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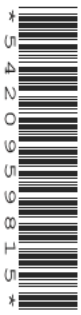
CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Cambridge International AS & A Level

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH **9695/23**

Paper 2 Prose and Unseen **May/June 2026**

2 hours



You must answer on the enclosed answer booklet.

You will need: Answer booklet (enclosed)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **two** questions in total:
  - Section A: answer **one** question.
  - Section B: answer **one** question.
- Follow the instructions on the front cover of the answer booklet. If you need additional answer paper, ask the invigilator for a continuation booklet.
- Dictionaries are **not** allowed.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is 50.
- All questions are worth equal marks.

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Section A: Prose

Answer **one** question from this section.

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

1 **Either** **(a)** Discuss Desai's presentation of the relationship between the cook and Jemubhai in the novel.

Or **(b)** Comment closely on Desai's presentation of the airport in the following passage.

After Delhi, the Gulf Air flight landed in Calcutta's Dum Dum airport. Biju smelled again, the distinctive smell of a floor being disinfected with phenyl by a sweeper woman both destitute and with a talent for being exceedingly irritating. Eyes lowered and swatting bare feet with a filthy rag, she introduced some visitors for the first time to that potent mixture of intense sympathy and intense annoyance.

There was an unruly crowd around the luggage conveyor belts because several planes were in at the same time and even more varieties of Indians than the ones showcased on Gulf Air were on display, back in the common soup after deliberate evolution into available niches abroad. There was the yuppie who had taken lessons on wine, those who were still maintaining their culture and going to the temple in Bern, or wherever. The funky Bhangra boy with earring and baggy pants. The hippie who had hit on the fact that you could escape from being a drab immigrant and have a fantastic time as an Indian among the tie-dyed, spout all kinds of Hindu-mantra-Tantra-Mother-Earth-native-peoples-single-energy-organic-*Shakti*-ganja-crystal-shaman-intuition stuff. There were computer boys who'd made a million. Taxi drivers, toilet cleaners, and young straight-laced businessmen who tried to be cool by having friends over for 'some really hot curry, man, how spicy can you take it?'

Indians who lived abroad, Indians who traveled abroad, richest and poorest, the back-and-forth ones maintaining green cards. The Indian student bringing back a bright blonde, pretending it was nothing, trying to be easy, but every molecule tense and self-conscious: 'Come on, yaar, love has no color …'. He had *just happened to stumble into the stereotype;* he was the genuine thing that *just happened to be the cliché …*

Behind him a pair of Indian girls made vomity faces.

'Must have got off the plane and run for an American dame so he could get his green card and didn't care if she looked like a horse or no. *Which she does!!!!*'

'Our ladies are the most beautiful in the world,' said one man earnestly to the Indian girls, perhaps worried they would feel hurt, but it sounded as if he were trying to console himself.

'Yes, our women are the best in the world,' said another woman, and our men are the absolute worst *gadhas* in the whole wide world.'

'Dadi Amma!' everyone shouting. 'Dadi Amma!' A granny, sari hitched high for action, showing limp, flesh-colored socks and hairy legs, was racing about with the luggage trolley, whacking into ankles, clambering over the luggage belt.

Two men with disdain on their faces, off the Air France flight, had sought each other out, 'Where are you from, man?' hanging aloof.

'Ohio.'

'Columbus?'

'No, a little outside.'

'Where?'

'Small town, you wouldn't know.'

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'?'

'Paris, Ohio.' He said this a little defensively. 'You?'

'South Dakota.'

He brightened. 'Just look at this,' he said, gesturing outward, relieving them both of pressure, 'each time you come back you think something must have changed, but it's always the same.'

'That's right,' said the other man. 'You don't like to say it, but you have to. Some countries don't get ahead for a reason … .'

They were waiting for their suitcases, but they didn't arrive.

(*from* Chapter 48)

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from ***Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1***

2 **Either** **(a)** Compare the presentation of ways in which significant events transform characters' lives. In your answer, you should refer to **two** stories from the selection.

Or **(b)** Comment closely on the following passage from *Tyres*, considering Adam Thorpe's presentation of the narrator's experience of the war.

