

Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for each question of the Literary Study assessment.

Candidate A

Prose fiction

Discuss some of the ways in which the theme of oppression is explored in two novels or three short stories.

The candidate was awarded **11 marks** for this piece.

The candidate introduces their relevant approach to the question by indicating that oppression in both novels has an 'effect [...] on setting and the characters' life choices' and they move on to comment upon the settings of both novels showing a knowledge and understanding of the texts. They go on to touch upon contrast, juxtaposition, and tension – in terms of setting – as a starting point for their approach to addressing the question.

In the second paragraph, the candidate uses textual evidence to address the demands of the question in looking at the 'oppressive setting of winter' in *Ethan Frome* which is seen as 'a metaphor for his character's inner struggles', but the analysis is more implied and assertive than explicit and could be seen to be limited to some degree.

The candidate goes on to show their further knowledge and understanding of the text by looking at the tensions within the Frome household between Ethan, his wife Zeena, and his wife's cousin Mattie, and the 'oppressive nature of their marriage'. Textual evidence is used to show Ethan's attraction to Mattie, and a reference to a metaphor following the quote in the text is made (but the metaphor itself is not given); and this is contrasted with the comment on Zeena being 'angry and witch-like' and this amounts to 'how oppressive she is on Ethan's happiness'. It is the case that two pieces of textual evidence are provided, yet the analysis could be said to be inferential and limited to some degree. Although conflict, imagery, and contrast are mentioned in this section of the response, it is only really contrast that it dealt with here, but the comments are valid if a touch underdeveloped.

In the next paragraph, the candidate again shows knowledge and understanding of the text with valid analysis of the sledding scene and moves on to comment upon a scene where Ethan and Mattie are observing couples 'sledding' and being

happy as ‘a symbol of possibility and excitement’ – which is a valid analysis of this scene – and also how the scene shows how the setting ‘impacts Ethan [and] mirrors Ethan’s pent-up emotions.’

The ‘sledding hill’ is once again looked at, but from a more negative standpoint as the candidate shows their knowledge and understanding of the text by stating that Ethan is ‘heart-broken’ when Mattie is asked to leave the Frome farm by Zeena. The candidate offers an accurate analysis of the situation by stating that the landscape ‘is no longer a symbol full of majestic beauty and hope, but the oppressive setting only reflects their despair’ and an apposite piece of textual evidence is used to address the demands of the task (‘they might have been in their coffins underground’) and is linked also to the idea of suicide.

An evaluative stance concerning oppression is then presented but is primarily assertive and demonstrates some weakness in relevance as it lacks focus and clarity.

The second novel, *Summer*, is now dealt with and the candidate’s knowledge and understanding of the text is presented when they write that ‘Charity Royall is bound to a small, empty town [which] causes her to be miserable and alienated.’ The candidate then writes that the setting of the novel – North Dormer – can be seen as ‘having connotations with sleepiness’ and is a valid analytical comment and a relevant approach to the question where this text is concerned.

Next, the candidate moves on to looking at the main protagonist’s ‘alienation’ and ‘role as an outsider’ in the town as she was ‘brought down from the Mountain’ and feels that she is a ‘prison house’. The textual evidence addresses the demands of the task, and the analytical comment is valid as is the reference to repetition.

The candidate makes a more assertive observation in the following paragraph, albeit a valid observation, yet with no textual evidence to support this.

The candidate goes on to look at ‘Charity’s oppressive view of status and superiority’ with Lawyer Royall being ‘high on the social hierarchy’ as he is from Nettleton, but Lucius is further up in the social hierarchy as he comes from a place larger than Nettleton. Knowledge and understanding of the text is shown, and textual evidence is provided. An evaluative stance is provided when the candidate comments that ‘this causes Charity to feel worthless, inferior to those around her.’

This next paragraph shows a knowledge and understanding of the text in ‘Charity’s wish to escape the oppressive life of North Dormer’, her view of

'Nettleton as an embodiment of sophistication', and that she is 'falling into a trap that many other girls have fallen into' but there is limited textual evidence to support the demands of the question and assertion lies at the heart of the paragraph.

