



MAJLIS PEPERIKSAAN MALAYSIA  
*Malaysian Examinations Council*



**Laporan Peperiksaan**

# **STPM 2023**



**Literature in English  
(920)**



### OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 1 2023, 71 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 80.28% of them obtained a full pass.

The percentage of each grade is as follows:

| Grade      | A    | A-   | B+   | B     | B-    | C+    | C     | C-   | D+   | D    | F    |
|------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|
| Percentage | 1.41 | 0.00 | 4.23 | 18.31 | 14.08 | 29.58 | 12.68 | 7.63 | 4.58 | 6.10 | 1.41 |

### PAPER 920/1 (POEMS AND MALAYSIAN SHORT STORIES)

#### RESPONSES OF CANDIDATES

##### *General comments*

This paper is based on selected poems prescribed in the syllabus as well as short stories taken from the Malaysian Short Stories. There are a total of four questions divided into three sections. Section A: Critical Appreciation provides candidates with the choice of answering a question based on the poems or the short stories. Sections B (Poems) and C (Short Stories) do not provide options and candidates must attempt the question set accordingly.

In general, the questions are clear in how they are phrased, as well as in terms of what they require of the candidates. They are not overly challenging, but they do demand that the candidates have a good overall understanding of the texts, as well as of some central literary elements and techniques such as imagery, characterisation, and theme. This question paper has achieved a good balance between clarity and complexity.

##### *Comments on individual questions*

#### SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

##### Question 1

Question 1 presents a short poem, *Love's Philosophy* by P. B. Shelley. The question asks candidates to examine the use of imagery in this poem. Candidates need to be able to identify the poem's main idea – essentially, the poet shows many examples of how various elements in nature 'mix' and 'mingle' and uses this as an argument for his lover to kiss him. If they cannot do this, then their discussion of the imagery will not be contextualised. They must be able to talk about how (for example) stanza two contains tactile imagery (kiss, clasp), which points to the speaker's endgame (to kiss and clasp his lover). They should also point out that all the imagery is related to nature (mountains, rivers, ocean, wind, moon and sun, flowers, etc.), as the speaker is trying to convince his lover that it would be natural for them to kiss.

Example of an excellent answer shows that the candidate can go beyond just normal ideas of love between two people. For example, the candidate explains that the idea of ‘the winds of heaven’ mixing according to some divine law, suggests that all people have a divinely ordained soulmate. The candidate is also able to not just identify ‘enjambment’, but also to explain that this technique shows that the speaker’s feelings are spilling over, in the same way that the line spills over into the next line.

Average candidates could have written a lot more, but they did not provide detailed, analytical answers. For example, one of the average candidates began the answer to Question 1 with an explanation of imagery and what it is used for. Some of the discussion of imagery is acceptable. This candidate talks about visual imagery (rivers and oceans mingling), and ties this to the idea that different parts of nature need each other, just like human beings. The candidate tries to explain that the line ‘moonbeams kiss the sea’ is an example of kinesthetic imagery – but it is more visual. While the candidates do identify images, they do not do a good job of explaining how the images work.

## **Question 2**

The question focuses on a short story which talks about familial love and sense of duty. The question asks about precisely this central point – candidates are asked to identify how the characters are related, and how their values are revealed by how they function in terms of these relationships. Candidates should be able to point out that ‘the man’ is the central character in the story, and that the other main characters mentioned in this extract are his wife, daughter (Sumitry) and son (Raju). Sumitry and Raju’s own families are mentioned peripherally. In terms of how their behaviour to each other reveals their values, the candidates should be able to point out that the main value the family espouses is of caring for each other despite all the burdens and barriers they face. The old man is irritable and short-tempered, but this is because he is in pain and tired. His family are worn out looking after him, but still do not forsake him. The candidates should be able to point out that their relationship is a complex mix of love, pain, and duty.

A good answer for Question 2 referred to several different values held by the family, and then ties these values to the relationships among the family members. For example, the candidate refers to the ‘burden’ of looking after the old man, and links it with the idea that Raju’s sons ‘walked around as if with loads on their backs’, i.e., as if he is a physical burden to them, not just a mental/spiritual burden.

