S6 English Literature Practice Paper: Unseen Poetry, Shakespearean Tragedy, Narrative Voice, Drama in Performance, Comparative Analysis and Essay Craft (100 marks)

Secondary 6 | English Literature | Time: 90 minutes | Total: 100 marks | 24 questions

---

Part 1: Unseen Poetry Analysis (16 marks)

Read the eight-line poem below (lines separated by slashes), then answer questions 1 to 4: The lamplight leans across the empty desk / A clock divides the dark with even hands / Outside, the rain rehearses on the glass / The argument it never quite began / I keep your letter under cooler light / Its paper older than the words it keeps / The night is long, the house is very still / And somewhere in the garden something sleeps.

1. Which figure of speech is used in line 3, "the rain rehearses on the glass"? Explain its effect. [4]

Answer: Personification: the rain is given the human act of rehearsing, so an empty room gains a voice and the speaker projects the unspoken argument onto the weather.

2. How do the tone and the space shift between line 4 and line 5? [4]

Answer: The first four lines look outward to window, rain and argument; line 5 turns inward to a private object and cooler light, so agitation settles into suppressed stillness.

3. How do the empty desk, the cooler light and the very still house work together to build the poem's theme? [4]

Answer: All three work by absence: no one at the desk, light without warmth, stillness that is too complete, pointing to a relationship finished or never begun.

4. Why is the final line, "somewhere in the garden something sleeps", more effective than a direct statement of grief? [4]

Answer: It displaces feeling onto a vague third thing; "somewhere" and "something" refuse to name it, leaving unease for the reader to fill with their own loss.

Part 2: Shakespearean Tragedy — Macbeth (18 marks)

Read the extracts and plot points below, then answer questions 5 to 8.

5. Act 1 Scene 1 opens with the witches and "fair is foul, and foul is fair". What does this contribute to the structure of the play? [4]

Answer: It establishes an inverted moral world, so the audience expects order to be broken and is prepared for Macbeth's later self-deception in language.

6. In the "If it were done" soliloquy, what is Macbeth chiefly afraid of? [5]

Answer: Not punishment but judgement and conscience: he knows regicide is wrong in this life and the next, so the soliloquy shows moral awareness overruled by ambition.

7. In the scene where Duncan arrives at Inverness, how does dramatic irony operate? [5]

Answer: Duncan praises the sweet air of a castle where he will be murdered, and his praise of the hostess falls ironically on the woman planning the killing.

8. Sleep imagery recurs throughout Macbeth. Explain three functions it performs. [4]

Answer: First, sleep stands for innocent peace, and the murdered "sleep"; second, Macbeth can no longer sleep, so insomnia becomes conscience; third, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking shows the accomplice punished too.

Part 3: Narrative Voice in the Novel (16 marks)

Referring to one novel you have studied, answer questions 9 to 12.

9. How does first-person retrospective narration affect reliability? [4]

Answer: A narrator who already knows the ending selects and justifies, so readers must separate what happened from what he is willing to tell.

10. How can setting do thematic work rather than merely providing background? [4]

Answer: Setting constrains choice and speech: a closed space narrows a character's freedom, so theme such as class or isolation is enacted by space itself.

11. Take one object in the novel and show how it moves from thing to symbol. [4]

Answer: The object first appears in ordinary action, gains meaning through repetition, and ends as a stand-in for a character's inner state or fate without authorial gloss.

12. If a character's language changes across the novel, how does this reveal growth or deterioration? [4]

Answer: Long periodic sentences shorten and abstract diction turns concrete, so the narrowing of language registers a gain or loss of power over the world.

Part 4: Drama in Performance (16 marks)

The following questions ask you to make directorial choices and justify their effects.

13. For a confessional soliloquy, what lighting would you choose, and why? [4]

Answer: A single tight top light leaving half the face in shadow hides expression, so the audience listens harder and the sense of concealment grows.

14. Design a subtext for a short exchange on stage. [4]

Answer: Two polite lines, carried by a pause and avoided eye contact, imply both know the other is lying and neither will say so.

15. How can casting or blocking steer the audience's sympathy? [4]

Answer: Placing the character lower on stage and apart from the others isolates them visually, drawing sympathy towards the weaker figure.

16. How do pace and pause build tension? Give one example. [4]

Answer: Dialogue speeds up until lines overlap, then stops for three seconds; the silence is louder than the words and tension peaks there.

Part 5: Comparative Analysis (18 marks)

Choose two poems or two texts and answer questions 17 to 20.

17. Compare how two texts treat death: stance, tone and imagery. [5]

Answer: One treats death through religious consolation in a calm tone; the other confronts it with images of bodily decay in a hard tone, moving from acceptance to resistance.

18. How does narrative distance differ between the two texts, and with what effect? [4]

Answer: One stays close to the speaker's feeling in the first person; the other observes from a third-person distance, leaving readers room to judge.

19. Compare the use of natural imagery in the two texts. [4]

Answer: The same imagery of water and season means passing time in one and renewal in the other, showing meaning depends on structural placing.

20. Which text is more convincing? Support your judgement with textual evidence. [5]

Answer: A full answer states a position, quotes twice and explains how each quotation supports it; description without evaluation earns nothing.

Part 6: Essay Craft and Argument (16 marks)

These questions test essay structure and expression rather than knowledge of texts.

21. This sentence is too vague: "This poem is good and uses a lot of imagery." Rewrite it as a debatable thesis. [4]

Answer: A rewrite needs a contestable claim plus reason, e.g. "The poem replaces direct lament with cold domestic imagery, which makes loss feel more real."

22. When quoting, how do you avoid a quotation that floats free of analysis? [4]

Answer: Keep the quotation short and follow at once with an explanation of how its wording supports the claim; never leave a quotation as decoration at the sentence end.

23. What is the standard structure of a comparison paragraph? Give three steps with one demonstrative sentence each. [4]

Answer: Three steps: a judgement on the shared theme, evidence from each text, then a comment on what the difference means; one sentence per step forms the paragraph.

24. Upgrade the descriptive sentence "Macbeth regrets killing the king" into an evaluative one. [4]

Answer: Add judgement and basis, e.g. "Shakespeare renders guilt as insomnia rather than remorseful speech, so Macbeth's regret reads as fear, not repentance."
