

Question 4

The Short Story

(20 marks)

Encounters from Africa: An Anthology of Short Stories (Ed. Macmillan)

Read the excerpt below and then answer the questions that follow. It is taken from Chinua Achebe's short story, 'The Voter'.

'We believe every word you say to be true,' said Ezenwa. 'We shall every one of us drop his paper for Marcus. Who would leave an *ozo* feast and go to a poor ritual meal? Tell Marcus he has our papers, and our wives' papers too. But what we do say is that two shillings is shameful.' He brought the lamp close and tilted it at the money before him as if to make sure he had not mistaken its value. 'Yes, two shillings; it is too shameful. If Marcus were a poor man – which our ancestors forbid – I should be the first to give him my paper free, as I did before. But today Marcus is a great man and does his things like a great man. We did not ask him for money yesterday; we shall not ask him tomorrow. But today is our day; we have climbed the *iroko* tree today and would be foolish not to take down all the firewood we need.'

Roof had to agree. He had lately been taking down a lot of firewood himself. Only yesterday he had asked Marcus for one of his many rich robes – and had got it. Last Sunday, Marcus's wife (the teacher that nearly got him in trouble) had objected (like the woman she was) when Roof pulled out his fifth bottle of beer from the kerosene refrigerator, and was roundly and publicly rebuked by her husband. To cap it all Roof had won a land case recently because, among other things, he had been chauffeur-driven to the disputed site. So he understood the elders about the firewood.

- (a) Briefly explain what Ezenwa was responding to. (2 marks)
- (b) Why are the elders expressing dissatisfaction? (3 marks)
- (c) What is the significance of the following sentence: 'Who would leave an *ozo* feast and go to a poor ritual meal?' (4 marks)
- (d) What does the excerpt reveal about the nature of electioneering in the society? (5 marks)
- (e) Who is Roof and what do we learn about his character from this excerpt and the rest of the story? (6 marks)

This was based on an extract from the short story "The Voter". The theme was familiar and questions accessible and almost all the candidates answered this question and scored highly.

Weaknesses

There was however one problem noticed. Candidates were too familiar with this theme and became over-enthusiastic and wrote longish responses in complete disregard of the guidance given by the number of marks allocated to the sections. Candidates should be trained to gauge the amount of writing in structured response question by the indication of marks given. One simply disadvantages themselves by spending too much time on a section which doesn't earn them any more marks than those indicated. In fact of writing too much, they may run out of time to cover other areas which depresses their overall scores. This should not be allowed to continue.