Laporan Peperiksaan STPM 2018

Literature in English (920)

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Literature in English *(920)*

CONTENTS

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/1)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 1, 92 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 70.67% 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	6.52	4.35	11.96	15.22	11.96	8.70	11.96	10.87	6.52	5.43	6.52

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

General Comments

Paper 1 consists of three sections, Sections A, B and C. In Section A, candidates are required to analyse a given poem or an excerpt from a short story in which answers must focus entirely on the particular poem or excerpt, demonstrating a close reading of, and a critical response to it. No reference should be made to extraneous details not found in the poem or the excerpt. In Section B, candidates have to answer one compulsory essay question which requires close reference to two poems from the syllabus. Meanwhile, Section C requires candidates to answer another compulsory essay question which also requires close reference to two short stories from the syllabus. Candidates, therefore, have to answer a total of three questions and each question carries 25 marks.

Generally, Questions 1 and 2 focus on a clear and specific point for the candidates to discuss. Question 3 focuses on one of the themes in the poems. Question 4 is quite open as it allows the candidates considerable scope to give personal responses. There was nothing abstract being asked for: either the themes, usage of language in the excerpt or the question was open, allowing the candidates to express their opinions and responses.

The candidates' command of English was generally mediocre. Hardly anyone was able to write without some mistakes in grammar and idioms. Organisation of answers was often poor as well. To summarise, the candidates were unable to construct a clear and logical argument, and instead analysed the poem or story stanza by stanza or paragraph by paragraph.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

Question 1

Candidates are required to describe how the language of a poem entitled *A Bird Came Down* by Emily Dickinson captures the behaviour and feelings of the bird.

Candidates are expected to describe the language of the poem in terms of its imagery, diction, rhythm, etc. and then link these to how they bring out behaviour and feelings. This poem describes a bird walking down the path, stopping to catch and eat a worm and drink some water; it hops out of a

beetle's way, then becomes alert and fearful when it notices the speaker. It then flies away, and the speaker is caught by its beauty as it flies. Through the description, the poet shows us how the bird is wild and savage, and at the same time is civilised and beautiful.

For example, the image of touch in 'stirred his velvet head' – the word 'velvet' shows us the soft, rich texture of the bird's feathers. This contrasts with the very hard, shiny visual image of the bird's eyes as 'frightened beads'. Candidates are also expected to comment on how the use of imagery draws out the contrast between the bird's fear (eyes as bright, hard beads, shiny and alert) and the softness of the bird's physical beauty.

In general, a majority of the candidates touched on these ideas but did not go further in their detailed analysis of the language used. There were also some candidates that did not have the basics needed to successfully attempt the question.

Question 2

Candidates are required to describe how the language of a short story entitled *The Touring Company* by Shirley Lim reflects the mind and feelings of the narrator.

Candidates are expected to point out the narrator's sense of nostalgia, contrasted with her uncertainty about the present. Good candidates should be able to pick up on the differences in emotions when the narrator talks about the night and her boyfriend. For example, when talking about the night, she focuses not on the darkness but on how that darkness brings out the light; she then lists various kinds of lights – the long list of short words and phrases separated only by commas reflect the narrator's sense of breathless wonder. This can be contrasted with the description of what she will do when her boyfriend arrives – 'He was coming to fetch her. And they would kiss under the trees and talk about their life together.' The use of the word 'and' implies habit rather than excitement. This lack of excitement is underscored by the long sentence, not broken up into shorter phrases – it remains calm, balanced, unexcited.

In general a majority of the candidates tend to summarise the narrator's actions, without analysing her feelings. However, there was a candidate who pointed out that the short sentence 'He was silent' shows the difference between the narrator and her boyfriend. There was also a candidate who pointed out that this difference is shown by the idea that the narrator should be in a place where 'he was not'.

SECTION B: *Poems*

Question 3

Candidates are required to examine the treatment of the theme of alienation of any of the two poems prescribed in the syllabus.

For this question, candidates are expected to select at least two poems, which deal in some substantial way with the theme of alienation. For example, the poem entitled *Aunt Jennifer's Tigers* by Adrienne Rich: 'Though she may not have been cast aside physically, … she was definitely alienated emotionally'. This statement shows that the narrator is emotionally abused in the poem and she was alienated emotionally, not physically.

