

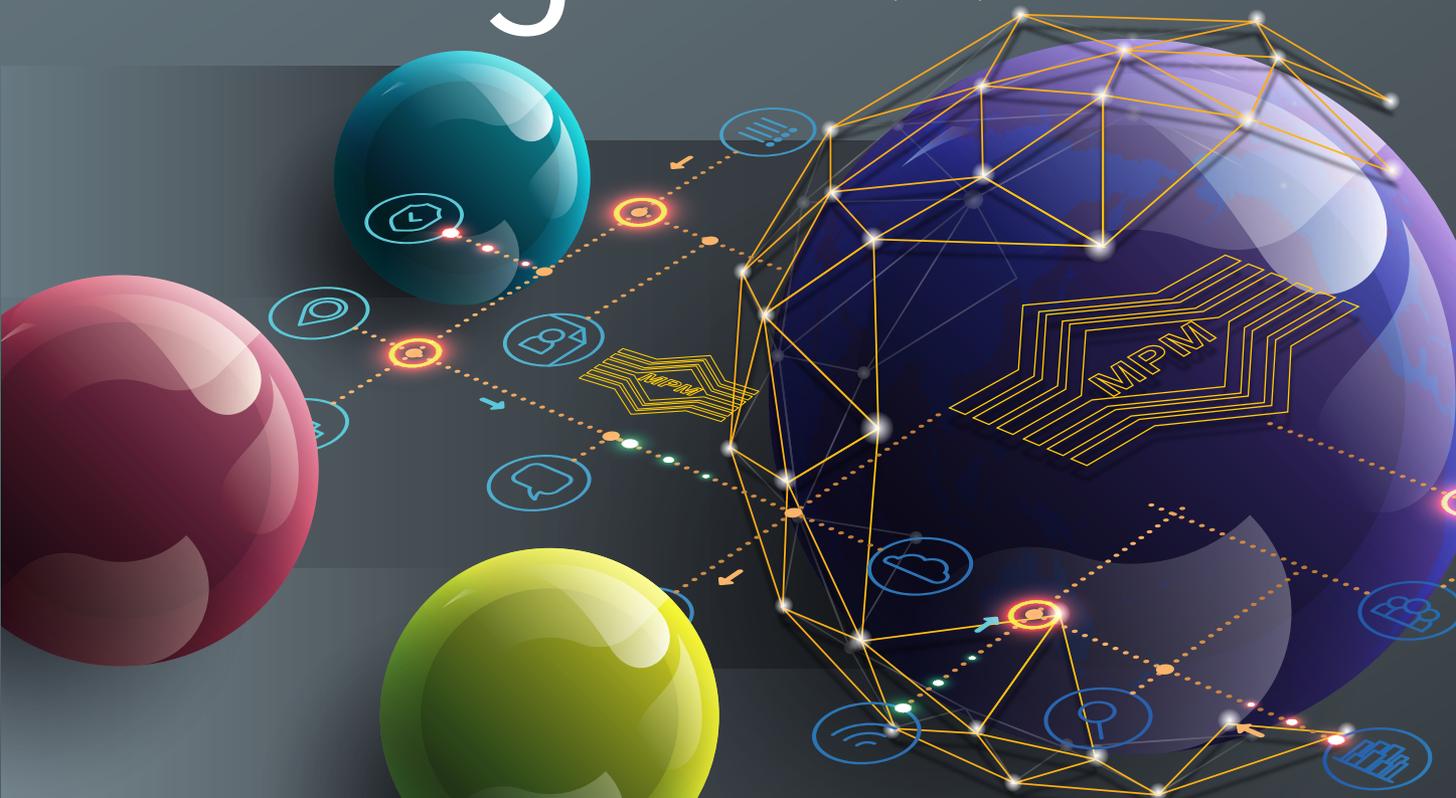


MAJLIS PEPERIKSAAN MALAYSIA



LAPORAN PEPERIKSAAN STPM & MUET 2021

Literature in English (920)



CONTENTS

Literature In English (920/1)	1 – 2
Literature In English (920/2)	3 – 5
Literature In English (920/3)	7 – 9

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/1)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 1, 61 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 60.66% 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	3.28	0.00	6.56	18.03	11.48	8.20	13.11	11.48	4.92	9.84	13.10

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

PAPER 920/1 (POEMS AND MALAYSIAN SHORT STORIES)

