

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9695/72

Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

May/June 2014

2 hours

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

Do not use staples, paper clips, glue or correction fluid.

DO NOT WRITE IN ANY BARCODES.

Answer **two** questions.

You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

This document consists of **7** printed pages and **1** blank page.

- 1 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the story *Shadows on the Wall* by Charles Mungoshi (born 1947).

Father is sitting just inside the hut near the door and I am sitting far across the hut near the opposite wall, playing with the shadows on the wall. Bright sunlight comes in through the doorway now, and father, who blocks most of it, is reproduced in caricature on the floor and half-way up the wall. The wall and floor are bare, so he looks like a black scarecrow in a deserted field after the harvest.

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Outside, the sun drops lower and other shadows start creeping into the hut. Father's shadow grows vaguer and climbs further up the wall like a ghost going up to heaven. His shadow moves behind sharper wriggling shadows like the presence of a tired old woman in a room full of young people, or like that creepy nameless feeling in a house of mourning.

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He has tried five times to talk to me but I don't know what he wants. Now he talks about his other wife. He wants me to call her 'mother' but I can't because something in me cries each time I say it. She isn't my mother and my real mother is not dead. This other woman has run away. It is now the fourth time she has run away and tomorrow he is going to cycle fifty miles to her home to collect her. This will be the fourth time he has had to cycle after her. He is talking. I am not listening. He gives up.

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Now the sun shines brilliantly before going down. The shadows of bushes and grass at the edge of the yard look as if they are on fire and father's features are cut more sharply and exaggerated. His nose becomes longer each time he nods because now he is sleeping while sitting, tired of the silence.

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Father dozes, wakes up; dozes, wakes up and the sun goes down. His shadow expands and fades. Now it seems all over the wall, behind the other shadows, moving silently like a cold wind in a bare field. I look at him. There is still enough light for me to see the grey stubble sticking up untidily all over his face. His stubble, I know, is as stiff as a porcupine's, but as the light wanes now, it looks fleecy and soft like the down on a dove's nestling.

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I was in the bush, long ago, and I came upon two dove nestlings. They were still clumsy and blind, with soft pink vulnerable flesh planted with short scattered grey feathers, their mouths open, waiting for their mother. I wished I had corn to give them. As it was, I consoled myself with the thought that their mother was somewhere nearby, coming home through the bush in the falling dark with food in her mouth for her children.

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Next day I found the nestlings dead in their nest. Somewhere out in the bush or in the yellow ripe unharvested fields, someone had shot their mother in mid-flight home.

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Not long after that, I was on my father's shoulders coming home from the fields at dusk. Mother was still with us then, and father carried me because she had asked him to. I had a sore foot and couldn't walk and mother couldn't carry me because she was carrying a basket of mealies for our supper on her head and pieces of firewood in her arms. At first father grumbled. He didn't like to carry me and he didn't like receiving orders from mother: she was there to listen to him always, he said. He carried me all the same although he didn't like to, and worse, I didn't like him to carry me. His hands were hard and pinchy and his arms felt as rough and barky as logs. I preferred mother's soft warm back. He knew, too, that I didn't want him to carry me because I made my body stiff and didn't relax when he rubbed his hard chin against my cheek. His breath was harsh and foul. He wore his battered hat that stank of dirt, sweat and soil. He was trying to talk to me but I was not listening to him. That was when I noticed that his stubble looked as vulnerable as the unprotected feathers on a dove's nestling. Tears filled my eyes then and I tried to respond to his teasing, but I gave it up because he immediately began picking on mother and made her tense and tight and this tension I could feel in me also.

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After this he always wanted me to be near him and he made me ignore mother. He taught me to avoid mother. It was hard for me but he had a terrible way of making mother look despicable and mean. She noticed this and fought hard to make me cheerful, but I always saw father's threatening shadow hunched hawkishly over me. Instead of talking to either of them I became silent. I was no longer happy in either's presence. And this was when I began to notice the shadows on the wall of our hut.

One day the eternal quarrel between mother and father flared up to an unbelievable blaze. Mother went away to her people. After an unsuccessful night full of nightmares with father in the hut, he had to follow her. There had been a hailstorm in the night and everything looked sad in the dripping chill of the next day. The small mealie plants in the yard had been destroyed by the storm; all the leaves torn off except the small hard piths which now stood about in the puddles like nails in a skull. Father went away without a word and I was alone.

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2 Write a critical commentary on the following poem by Sydney Sipho Sepamla (1942–2011)

A Childhood Memory

I was going to say childhood is fun
 going to say a child's memories are a pleasant store
 but my own false start
 would tend to belie such claim
 I know I stormed into manhood
 beginning with those childhood scenes
 I'd rather forget

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I remember as a small boy
 unhappy Friday afternoons
 at the Randfontein market place
 I would be waiting my turn on a queue
 for a rationed basket of potatoes
 it was one of those things which unhappily
 reminded us of World War 2
 there was this man with long arms
 and I would see him stretch them over my head
 to serve a rationer behind me

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When I came to understand this act
 which served notice for many more like it
 separating me from other human beings
 my chest would fill up with bitterness
 tears of impotence would well up into my eyes
 and I grew up to hate the sight of the market place
 even this day I don't want to know where it used to stand
 and as for that man I've met many of his kind

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I see with pride today's child
 take the bull by the horns
 for Africa has grown up
 how I wish to re-trace my life's step

Turn to page 6 for Question 3

3 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the short story *Lucy* by Nell Freudenberger (born 1975).

