



MAJLIS PEPERIKSAAN MALAYSIA



LAPORAN PEPERIKSAAN STPM & MUET 2020

Literature in English (920)



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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/1)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 1, 80 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 68% 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	6.67	4.00	12.00	10.67	8.00	17.33	9.33	17.33	4.00	4.00	6.67

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 in which each question carries 25 marks.

Generally, questions 1 and 2 focus on a specific point for the candidates to discuss. Question 3 focuses on one of the themes in the poems. Question 4 is much more accessible generally, as even those candidates with a tendency to narrate events, were able to (at least at a basic level) tie the plot with the idea of changes in character.

Generally, students showed a poor grasp of English, both in terms of grammar and idiom. While generally students used a standard essay format of 'intro, body, conclusion', few of them were able to use that form to develop a strong argument. Many candidates resort to summary or paraphrases, rather than attempting deeper analysis.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: Critical Appreciation

Question 1

Candidates are required to discuss how nature is used to illustrate fading love in *Sonnet 73: That time of year thou mayst in me behold* by William Shakespeare.

Candidates are expected to point out how nature is used to illustrate fading of love such as through the images of seasons, through the cycle of the sun, through the cycle of day, through the images of a dying fire and ashes and through the cycle of life.

In general, most of the candidates were able to pick out references to nature such as ‘yellow leaves’, ‘twilight’, ‘ashes’, etc. However, few were able to then deepen the discussion by saying that the description of yellow leaves implies autumn, i.e. the year is drawing to a close, a time when nature ‘dies’ – and in the same way, the speaker is confronting his own approaching death.

Question 2

Candidates are required to discuss how the negative effects of development are depicted through the condition of the mansion in *A Love of the Past* by Stella Kon.

A good answer would use textual evidence to analyse the state of the mansion, rather than merely stating its condition. For example, the mansion had been “subdivided into verminous cubicles...” This situation directly and vividly illustrates the simultaneous development and deterioration of the mansion and Singapore. Another good answer would be discussing about the fate of the mansion. For example, after the war, the mansion changed its role again as “it became a warehouse” due to its close proximity to the river.

In general, this question would take a particularly good student to be able to tie the decay of the mansion to issues such as economic development.

SECTION B: Poems

Question 3

Candidates are required to discuss how memories are represented with close reference to any of the two poems prescribed in the syllabus.

For this question, candidates are expected to select at least two poems, which the candidates would be able to use to discuss how memories are represented. There are several poems that could be analysed such as *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning, *On Growing Old* by John Masefield, *Piano* by D. H. Lawrence, *Digging* by Seamus Heaney and many more. Popular poem choices were D. H. Lawrence’s *Piano* and Seamus Heaney’s *Digging* which were analysed to great effect.

In general, most of the candidates referred to Heaney’s *Digging* but then stopped at saying that the speaker remembers his father and grandfather digging the earth, without going on to examine the speaker’s feelings about his own ‘digging’ with the pen rather than the shovel. Moreover, there are candidates that picked unsuitable poems like Wordsworth’s *Solitary Reaper* or Hardy’s *At Tea*. However, good candidates focused on how poets used literary devices and elements to evoke memories, such as imagery and symbolism, while others argued for how memories were presented as nostalgic, positive, regretful and many more.

SECTION C: Malaysian Short Stories

Question 4

Candidates are required to discuss how life’s circumstances change individuals with close reference to any two short stories prescribed in the syllabus.

Candidates are expected to choose relevant short stories and discuss how life’s circumstances change individuals. Some of the short stories that could be discussed by the candidates: (i) *Pictures in My Mind* by Pretam Kaur, a story about a young protagonist who shares her experiences and impressions of life, death, family and friends. All these impressions or ‘pictures’ become lessons of life for her and

she grows in understanding life's complexities and challenges; (ii) *The Touring Company* by Shirley Lim: The story follows the dreams and impressions of a young girl, Daphne. We are told about her school, her friends, her love for literature and theatre and how this love shapes her ambitions and feelings. The story ends with Daphne, now older, having a more complex attitude towards life and people; and (iii) *The Dream of Vasantha* by K.S. Maniam, a story where Vasantha's husband has died and it is interesting to see how she copes with life, making a living for her son and herself. We are given her dreams and aspirations. The story also documents her relationship with her son, Ganesh. All this information creates a composite picture of a woman coming to terms with the death of her husband. Popular selections were K. S. Maniam's *Ratnamuni*, and *The Dream of Vasantha*. Both texts lend themselves well to the question's requirements. Unusual and less successful selections included *A Certain Cry*, *Love in the Past* and *Through the Wall*.