One time, in March or April 1943, my father came back from town one day, looking very pleased with himself. He was scrubbed clean and in his best suit. He had left very early, before I had even shaved. He had spent the morning in the *gendarmerie*, he told me. 'There are a few new faces I don't know, but there is Jules, getting along fine, with his own office. He is in charge of regularising.' 'What is he regularising?' I asked. (There were no clients about, I might add.) 'The STO,' he said. My heart came into my mouth. By this he meant the latest bad idea of Laval's, the *Service du Travail Obligatoire*. Jules – an old schoolfriend and card-playing companion of my father's – did no more than type out lists and send out letters, but he had a certain control over things. Jules had shown my father round, 'and I shook a few hands.' Just as well he had scrubbed his own, as best he could. That is why I escaped the fate of certain others of my age, amongst them several friends. When I was twenty, I spent a few not unpleasant months in the Vosges cutting wood and gathering charcoal and getting very cold with some young people from places like Lyon – smart, educated people, who had never cut wood in their lives before. But I never went to Germany.

Whether it was because of this visit, and his odd evening with Jules playing for small money and drinking, I do not know – but the Germans used us. That is to say, they used us when it suited them, for they seemed to have their own mechanics, even their own tyre people, like they had their own newspapers and their own films and their own language. Maybe they would have used us anyway, in that case, but my father saw it as his doing. The odd thing is, he hated the Germans – they had, after all, given him his limp, in '17, and the itch would come back with heat. When the *maquisards* really got going, he didn't turn them away, when they came as clients. He served them and pretended that he didn't know, but somehow those boys never paid, only shook hands. But he said to me, one day, after the famous 'Petit Ours' (tall and elegant) had had a tube repaired on his motorcycle one evening, late: 'Don't get mixed up in all that. These boys, they are free. You are not. When all this is finished with, and those bastards are back in Berlin, that sign will have your name on it, and your son will be *le fils*. I will be the old fellow who stands watching the world go by, and getting in your hair, and proving, at ninety, what a damn good grip I still have at the expense of your clients' knuckles!' He laughed uproariously at this, but I think he was nervous, inside. I suppose he was playing a delicate game. He was a man who could never take risks. It was moulded into him, it was part of his job.

When old Mme Renouvin slid off the road in her little blue Peugeot, in 1938, and was found dead as a log in a wild rose bush, where she'd been thrown, and the report in the local paper blamed it on a 'blow-out', my poor father did not eat for days, like a fast of repentance. The fact is, Mme Renouvin was the worst driver anywhere, and in those days you could smooth out a tread in months if you took corners poorly, the surfaces were that gritty. But she was a client, and the last man to have dealt with her tyres was my father. Surprisingly, there was no decline in custom. That, as I said, came with the war, when the road traffic died away to near silence, and everyone went hungry. If we hadn't had the chestnuts, in our area, I think we might have starved to death. So my father's visit to the *gendarmerie* certainly put things straight.

(*from* Tyres)

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EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

3 Either (a) 'He had got into the habit of loving and trusting Brenda.'

With this comment in mind, discuss some of the ways in which Waugh presents Tony's relationship with Brenda.

Or (b) Comment closely on Waugh's presentation of the changes to John Beaver's reputation in the following passage.

But with the exception of her sister's, opinion was greatly in favour of Brenda's adventure. The morning telephone buzzed with news of her; even people with whom she had the barest acquaintance were delighted to relate that they had seen her and Beaver the evening before at a restaurant or cinema. It had been an autumn of very sparse and meagre romance; only the most obvious people had parted or come together, and Brenda was filling a want long felt by those whose simple, vicarious pleasure it was to discuss the subject in bed over the telephone. For them her circumstances shed peculiar glamour; for five years she had been a legendary, almost ghostly name, the imprisoned princess of fairy story, and now that she had emerged there was more enchantment in the occurrence than in the mere change of habit of any other circumspect wife. Her very choice of partner gave the affair an appropriate touch of fantasy; Beaver, the joke figure they had all known and despised, suddenly caught up to her among the luminous clouds of deity. If, after seven years looking neither to right or left, she had at last broken away with Jock Grant-Menzies or Robin Beaseley or any other young buck with whom nearly everyone had had a crack one time or another, it would have been thrilling no doubt, but straightforward, drawing-room comedy. The choice of Beaver raised the whole escapade into a realm of poetry for Polly and Daisy and Angela and all the gang of gossips.

