

SPANISH LITERATURE

Paper 8673/41

Texts

Key messages

- Candidates must answer only **one** question on each text.
- Candidates should read the question carefully and respond to all aspects of their chosen question.
- Candidates are advised to plan each response before starting to write.
- Handwriting must be legible.
- Option **(a)** questions in *Sección Primera* require more extensive treatment in part **(iii)**, where candidates are expected to refer in detail to the work as a whole, not simply the printed extract.
- Quotations should be brief and relevant. Candidates should not copy the notes from the back of the book as part of their essay.
- Candidates should avoid re-telling the story of the text.

General comments

Examiners reported that the majority of candidates had prepared the set texts thoroughly and that most Centres had given good guidance in tackling the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

Both options were well answered, with candidates using their knowledge of the text well.

Option **(a)** gave candidates much scope for exploring the reasons why Castel is unable to resolve his problems. Most focused on his obsessive behaviour and his inability to relate to other people. It was important to analyse this in relation to specific incidents in the novel, rather than simply relate a list of events. Many made reference to the importance of the painting and his meeting with María. There were also some effective arguments which included observations of style – the first person singular narrative has particular significance.

Option **(b)** gave rise to arguments both supporting and challenging the statement given. Some candidates weighed up positive and negative aspects before coming to a conclusion.

Question 2 Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

In option **(a)**, the main comment relates to part **(iii)**, where candidates must make reference to the whole text in their answer. The main themes to be explored here are the relationship between Don Lope and Pedro Crespo, as representatives of very different strata of society and individuals with strong beliefs, and the idea of harmony.

Option **(b)** required a detailed and focused analysis of the use of poetic imagery to bring out the themes of the play. Candidates could choose the themes they wished to discuss, giving much opportunity for individual interpretation.

Question 3 Gabriel García Márquez: *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

Option **(a)** dealt with one of the more abstract stories in the collection in relation to parts **(i)** and **(ii)**, but candidates had to make reference to at least one other story in part **(iii)**. This question focused on the priests as individuals and as representatives of the Church in a wider sense. Candidates had no difficulty in

choosing a second story and gave many varied interpretations of the work of the priests and its relevance to the community.

Option (b) elicited some lively essays in which nearly all agreed that the women are in charge – or at least are usually right. Baltasar and Dámaso were often cited as examples of men under the control of their partners. It was important to consider the fact that both individuals still behave badly and Baltasar in particular is nervous of revealing the truth of his actions. Careful planning and judicious selection of material resulted in good essays.

Question 4 Lauro Olmo: *La camisa*

Parts (i) and (ii) in option (a) posed no difficulty. Part (iii) required candidates to analyse the presentation of the theme of *'la ilusión'* as central to the play and to find material to illustrate how the author presents it. It was then possible to consider whether it is the main theme or to offer an alternative.

In answering option (b), candidates needed to offer an overview of the types of humour present in the play and then discuss how the author uses it. There were good discussions of the pranks carried out by the boys – here the incidents offer light relief for the audience, give an authentic feel to the characters and highlight the unsavoury nature of Paco's character.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Carlos Ruiz Zafón: *La sombra del viento*

Essays on option (a) tended to focus on how Daniel's life was taken over by the discovery of the book in *'El cementerio'*. Every aspect of his emotional and moral development was affected.

In option (b), candidates were able to give many examples of characters who survived traumatic experiences and analysed them in detail. In order to achieve the highest marks, candidates needed to organise the argument in a logical way rather than simply give illustrations.

Question 6 Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

In option (a) candidates gave full responses to the idea of the repressive society using Tita's suffering at the hands of her mother as the prime example. The second aspect – the *'comunidad ... machista'* – needed to be thought through. Most candidates decided that Mamá Elena had taken on the mantle of the man of the household and analysed from that point of view. Others felt that Pedro's role was appropriate here also.

Option (b) was well answered as candidates used their detailed knowledge to proceed from the specific to the general.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

Option (a) presented few problems. Most essays were competent, with detailed discussion of the effect of the pressures of the community on the relationship between Yerma and Juan.