In an average answer for Question 2, the candidate organises the answer well, stating each ‘family value’ in a paragraph and explaining it through incidents from the story. For example, to explain the value of ‘obaisance’ (which is assumed to mean obedience), the candidate explains that the family does whatever the father wants regardless of how difficult it is. However, the answer does not rise above the average because the English proficiency is somewhat poor, and the analysis does not go beyond surface level.

## **SECTION B: Poems**

### **Question 3**

For question 3, candidates are required to show how attitudes towards youth and old age are shown in two poems. There are several poems which cover this theme, so candidates should not have any issues finding suitable poems for the answer. In looking at how attitudes towards old age and youth are shown, candidates should examine the ways in which the poets use literary techniques and elements to support or show their attitudes. It is not enough to just explain that the poet says a certain thing

about the subject. For e.g., they might point out that in Jenny Joseph's poem 'Warning', she uses visual imagery (bright colours such as purple and red) and taste imagery (brandy, sausages) to create a surprising vision of old age as being a time of excess and enjoyment, not restraint. Or they can show how in Sonnet 73, Shakespeare uses nature imagery (yellow leaves, twilight, sunset, ashes) to express his sense of old age as being a prelude to death. They should then conclude that both poets display very different attitudes towards old age.

The good candidate chooses poems which show very contrasting attitudes towards youth and old age. The candidate writes an introductory paragraph which briefly explains the differences in attitude displayed by both poets. The candidate explains that the poem 'Warning' is lighthearted and focuses on the liberation of growing older. The candidate could stand to add more detail. For example, they say that Yeats 'uses diction to express his love' but does not give examples.

The discussion of Question 3 by the average candidate is shallow. For example, when talking about the poem 'On Growing Old', the candidate states that the poet talks about what is lost when old age takes over but does not realise that the poet also sees some beauty in old age, with the speaker being willing to trade youth for wisdom – so even as the night/death draws near, 'the night will blossom as the rose'. The candidate has missed a whole dimension of what the poet is saying.

## **SECTION C: Malaysian Short Stories**

### **Question 4**

For Question 4, candidates are required to consider how isolation is depicted through the characters in two stories. In order to do this, candidates should be able to discuss the relationships shown in the stories, and examine not just why the characters are isolated, but how that isolation is shown. For example, in 'As the Buffaloes Bathed', they can point out that the old man is never actually alone – he is always surrounded by his family. However, because he is so dependent, and because he is tired of his suffering, he is unable to really relate to his family members, and so he feels alone, isolated by pain and age. It is not enough to just show that they are isolated. It is necessary to examine the writer's techniques.

In one of the stronger responses to this question, the issue of isolation in Question 4 is dealt with in a complex manner. For example, the candidate points out in relation to 'No Visitors Allowed' that isolation comes about both because the narrator's father is dying, and because the narrator chooses to be alone sometimes, to be able to deal with his emotions. It is, therefore, not just a negative thing.

In an average answer for Question 4, the candidate shows some insight, explaining that the old man in 'As the Buffaloes Bathed' feels isolated despite being surrounded by family. The response to 'Pasang', however, is less insightful. Chranpal is put forward as an example of an isolated character – but rather than being isolated, Chranpal is just frustrated about not having enough money for a top. He has a family and a group of friends who welcome him. Candidates do need to learn how to choose better texts for their responses.

### OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 2 2023, 68 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 86.76% of them obtained a full pass.

The percentage of each grade is as follows:

| Grade      | A     | A–   | B+    | B     | B–    | C+    | C    | C–   | D+   | D    | F    |
|------------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Percentage | 14.71 | 7.35 | 14.71 | 19.12 | 16.18 | 11.76 | 2.94 | 0.00 | 4.41 | 1.47 | 7.35 |

### PAPER 920/2 (PLAYS)

#### RESPONSES OF CANDIDATES

##### *General comments*

This paper is based on two plays i.e., Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Each play contributed two questions for a total of four questions in three sections. Section A: Critical Appreciation provides a candidate with the choice of answering a question based either on *Twelfth Night* or *A Raisin in the Sun*. Sections B (*Twelfth Night*) and C (*A Raisin in the Sun*) do not provide options and candidates must answer the question set.