The candidate goes on to now look at the 'role status plays in Charity's life' where textual evidence to meet the demands of the question is provided alongside an apposite piece of textual evidence where Lawyer Royall comments upon the fact that 'they all know what she is and what she came from.' There is a relevant piece of analysis on this setting at the cottage, and an evaluative stance with respect to the text.

The next paragraph then moves on to look at a moment of epiphany in the hotel where Charity 'sees Royall's strength, kindness, and an understanding in his actions.' The candidate then shows their discernible and relevant evaluative stance that 'He is offering her what she needs, but not what she wants' and how her oppression 'affects her chance at happiness and life choices.'

Juxtaposition lies at the heart of the penultimate paragraph with the comparison to the opening where Charity is alone, and the reference to 'they' at the end of the novel, showing that she is 'no longer separated' from Royall, but 'united as "they"'. The candidate shows their knowledge and understanding of the text and makes a valid analytical comment on this juxtaposition and goes on to provide an evaluative comment based on the evidence discussed.

The final paragraph offers an evaluation of the texts stating that both 'protagonists are limited from growth' and that Ethan 'becomes more isolated' and 'lacks action' whilst Charity comes to 'accept her fate and let go of her dream of escaping her lonely, lifeless town'. This is a discernible and relevant evaluative stance with respect to the texts, yet is not well supported by evidence discussed.

This is a response which is located initially within the 12-10 mark range, especially with the knowledge and understanding of the texts. The candidate does look at a range of techniques (setting, metaphor, symbol, epiphany, juxtaposition, imagery, conflict, contrast, repetition, and tension) but the analysis – at times – shifts to the 9-6 mark range as it can be limited, underdeveloped and assertive. Yet the evaluative stance has touches of the 15-13 mark range (relevant and discernible) in the latter part of the response, but is often not based on evidence discussed. In terms of technical accuracy, the piece meets minimum competence for technical accuracy which includes few errors in the use of structure, style, language and/or literary terminology. Holistically, this response is most comfortably placed in the 12-10 mark range but cannot be said to 'fully meet' the requirements of the mark range, but neither does it 'just meet' the requirements of this range, so a mark of 11 is awarded.

Candidate B

Prose fiction

Discuss some of the ways in which the theme of oppression is explored in two novels or three short stories.

The candidate was awarded **18 marks** for this piece.

The introductory paragraph illustrates immediately the candidate's secure knowledge and understanding of both texts. The candidate succinctly defines the issues which underpin Ethan and Charity's characterisation ('the repressive New England setting' in *Summer* and Ethan's 'vindictive wife Zeena' in *Ethan Frome*) and how oppression plays a part in their lives and their futures. This defines a relevant exploration which demonstrates secure consideration of the implications of the question.

The candidate begins by looking at the symbolic significance of the town of Starkfield and then looks at the 'narrator' as an 'outsider' who goes on to describe Ethan as a 'ruin of a man' to make the connection between the 'bare and empty' Starkfield and Ethan's situation in this oppressive place. There is then a relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary technique (setting, character, symbol, and narrator) which strengthens the line of argument, and the candidate continues to show a secure knowledge and understanding of those living at the Frome farm and uses extensive textual evidence – which is often grammatically integrated into the sentences – which clearly supports the demands of the question.

The candidate moves on to look at the oppressive power Zeena has over Ethan and shows, once again, their secure knowledge and understanding when they observe that Ethan's marriage is 'built on shaky foundations' and his attraction to Mattie 'comes about as she is everything Zeena deprives him of'. It is worth noting that, as in the previous paragraph, the candidate refers to the 'reader' which shows their awareness of the events/characters in the novel as literary constructs. Extensive textual evidence is also used throughout the paragraph to support the demands of the question and their analysis strengthens the line of argument when they state that Zeena uses Ethan's fear of 'being alone as a tool to impose her superiority in their relationship' and that Ethan 'doesn't do the obvious thing [leave Zeena and run off with Mattie] because he is so entrenched in his duty to Zeena'.