In option (b), however, many candidates did not respond to the question accurately. The subtitle *'poema trágico'* is given and candidates were asked whether it was appropriate or not. Unfortunately, a large number of essays only discussed whether the play is a tragedy or not. The question asks whether it is a tragic *poem*. The best essays analysed the poetic elements of the play and showed how these contributed to its tragic nature. This was a prime example of the need to read the question carefully as many competent essays on *Yerma* as a tragedy could not access the full range of marks as there were no references to the use of poetry.

Question 8 Alfonsina Storni: *Selección de poemas*

Option (a) gave candidates a clear focus and an opportunity to analyse the theme of the city as presented in the two poems specified. Candidates were free to offer individual interpretations provided they were supported by brief quotations from the poems.

In option (b), candidates were required to balance the themes of the poems with the format and style. There needed to be detailed discussion of both, so judicious choice of poems was essential.

Concluding remarks

Examiners are pleased to report the continuing trend that candidates have more detailed knowledge of the texts chosen. The majority follow the rubrics correctly but it is always disappointing to see a script where a candidate has reduced the possible marks available by mistakenly answering two questions on the same text.

Many candidates produced good work, but could have attained higher marks by focusing more precisely on the question set and giving greater attention to planning the response and constructing the argument. Centres and candidates are advised to practise essay questions as much as possible to perfect examination technique.

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General comments

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Comments on specific questions

Sección Primera

Question 1 Ernesto Sábato: *El túnel*

Answers to **(i)** and **(ii)** showed knowledge of the text and were generally sufficiently detailed. In part **(iii)** candidates interpreted the '*misterioso amor*' in the relationship between Castel and María as unhealthy or unusual. The best answers then went on to refer to incidents which illustrate this. Examples include Castel's obsessive behaviour versus María's seemingly evasive responses, reminding us that we only see events through Castel's eyes. Candidates are free to select the episodes which best support the answer but these should show detailed knowledge of the whole text.

Option **(b)** was answered very well by a small number of candidates. These essays showed how the author uses Allende, as a blind man, as a counterbalance to Castel. Ironically the blind man 'sees' the situation more clearly than the sighted one. Castel is blinded by his own preoccupations and problems. Most candidates analysed the episodes when the two men met, commenting in detail on how the differences between the men were revealed through the dialogue and reactions.

Question 2 Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *El alcalde de Zalamea*

In Option **(a)**, part **(iii)**, the best essays analysed the presentation of Chispa compared with the other female characters in the play, and drew conclusions from this. Candidates who agreed with the question found it more difficult to construct a successful argument.

In Option **(b)** candidates needed to respond to both aspects of the question. The first concerned the hierarchical social structure – this was well understood, and candidates were able to show how characters fitted in to it. The second aspect related to the universal themes. Many good essays discussed how themes, such as that of honour, involved all the social classes portrayed in the play, making them 'universal' in this way. Successful answers also analysed the themes and argued that they were universal in certain aspects but not in others.

Question 3 Gabriel García Márquez: *Los funerales de la Mama Grande*

In option (a) the most successful answers responded directly to the questions set. In (i) and (ii) candidates gave brief but precise responses to these 'context' questions, demonstrating understanding of the story quoted. In dealing with part (iii), candidates needed to consider first how they would show that the train was used by the author to help the reader understand the society presented in the short stories. Once this was settled, the choice of stories to support the argument could be made.

Option (b) required candidates to give careful consideration to the task and to decide whether to agree with the statement in the question or to challenge it. Candidates needed to analyse the role played by the Church and whether it is the same in all the stories. Those answers which listed examples of references to the Church or the cemetery in a very literal interpretation of the question could not achieve high marks. Better essays analysed the nature of the Church's role. For example, in *La siesta del Martes*, the mother is obliged to go to the Presbytery to obtain the key to the cemetery to visit her son's grave. As the story progresses the reader discovers that the priest displays a lack of charity and kindness to the bereaved woman, irritation at being disturbed, and general insensitivity. The mother questions the priest's interpretation of what is morally right. Although the existence of the Church and the priest are seen as central to the community, candidates needed to consider to what extent the values displayed are relevant to the people. In *Rosas artificiales*, the Church is seen as arbiter of strict codes of behaviour but also as a useful pretext to cover up romantic encounters. The irony implicit here brings into question the true role of the Church. These are only examples of approaches – Examiners accept candidates' own interpretations provided they are supported with reference to the text.

