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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/1)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 1, 81 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 40.72% 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	1.23	1.23	6.17	6.17	8.64	8.64	8.64	7.41	12.35	12.35	27.16

PAPER 920/1 (*Poems and Malaysian Short Stories*)

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 where each question carries 25 marks.

Generally, the questions are well constructed, providing equal opportunity for students to respond to both poems and short stories studied. They suit the abilities expected from STPM candidates taking Literature in English subject. The questions took into account that these were likely first semester candidates and, thus, provided opportunities for them to demonstrate basic literary analysis skills and knowledge. Some of the questions asked for technical information (imagery, theme) while others asked for more critical thought (ideas about culture). The questions were also clear in terms of focus, particularly questions 1 and 3. Questions 2 and 4, however, were more challenging but absolutely suited for STPM level examinations.

Command of English was generally mediocre. Hardly anyone was able to write without some mistakes in grammar and idiom. Organisation of answers was often poor as well. Furthermore, they tended to stay within the bounds of summary and all-encompassing statements were unsupported by textual evidence. Candidates were not able to integrate quotes and textual evidence into their analysis. Candidates should also be taught not to refer to Western writers by their first names or titles (for e.g., John instead of Keats, or Lord instead of Byron). 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 discuss the imagery presented in the poem *To Autumn* by John Keats, and to show how those images help bring out the ideas of growth and decay.

Candidates are expected to link the ideas of growth and decay to the season, Autumn. Autumn stands on the cusp of life and death – it is the harvest season, when everything is at its peak of ripeness, but it is also leading into winter, the season of death. Candidates are expected to pick out images of sight, sound, smell, etc., and explicate how those images are linked to growth and decay. So they should pick out images of growing fruit, overflowing honey, oozing cider – which show growth and plenty. Also, they can pick words such as 'fruitfulness', 'maturing', and 'load and bless'. Decay is shown in the final stanza – images of death ('soft-dying day', 'wailful choir', 'small gnats mourn', etc.).

An example of a potentially good response is: 'The use of imagery to depict growth and decay is shown in the third stanza in line 35, which is "while barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day". According to the poem, Keats used the word "bloom" to show the growth of more clouds which also means more clouds are being formed in the skies. On the other hand, in "soft-dying day", Keats used the word "dying" to depict decaying of the day. Which brings the meaning of dying of the day as in the skies are getting dark. These lines show that John Keats has used the literary device imagery to depict growth and decay in this poem. However, some poorer candidates ended up merely paraphrasing or simplifying the lines instead of illustrating how imagery contributes to the theme of growth and decay.

In general, most candidates were able to tackle Question 1, providing textual evidence to support their points.

Question 2

Candidates are required to discuss how the past and present are utilised by the author in conveying the protagonist's current state of mind in *The Touring Company* by Shirley Lim.

Candidates are expected to identify the 'protagonist's current state of mind' – she seems tired, distracted, and dissatisfied (support the answer with reference to words such as 'hot day', 'negative discomfort of her room', 'Somewhere, she thought passionately, are wet, cool, running, deep sleep, ease', 'her body felt heavy, her flesh already sagging', etc.). They should then look at how this is contrasted with the past (glamour, lightness, 'fantasy coolness', excitement, etc.). The past and present are contrasted with each other because the past seems exciting and cool, while the present is heavy and uncomfortable, showing her dissatisfaction and lack of comfort in the present.

One of the candidates was able to identify that the writer had used reminiscence and daydreaming to play with narrative time: 'Lim uses daydreaming as a way to shift the protagonist's current state of mind to the present. For example, we see the protagonist struggling and suffering in the searing heat and felt discomfort but then she choose to think about, "wet, cool, running, deep sleep, ease" to distract herself momentarily for her current state of mind'.

In general, the majority of the candidates chose not to answer this question. When they did, the candidates did not seem to understand the meaning of 'current state of mind' and merely stated examples of sentences in the past simple or present simple tense. Furthermore, the candidates who attempted Question 2 merely summarised the passage, a common problem among the candidates.

SECTION B: *Poems*

Question 3

Candidates are required to examine the poet's treatment of beauty in any of the two poems prescribed in the syllabus.

