
A-LEVEL SPANISH

7692/2 Paper 2 Writing
Report on the Examination

7692
June 2022

Version: 1.0

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General

There have been examples of essays from across the full spectrum of films and texts this year. The vast majority of students have been prepared very well for the component, especially considering the difficult circumstances and time in the classroom lost due to covid. The most widely chosen text continues to be *La casa de Bernarda Alba* but also popular is *Como agua para chocolate*. The most commonly studied films, by some margin, are *El laberinto del fauno* and *Volver*.

Section A Texts

Question 1 *La casa de Bernarda Alba*

The answers were divided fairly evenly between the two choices.

Question 1.1 on the theme of fear was generally well answered. Most students talked about fear of society's judgement and fear of Bernarda, her oppressive regime and the *bastón*. The best students cited the villagers' reaction to *la hija de la Librada* as a reason to fear society's judgement and explained that Adela's fear of losing her chance of love became greater than the fear of her mother.

In question 1.2, which required an analysis of the conflict between society and the needs of the individuals, many students focused on the word 'conflict' and directed the whole essay towards any aspect of conflict that is dealt with in the play. There were a lot of references to oppression, the different lives of men and women, and the class system. In general, there was insufficient focus on the needs of individuals and how these would not be fulfilled because of the expectations of society.

It is still surprising and disappointing to see many students link Bernarda to Franco and her dominance to his regime.

Students should be discouraged from forcing unnecessary subjunctives into their writing; sentences such as "*Si yo fuera Bernarda, no trataría a mis hijas de esta manera*" are not appropriate in a literature essay.

Question 2 *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*

Question 2.1 on the representation of the Church was the less popular of the two questions. The weakest answers focused solely on the visit of the bishop, and some suggested it was the Pope who visited. The best answers referenced the priest's acceptance of the killing.

Question 2.2 was more successfully tackled on the whole. The best answers showed how society's expectations impacted on the lives and deaths of the people. They explored honour, the expectations of the role of women and the double standard in sexual roles of men and women.

Question 3 *Como agua para chocolate*

Question 3.1 was marginally the more popular of the two. Most students were able to cite episodes of magical realism and explain how they affected the characters or plot; they also explained how the episodes reflected Tita's emotions. The best students explained *why* Tita's feelings were channelled into her cooking and how the magical realism episode developed the readers' understanding of other characters and themes.

Question 3.2 produced a large variety of approaches to the question. Although it was perfectly acceptable to discuss and compare the three sisters, quite a few students spent far too little time

on Gertrudis and turned the essay into a discussion on Tita. The best students dealt with Gertrudis's flight from the ranch, her stay in the brothel and her rise to General in the army. Very few thought to mention her conformity in the end where she marries and has a child. Most students decided that the question required some consideration of how Tita and Rosaura dealt with society's expectations and some dealt well with Tita's quietly growing resistance.

Question 4 Réquiem por un campesino español

Question 4.1 asked students to consider the two very different halves of the book. There were some very well written essays which ensured they dealt with the second part of question and considered the author's intentions in dividing the book this way. There were some examples of confusion regarding the plot and mistaken identities regarding the characters.

Question 4.2 produced some good answers and students had good ideas about the aspects of inequality and injustice explored in the novel. Quotations were generally well used at appropriate points. Weaker essays focused largely on criticising Mosén Millán but not linking his flaws to the question set.

Question 5 La sombra del viento

Very few students tackled this novel and the few responses were divided evenly between the questions. The main issue with both questions seemed to be a failure to grasp the scope of the question. In question 5.2 students tended to talk about violence but largely ignored the reference to the violence going unseen. In question 5.1, it was clear that this complex novel had been challenging for some students, who struggled to remember events and characters with accuracy.

Question 6 La casa de los espíritus

Questions on this novel were answered by very few students and responses were divided evenly between both questions. Some essays were short, making very few points, but there were a couple of very good responses to both questions.

Question 7 Rimas

Fewer than 20 students answered the questions on Bécquer; question 7.2 (on suffering for love and his art) was the more popular of the two. There were good answers to both questions, and in 7.2 students often covered both aspects well. Some students argued perfectly reasonably that, although Bécquer suffered, he also experienced moments of pure happiness.

Question 8 Las bicicletas son para el verano

Question 8.1 on the cross section of society was the more popular of the two and was done well. Most students could pick out examples of different classes and political ideas, although it was surprising that quite a number did not mention property owners Don Álvaro and Doña María Luisa or the maid María, as opposite ends of the social spectrum, or the radical Anselmo. The weaker responses omitted any discussion as to why the playwright showed us this cross section. Question 8.2 was not generally answered as well; the element of serious issues went well but fewer students dealt convincingly with the comic elements. In general, there was evidence of confusion

concerning the politics of the time, with some students confusing the two sides and the political inclinations of the main characters.

Question 9 El otro árbol de Guernica

Both questions were done well on the whole, and many students had a very good knowledge of the novel and its themes. In 9.2, the preferred choice by some margin, the best responses showed an understanding of the origins of the Guernica tree and how it came to be a point of unity for the evacuated children at the *Fleury*. They also explored the author's belief in having 'roots' as expressed through the main character, Santi. Some confusion arose over the image of the mast and some students did not realise it was not a positive image, like the tree, but a symbol of someone who had lost their roots. In 9.1 students were able to cite good examples of where the children bonded and overcame their differences. In general, there was little understanding of how, at first, the unity was only among the Basque children but that regional differences were soon outweighed by the common bond of their Spanish connection.

Question 10 El coronel no tiene quien le escriba

There was a mixed response to these questions. The best answers to 10.1 were able to demonstrate why the colonel's optimism had a positive effect, as well as negative, and the weakest simply narrated events when he looked at life in a positive way. The second option was less popular but produced a handful of really good responses.