The next paragraph looks in a very detailed manner at the 'climactic moment in the novel' when Zeena tells Mattie she is leaving the Frome farm which the candidate sees as an 'act of oppression'. The candidate shows a secure knowledge and understanding and builds upon this by a detailed exploration of this key climactic moment which is supported by the extensive use of textual evidence which clearly supports the demands of the question. The analysis strengthens the line of argument as they touch upon the fact that Ethan 'becomes

self-aware that he does not, and will not, ever have power in his relationship' as he realises 'that he has been manipulated by his wife' but then 'finally articulates that he is "taking her" [Mattie] with some power and dominance in his tone.'

The final paragraph on *Ethan Frome* looks at the 'tragic consequence of the "Big Smash"' and Mattie and Ethan's failed suicide attempt. As with the previous paragraphs, the knowledge and understanding is secure, and the analysis strengthens the line of argument whilst being supported by extensive textual evidence.

The candidate moves on to look at the novel *Summer* and shows that they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the text by defining Charity Royall as 'self-centred and naïve' whilst commenting on her 'abstract parentage' which alienates her in North Dormer and causes her to 'feel oppressed'. At the same time, she 'manipulates Lawyer Royall into getting her a job at the library' and eventually 'meets Lucius Harney, an outsider to North Dormer' who is 'partly responsible for Charity's oppression' as she comes to believe that Lucius loves her. The analysis is relevant and strengthens the line of argument and is supported by extensive textual evidence which clearly supports the demands of the question. Throughout the response, the focus for the analysis lies in the characterisation, relationships, key moments and contrast and they are often integrated throughout a paragraph as exemplified here. The analysis articulates the fact that being an outsider brought from the Mountain causes Charity 'to feel like she doesn't belong [and] feel oppressed'; it then states that Lucius Harney 'sees Charity for what she is, an outsider, and sees her through the same lens he looks at old houses [...] with a sordid fascination' a view of Charity which 'will not remove her oppression but will only fuel it.'

The candidate continues with their response by looking at the 'contrast between Lucius and Charity' which primarily revolves around their 'different backgrounds', and observing that Charity becomes 'more mature, less innocent through her affair with Lucius', all of which adds to this candidate's secure understanding and knowledge of this text. Extensive textual evidence is used once again to clearly support the demands of the question and the analysis also strengthens the line of argument with regard to oppression by stating that Lucius 'will never understand [Charity's] feeling of non-belonging' as Charity then 'becomes self-aware that they are too different to be together' and that eventually 'Harney's true nature is revealed [...] reinforcing to Charity that she does not belong anywhere and her sense of oppression reaches its peak.'

The final paragraph on *Summer* looks towards the end of the novel when Charity – now pregnant – 'decides to flee up the mountain to reconnect with her mother only to find her dead' and then for Lawyer Royall to 'come to "rescue" her' despite the fact of his 'attempted seduction of her when she was 15, and in spite of two rejected proposals of marriage', all of which and exemplifies the candidate's secure knowledge and understanding of the text. The candidate makes analytical

comments on Charity's 'hopelessness' which 'keeps her oppressed despite her trying to escape' and that, ultimately, she 'is out of options.' When Lawyer Royall appears, Charity is said to be 'glad to have "someone near her in the awful emptiness" and is appreciative of their "sudden nearness of each other."' This analysis is supported with extensive textual evidence and the analysis strengthens the line of argument. It is at this point that the candidate makes a clearly identifiable stance with respect to the text and question, and securely based on evidence discussed within the response when they write of Charity 'being tricked and used, is manipulated using her desperation to belong and will now forever be trapped [...] living a life which will no doubt be entrenched in duty, obligation, unhappiness, and oppression.'

The final paragraph brings the texts together and offers a clearly identifiable evaluative stance with respect to both texts and question and is securely based on the evidence discussed. An example of this evaluative comment is highlighted when the candidate observes that 'both outcomes are similar' but 'Charity's is dressed up a little better, but both of them still equally oppressed in their inability to escape duty and obligation.'

This candidate consistently hits the markers of the 18-16 mark range. They have a consistently secure knowledge and understanding of both texts, and at the same time they use extensive textual evidence, with an analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques which strengthens the line of argument, and a clearly identifiable evaluative stance which is always securely based on the evidence provided throughout the response. The candidate meets the minimum competence for technical accuracy which includes few errors in the use of structure, style, language and/or literary terminology. As the response fully meets each aspect of the 18-16 mark range, this response is given the highest mark in this range and is awarded 18 marks.