For this question, the candidates are required to first define how they see the term 'beauty' in the chosen poems – nature, physical beauty, etc. They then need to analyse what the poets say about beauty, and how they present beauty. For example, do they use a lot of imagery? What kind of imagery? Most importantly, the candidates should also be able to choose the right poems to answer this question. Candidates tended, however, to examine quite poorly.

Strong candidates had a definition that dealt with the idea of beauty in both the chosen poems. For example, one candidate focused on how poets distinguished between physical and inner beauty as demonstrated in two poems. Another strong answer examined what the poet said about beauty: 'Yeats highlights the transient nature of beauty in the poem. The persona states that he would have loved her, even if her physical appearance changes due to aging… He believes that someone's true beauty can be seen in her soul and personality.' Weaker answers, however, were those that seemed to tag the word 'beauty' along with the theme of the poem without discussing how that theme demonstrates or illustrates beauty, for example, 'The theme of this poem is nature. Sonnet 75 is set in nature itself. In this poem, the narrator links the beauty of nature to the eternal feeling of love that he chooses to believe in'.

Furthermore, the candidates often discussed the poems separately, without finding a common thread between them by specifying a definition of 'beauty'. Instead, they produced vague and general statements such as 'The treatment of beauty in "Love's Philosophy" by P.B. Shelley and "She Walks in Beauty" by Lord Byron is very specially portrayed' – the word 'specially' is vague, and there was no focus in the essay. Another candidate wrote that '"She Walks in Beauty" by Lord Byron and "To Autumn" by John Keats are two of the poems that describes the poet's treatment of beauty', but there was no discussion of what aspects of beauty the poets talked about.

The candidates generally seemed unable to choose appropriate poems for the theme of the 'treatment of beauty'. In the end, they wrote more on love than beauty, thus losing focus. Perhaps due to time constraints and absence of texts, they were not able to write an effective essay.

SECTION C: *Malaysian Short Stories*

Question 4

Candidates are required to discuss the depiction of traditional practice of religion and culture in any two short stories prescribed in the syllabus.

Candidates are expected to not only describe traditional religious and cultural practices, but also to discuss them – that is, to examine what these practices are, and the way they are practiced, say about the people or societies in the stories. Thus, if they chose *Through the Wall* by Pretam Kaur, they need to discuss how female babies were not valued in traditional Chinese culture, and how the inhumane treatment of the new mother is contrasted with the celebration of the birth of the female calf in the Punjabi household. Are female animals more valued than female humans? This could be compared with the reaction to the birth of a girl in *Birthday* by M. Shanmugalingam.

Most candidates tended to describe rather than to discuss. Answers were therefore very shallow, tending to provide summaries of the stories, or descriptions of what the candidates perceived to be traditional practices and beliefs. Moreover, most candidates ended up detailing the cultural or religious aspects that are depicted in the texts without critically discussing their uses. However, this is a good question to test candidates' critical thinking abilities, and is a good marker of identifying candidates who excel at the subject.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH
(920/2)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 2, 82 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 68.30% 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	13.41	4.88	10.98	9.76	13.41	6.10	9.76	9.76	7.32	4.88	9.76

PAPER 920/2 (*Plays*)

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

General Comments

For Paper 2, candidates are required to study the plays 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.

The level of difficulty of the question paper is average. The candidates should be able to answer the questions set if they had studied the texts and were adequately prepared in terms of answering techniques for literary essays.

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 a few candidates even 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. This is especially true when it comes to a classic text like a Shakespeare play with its archaic language. It also affects the extent to which they are able to answer the 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 an essay's meaning and can impede the examiners' grasp of the written answers, with candidates failing to gain good marks for their efforts.

SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

Question 1

Candidates are required to describe Sir Andrew's character based on the excerpt given.

Candidates are expected to respond by describing Sir Andrew's character based on information gathered from three sources, i.e., Sir Andrew himself, Sir Toby and Fabian.

