

H

National Qualifications

2026

English

Critical Reading

Friday, 1 May

Instructions to Candidates

Candidates should enter their surname, forename(s), date of birth, Scottish candidate number and the name and level of the subject at the top of their first answer sheet.

Total marks — 40

SECTION 1 — Scottish Text — 20 marks

Read an extract from a Scottish text you have previously studied and attempt the questions that are printed in a separate booklet.

Note: for Section 1 — only Part C Poetry, Text 5 is provided in this paper.

Attempt ALL the questions for your text.

SECTION 2 — Critical essay — 20 marks

Note: for Section 2 — only Part A, Drama is provided in this paper.

You must clearly identify the question number you are attempting on your answer sheet.

[Braille page 2] Marks are shown in square brackets at the end of each question or part question.

An owl in the margin indicates a new question.

[Braille page 3] SECTION 1 — SCOTTISH TEXT — 20 marks

Read the text extract carefully and then attempt ALL the questions for your chosen text.

Text 5 — Poetry

Read the poem below and then attempt the following questions.

Old Highland woman by Norman MacCaig

She sits all day by the fire.

How long is it since she opened the door

and stepped outside, confusing

the scuffling hens and the collie

dreaming of sheep?

Her walking days are over.

She has come here through centuries

of Gaelic labour and loves

and rainy funerals. Her people

are assembled in her bones.

She's their summation. Before her time

has almost no meaning.

When neighbours call

she laughs a wicked cackle
with love in it, as she listens
to the sly bristle of gossip,
relishing the life in it,
[Braille page 4] relishing the malice, with her hands
lying in her lap like holy psalms
that once had a meaning for her, that once
were noble with tunes
she used to sing long ago.

Questions

ow 45. Refer to lines 1 to 6.

Analyse how the poet's use of language creates a sense of the woman's past and/or present. [2 marks]

ow 46. Refer to lines 7 to 12.

By referring to at least two examples, analyse how the poet's use of language conveys the importance of the woman's heritage. [4 marks]

ow 47. Refer to lines 13 to 22.

By referring to at least two examples, analyse how the poet's use of language conveys a clear impression of the woman. [4 marks]

ow 48. By referring to this poem and to at least one other poem by MacCaig, discuss how the poet uses the experiences of characters and/or speakers to explore central concerns. [10 marks]

[END OF SECTION 1]

[Braille page 5] SECTION 2 — CRITICAL ESSAY — 20 marks

Attempt ONE question from the following genre — Drama.

PART A — DRAMA

Answers to questions on drama should refer to the text and to such relevant features as characterisation, key scene(s), structure, climax, theme, plot, conflict, setting ...

ow 1. Choose a play in which a central character is presented as emotional or calculating or vulnerable.

By referring to appropriate techniques, explain how the central character is presented as emotional or calculating or vulnerable and discuss how this contributes to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

ow 2. Choose a play in which there is a scene involving a significant revelation or turning point.

By referring to appropriate techniques, briefly explain the nature of the significant revelation or turning point and discuss how this scene contributes to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

[Braille page 6] ow 3. Choose a play which explores jealousy or loyalty.

By referring to appropriate techniques, explain how this jealousy or loyalty is presented and discuss how this contributes to your appreciation of the play as a whole.

[END OF SECTION 2]

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]