The answers given by the candidates ranged from the meaningless to the excellent. Some candidates who did not understand the meaning of 'alienation' summarised the plot of the poems that had been chosen by them and did not link it to the idea of alienation at all or simply chose poems that were not relevant to the question. However, there were candidates who not only understood alienation, but were also able to link it to the events in the poems.

SECTION C: *Malaysian Short Stories*

Question 4

Candidates are required to discuss happy or joyous moments which affect the characters' thoughts, feelings and actions with reference to any two short stories prescribed in the syllabus.

Candidates are expected to choose relevant short stories and discuss these moments, rather than just describe them. The question required the candidates to take the analysis beyond happiness, to a moment when the happiness is lost. Some of the short stories that could be discussed by the candidates: *(i) Birthday* by Dato' Dr M. Shanmughalingam, a story about how happy the whole family is at the impending birth of the child, and how much enjoyment they get out of planning the future of the expected male baby. However, because of gender bias, the baby who is actually a girl instantly ruins the happiness of many of the characters. *(ii) Dream of Vasantha* by K. S. Maniam, a story about Ganesh's unhappiness (why is Ganesh so badly behaved), Ganesh's tragedy (death of Ganesh's friend) and Ganesh's happiness (Ganesh turns over a new leaf). *(iii) Through the Wall* by Pretam Kaur, a story about the birth of the Chinese girl's baby as a happy moment, changed when she discovered it was a girl and after the baby was sold to a Malay family.

On the whole, candidates purely focused only on the happy moments and did not focus on the moment when the happiness is lost.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/2)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 2, 93 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 58.07% 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	8.60	2.15	7.53	18.28	5.38	4.30	11.83	11.83	11.83	7.53	10.75

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

General Comments

For this Paper, candidates are required to study the plays as prescribed in the syllabus namely *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare and *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. For Section A: Critical Appreciation, candidates are required to answer only one question, either the question on *Twelfth Night* or *A Raisin in the Sun*. For Sections B and C, the questions are compulsory. Candidates have to answer the question on *Twelfth Night* in Section B and the question given on *A Raisin in the Sun* in Section C. Candidates have to answer a total of three questions and each question carries 25 marks.

Candidates' Language Proficiency

Approximately 50-60% of the candidates have a fairly good command of written English and they are generally able to express themselves. However, there is a sizable number who are not very proficient, and few candidates showed some form of interference from their mother tongue in their use of the English language. This affects the level of their understanding of the texts studied as they are not able to grasp the lexical nuances and syntactical complexities found in many literary texts. It also affects the extent to which they are able to answer questions. Thus, even though grammatical errors are not overtly taken into consideration in the marking process; numerous grammatical and language errors do have a negative impact on meaning of the essay and can impede the examiners' grasp of the written answers.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

Question 1

In the first part of the question, the candidates are required to show how Viola's reactions to the events in the excerpt which centred on the gifts of a ring for Cesario, shed light on Viola's character and feelings. For this part of the question, the candidates must be able to describe Viola's character and feelings by providing evidence from the excerpt and explanation of her behaviour. For example, Viola is quick-witted as she is able to quickly figure out the real reason why Olivia (through Molvolio) is pretending to return Orsino's ring i.e. Olivia wants to give it to Cesario as a token of love. Another

example that Viola has empathy can be seen in the line '*Poor lady, she were better love a dream*'. The thought that Olivia has probably fallen for 'her outside'. She is part of the love triangle but she does not despair and hopes that time will solve their difficulties.

As for the second part of the question, the candidates are required to analyse the differences in tone. For this part of the question, the candidates must identify and compare the Viola-Malvolio exchange and Viola's soliloquy, focusing on the language and style. The first part of the passage is written in prose and sounds matter of fact, even somewhat rude and ungracious, especially when Malvolio throws the ring for Viola to pick up. On the other hand, the second part is in verse and is expressive of Viola's mixture of feelings; upset at the realisation that Olivia has fallen for Cesario, sympathy for Olivia's plight, and dismay at the love triangle caused by that.