Most candidates were able to answer on Sir Andrew's characteristics. The candidates' strength lies in their knowledge of the character. Expected answers include traits such as 'foolish', 'gullible', 'easily cheated', 'cowardly', and 'easily flattered', which can be sourced from Sir Andrew himself and two other characters, Sir Toby and Fabian. Candidates were also expected to support their argument with textual evidence from the excerpt.

The strong candidates dealt with more than just Sir Andrew's words and actions. They drew on Fabian and Sir Toby as well, to describe Sir Andrew's character. For example, one candidate stated that 'Sir Andrew is a coward… Sir Toby then confirms that Sir Andrew is a coward by saying that "if he were opened… flea" (lines 54–55).'

Weak candidates tended to misinterpret the excerpt with Sir Andrew being seen as 'respectful' and 'brave'. The weaker candidates also tended to writing a summary or retelling of the excerpt, and/or show a poor organisation of analysis.

Candidates' answers often involved inconsistent use of tenses, the language may be inaccurate at times, with some candidates using 'innocence' rather than 'gullible'.

Question 2

Candidates are required to discuss how Joseph Asagai helps Beneatha and Mama to start thinking about a different kind of identity based on the excerpt given.

One of the examples that candidate can state in their response is how Mama treats Asagai like a son although she does not know anything about him or Africa. This creates a sense of a greater 'African' family. Furthermore, Asagai also provides some information on Africa in terms of its language and the notion of national and tribal origins. Asagai calling Beneatha 'Alaiyo' also helps Beneatha and Mama to start thinking about a different kind of identity.

The question is quite demanding and challenging. The key to doing well in this question is to understand the meaning of the phrase 'a different kind of identity'. Within the context of this question, the phrase refers to Asagai's efforts to make Beneatha and Mama aware of his Nigerian culture and Yoruba tribal roots, and how this in turn affects their way of thinking and sense of identity.

Strong candidates produced very insightful comments due to their strong understanding of the characters in the play. The following example from a candidate is a good example:

> 'We can see that Asagai uses an African term "Alaiyo" which he later goes to interpret as "one for whom bread – food – is not enough". He uses this term on Beneatha. By doing so we see that he's associating Beneatha's characteristics with an African term that may be used in Africa… We also see Beneatha gaining appreciation towards his understanding of her personality and nature. Thus, we can see that by using African term and language Asagai has managed to help Mama and Beneatha think about a different kind of identity.'

Weak candidates tended to claim that Asagai completely changed Beneatha's and Mama's ideas about identity. Weaker candidates also stretched their interpretations of Mama's character, stating that she cared about her African identity. Other weaknesses include poor discussion on the kind of thinking Asagai brings, misguided discussion on personal identity (rather than Black/African identity), mere retelling of plot and inconsistent use of tenses.

SECTION B: William Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night*

Question 3

Candidates are required to compare and contrast Viola and Olivia's strengths and how they feel powerless when faced with certain situations. All these have to be done using relevant textual evidence from the play.

Candidates are expected to respond by comparing and contrasting the strengths in both characters and how they feel powerless when they faced certain situations. One of the examples that candidate can state in their response is how both characters love their brothers. Another example is how their gender makes them feel powerless when they are involved in situations where men see them as weak e.g., men see Olivia as weak as she does not have a male protector. Finally, the differences in how Viola and Olivia love.

The majority of candidates performed quite satisfactorily where they have knowledge of the characters' unique traits. Strong candidates who focused on strength and powerlessness performed well. Some examples of strong responses:

'Although the love of Viola and Olivia was quite prominent in the scene, Viola and Olivia were powerless in facing this circumstance because Viola didn't want to reveal her true identity while Olivia didn't want to lose her friendship. Thus, Viola and Olivia have displayed their strength and powerlessness in their characters in facing certain circumstances.'

'They both portray strength similarly in a sense that both are strong in going through the pain of losing a loved one.'

'Viola and Olivia portray powerlessness differently in the play…. Viola looked like a young man who is very able to fight with Sir Andrew, but underneath all that, she is actually a powerless female who was not trained to fight… In contrast to that, Olivia, even though a countess, is powerless when faced with love… Therefore, it is clear that Viola and Olivia display powerlessness differently in the play.'