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 in three sections. Section A: Critical Appreciation provides a candidate 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 have to attempt the question set accordingly.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: Critical Appreciation

Question 1

Candidates are required to look at how a particular theme (rebirth) is brought out using language. Here, 'language' refers to things like figurative language, syntax, punctuation, diction, etc. So students should begin by explaining that the poem talks about being 'reborn', and should discuss what that means. Because this is a critical appreciation question, they should not talk about Cummings' religious beliefs outside of what is shown in the poem. Once they have clarified that point, they should then move on to discussing how language brings out these ideas. For example, they can explain that "the leaping greenly spirits of trees" gives an impression of life and growth because the trees are personified as leaping and having a spirit, while the colour green is associated with the new growth of leaves. Many candidates pointed out Cummings' idiosyncratic punctuation and capitalisation, tying it to the idea that he uses upper and lower case letters to illustrate his humility before God. However, generally, this was the only real analysis done. Candidates would state that Cummings used colours – green and blue – to signify life, but without explaining why these colours might signify life. They would mention the odd phrasing of the final couplet (the ears of my ears awake) without examining how these phrases signify a deeper way of living. The weakest answer was just nine lines long, and mentioned only one point. An average answer would mention various types of figurative language, without analysis.

Question 2

Candidates are required to examine the actions, reactions and interactions of the two characters to discuss their personalities. 'Personality' refers to what these two people are like. The tone of the excerpt is comedic and lightly ironic. Candidates should pick up the fact that the husband and wife are stereotypical examples of a traditional married couple – working husband and housewife.

They should also note that both are fairly content with their roles – there is no major conflict between them. Ganam is a bit inattentive to his wife, because he is completely absorbed in the cricket match, not

because he doesn't care. Santha is not a doormat – she plays the typical housewife role, but to herself, she mocks her husband, sarcastically thinking of him as 'lord and master'. But she is content in her role and excited about the baby. When Ganam finally understands what she is saying, he is also excited.

Poor answers tend to take their behaviour in isolation, without putting them together as a unified whole. For example, in a poor answer, the candidate calls Ganam "a very selfish person", as well as "a playful person" who "doesn't take things seriously". A surprising number of candidates also misread the author's sarcasm when he mentions that "the menu was white rice stripped of all its vitamins". One weak candidate suggested this as evidence that Santha "important health" because this "is a really healthy food to consume". An average answer points out that Ganam is "unattended" (sic) and Santha is "calm", but there is more summary than analysis. A good answer also makes these points – Ganam is "unattentive and easily gets distracted by his interests". However, in this case, the candidate follows this up by giving examples of his lack of attention, and concludes by returning to the point that he is unattentive.

SECTION B: Poems

Question 3

Candidates are required to examine poems which discuss the idea of beauty, looking at how different poets approach the topic. They can, for example, look at Yeats's "When You are Old", to show that the poet values inner beauty (the soul), while others only looked at physical beauty. He points out that outer beauty will fade, and only he, who loved her soul, will continue to love her. Lawrence's "Snake" contrasts the poet's admiration for the snake's beauty, with his fear of the snake (because it is venomous). Byron's "She Walks in Beauty" describes both the inner and outer beauty of a woman, focusing on how she is beautiful because every aspect is in perfect balance. Candidates should also look at how beauty is brought out – through figurative language, diction, etc. Generally, far too many candidates merely narrated the poems without offering analysis. For example, in a poor answer, a candidate says Byron "loves to write about the beautiness of a woman". Literary device such as simile is used by Lord Byron to describe beauty". The candidate mentions the simile ('walks in beauty like the night of cloudless climes'), but does not analyse the effect of the comparison. A good answer has a level of subtlety in analysis, and shows understanding of literary terms.

SECTION C: Malaysian Short Stories

Question 4

This should actually be an easy question to answer, as it is thematic, and doesn't require much discussion of literary terms. One issue, however, is that candidates often mix up stories and authors. Thus, they attribute stories to the wrong authors, or name one story but narrate the plot of another story. Candidates should pick stories in which money has a strong influence on the lives of the characters. In 'A Love of the Past', for example, Melinda's desire for financial security leads her to be a wealthy man's mistress, despite being in love with someone else. Jade Swallow, although dead, is still acquisitive. It is their focus on wealth that leads to Jeffrey's tragic death. In 'Through the Wall', poverty and gender bias intersect – when the Chinese girl gives birth to a female, the decision is made to sell the baby because they cannot afford to raise a child who will ultimately (according to the social understanding of it) bring benefit to another family (her husband's). In 'The Dream of Vasantha', Vasantha is taken advantage of because she is poor and powerless, but she struggles to make sure her son will not be equally poor and powerless. Candidates tend to narrate the plots rather than to carry out analysis.