A majority of the candidates who attempted this question were not able to provide satisfactory answers. Many candidates resorted to writing a summary of either the excerpt or the main themes of the play instead of using relevant quotations from the excerpt to illustrate their point. The candidates must understand the meaning of tone in literature in order to answer the second part of Question 1. Tone is generally conveyed through the choice of words, or the viewpoint of a writer on a particular subject. However, some candidates often have difficulty in differentiating between tone and literary tone, which refers to the attitude behind the way a person speaks to someone.

Question 2

Candidates are required to identify the source of the conflict between Walter and Beneatha; and then discuss how language and style is used to present the conflict between the siblings. The candidates must use the excerpt to track the changes in the tone and language used by the siblings to show how the conflict begins and escalates. The conflict between Walter and Beneatha is due to the underlying differences between brother and sister with regards to educational opportunities and the use of money for this.

The conflict is presented in various ways via dramatic techniques such as the dialogue, the tone of voice, sarcasm, the use of punctuation and exclamation marks as well as the use of questions. For example, Walter provoked Beneatha by using a sarcastic tone of voice which can be seen in line '*Now ain't that fine*' and '*You such a nice girl*'. This showed the siblings' differing diction to their personal values and wishes or wants with regards to how the money should be spent.

In general, the candidates who answered Question 2 did better than those who answered Question 1. However, many candidates failed at the start to identify the source of the conflict between Walter and Beneatha. The candidates must include evidence from the excerpt when presenting their answers.

SECTION B: *William Shakespeare: Twelfth Night*

Question 3

Candidates are required to discuss how Viola and Sebastian were able to help Olivia and Orsino to overcome their respective follies and become more self-aware or mature. The candidates must identify the foibles that Olivia and Orsino had at the beginning of the play and show how Viola and Sebastian were able to make them aware of their foibles, become less self-absorbed and more mature.

Both Olivia and Orsino are self-absorbed and self-indulgent individuals. Olivia who is self-imposed and unrealistic, vows to cloister herself and not see a man from outside for seven years after the death of her brother. As for Orsino, he thinks that he loves Olivia but does not bother to woo her himself and instead sends messengers, including Cesario, to her to declare his love while he indulges in the melancholy of unrequited love amidst music and flowers.

Furthermore, both Viola and Sebastian help Olivia and Orsino to overcome their follies. This can be seen when Viola disguised as Cesario and helps Olivia get out of her vow and unknowingly awakens suppressed feelings in Olivia when she falls for Cesario. However, she mistakes Sebastian for Cesario when he readily reciprocates her love and they get married. As for Orsino, he becomes close to Cesario, who is actually Viola, and he learns to be less self-centred and falls for Viola after he realises she is not Cesario, who has many times indirectly professed her love to him.

In general, many candidates were able to correctly identify the foibles of Olivia and Orsino. However, the candidates could not provide suitable quotations or paraphrases from the play to strengthen their line of arguments. This showed their lack of mastery of the material.

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

Question 4

Candidates are required to identify the main characters who made decisions based on their sense of pride and self-respect. Each character identified should be discussed by identifying the important decisions made by them and how and why the decision was made, using appropriate quotes from the play.

There are three main characters that made decisions based on their sense of pride and self-respect such as Mama, Walter, Beneatha and the Younger family unit. Candidates could also write about the pride of the whole family. The pride of the whole family can be seen when they decide to move to the new house despite their money problems and the veiled threats of the white residents because they refuse to be kept 'in their place' any longer. For Mama, her decision is based on self-respect and what is best for the family. Her decision to buy the house in a white neighbourhood is due to her pride and dignity, wanting something better for her family than what they have now. Mama's decision to entrust the rest of the money to Walter because she wants to restore his male pride as he feels that she has been controlling him in the matter of the money.

As for Walter, he links pride and self-respect to money. This can be seen when he wants to get into business because his pride is damaged by the menial job he has as a chauffeur. He wants to be his own boss, working with other men like him and to be seen as equal.

Finally, Beneatha links her pride and self-respect to personal development. This can be seen when her growing awareness of and pride in her African heritage e.g. her rejection of George Murchison, and her decision to have her hair in a more natural style. This is her way to find and maintain pride in a society which looked down on her for not being white.

