicious selection of evidence than the combined snapshot/narration direction did. The less successful candidates either avoided the question by means of producing a series of mini-commentaries or seemed to take a stance in the introduction that was then either abandoned or unsubstantiated in the course of the response.

Q5. This popular prompt was not as successful as might have been hoped by the many who appeared to put their faith in it. In short, if the candidate clearly understood what is meant by 'persona' and attempted to comment on its nature as indicated by the content of the poem, the result reflected an acceptably relevant response to the prompt. A number of good responses addressed the works of Carol Ann Duffy, Grace Nichols, Thomas Hardy and/or Seamus Heaney. The less relevant approaches often confounded poet or character created in the poem with the persona. That the two are the same can well be argued in some instances. However, in many of those cases the connection between the persona and author or character was, more often than not, not made clear.

Q6. Candidates choosing this question produced responses that did not lack in examples of repetition. However, the link of many examples – such as anaphora, sound devices and/or initial and final lines/thoughts – were not convincingly presented as contributors to 'possible meanings'. More often the effect had something to do with tone, atmosphere or mood which could have been, but were not always, used as pathways to meaning. Even when the possible central idea of the poem was stated, the connections to repetition were either not treated or underplayed. Candidates who did not know poems in detail should never have tried this question. Some candidates could not remember whether a line or phrase was repeated once, twice or never.

Q7. Since so many candidates deal with the *Bildungsroman* or often recognize the changes in character on a less broad scale, one would have thought that this prompt was eminently accessible. And yet, it did not produce the abundance of good responses one might have expected. Again, the pull of narration seemed to work against the candidate in too many cases. It is inevitable that some telling of situation is essential in approaching the various states of the characters involved. It was sometimes successfully argued that a character's development of self-understanding was not a matter of ever lacking it entirely but that the understanding simply changed over time. Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* were three examples where the need for narration is almost required if 'progression' is to be shown and yet where too often the analysis did not transcend that narration in order to draw conclusions on the state of 'self-discovery' or self-understanding.

Q8. The ideas of disturbing content or revolting language would seem to be wide enough a set of parameters to encourage candidates to find relevant elements in their texts. It would appear, however, that our candidates are not easily disturbed by content or revolted by language as very few candidates opted for this prompt. Some texts chosen to be discussed here included *1984*, *The Things They Carried*, *A Handmaid's Tale* and stories by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Even here with plenty to disturb a reader, the responses more often reproduced the themes or plots of the works rather than clearly identifying the elements in either of these elements that the candidate found disturbing. Even if 'disturbing' was associated with elements of the text, it was seldom clear why the candidate found them disturbing. As in so many of the prompts, the direct response to the prompt may have been weak, but the stronger answers went into detail about how the shock response was manipulated.

Q9. The seemingly straightforward question on 'recurring motifs or symbols' did not always produce straightforward responses, a result which indicated that candidates often were not able to distinguish between a motif (sometimes interpreted as 'motivation'), a symbol and an element in a work that may have passing symbolic value in developing character or setting but does not rise to the importance of a symbol necessary to understand the themes and central concerns of the work. As a result, in the problematic cases everything and anything became a symbol. An additional weakness was the fact that sometimes a feature of the 'recurring motif' identified was that it often did not 'recur' and isolated examples were offered.

Q10-12. Only a relatively few papers addressing these prompts were encountered. Regardless of the prompt chosen, the non-question-specific remarks in this report apply to these responses just as fully as they do to the responses treating Questions 1 through 9.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Criterion A: Many more candidates seem to recognize that a complete response to the prompt also involves revealing an understanding of the larger ideas of each work. When these ideas are approached through the question, then the results can be satisfying indeed. However, many candidates list the themes as larger concerns of each work (valid enough) but only as a list in the introduction or as something added on to the end of any given paragraph without having shown how the prompt or the focus of the paragraph logically leads to the restatement of theme/larger idea. In many cases the theme is not the larger idea in itself; the stance on the

theme is closer to the larger idea. If the 'theme' is death, then the larger idea might be the attitude towards death as it occurs in the poetry of Plath, Keats or Dickinson.