Most candidates' essays are structured to include an introductory paragraph – with the majority also including some form of thesis statement, body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph. The good candidates were able to provide between three or four well-developed points together with the relevant textual evidence. But the average and weaker candidates were not able to do this; they were able to provide only one or two points of argument. Their answers also tend to be superficial, and their thread of argument disjointed. Some candidates were also not able to effectively incorporate the excerpts in their answers for Section A. Overall, answers from average and weak candidates show lack of critical insights on the text. Many candidates – especially those who were unsure as to what the question wanted– resorted to a general retelling of the plot or writing about the main themes of the play in the hope that the examiners will find something relevant in what they had written and give them marks.

##### *Comments on individual questions*

#### SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

##### Question 1

The question required the candidate to pick out and differentiate Orsino's ideas and perceptions regarding how men love as opposed to how women love; the candidates also must utilise the correct quotes from the excerpt to back up their argument. For example, Orsino argues that the love women

have for men can be shallow or superficial. As Orsino puts it, love lies in the “palate” not the “liver”. He goes on to say that men’s love towards women goes much deeper. To him, men’s love towards women is fresh and robust, and does not prize “not quantity or dirty lands.” In addition, he avows that his love for Olivia is incomparable to anything else in the world; only his feelings for Olivia are true.

Many candidates overlooked the fact that the question is in two parts. Many candidates lost marks when they did not provide an answer to the second part which is about whether the candidate agree or disagree with Orsino’s perceptions about love. For this part of the question, the candidate can either agree or disagree with Orsino’s perceptions about love. They must provide ‘evidence’ to back up their argument, based on their personal viewpoint to get marks. If for example, the candidate decide to disagree with Orsino, the most obvious evidence would be to use what Viola/Cesario said in the play to rebut Orsino’s arguments.

The weaker candidates were not able to satisfactorily deconstruct and analyse the excerpt to differentiate between the love men have for women and the way women feel love for men. Weaker candidates tend to focus on a descriptive summary or superficial reading of the excerpt and/or not using examples from the excerpt to back-up their line of argument. Those who did not have the time to study the text in detail, resorted to a cursory discussion of themes that is related to love.

## **Question 2**

The question requires the candidates to show how the playwright presents the conflict. Asagai does most of the talking in the excerpt and thus it is important that the candidates be able to identify what arguments Asagai uses and how he says it, to persuade Beneatha to not give up on her dream.

Most candidates did quite well for this question, as they were able to highlight and link the series of arguments Asagai used and how he used them to dissipate Beneatha’s anger and rebuild her dream. By the end of the excerpt, Beneatha appears confused about her feelings and says she needs to sit down and think. Yet the audience can gauge from Asagai’s words that he is quietly hopeful that Beneatha will eventually follow him and his dream. Clues to characters’ actions and emotions could be found in the stage directions, and the good candidates were able to put them to good use in their answers. There were a few good candidates who had a slightly different spin on the excerpt when they couched the conflict in terms of education and how it can bring about a change in the mindset of both Africans and African Americans.

Some average and the weaker candidates spent a lot of their time summarising what went on, rather than focusing on how Asagai’s series of arguments helped resolve, rebuild, and renew Beneatha’s sense of self. The weaker candidates were not able to satisfactorily break down the excerpt to show the emotional interplay between the two characters, to explain why they felt the emotions. Describing actions rather than analysing the arguments between the characters weakens the argument.

Quite a few weak candidates relied on a superficial reading of the excerpt and/or not using examples from the excerpt to back-up their line of argument. A small minority resorted to a cursory discussion of the main themes of the play.

## **Comments on Individual Questions**

### **SECTION B: William Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night***

#### **Question 3**

For question 3, the question requires candidates to discuss the portrayal of Sir Andrew and Feste in *Twelfth Night*. All candidates are required to answer this question. The question is quite straightforward and easy, as the candidate must focus on only two characters i.e., Feste and Sir Andrew Aguecheek. The candidate must carefully choose suitable examples and quotes from the play to strengthen his/her arguments regarding how the two characters are portrayed.

Shakespeare often used Fools in his plays, with the comedy *Twelfth Night* being especially filled with a Fool, quite a few fools and sometimes foolish characters like Malvolio, Sir Andrew, Olivia and Orsino. The candidates who did well for this question were able to identify and differentiate between the roles/functions that fools and foolish people play in *Twelfth Night*. For example, both the characters of Feste and Sir Andrew are used by Shakespeare to provide comedic relief in the play. Sir Andrew is clearly a dim-witted foolish person who becomes the center of ridicule to Sir Toby's revelries and a character whose denigration is amusing. He was easily manipulated by Sir Toby into believing that he could be a potential suitor for Olivia. Feste is clearly the most witty, intelligent person and far wiser than his masters. He can see the true nature of those around him, mocking their foibles and flaws, leading to the comic resolution of events. The good candidates were also able to provide relevant examples from the play to back up their argument.