Weak candidates either ignored, misinterpreted or did not address the key terms. The weak candidates wrote about other similarities and differences between Viola and Olivia, e.g., hopelessness instead of powerlessness. They also tended to focus more on differences rather than similarities and vice versa, without critically synthesising the similarities and differences of the characters.

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

Question 4

Candidates are required to discuss the quote given towards the end of the play where Mama tells Beneatha that 'There is always something to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned nothing.' All this has to be done using relevant textual evidence from the play.

Candidates are expected to first identify and contextualise where in the play the quote comes from. The candidates then have to explain what happened and why it happened, and what the outcome is. The line is spoken when Beneatha shows her contempt for Walter, who has apparently given up on their dream and is willing to sell out to Mr. Lindner. She sees nothing in him worth loving. Mama says that despite everything, their setbacks, struggles, anger, etc., they should focus on loving, understanding and supporting each other because there is something within the individual that should be loved. The family struggles all the time (e.g., the grinding poverty where they live in cramped apartment, not having enough money), but that is ultimately tied together with love.

Many candidates performed poorly on this question as they were either not sure where the quote came from and thus could not contextualise the situation or they misinterpreted the quote. The best candidates generally had a good grasp of the characters and how they responded to each other. They were thus able to identify what 'something left to love' was and foregrounded the importance of that lesson to the characters and themes of the play. For example, 'Walter does this because he loves his son, Travis. He wants to give him "the world" and send him to all the best schools. In his darkest moment, his love for his son saved him and regained his pride. This supports that there is always something left to love, and for Walter, it was his son Travis.'

Weak candidates tended to retell the play's plot, failed to discuss what the quote means in relation to the play and displayed poor control of language.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/3)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

For Semester 3, 82 candidates sat for this subject and 70.74% 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	14.63	7.32	7.32	6.10	15.85	12.20	7.32	9.76	4.88	4.88	9.76

PAPER 920/3 (*Novels*)

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

General Comments

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.

Overall the questions were straightforward, 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, to discuss Jane's reaction to and concern about Elizabeth's breaking news based on an excerpt from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, to discuss what the gatherings represent to the narrator and her friends based on an extract from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, to discuss how the social status of women is reflective of the historical context during Austen's time in *Pride and Prejudice*, and to discuss the strengths of each character in *The Joy Luck Club*.

The majority of the candidates' answers were of average quality. Most of the answers managed to meet the requirements of the answer scheme but did not manage to fulfil all of the requirements of the Grading Scheme for STPM Literature in English (920). With regard to candidates' use of English, a large number of candidates did not seem to possess a high level of proficiency in the English language. A large number of the answers were also hampered by poor English and writing skills. Despite this, however, most candidates did manage to address the items in the answer scheme.

Pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates' answers, there was appropriate level of critical analysis or evaluation of content within the answers, although there were some minor errors with some spelling and grammatical mistakes in candidates' answers. For Section A, some candidates did not provide enough textual evidence despite having been provided with the excerpts. There were also a number of candidates who failed to provide any textual evidence to support their answers. For

Section B, particularly, Question 3 was a very difficult question to answer. Some of a number of candidates had found it difficult to foreground the historical context in their answers and, instead, had made only fleeting references to the historical context. Not many candidates managed to effectively address what the question had required of them, however, able candidates excelled in this question. As for Question 4, the level of difficulty of this question was low in comparison to Question 3 but, together, they provide a good balance in the question paper. Many candidates managed to answer the question well by discussing the strengths of two mothers from the source text.

In general, the level of difficulty was appropriate for STPM standards with a balance of accessible as well as challenging aspects. The questions did allow for differentiation among candidates with able candidates producing nuanced and insightful responses while less able candidates were given the opportunity to demonstrate basic understanding of the studied texts.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: *Critical Appreciation*

Question 1

Candidates are required to discuss Jane's reaction to and concern about Elizabeth's breaking news based on an excerpt from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

They are expected to answer by providing different types of responses, from literary analysis (stylistics – use of exclamation marks), to Jane's reactions (disbelief) and concern (uncertainty). Any relevant and well-supported points pertaining to the excerpt given are accepted and all the answers are gleaned from the excerpt.