Criterion B. Many candidates come to the exam with important preconceived ideas about each work that too many of them then make the focus of the response regardless of the question. On the one hand, the presence of these ideas in the response (even when not directly tied to the prompt) can show some understanding of the works themselves. On the other hand, examiners have commented on finding material (such as general background or biographical information) that often impedes candidates both in responding directly to the question as well as in showing relevant understanding of the works. It would be negligent of a teacher not to lead candidates into an understanding of a work's distinguishing qualities, but it is crucial also to give candidates the knowledge, understanding and confidence to forge a new path into each work in response to the prompt. This ability can be developed through candidates' practising using their works to respond to a variety of different types of questions, possibly drawn from past exams. Often less than optimally effective are also those cases where candidates appear to approach every text with beliefs and causes, elements important to candidates in a contemporary way that may not be the center of the works themselves: such as the oppression of women, or some other focus group; or the futility of war; or the importance of love. In their thinking as they approach the prompt, candidates need a flexibility of critical thinking that can be supported by detailed evidence that they use on this occasion and perhaps no other. Responses that provide the same evidence no matter the question evidence training but not necessarily critical thinking. Some tips to help candidates avoid wandering away from the question include highlighting key words, only answering if they fully understand the question, and referring back to the question throughout the response, especially in the transitions and conclusion.

Criterion C: Many prompts contain literary terms that the candidates are asked to address while others do not specify devices. In the case of prompts that direct candidates toward the discussion of one or more literary devices, it is important to remember that addressing these devices alone, even if that is well done, will not likely result in a strong mark for Criterion C unless other devices that support that central argument are integrated into the responses, both by identifying them and exploring their influence on the prompt and on the work as a whole. For candidates choosing a prompt that does not specify device, the challenge is not less; but it is perhaps less likely to be overlooked because of the nature of the prompt. Candidates doing well on Criterion B in terms of required attention to device do not automatically do well on Criterion C. As much as possible candidates are not doubly rewarded, or penalized, across the criteria.

Some suggestions for attention may seem rather picky. However, as long as we wish our candidates to present themselves not only as creative and critical thinkers, we also want them to show a concise and accurate control of the language.

No doubt teachers are confronted on a daily basis by the same types of weaknesses in expression that examiners comment on at the end of each session. So it should be clear what needs attention in terms of spelling, punctuation, syntax and other basic focuses of most lessons in grammar. By the time candidates begin the Diploma Programme, they have probably already developed a general level of fluency and ease in the language about which little can be done in terms of improvement during the two years of the program. However, the

little niceties – including the matters mentioned below – can and should be worked on because a control of the mechanics of the language can well result in a stronger mark in Criterion E.

Is subject/verb agreement a thing of the past? Are possessives antiquated? Does spelling count? The relevant forms of grammatical expression may, in fact, be on their way out as language is always evolving; but the standard rules still apply as far as we know.

An accurate identification of the theme can seldom occur in one word. For example, ‘war’ in itself is not very effectively described as a theme. It is the stance that the work promotes on war that is more likely to be the theme: the effect of war on man’s psyche, or the use of war as a political tool to create loyalty to the leader.

As we go further and further into the digital age, handwriting is becoming less and less legible. More and more requests for the use of a word processor ought to be made. The evidence of the need is inordinately clear. Its use can only help the candidate.

Both questions 6 and 9 addressed the element of repetition. It is a phenomenon that no doubt is regularly commented on in the course of a candidate’s writing over the two-year period. Here is a point that almost every candidate addressing repetition should note: an element that occurs twice in a work/poem is repeated ‘once’, not ‘twice’.

It would be nice for candidates to use the conclusion as a way to reveal the importance of the technique/element under discussion in the chosen works or for the conclusion to develop the themes of the works in a meaningful way.