A better answer examines why money is so important: "One can see that Jade Swallow, a concubine in 1819 Singapore had to live amongst treachery and violence as a way of survival and had no other choice as they cannot be financially independent. She had no value and could be easily discarded" – this answer ties the character's love of money to her disadvantaged position as a woman in old Singapore. A good answer takes the analysis a bit further by examining how the characters influence each other: "If she truly did not value money, she would simply leave Mr Wong for Jeffrey. This in turn becomes her inner conflict that Jade Swallow takes advantage of".

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/2)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 2, 60 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 88.33% 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	15.00	10.00	16.67	13.33	21.67	6.66	5.00	1.67	3.33	3.34	3.33

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

PAPER 920/2 (PLAYS)

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 have to answer the question set.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: Critical Appreciation

Question 1

The question requires candidates to discuss and show the differing opinions presented by Orsino and Viola regarding how a woman expresses her love, based on information assembled from what they say in the excerpt.

Candidates should be able to discuss and show the differences in opinion regarding how a woman expresses her love, as presented by Orsino and Viola who is in disguise as Cesario. Good candidates were able to strengthen their lines of argument with the use of relevant quotes from the excerpt. One good candidate pointed out that Orsino has no true idea of how a woman loves. He is operating based on assumptions, which also makes him biased.

The weaker students were not able to satisfactorily breakdown the excerpt to show the two characters' reasoning/thought processes; relying instead on a 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 gender.

Question 2

The question requires the candidate to focus on Ruth and track the different emotions she feels when she learns that Mama has bought a new house. Candidates should be able to track and show the change in emotions that Ruth feels on learning that Mama has bought a new house.

- Ruth's first response is unrestrained joy. She is excited and wants Walter to be happy too; but when he does not respond, it does not dampen her own happiness especially when Mama says they will move very soon.
- She is then startled and worried when she learns that the house is in a white neighbourhood. Mama herself was worried; yet had made that contentious decision as she had wanted to get the best value for their money. This is because the houses built for African Americans are substandard and more expensive, which is indicative of racial prejudice.
- Ruth's fighting spirit comes to the fore when she declares that "I ain't one never been 'fraid of no crackers". Ruth describes her current home – a broken down, inadequate place and space. She feels that living there has brought her misery and feels that having space and a well-built home is like having hope. In getting out of the slums, they are also moving away from the kind of life that (mainstream white) society seems to think they deserve. They are breaking barriers.
- The feeling of joy overtakes her again because for the first time she feels that there truly is hope for the future.

Good candidates were able to strengthen their lines of argument with the use of relevant quotes from the excerpt, and linking the bone of contention i.e. the new house to the larger issue of the Younger's attempt to break down the barriers of racial prejudice.

The weaker candidates were not able to satisfactorily breakdown the excerpt to show Ruth's emotions; relying instead on a superficial reading of the excerpt and/or not using examples from the excerpt to back-up their line of argument. Some resorted to a cursory discussion of the main themes of the play.

SECTION B: William Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night*

Question 3

The question requires the candidate to discuss the significance/importance of weddings to the play, using relevant textual evidence from the play to illustrate their answer.

Marriage is an important theme in many Shakespeare's plays; in comedies weddings celebrate love and restore order to the kingdom. Candidates should be able to write about two out of the three marriages depicted in *Twelfth Night*.

The majority of answers submitted by candidates first focussed on the marriage 'journey' between Sebastian and Lady Olivia, then went on to write about Viola and Orsino. Very few candidates wrote about Sir Toby and Maria. It also appears that many candidates were unsure as to what the question wanted, as the answers they submitted tended to ramble and switch focus abruptly. One unsure candidate wrote about how "weddings are seen as an important step to do before building a life with their partner"; while another candidate claimed that "because [in *Twelfth Night*] marriages happened off-stage, it is not considered significant."

The key to doing well in this question is to focus the discussion on the significance or importance of weddings to the chain of events, and how that often becomes the source of humour in the play. The few candidates who did this, were able to get very good scores. For example, one candidate says Shakespeare thumbed his nose at some social conventions of the time by making Lady Olivia a comic advocate for a woman's right to choose their life partner; another candidate said Shakespeare used the confusion surrounding Viola/Cesario's character to question the "slipperiness of gender" and even the concept of marriage.