Mrs Beaver made no bones about her delight. 'Of course the subject has not been mentioned between John and myself, but if what I hear is true, I think it will do the boy a world of good. Of course he's always been very much in demand and had a great number of friends, but *that isn't the same thing*. I've felt for a long time a Lack of Something in him, and I think that a charming and experienced woman like Brenda Last is just the person to help him. He's got a *very* affectionate nature, but he's so sensitive that he hardly ever lets it appear … to tell you the truth I felt something of the kind was in the air last week, so I made an excuse to go away for a few days. If I had been there things might never have come to anything. He's very shy and reserved even to me. I'll have the chess-men done up and sent round to you this afternoon. Thank you so much.'

And Beaver, for the first time in his life, found himself a person of interest and, almost, of consequence. Women studied him with a new scrutiny, wondering what they had missed in him; men treated him as an equal, even as a successful fellow competitor. 'How on earth has *he* got away with it?' they may have asked themselves, but now, when he came into Brat's, they made room for him at the bar and said, 'Well old boy, how about one?'

(*from* English Gothic – 1, Part 4)

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COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

4 Either (a) Discuss the presentation and significance of the Randall plantation in the novel.

Or (b) Comment closely on the following passage, considering ways in which Whitehead presents Cora's experience of the Museum of Natural Wonders.

'What do you say, Skipper John,' Cora asked her fellow sailor. 'Is this the truth of our historic encounter?' She had lately taken to making conversation with the dummy to add some theater for the audience. Paint had flaked from his cheek, exposing the gray wax beneath.

The stuffed coyotes on their stands did not lie, Cora supposed. And the anthills and the rocks told the truth of themselves. But the white exhibits contained as many inaccuracies and contradictions as Cora's three habitats. There had been no kidnapped boys swabbing the decks and earning pats on the head from white kidnappers. The enterprising African boy whose fine leather boots she wore would have been chained belowdecks, swabbing his body in his own filth. Slave work was sometimes spinning thread, yes; most times it was not. No slave had ever keeled over dead at a spinning wheel or been butchered for a tangle. But nobody wanted to speak on the true disposition of the world. And no one wanted to hear it. Certainly not the white monsters on the other side of the exhibit at that very moment, pushing their greasy snouts against the window, sneering and hooting. Truth was a changing display in a shop window, manipulated by hands when you weren't looking, alluring and ever out of reach.

The whites came to this land for a fresh start and to escape the tyranny of their masters, just as the freemen had fled theirs. But the ideals they held up for themselves, they denied others. Cora had heard Michael recite the Declaration of Independence back on the Randall plantation many times, his voice drifting through the village like an angry phantom. She didn't understand the words, most of them at any rate, but *created equal* was not lost on her. The white men who wrote it didn't understand it either, if *all men* did not truly mean all men. Not if they snatched away what belonged to other people, whether it was something you could hold in your hand, like dirt, or something you could not, like freedom. The land she tilled and worked had been Indian land. She knew the white men bragged about the efficiency of the massacres, where they killed women and babies, and strangled their futures in the crib.

Stolen bodies working stolen land. It was an engine that did not stop, its hungry boiler fed with blood. With the surgeries that Dr Stevens described, Cora thought, the whites had begun stealing futures in earnest. Cut you open and rip them out, dripping. Because that's what you do when you take away someone's babies – steal their future. Torture them as much as you can when they are on this earth, then take away the hope that one day their people will have it better.

(*from* South Carolina)

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Section B: Unseen

Answer **one** question from this section.

Either

5 Comment closely on the presentation of the country in the following passage.

In your answer, consider the writer's choice of language, structure and narrative methods.

All across the country, people felt unsafe.

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Or

6 Comment closely on the presentation of the relationship in the following poem.

In your answer, consider the writer's choice of language, imagery and poetic methods.

A Companionship

I saw we moved together.
Often we were a bike, ridden
on two flat tyres.

Often we were a pair of fuses
well lit, hissing
but failing to feed the explosion.

Often we were stags
full of shots
bellowing to each other.

Often we were twin fields of words
like fallen apples
unharvested.

Often we were handshakes
that shook
damaged heads.

Often we were hidden stars
that never appeared
though sometimes nearly.

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