On the whole, strong answers would focus on identifying specific life circumstances and clearly presented the change that individual characters went through. Weak answers, on the other hand, would retell the events of the plot and not foreground life circumstances. Another weakness was that candidates did not demonstrate or explain what changes occurred in individuals.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/2)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 2, 76 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 82.68% of them obtained full pass. The percentage of each grade is as follows:

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
Percentage	14.67	8.00	22.67	10.67	8.00	6.67	12.00	8.00	5.33	0.00	4.00

PAPER 920/2 (PLAYS)

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

General Comments

For Paper 2, 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.

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.

Approximately 50%–60% of the candidates were able to contextualise a close analysis of the passages in their responses to the passage-based questions in Section A. For Sections B and C, candidates who were well prepared provided the best answers to the questions posed. A few good candidates were able to perform well across the board, but other good and many weaker candidates faltered in answering at least one question; thus reducing their overall score. This is most probably due to the fact that they were more familiar/comfortable with one text compared with the other.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: Critical Appreciation

Question 1

Candidates are required to discuss Viola's motivation in faking her identity in *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare.

Candidates are expected to discuss Viola's motivation in faking her identity, based on information gleaned from what Viola and the Captain say in the excerpt. Candidates should be able to discuss Viola's motivation in changing her identity by tracking her reasoning, as she discusses her limited options with the captain who saved her from the shipwreck. This will eventually become the reason why she decides to work for Duke Orsino as a eunuch.

Twenty-nine (29) candidates attempted this question. Most candidates did well, as they were able to identify Viola's main motivation as survival or self-preservation. However, only the good candidates were able to track her thought processes to show why it becomes her main motivation, as she weighs her options and decides what to do to ensure her survival in unfamiliar territory.

The weak students were not able to satisfactorily break down the excerpt to show her reasoning or thought process, relying instead on a superficial reading of the excerpt. Those who did not have the time to study the text in detail, resorted to a cursory discussion of the main themes that is related to disguise or gender. One desperate candidate wrongly answered the question using Macbeth.

Question 2

Candidates are required to discuss the function of the stage directions in illustrating Ruth's behaviour in *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry.

Candidates are expected to show how the stage directions written by the playwright in the excerpt, helps the actor flesh out Ruth's character through her actions on the visualised set. Stage directions serve many functions, but their primary purpose is to guide actors' movements on the stage. Stage directions can also be used to tell an actor how to shape his or her performance. They may describe how the character behaves physically or mentally and are often used by the playwright to guide the play's emotional tone. Some stage directions also include notations on the set, lighting, music, and sound effects. The excerpt comes from the beginning of the play and is part of a longer set of stage directions. The excerpt is focused on Ruth's actions as she goes through her morning routine to get her son and husband out of bed and into the shared bathroom. The stage directions show the poverty of the family and the domestic stress experienced by Ruth.

Forty-seven (47) candidates answered this question. Most of the candidates who answered this question did well, as they were able to include the three main points in their answer and provide relevant supporting evidence from the excerpt. Some saw the symbolism of the feeble light coming into the room that did little to disperse the morning dark, as a reflection of the little hope that the family has to get out of their current situation.

Weaker students did not know how to effectively utilise the excerpt to provide examples on the family's poverty or Ruth's tiredness that is shown through her almost mechanical morning routine. Instead the candidates resorted to retelling the excerpt, or trying and failing to link the excerpt to a relevant main theme.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION B: William Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night*

Question 3

Candidates are required to discuss the significance of trickery. All this has to be done using relevant textual evidence from the play.