The candidates generally did quite well for this question. The majority of the candidates correctly identified the three main characters in the play who made good or questionable decisions based on their sense of pride and self-respect. The excellent candidates were able to state that there are different aspects of pride and self-respect shown in the play. Some only wrote about Mama and/ or Walter, and thus lost marks they could have got if they had included Beneatha. There were also some weaker candidates who incorrectly included Ruth (who is a minor character) in their answers.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/3)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 3, 95 candidates sat for this subject and 66.31% 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	12.63	5.26	2.11	6.32	16.84	9.47	13.68	5.26	3.16	3.16	22.11

PAPER 920/3 (*Novels*)

General Overview

For Paper 3, candidates are required to study the two novels prescribed in the syllabus namely *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. Section A requires candidates to analyse a given excerpt from each novel. Candidates are required to answer questions on one excerpt only. Answers must focus entirely on the particular excerpt, demonstrating a close reading of, and a critical response to it. No reference should be made to extraneous details not found in the excerpt. For Sections B and C, candidates are required to answer compulsory essay questions on *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Joy Luck Club* respectively. Answers require close reference to the novels and must be relevant, critical, and informed. Candidates must provide appropriate textual evidence to support their answers. Candidates, therefore, have to answer a total of three questions and each question carries 25 marks.

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

General Comments on Question Paper

Overall the questions were straightforward, requiring candidates to answer using basic literary knowledge of the themes and issues of the texts as well as on the technical aspects of literary conventions; for example, Lady Catherine's treatment of Elizabeth in relation to rank and social class in marriage based on an extract from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the way the daughter in the novel perceives her mother's criticism of others based on an extract from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, how the depictions of Rosings and Pemberly reflect Elizabeth's views of the owners in *Pride and Prejudice*, and to examine the use of symbolism to represent love in *The Joy Luck Club*.

In terms of planning and presentation of the answers, most of the candidates' structure was good with appropriate choice of content. The answers were linked clearly and there was balance. The answers were always appropriate to the question; there were minor gaps and the answers showed few errors of fact and interpretation. Presentation of answers was clear and complete, showing good comprehension on the part of the candidates.

Pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates' answers, there was an appropriate level of critical analysis or evaluation of content within the answers, although there were some minor errors with some spelling and grammatical mistakes. Arguments presented were generally original and there was clear evidence of real engagement by candidates with the question under consideration. However,

for Question 4 on the use of symbolism to represent love in *The Joy Luck Club*, some candidates misunderstood the term 'symbolism' with 'symbolic acts' as well as just 'symbols'. Most candidates only managed to attempt to discuss the plot without making any references to symbolism as discussions of the characters of the text were sometimes weak and not clearly explained.

Generally, most answers were acceptable at the level of knowledge and understanding, although there were some minor errors with some spelling and grammatical mistakes in candidates' answers. References to texts in question were generally correct and the answers were readable and generally presentable.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

Question 1

Candidates are required to discuss Lady Catherine's treatment of Elizabeth in relation to rank and social class in marriage based on an extract from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

They are expected to answer by emphasising how Austen's depiction of Lady Catherine's treatment of Elizabeth during this visit to Longbourn demonstrates her critique of women trapped in the nineteenth-century, especially in the way such divisions and prejudices are linked to wealth and family connections. Any relevant and well-supported points pertaining to the extract given are accepted and all the answers are gleaned from the extract.

In general, candidates who chose this question answered with extensive, relevant and adequate content. 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 extract.

However, their interpretations of the extract were clear and logical though the discussions at times lacked real depth. Their arguments were relevant to the question and demonstrated personal interpretations.

Their answers also showed that the candidates were aware of the need to discuss how, as Darcy's aunt, the wealthy Lady Catherine epitomises class snobbery, especially in her attempts to order the middle-class Elizabeth away from her well-bred nephew, albeit without success. Candidates could give appropriate examples from the extract which, however may be limited in scope, there is an element of critical analysis.

Unfortunately, some candidates were unable to make Lady Catherine's treatment of Elizabeth in relation to rank and social class in marriage based on a close reference to the extract given.

Question 2

Candidates are required to discuss the way the daughter perceives her mother's criticism of others based on an extract from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

They are expected to answer by stating the evidence in the excerpt to support their discussion of the way the daughter perceives her mother's criticism of others. The daughter questions her mother's criticism of others, the daughter is sensitive to the person being criticised, she sees her mother as being too critical of everyone and is never happy with anything, she sees her mother as someone who imposes her own values on others, she perceives her mother's criticisms as being old-fashioned and she laments the fact that her mother does not listen to other opinions. Any relevant and well-supported points pertaining to the extract given are accepted and all the answers are gleaned from the extract.

