

# Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for each question of the critical reading question paper.

## Candidate 3

### Section 2 – Question 5

**Choose a novel or short story which explores the theme of either good and evil or appearance and reality. By referring to appropriate techniques, explain how the writer explores the theme and discuss how this contributes to your appreciation of the text as a whole.**

The candidate was awarded **15 out of 20 marks** for this essay.

The candidate has chosen an appropriate text, 'The Great Gatsby', for question 5. The introduction succinctly summarises the plot of the novel and the fate of its main character, Gatsby. The candidate successfully responds to the question of 'the theme of appearance and reality' and ties this discussion into the theme of 'the futility of the American Dream', which Gatsby 'embodies'.

This essay is placed in the 15-13 category as it is a clear response to the question, with elements approaching secure.

Knowledge and understanding are clear and well established throughout. In the second paragraph, the candidate examines our introduction to Gatsby, via his stretching for the green light: 'we understand the extent of his yearning for Daisy and the life she lives'. By recognising the light represents a life with Daisy, the candidate shows awareness of how the novel contrasts surface image (the light) with underlying reality (Gatsby's dream).

The third paragraph maintains focus on Gatsby and the disappointed expectation that he would be 'a full-blooded character.' This knowledge is tied well to the task as 'we wonder if he's truly the dashing character ...or just a man with a carefully constructed persona.'

The essay goes on to explore Gatsby's links with the criminal world through the meeting with Wolfsheim. The candidate demonstrates their clear evaluative stance, for example, 'leads us to doubt our admiration for Gatsby ... Fitzgerald reveals that Gatsby's quick millions may not have come from a moral place.'

The candidate next explores how Gatsby worked hard to construct the 'perfect version' of himself and links this to the idea of achieving the American Dream. We see here again the use of textual evidence to support the clearly structured line of thought.

The candidate's understanding of the character of Tom and his role in the novel edges into secure. Through Tom's attack on Gatsby, 'Fitzgerald reveals the truly shallow nature of the elite'. Tom belittles Gatsby using his 'incredulous and insulting' voice and his 'snide comments' about Gatsby's education. The candidate's evaluation of the significance of this moment also moves towards secure: 'all of the effort, time and money put into becoming Jay Gatsby has gone to waste'.

In the penultimate paragraph, the candidate considers how the novel 'critiques the idea that wealth equates to happiness', exploring the shallow, callous lifestyle of the Buchanans, the importance of the Valley of the Ashes and Gatsby's naivety as he 'essentially raised Daisy onto a pedestal'.

The conclusion ties the candidate's argument together and demonstrates a clear grasp of Fitzgerald's moral message.

Overall, the essay maintains a clear focus on the demands of the question and on the theme of appearance versus reality. The candidate frequently refers to the American Dream and how 'it highlights the motivation behind the fabricated life of Jay Gatsby'.

The chosen evidence covers the breadth of the novel: Gatsby's introduction, his past, his relationship with Daisy, and the Buchanans' hypocrisy.

Analysis of language and the role of characters is well handled throughout the essay. Gatsby's 'affiliation with criminals' is neatly tied to the sense of mystery surrounding the character. The Valley of Ashes is also well analysed, tying into the wider theme of 'the extreme wealth inequality and the social divide between the rich and the poor'.

Engagement with the text is clear throughout. This is exemplified by the candidate's conclusion: 'the corruptive nature of the American Dream and how it can ruin lives, rather than uplift them.'

Overall, this candidate maintains a clear focus on the task throughout. They demonstrate a good understanding of the text. The discussion of characterisation and analysis of language is generally clear and, on occasions, for example when discussing Tom Buchanan, secure. The essay is placed at the top of the 15-13 range and was awarded 15 marks.