I had often imagined meeting Mrs. Chawla, Arun's mother. It would be in a restaurant, and I would be wearing a sophisticated blue suit that my mother had sent me soon after I moved to India, and Mrs. Chawla would not be able to keep herself from admiring it. Of course, in those fantasies Arun was always with me.

As it happened, Mrs. Chawla appeared early one morning, in a car with a driver, unannounced. I was sitting at the kitchen table in my painting shorts, having a cup of tea. There was no time to straighten up the living room or take a shower. I went into the bedroom, where Arun and I had often slept, and put on a dress—wrinkled, but at least it was clean. I put my cup in the sink and set a pot of water on the stove. Then I watched through the window. Mrs. Chawla had got out of the car and was standing with her arms crossed, instructing her driver how to park. The car moved forward, backed up, and then inched forward again.

Mrs. Chawla shaded her eyes to look at the backyard: the laundry line with my clothes hanging on it, the grackles¹ perched on the telephone pole, the pile of soft, rotting bricks. I had a feeling that had come to seem familiar in the eight months since Arun had died, a kind of panic that made me want to stand very still.

The bell rang.

'Hello, Mrs. Chawla,' I said. 'I'm glad you came.' From her handwriting, I had expected someone more imposing. She was several inches shorter than I was, and heavy. Her hair was long and dyed black, with a dramatic white streak in the front; and she was wearing a navy blue salwar-kameez², the trousers of which were tapered at the ankles, in a style that was just becoming fashionable.

'Yes,' she said. 'I've been meaning to. I can't stay long.' She gave me a funny smile, as if I weren't what she had expected, either.

'Will you have some tea?' I offered.

'Do you have tea?' she asked, sounding surprised. She looked at the drawn blinds in the living room. There was a crumpled napkin next to the salt and pepper shakers on the table, where I had eaten dinner the night before, and which I had asked Puja, the servant, to clean. Now that it was summer, cockroaches had started coming out of the walls.

'Please don't go to any trouble,' she said. 'Puja can do it—is she in the kitchen?' Arun had hired Puja to do my cooking and cleaning; when he told me she had worked for his mother, I'd hoped that Mrs. Chawla was making a friendly gesture. In fact, Puja was a terrible housekeeper and a severely limited cook. She lived in a room at the back of the house, with her husband and four little girls; at night I often saw her crouched in the backyard, making chapatis on a pump stove with a low blue flame.

Mrs. Chawla walked confidently toward the kitchen, calling Puja in a proprietary voice, and I realized that Arun's mother had been in my house before. She could have come any number of times, in the afternoons, when I taught art at the primary school or went out shopping in Khan Market. Puja would have let her in without hesitation.

When Mrs. Chawla reappeared, she scrutinized the chairs, before choosing to sit on the sofa. She smiled, revealing a narrow space between her teeth. 'Where exactly are you from?' she asked.

'My father lives in Boston, but my mother is in California now,' I told her.

'Ah,' said Mrs. Chawla softly, as if that explained everything. 'An American family. That must make it difficult to decide where to return to.'

I had no plans to return, as I should have explained. 'It rules out Boston and California,' I said instead.

Mrs. Chawla didn't smile.

My brother, I added, was getting married in Boston in July.

'And you like the bride?' she asked.

'Oh,' I said. 'I only met her once.' I could feel the next question coming, and then a thing happened that often happens to me with people who make me nervous.

'What's her name?' Mrs. Chawla asked.

Her name, which I knew perfectly well, slipped into some temporarily unrecoverable place. 'Actually, I don't remember,' I said.

Mrs. Chawla looked at me, puzzled. 'How strange,' she said.

Puja brought the tea. She knelt on the floor and began placing things, item by item, on the coffee table: spoons, cups, saucers, milk, sugar, and a small plate of Indian sweets that Mrs. Chawla must have brought with her. The tea, it seemed, was no longer my hospitable gesture. 60

'How is she doing?' Mrs. Chawla asked, nodding at Puja.

'She's wonderful,' I lied. Now that Arun wasn't here to tell her what to do, the house was getting dirtier and dirtier. 65

Puja's little girls were watching us from the kitchen doorway. When Mrs. Chawla saw them, she said suddenly, 'Girls,' and repeated it sharply in Hindi. 'I have told her that if she has another baby'—Mrs. Chawla paused and looked at Puja—'*Bas!* Enough, I'm sending her back to Orissa.' She turned back to me. 'That's east India,' she informed me, as if I had never seen a map of the subcontinent. 'The people there are tribals. Did you know that? Puja is a tribal. These people have nothing, you know, except floods and cyclones. Now they're having terrible floods—have you seen them on television? Thousands of people are sick, and there isn't enough drinking water. I tell her that, and what do you think she says?' 70 75

Puja knew only a few words of English. She seemed to be smiling at her feet, which were bare, extremely small, and decorated with silver toe rings.

'She says she needs another child because she wants to have a boy,' Mrs. Chawla said. 'Stupid girl.' Puja giggled. 'Stupid,' evidently, was one of the English words she did know. Then Mrs. Chawla said something else, in Hindi, and Puja stopped giggling and left the room. 80

¹ grackles: birds

² salwar-kameez: traditional costume

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Question 3 © Nell Freudenberger; ed. R Ford; *The New Granta Book of the American Short Story*; Granta Publications; 2007.

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