A good way to study and revise for a literature exam is to actively make their own personal notes when breaking down the play into its constituent parts, and practice writing timed essays. Many average and weak candidates however, tended to fall back on what they had memorised about the characters of Feste the Fool and Sir Andrew from (online) study guides and regurgitated what they remembered, with little attempt to adapt it to the precise needs of the question.

### **SECTION C: Lorraine Hansberry: *A Raisin in the Sun***

#### **Question 4**

The question requires candidates to do three things i.e., 1) identify their specific dreams, 2) briefly detail how and/or why their dreams got deferred and 3) discuss whether the dreams were left dried up like raisins (i.e., abandoned) or did their dream breakdown and/or 'explode' a deeply held assumption (e.g., gender stereotypes) or cultural myth (e.g., blacks are poor). They also need to decide how relevant the statement is to the dreams held by Walter and Beneatha.

The key to doing well for this question is to 1) identify their specific dreams, 2) briefly detail how and/or why their dreams got deferred and 3) discuss whether the dreams were left dried up like raisins (i.e., abandoned) or did their dream breakdown and/or 'explode' a deeply held assumption (e.g., gender roles) or cultural myth (e.g., blacks are not as clever as whites)? The statement is very clearly relevant to Beneatha's and Walter's dreams.

The good candidates correctly identified both Walter's and Beneatha's dreams and briefly explained how and/or why their dreams got deferred. They also correctly argued that Walter's dream of material wealth shriveled up like a raisin when he discarded it. Towards the end of the play, he matures and evolved into a person that eventually chose to stand in solidarity with his family to fight social and racial injustice in 1950s America. Beneatha's dream of becoming a doctor and saving her race from



ignorance is definitely worthy and a game changer, yet it appeared to hit a brick wall when Walter lost the insurance money. It was clearly a difficult task as she also faced gender stereotyping and racial discrimination in achieving her dream. She even appeared to give up on her dream. However, her deepening relationship with Asagai opened her eyes to an alternative and alluring new dream of going to Africa to reconnect to her African roots, and using her medical knowledge to affect meaningful change there. It's not clear by the end of the play whether she will leave with Asagai, but she is clearly hopeful again. A candidate had a nice conclusion for this question. This candidate wrote that "even though both Beneatha's and Walter's dream were deferred, they both can look forward to leading a better life as a family. They are part of a strong family that can face future obstacles."

Many average to weak candidates see the phrase 'dream deferred' in the question and they immediately start writing; first by identifying Beneatha's and Walter's dream and then go on to provide a blow-by-blow account to explain in great detail the reasons and events that led to their dream becoming deferred. Those that went down this route lost marks as they had not linked the first half of the statement to the second half of the statement i.e. "Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? ... or does it explode?". The candidates also did not consider how relevant is this statement to the dreams of Beneatha and Walter.

### OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 3 2023, 64 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 82.81% of them obtained a full pass.

The percentage of each grade is as follows:

| Grade      | A     | A-    | B+   | B    | B-    | C+   | C    | C-   | D+   | D    | F    |
|------------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Percentage | 31.25 | 10.94 | 7.81 | 1.56 | 17.19 | 7.81 | 6.25 | 3.13 | 1.56 | 6.25 | 6.25 |

### PAPER 920/3 (NOVELS)

#### RESPONSES OF CANDIDATES

##### *General comments*

This paper is based on selected novels prescribed in the syllabus, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. There are a total of four questions divided into three sections. Section A: Critical Appreciation provides a candidate with the choice of answering a question based on the excerpts from the two novels. Sections B (*Pride and Prejudice*) and C (*The Joy Luck Club*) do not provide options and candidates must attempt the question set accordingly.

The questions were rather straight-forward, requiring candidates to answer using basic literary knowledge on the themes and issues of the texts as well as on the technical aspects of literary conventions; for example, discussing how Jane and Elizabeth are perceived by Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst based on an excerpt from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, to discuss how Waverly views space based on an excerpt from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, to examine the roles of Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice*, and to discuss the significance of Jing-Mei Woo's journey to China in *The Joy Luck Club*.