Interestingly, the candidates' answers were appropriately comprehensive where their answers were also relevant to the question and clearly presented with few of any errors of fact or interpretation. They also showed the ability to comment effectively the way the daughter perceives her mother's criticism of others which was presented in a manner appropriate to the question and linked to other characters. The comments were in no way derivative but clearly reflected the candidates' own understanding of the topic under consideration. Where the examples from the extract were involved, they were clearly relevant to the question.

Question 3

Candidates are required to describe how the depictions of Rosings and Pemberly reflect Elizabeth's views of the owners as presented in *Pride and Prejudice*.

They are expected to answer by drawing attention to how the houses are the extensions of the owners' personalities where the descriptions of houses tend to reflect the character of their own owners. Any relevant and well-supported points pertaining to the extract given are accepted and all the answers are gleaned from the extract.

Remarkably, the candidates' answers showed a degree of originality and understanding of the question involved, namely to discuss how, when Lizzy visits Pemberly, her reaction is different. Furthermore, they also focused on how she notices the vastness of the house and how it sits well in nature. Some candidates focused on Pemberley as grand, but also natural, where the architecture of the house shows the character of Mr Darcy himself. They highlighted how, at first, Lady Catherine and Darcy's character seems pretty similar, where they both appear haughty, cold, and proud, but their houses show that deep down inside, they are vastly different.

The answers given did not only merely describe but were critically analysed and evaluated. Their arguments were well founded, cautious and coherent. The candidates showed the ability to skilfully synthesise a wide range of examples from the novel which were appraised critically rather than merely presented.

Question 4

Candidates are required to examine the use of symbolism to represent love with close reference to the *The Joy Luck Club*.

The candidates are expected to answer by showing an understanding of what symbolism is, namely the use of objects, characters, figures, or colours to represent abstract ideas or concepts, in this instance, love. They should refer to some objects, characters, figures, or colours in the novel that are used to represent love.

Less than five candidates managed to answer this question according to the answer scheme and less than five managed to answer this question correctly.
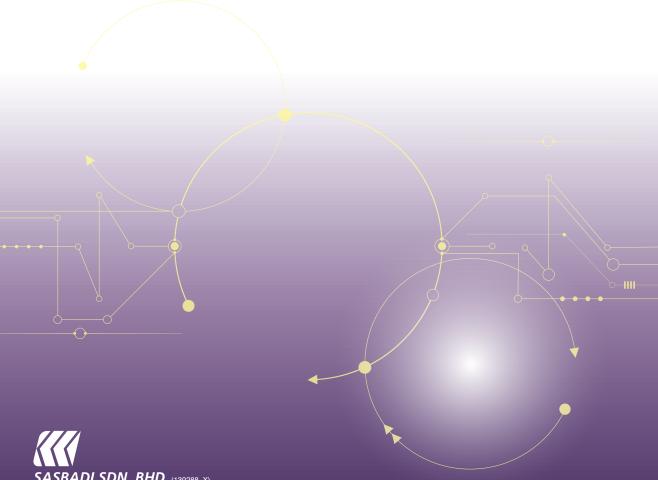
The rest of the candidates misunderstood the meaning of the literary device 'symbolism' and mistook the term with either 'symbolic acts' or merely 'symbols'. Some of the answers included 'plot' and 'storytelling' with regards to the concept of love. Clearly, there were serious gaps in the answers presented. Some of them were not even appropriate to the question; for example, the discussion is a retelling of the plot. There were many errors of fact and interpretation indicating a lack of knowledge and understanding and no textual evidence was provided.

Most of the answers were derivative; for example, most candidates merely summarised the plot of the story. There was little if any attempt to interpret the novel 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.

The answers disappointingly showed that the candidates had little understanding of the relevance of the literary themes and issues to the question and to the text. Textual evidence, if given, was inappropriate and irrelevant to the question under consideration.

Overall, answers showed lack of understanding of the question or literary themes and issues, an absence of critical evaluation and the inability to apply literary themes described.

Laporan Peperiksaan STPM 2018