Section B Films

Question 11 El laberinto del fauno

This was the most widely chosen film, with *Volver* a close second. Responses were fairly evenly split between the two questions, but the one on Captain Vidal proved the most popular. In question 9.1 the best answers argued that it was Del Toro's intention to leave it up to the audience to decide whether the underground world was real or a product of Ofelia's imagination and that most of the evidence could be interpreted both ways. Some responses seemed unclear how to approach the question and produced an overall consideration of why the director created the underground world in the film. Question 11.2 produced a wide range of essays. Less successful responses gave a character description of Vidal with weak examples to demonstrate his cruelty, such as telling Ofelia she had offered the wrong hand to shake. The best responses referred to his brutality towards the poachers and the stutterer, his obsession with timekeeping and control and his desperation to have son and continue his legacy. Some perceptive essays referenced Vidal's attitude to his father and suggested he feels pressurised to live up to the standards expected of him.

Question 12 Ocho apellidos vascos

This film is a popular choice and, while a good number tackled both questions, 12.2 was the preferred option. Question 12.1 proved a challenge for many, and weaker responses talked about how Rafa changed when he was masquerading as Antxon instead of considering the real changes that Rafa underwent as a result of his experiences. Question 12.2 was better done on the whole. The best answers talked about the humorous way that the contentious past of the Basque Country was treated and cited other reasons that explained the film's success. Weaker answers implied that the '*miedo y conflicto*' of the question referred to the stereotyping of regional characteristics.

Question 13 María, llena eres de gracia

The best answers to 13.1 gave a wide range of reasons why the film suggested a hopeless future for the young of Colombia, from the shortage of jobs and the cycle of poverty to the lack of entertainment. The weaker responses suggested that drug smuggling represented hope as it offered a way to make easy money. Some successful answers contained a paragraph on the contrast between the USA and Colombia which emphasised the hopelessness of a future in Colombia; this worked well as long as students ensured that the bulk of the essay focused on Colombia itself. Most of the students answering question 13.2 explored the attitudes of María's boss, her boyfriend Juan and the drug dealers. Some successfully contrasted their sexist attitudes with the supportive approach of the avuncular Don Fernando in the USA. Disappointingly, few referred to the lack of men in María's household and the inevitability of Juan's infidelity if she married him.

Question 14 Volver

This is the second most popular choice among the films and produced both excellent and weak responses. The best answers to 14.1 looked at the new life for Raimunda after Paco's death, the closer relationship between Raimunda and Paula and the impact of Irene's return on the lives of Raimunda and Sole. Weaker essays focused too much on the concept of returning; this seemed to be because students were recalling a term time essay and not applying their knowledge to the question set. There were quite a few responses that spent too long on unconvincing discussions of the use of colour. Question 14.2 was surprisingly badly done by a number of students who misunderstood the question and made no reference to Agustina at all. Some of the weaker essays honed in on the word '*vecinos*' and focused on the solidarity among neighbours. There was a lot of confusion regarding the plot and which events happened in the city and which in the village; there were cases where it was clear that knowledge of the film was really quite sketchy.

Question 15 Abel

Very few students answered questions on this film; question 15.1 was far more popular than 15.2. The best responses to 15.1 argued that the abandonment of Anselmo had caused many of the family's problems, but that he also caused problems on his return. They accepted that Anselmo was instrumental in rescuing the boys from the pool but that, in many ways, Cecilia was better off without him. Only two students answered question 15.2 on the relationship between Paul and Abel.

Question 16 Las 13 rosas

Fewer than 50 students answered on this film. Question 16.2 produced the most responses and the most successful, exploring a variety of characters and situations that demonstrated the lack of freedom for everyone.

Language

There is a fine line between using complex language with a range of structures and forcing inappropriate subjunctives or pre-learned phrases into an essay. On the whole it is more important to have the vocabulary needed to express points clearly and to be able to deal with tenses and verbs accurately. It is not appropriate to use phrases such as '*que yo sepa*' in a literature/film

essay, nor the ‘if/would’ structure that we see all the time, particularly in essays on *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. Similarly, expressions of emotion that are followed by a subjunctive are out of place in this style of essay; for example ‘*me enfada que Paco trate a Paula de esta manera*’.

General points: advice to students

Students should ensure that they learn the key vocabulary that is needed whenever they write or talk about a certain book or film.

When revising, they should jot down a list of themes and characters and then take each one and write notes on everything they can remember about that theme or character. Then, they should return to their class notes and check their work.

Students should look at past papers for questions and practise writing essay plans on the questions set. It is important to get the names of characters, authors and directors right. To begin with, it gives a bad impression to get these wrong and, at worst, the whole essay can be off point if students mistake one character for another.

A detailed knowledge of the book or film is essential. The aim should be to know the book or film so well that students can adapt their knowledge to whatever comes up.

Students spend time ‘unlocking’ the question – the whole question. What exactly does it ask? Is there more than one element that needs covering? What kind of evaluation or analysis does it require?

Students should be careful not to twist the question so that they can reproduce an essay they have done in term-time; instead they should adapt what they know to the question set.

Students should avoid spending ages re-telling the story; when providing evidence for a point they are making, they should explain the episode briefly, just enough for their reference to be clear and relevant.

They must also be absolutely sure their understanding of the historical or geographical setting of the book or film is accurate. Examples of misunderstandings are: the erroneous link of Bernarda Alba to Franco; in *Volver*, comments on Franco’s impact on the life of Raimunda or all the neighbours in the village helping to move Paco’s body; the film *El laberinto del fauno* taking place during the Civil War.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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