Candidates are expected to discuss the importance of trickery to the play, using relevant textual evidence from the play to illustrate their answer. Trickery refers to the activity of using tricks, i.e. disguises and deceptions to deceive or cheat people. Trickery is significant because it provides the chain of events that lead to disorder in Orsino's kingdom. In the play, trickery is the source of humour, which is the important ingredient of Shakespearean comedies. Moreover, trickery illustrates the degree of self-deception of characters in the play, e.g. Malvolio, Orsino, and Olivia.

All candidates are required to answer this question. The question appears to be easy, but is actually quite tricky and many candidates failed to do well. The key to doing well in this question is to focus the discussion on the significance or importance of trickery to the chain of events, and/or that trickery is the source of humour in the play. The few candidates who did this, were able to get very good scores.

A majority of candidates performed quite satisfactorily where they were able to write about how Viola's disguise set in motion a love triangle between herself, Orsino and Olivia. However, many of the average and weaker candidates thought the question was about tricks and that they had to provide examples of how certain characters tricked other characters. Thus for example, many of these students spent most of their time giving a blow-by-blow account of how Maria and her co-conspirators were able to trick Malvolio into thinking that Olivia has feelings for him. There were other weak candidates who wrongly claimed that Feste is able to trick people like Olivia into making a fool of herself. Surprisingly, not many of the weaker candidates wrote about how trickery was the main contributor to the humour in the play.

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

Question 4

Candidates are required to discuss the dreams of any two main characters and how they are deferred.

Candidates are expected to first identify any two of the main characters, state what are their dreams and explain how and/or why their dream got deferred. The candidates are required to identify two main characters, their dreams and how or why it got deferred. Candidates may choose to discuss Mama Lina, Ruth, Beneatha, or Walter.

All candidates are required to answer this question. This question is easy to answer as it is about the main theme of the play. The majority of the candidates were able to identify two of the main characters and describe their dreams. However, many candidates forgot or did not write enough about how, i.e. what happened and why the dream got deferred.

For example, many candidates correctly stated that Mama's dream is to own a house with a yard and garden and they went on to provide many details of that dream. Some candidates even included how the sickly plant could be regarded as a symbol of that dream. However, many candidates said that her dream got deferred when her husband died; when in actual fact the dream kept getting deferred because Mama and her husband just could not save enough money to make the down payment on a house. And the fact that the insurance money had ironically given her the chance to achieve her dream. Thus, it was mistakes like these that caused many candidates to lose marks.

Walter is another character that has had his dream deferred. The good or strong candidates would have gone further as that is not the end of Walter's dream. His character eventually comes to a realisation that family is more important than money, and this realisation brings with it a different mindset that heralds better things for the family. The weaker candidates would write at length about how Walter lost his dream when his business partner or friend ran off with the money meant for the liquor store and Beneatha's medical school fees.

Weak candidates tended to retell the play's plot, wrote about other themes found in the play; there were also candidates that confused "differ" and "defer".

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/3)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

For Semester 3, 77 candidates sat for this subject and 84.43% of them obtained full pass. The percentage of each grade is as follows:

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
Percentage	24.68	12.99	7.79	9.09	11.69	14.29	3.90	5.19	2.60	3.90	3.90

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.

On the whole, the questions were rather 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, Elizabeth's emotional responses related to her rejection of Mr Darcy's marriage proposal based on an extract from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the mother's perspective regarding Lena's choice of lifestyle based on an extract from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, the significance of balls as a social event with close reference to *Pride and Prejudice*, and the purpose of alternate settings between China and America with close reference to *The Joy Luck Club*.

Overall, most answers were acceptable at the level of knowledge and understanding but lacked any real critical element and the application demonstrated that candidates have weak comprehension of the questions or themes and issues involved. Some answers were shorter than required and generally there was evidence of inability to discuss the tasks required from the questions pertaining to the themes and issues of the texts and did not contain any textual evidence.