Question 4 Lauro Olmo: *La camisa*

Option (a) was generally well answered. Candidates had detailed knowledge of the text and used this effectively in analysing the presentation of the character of Paco.

In option (b) essays fell into two groups – those which only dealt with the themes and those which answered the question fully by analysing the way the author employs stylistic devices to present the themes. Successful essays showed how the author used the setting of the play effectively and discussed the importance of the 'camisa' itself.

Sección Segunda

Question 5 Carlos Ruiz Zafón: *La sombra del viento*

Both options were generally well answered. Candidates showed excellent knowledge of the text and obviously enjoyed it.

In (a), the best answers analysed the intricacies of the plot and the way they were linked. Candidates tended to focus on 'secretos' rather than 'maleficios' but the best essays gave sufficient overview of the text to achieve high marks.

Answers to (b) were sometimes limited by a simple interpretation of the question – that the reader would only enjoy the novel if fond of love stories. Other candidates were able to expand their interpretation of 'romántico' and to show that there were other aspects of the novel as well. Again, essays were well supported with references to the text.

Question 6 Laura Esquivel: *Como agua para chocolate*

This was a popular text which attracted many answers to both options.

In option (a), some candidates told the stories of the various relationships in some detail without considering the idea of 'derecho'. This limited the marks available. Other essays analysed the concept of responsibility within relationships, between parent and child as well as partners, and showed how the human need for affection can be manipulated, or indeed ignored, for selfish reasons.

Option (b) dealt with the theme of food, which had been well prepared by candidates. There was some tendency to write about the importance of food in general without relating this sufficiently to the quotation given. The best essays included a detailed analysis of episodes in the novel which illustrated the different elements within the question. Some took the three parts separately and discussed each in turn. Both of these approaches worked well.

Question 7 Federico García Lorca: *Yerma*

As always, it was important to read and respond precisely to the question set. Some candidates picked up one element of a quotation, for example, in the case of option (a), the word '*marchita*', and reproduced a prepared response on the theme of infertility. However, this was not an appropriate response to the question set which required candidates to consider whether the quotation encapsulates the expected denouement of the play. As stated earlier, candidates are strongly advised to plan their response before starting to write, settling on their reaction to the question and structuring the argument accordingly. Some good answers included analysis of successive moments in the play which prefigure the ending. It was also important to recognise that the quotation comes from the end of the play.

Option (b) gave a very clear focus for candidates. There were some very competent responses which showed how much preparation had been done in relation to the role of the chorus in Greek drama, and how García Lorca utilised this device in his work. Candidates were able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the chorus in terms of plot and theme. The best essays referred to differences of opinion between the '*lavanderas*' which gave an extra dimension to the discussion.

Question 8 Alfonsina Storni: *Selección de poemas*

In relation to both options, candidates used their texts to good effect in quoting from the poems, but needed to avoid copying out over-long sections. The theme in (a) was very specific and candidates had much scope in choosing another poem to contrast or support the analysis of *Amor*. In option (b), candidates were given the opportunity to develop an individual response to themes of their choice relating to Latin American concerns. It is essential to refer to the number of poems as specified in order to access the full range of marks.

Concluding remarks

Examiners are pleased to report the continuing trend that candidates have more detailed knowledge of the texts chosen. The majority follow the rubrics correctly but it is always disappointing to see a script where a candidate has reduced the possible marks available by mistakenly answering two questions on the same text.

Many candidates produced good work, but could have attained higher marks by focusing more precisely on the question set and giving greater attention to planning the response and constructing the argument. Centres and candidates are advised to practise essay questions as much as possible to perfect examination technique.