However, many of the average and weaker candidates spent quite some time giving a blow-by-blow account of how a character in the play, e.g. Orsino or Malvolio tried to 'romantically' pursue Lady Olivia. Neither Orsino or Malvolio was successful in getting married to Lady Olivia. Thus, candidates who focussed on this line of argument lose marks. However, the candidates who wrote about the comic moments that arose due to Malvolio's deluded marital fantasies were able to get some marks.

In addition, eight candidates either did not submit an answer or only provided a short introductory paragraph to this question.

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

Question 4

The question requires the candidate to identify and discuss how different members of the family view money, and why it becomes a constant source of conflict among the members of the Younger family.

For this question, candidates must first identify and discuss how different members of the family view money. Then the candidates have to provide reasons or examples as to why it becomes a source of continuing conflict in the play. For example, Mama Lina, Beneatha and Ruth sees money as a means to an end, while Walter Jr thinks of money as an end in itself. For this question, it is not enough to just focus the discussion on the different characters' attitude towards money. Candidates also need to provide the reason why it becomes the source of conflict by linking it to the socio-economic context and socio-cultural realities of the period e.g. sexism, racial prejudice, persecution and discrimination.

Many candidates skipped the first section regarding identifying the family members and detailing how the different family members viewed money; instead going straight into the why. This means that candidates lost marks for this first section. In addition, for many average and weaker candidates it was very tempting to provide an answer based on dreams deferred, as it was a theme/model answer many had memorised in terms of points and examples and they can see the similarities/connections to this question. Nevertheless, it is not what the question wants. One good candidate understood the question when s/he started his/her discussion by saying that "dreams cost money"; and money can trigger conflict among family members when one or more characters become greedy and/or selfish.

The majority of the candidates rightly focussed their discussion on Walter and Mama as they have clear conflicting views about money and how to use the insurance payment. However, the way the average and weaker candidates provided the answer made them lose marks. For example, they would first provide all the reasons why Walter wanted the money i.e., to gain self-esteem, to start a liquor business, etc. Then they did the same with Mama. The candidates should have developed the argument further by explaining the why by linking the characters' personal reason(s) to the economic and social realities of the era, for example, pointing out the fact that Mama's dream of buying a house is also her way of trying to get out of the poverty trap and gain freedom from racial discrimination and persecution. Her decision puts her in direct and continuing conflict with Walter's more self-centred dream of using the money to become a successful businessman and acquire the material markings of wealth e.g. expensive car, big house, etc. This conflict then builds into the major climax of the story when Walter finally has a change of heart. The weaker candidates often did not understand what the question required; thus, they fell back into a retelling of the play's plot, or writing about themes found in the play.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH (920/3)

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In Semester 3, 62 candidates sat for the examination of this subject and 72.57% 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	24.19	8.06	6.45	6.45	3.23	12.90	11.29	4.84	9.68	4.84	8.07

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

PAPER 920/3 (NOVELS)

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 in 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 have to attempt the question set accordingly.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A: Critical Appreciation

Question 1

Candidates are required to look compare and contrast the personality of Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy based on an extract from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Candidates are expected to present contrasting personalities in the characters of Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy. Candidates are expected to show that Mr Bingley is friendly, charming and outgoing. He is not only good looking but also refined in character. On the other hand, Mr Darcy is portrayed as very arrogant, proud and unpleasant. Also, Darcy's arrogance seems to stem from his sense of superiority in social and economic stature as compared to the other attending guests at the ball.

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. Unfortunately, there are some candidates who did not compare and contrast the personality of Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy based on a close reference to the excerpt given and relied on plots outside the excerpt. What they did was just to present their personalities separately and no attempts at comparison were made.

Question 2

Candidates are required to explain what Lindo means by her 'Chinese face' and why is it hard for her to keep it based on an excerpt from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Candidates are required to answer

by finding evidence in the excerpt to support their discussion of how Lindo refers to her Chinese identity as her “Chinese face”; how she had to keep her true self, her Chinese face (identity), hidden, in order to be accepted in America. Even before moving to America, she had to learn how to hide her real identity. She had to pay in order to learn this. Her personal details had to be adjusted to fit in with acceptable American expectations. She had to learn how to write her name in English, and to adjust her birth date to the Western calendar year, and to pretend that she was a student of theology who was going to go back to China to teach her people what she had learnt in America.