The strengths in candidates' answers came from a nuanced analysis of the excerpt, noting in particular Jane's changing reactions that build towards a gradual acceptance of Elizabeth's news. Some examples include 'Jane is dismayed and a little upset with Lizzy when she says "But Lizzy, you have been very sly, very reserved with me".' Another example given by good candidates is Jane Austen's use of less exclamation marks and more questions marks which denotes Jane Bennet's calming down and curiosity on the blooming love of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy.

Weak responses paraphrased Jane's reactions without comment or analysis. Some candidates also drew their responses from beyond the excerpt or misinterpreted the question. For example, one of the candidates answered by stating that 'Jane's concern about Elizabeth's news is an indication of her sensitive character.'

Question 2

Candidates are required to discuss what the gatherings represent to the narrator and her friends based on an excerpt from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

Candidates are expected to make connections between the novel's central motif/event (gathering) and the characters' pasts, desires, culture, and hopes. The answer scheme provided all the necessary points for evaluation purpose. In order to meet the demands of this question, candidates were required to use the provided terms only (such as 'the narrator and her friends') and not the characters' names (such as Suyuan Woo). This proved to be a demanding task for most candidates who answered this question as they were penalised for mentioning the characters' names.

The strengths in candidates' answers derived from the candidates' ability to organise their responses skillfully so that there is less overlap/repetition. Textual evidences were provided to support elaborations and comments on that significance.

Weak responses confused Suyuan and the Joy Luck Club (in America) with the narrator and her friends in the excerpt (in China). They celebrated the success of their families in America.

SECTION B: Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 3

Candidates are required to discuss how the social status of women is reflective of the historical context during Austen's time in *Pride and Prejudice*.

They are expected to make connections between the social status of women and the historical context during Austen's time. The answer scheme was informative and provided guidance to the examiners although we needed to accommodate and take into account candidates' interpretations of the question, which, more often than not, did not conform to the answer scheme.

Candidates who achieved higher bands excelled in articulating the connection between the aforementioned elements. They explained how the historical contexts informed the various socio-economic, moral and ethical positions that female characters in Austen's novel occupy. Some even addressed how women were viewed by men based on their socio-economic stature. However, candidates who achieved lower bands struggled to provide key ideas to their arguments, often drifting out of topic. Some of these candidates misconstrued the question as requiring them to explain the 'attitudes' of women during Austen's time.

Strong answers were able to draw historical context and social status. Women's education was limited to learning to play musical instruments, drawing, needle work and also learning to 'walk in gracious air' which were suggested by Miss Bingley.

Weak answers deviated from the focus of the question by drawing from male characters or focusing too much on marriage or social class without making links to the historical context as reasons why the status of women were as such.

SECTION C: Amy Tan: *The Joy Luck Club*

Question 4

Candidates are required to choose any two mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* and discuss their strengths.

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

Interestingly, candidates had varied understandings of what could be considered as "strengths". Candidates who achieved higher bands discussed the strengths of two mothers in the Joy Luck Club; paying attention particularly on their trials and tribulations in the past and attitude to life in the present. Some candidates discussed the 'strengths' of two selected mothers in terms of the mother-daughter troubled dynamics, e.g., Suyuan Woo – Jing Mei or/and Lindo Jong – Waverly Jong. However, candidates who achieved lower bands mixed up the perspectives of selected characters. For example, Jing Mei's view on her mother or/and Waverly's view on Lindo Jong. Some chose characters that are not in the Joy Luck Club but rather in *The Joy Luck Club* (the title of the novel); for instance Po-Po, An-Mei Hsu's mother. However, these candidates did not discuss such characters convincingly.

Strong answers provided thorough analyses of two characters with very clear definitions of strength, such as strength, sacrifice, love, and perseverance. For instance, Suyuan prioritises her daughters lives more than hers so she abandons them in hopes that they may be saved.

Weak answers provided imbalanced analyses with the second character either completely absent or very superficially addressed.

Overall, almost all answers were reasonably at STPM level showing few errors in knowledge and some lack of understanding.