##### *Comments on individual questions*

#### SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

##### Question 1

Candidates are required to discuss how Jane and Elizabeth are perceived by Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst with close reference to an excerpt from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Candidates are required to answer by finding textual evidence in the excerpt to discuss how Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst abuse Elizabeth by describing her as arrogant, disagreeable, and wild while Jane is seen in a patronising way by both characters. For example, through the diction used by Austen,

such as Elizabeth's petticoat's "six inches deep in mud", "laughing heartily", "find the whole situation amusing" and "father and mother, and such low connections", candidates are also expected to show that their low connections and lack of financial security are seen as them having very little chance of getting married.

In general, candidates who chose this question answered with extensive, relevant, and adequate content for the question. Their knowledge and understanding were demonstrated well although there were some errors of either fact or interpretation where they did not provide textual evidence from the excerpt. A high number of candidates could give appropriate examples from the excerpt which, however, may be limited in scope, there is an element of critical analysis. Unfortunately, several candidates did not discuss how Jane and Elizabeth are perceived by Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst but by Darcy and Bingley instead. A few candidates made references outside the excerpt prior to the events in question.

## **Question 2**

Candidates who chose to answer this question are required to discuss how Waverly views space with close reference to an excerpt from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

Candidates are required to answer by finding textual evidence in the excerpt to support their discussion of how space can tell stories about feelings, ideas, perception, and conception. They are also required to explain how Waverly's home is depicted as a private and safe place that allows her to master new skills and shortcuts. Examples from the excerpt include reference to the playground which can mean public scrutiny, the kitchen can symbolise madness, where "loud noises with pots and pans" can indicate anger, the shared bedroom prevents Waverly from generating creativity and the dining area can signify collective perception related to the Chinese eating etiquettes.

Most of the answers were derivative; for example, most candidates merely summarised the plot of the story pertaining to the role of space in general. There was little if any attempt to interpret the excerpt in any critical or evaluative manner. The arguments presented were muddled or irrelevant. Most of the answers were at the level of simple and limited description.

Interestingly, only some of the candidates' answers were appropriately comprehensive where their answers were also relevant to the question and clearly presented with few if any errors of fact or interpretation.

## **SECTION B: *Pride and Prejudice***

### **Question 3**

Candidates are expected to examine the roles of Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice*. Candidates are expected to answer that the two characters are important to the development of the narrative and the thematic structure of the novel. They are also expected to state that Mr. Gardiner is Mrs. Bennet's brother and how he is different to his sister. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gardiner is a wise adviser to the Bennet sisters to compensate for their mother's silliness. Examples include Elizabeth discussing the nature of Jane's love for Bingley, Elizabeth's affections for Wickham, and Mrs. Gardiner's letters and suggestions which lead to Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley. Candidates can also discuss how the Gardiners represent a happily married couple with decency, intelligence, good manners, and kindness in contrast to the Bennets.

The answers disappointingly showed that some candidates have little understanding of the term “roles” in the question and its relevance in the text. Textual evidence, if given, was inappropriate and irrelevant to the question under consideration. Most candidates answered by discussing Caroline Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh while some retold the characterisations of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet.

Overall, almost all answers were not at STPM level showing errors in knowledge, a lack of understanding of the question an absence of critical evaluation and the inability to apply the literary element described, namely the roles played by the two characters in the novel.

## **SECTION C: *The Joy Luck Club***

### **Question 4**

Candidates who chose this question are required to discuss the significance of Jing-Mei Woo’s journey to China in *The Joy Luck Club*. They are expected to answer by showing how the novel ends with Jing-Mei’s journey to China to meet her mother’s twin daughters whom she was forced to abandon. They are also expected to elaborate with other examples from the novel, such how Jing-Mei has taken over her mother’s place in the Joy Luck Club since her mother’s death, how the journey makes Jing-Mei reclaim her Chinese identity and roots, and how China and her twin sisters remind her of her mother and herself.

They also showed the ability to examine Jing Mei’s journey and link it to the plot and themes of the story in which answers were presented in a manner appropriate to the question and linked to the other American born daughters. The comments were in no way derivative but clearly reflected the candidates’ own understanding of the topic under consideration. Where the examples from the text were involved, they were clearly relevant to the question.



**Laporan Peperiksaan**

# **STPM 2023**



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