In general, the level of difficulty was appropriate for STPM standards with a balance of accessible as well as challenging aspects. There was appropriate level of critical analysis or evaluation of content within the answers. Arguments presented were generally original and there was clear evidence of real engagement by candidates with the question under consideration.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: Critical Appreciation

Question 1

Candidates are required to describe Elizabeth's emotional responses related to her rejection of Mr Darcy's marriage proposal based on an excerpt from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Candidates are expected to answer by focusing on Elizabeth's eventual change of heart towards Mr Darcy's marriage proposal and changes depicted physically through her facial expressions, especially on her judgement of Mr Darcy stemming from her initial prejudice against his snobbishness and his pride about his high social status.

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 extract.

A high number of candidates could give appropriate examples from the extract which, however limited they may be in scope, contain an element of critical analysis. Unfortunately, some candidates were unable to discuss Elizabeth's emotional responses related to her rejection of Mr Darcy's marriage proposal.

Question 2

Candidates are required to describe the mother's perspective regarding Lena's choice of lifestyle based on an excerpt from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

Candidates are expected to find evidence in the excerpt to support their discussion of the way the mother perceives Lena's choice of lifestyle – the mother is critical of Lena's choice of American cultural lifestyle. She feels sorry for Lena, resents Lena's stubborn refusal to learn the Chinese ways of thinking from her which she feels is wiser than the American ways, acknowledges the extent to which her own passivity has led to Lena's failure to uphold her own Chinese cultural values, believes Lena has made a mistake in her choice of lifestyle, disapproves of Lena's choice of not expanding her family, does not think highly of Lena's job as an architect and feels that Lena's new house does not have many functions.

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. They also showed the ability to comment effectively the way the mother perceives Lena's choice of lifestyle which were 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.

However, a number of candidates lost marks as they named the mother as 'Ying Ying' which is not the correct way of referring to the character 'the mother' in question.

SECTION B: Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 3

Candidates are required to discuss the significance of balls as a social event.

Candidates are expected to answer by drawing attention to how a social event like balls functions as a starting point to a courtship, how balls are structured around protocols, how balls provide the opportunity for experiencing each other's physical proximity while being watched by others, how balls are social events where behaviours are codified and how the varying levels of dance steps and movements in balls portray one's dancing ability.

Candidates' answers showed a degree of originality and understanding of the question involved, namely to discuss the significance of balls as a social event focusing on finding and meeting prospective partners; for example, Mr. Bingley at the Meryton Ball as well as Elizabeth and Mr Darcy's mutual feelings connecting at a succession of balls. The answers given were not only merely described 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 text which were appraised critically rather than merely presented.

However, this question was rather challenging to some candidates as they answered by retelling the plot of novel with regards to each and every ball depicted in the texts rather than focusing on its significance as a social event.

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

Question 4

Candidates are required to discuss the purpose of alternate settings between China and America.

Candidates are expected to answer by showing the purpose of alternate settings between San Francisco, USA and Kweilin and Taiyuan in China. This is because setting has a significant effect on plots and characters by establishing the mood of the characters and adds on to readers' understanding of the storyline and helps to develop the plot into a more realistic form, resulting in more convincing characters. The shift of the setting from one place and time to another has also helped to define the characters.

Less than twenty candidates managed to answer this question according to the answer scheme and less than twenty managed to answer this question correctly. Most candidates only managed to attempt to discuss the plot without making any references to the purpose of alternate settings as discussions of the characters in the text were sometimes weak and not clearly explained.

The rest of the candidates misunderstood the meaning of the literary element 'alternate settings' and mistook the term with either 'changes in settings' or merely 'settings'. Some of the answers included 'plot' and 'storytelling' with regards to the settings between China and America. Clearly, there were serious gaps in the answers presented. Some of them were not even appropriate to the question; for example, the answer is a retelling of the plot of changes in setting focusing on the story of each character in the text. There were many errors of fact and interpretation indicating a lack of knowledge and understanding and no textual evidence were provided.

Most of the answers were derivative; for example, most candidates merely summarised the plot of the story pertaining to 'settings' between China and America. 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.

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