They are also required to explain how Lindo also learnt that the best way for her to be accepted in America was by marrying an American citizen or by giving birth to a baby while she was there. To Lindo, her “Chinese face” is her real and true self, but she had to create a new ‘American face’ and hide her true face to survive in America. She finds it difficult to keep her Chinese self, as in America, she even had to pretend to be sincere.

Interestingly, 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. They also showed the ability to comment effectively on Lindo’s ‘Chinese face’ in which answers 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 excerpt were involved, they were clearly relevant to the question.

SECTION B: Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 3

For this question, candidates are required to discuss the significance of Longbourn property with close reference to *Pride and Prejudice*. They are expected to answer that the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* centres on the property of Longbourn and how it will be passed on. Since Mr Bennet does not have a son, upon his death, his five daughters will lose the property. In Chapter 7, it is stated that the property was “entailed in default of heirs male, on a distant relation.” In Chapter 13, Mr Bennet tells his family that his cousin, Mr Collins, “who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases.” In Vol 1, Chapter 19, it is shown that upon Mrs Bennet’s demise, Elizabeth gets £40 which Mr Collins claims is “unhappily so small.” Hence, Longbourn plays an important role because the family dynamics depends on retention of the property.

Candidates are also expected to discuss Mrs Bennet’s response that “it is the hardest thing in the world, that your estate should be entailed away from your own children” provides the push factor for her enthusiasm in plotting the marriage for all her daughters because they will be homeless once their father passes on. Longbourn estate represents a country gentry family with rather low standards. Mr. Bennet, a landowner and gentleman, is not a man of great fortune and apparently farms his own lands; he owns a carriage but is not wealthy enough to keep carriage horses. Together with his wife, he has never been able to save money from his income of two thousand pounds a year and so did not provide respectable dowry for their five daughters.

Candidates are also expected to discuss the relevance of all characters, who however, at one point enter the setting of Longbourn and brings here a notion of their wealthier world. Elizabeth returns here after each of her journeys; Mr. Bingley and later Mr. Darcy both enter this setting and express their desire for becoming connected with Jane and Elizabeth, thus, also with Longbourn. Even Lady Catherine once degrades herself and comes in order to prevent her nephew from marrying Elizabeth. Thus, Longbourn, the least noble country estate of *Pride and Prejudice*, stands as a bridge between different social statuses and highlights the power of love, which overcomes them.

Generally, the questions required candidates to provide answers pertaining to the significance of Longbourn property in *Pride and Prejudice* as opposed to the more important properties in the novel, namely Netherfield Park, Rosings, and Pemberley. However, some candidates answered by retelling the plot of novel with regards to each and every property depicted in the novel rather than focusing on its significance in the novel.

Most of the answers were derivative; for example, most candidates merely summarised the plot of the story pertaining to the role played by Longbourn limiting its significance only to the Bennets. A few described Longbourn as a “city”. 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.

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

Question 4

For question 4, candidates are required to examine the depiction of death with close reference to *The Joy Luck Club*. Candidates are expected to answer by showing how death maintains one’s legacy. Woo is asked of her aunts to tell stories of Woo’s mother to her mother’s sisters, of the ways Woo’s mother is able to survive against the odds, her kindness, smartness, dutiful nature, and excellent dishes she makes. Also, death can potentially alter heritage traditions. Woo is reminded of the complex links between becoming Asian-(American), of the ‘danger’ of not knowing Chinese cultural identities that are passed down for generations. Death is not inherently somber; the death of Woo’s mother relive stories of goodness, where many of Woo’s aunts are reminded of successful Chinese in America.

Candidates are also expected to answer that one’s death informs readers what is acceptable to do / and or say in Chinese culture posthumously. When someone dies, it is believed that he/she had a “full” life. Therefore, when Hsu makes mistakes, her mother is seen as following and haunting her every foot-steps. Hsu exploits mother’s dying stories to close and move on with her life. To experience death is to create new memories. Lena wants to learn about how a man dies so she can understand why her mother behaves strangely.

The answers disappointingly showed that some candidates have little understanding of the term “depiction” 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 retelling every single death event in the novel while some repeated the plot by the author in which death is depicted. Others retold how the deaths of the characters in the novel are depicted.

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 depiction of death in the novel.

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