

2023 ASSESSMENT REPORT

ENG315117 ENGLISH

General Comments

Overall, students and markers felt the 2023 paper featured fair and accessible questions. Essays that made genuine attempts to engage with the stimulus for each section and apply it to their texts were rewarded. Students are encouraged to avoid simply reproducing memorised or practice essays with only tokenistic acknowledgement of the exam questions. It is recommended that students and teachers alike utilise a wide range of past questions to practice adapting knowledge and applying it to different stimuli with agility.

Sections A and B are comparative, and students are encouraged to structure their essays accordingly. Some weaker responses wrote on a single text in each paragraph without using comparative structure or language to connect the two. Students are reminded that it is only appropriate to write in first-person in Section C.

Across all modules, and especially the Genre Study module, it is important that students understand the conventions, codes and features of different genres and forms studied. A thorough understanding of genre and context is beneficial across all modules.

Markers rewarded students who had a clear understanding of metalanguage and teachers are reminded that there is a glossary of terms in the course document. Students are reminded they do not need to include referencing in the exam, but they are expected to underline titles, even in exam conditions.

Teachers and students are reminded that a blank booklet in an exam means the best a student can achieve is a Preliminary Achievement, even if they receive 'A' ratings for the other two sections. Students must ensure they make a reasonable effort to write as much as they can in each booklet and manage their time equally across all three sections of the paper.

Section A – Genre Study

Question 1 – Dystopian Fiction

Successful responses showed thorough understanding of context of creation, and how this shapes the meaning (warning) of texts within the dystopian fiction genre. Stronger responses evaluated how and why composers used genre codes and conventions to convey these warnings and affect the audience. Stronger students knew the difference between codes and conventions and either compared or contrasted their use in set texts, discussing whether texts conform to or subvert genre conventions. A good overall understanding of the genre and texts' position within it was rewarded.

Markers looked for essays which were comparative in structure and language. Responses that applied the stimulus to and analysed both texts studied in equal depth were rewarded. Stronger responses were well-structured, showed a high level of familiarity with the texts and the genre, and correctly used relevant

vocabulary. Discussion was orientated around what the composer sought out to achieve in their work and how they crafted their writing to influence the responder to think, feel and act. Strong responses were able to make connections between the texts' cautions and their own society and their possible futures. Students that were able to ground their analysis in a discussion of the texts' social and political contexts were more effective in demonstrating their understanding of the texts' allegorical intents.

Weaker responses often drifted into retelling plot or did not connect examples to the stimulus, or the context and warning of the text. Some made very general references to context and did not display an overall understanding of the genre's purpose. Some weaker essays were not comparative and wrote on one text in each paragraph, without integrating textual evidence. Some were memorised and clearly used the language of practice questions, rather than adapting understanding of the genre to the set question.

Question 2 – Thriller

Strong responses demonstrated an appreciation of the codes and conventions of the genre, as well as the sociocultural context of texts studied. Markers rewarded essays which genuinely engaged with the stimulus, rather than simply repeating the language without showing its relevance to their memorised textual evidence. Markers rewarded responses which referred to the evolution of the genre over time, were comparative in nature, and effectively integrated evidence from both texts.

There were several students who clearly were able to memorise quotes from their studied texts (particularly from *The Dry*) and were able to integrate these well into their body paragraphs. While quotes are an effective way to show knowledge of the text, it is important not to stack paragraphs with too many quotes at the risk of meaningful analysis.

Weaker responses did not address the set question and wrote quite separately on the two texts rather than connecting and comparing them. Some responses listed codes and conventions without analysis or comparison of their use between the two texts, others used the terms interchangeably without demonstrating understanding of their meaning. Some students omitted context or discussed it in very general or inaccurate terms; for example, *North by Northwest* was set in the late stages of the Cold War.

Question 3 – Life Writing

Stronger responses were able to adapt with agility to the stimulus. Markers rewarded students who were able to identify the sociocultural impact or legacy of the texts, why the telling of these stories might require 'courage' and applied this to their set texts. Responses in the 'A' range were also able to offer judicious textual references and focus on distinctive features of genres and modes (film/memoir; graphic novel/film, etc.) Literary language and metalanguage were woven into the analysis.

Weaker responses did not address the stimulus or made fleeting references in the introduction and conclusion only. Some were of insufficient length (1 - 1.5 pages) to address the stimulus and criteria in the detail needed to secure higher grades. Some students retold life stories rather than analysing how composers used codes and conventions to tell these life stories, and what their impact might be. Others were not comparative and wrote two separate 'mini essays' on each text, rather than utilising a comparative structure.

Section B – Adaptation Study

Stronger responses dealt effectively with the Cuarón stimulus, discussing the challenges of the adaptation process and the ‘spirit of the story’ and applying these concepts to the texts studied. The strongest responses were able to sustain a meaningful focus on the question throughout all parts of the essay. Markers rewarded responses that were clearly comparative and gave equal weight to both texts in their analysis. Markers expected correct use of relevant vocabulary such as hypotext, hypertext, omission and adaptation (rather than ‘adaption’).

Markers rewarded papers which focused on themes, ideas and concepts and used the language of literary analysis (point of view, tone, style, symbolism, language and narration) or the language of film analysis (camera angles, lighting, sound, editing, cinematography) to describe how these were explored and transitioned from one medium to another. They focused not only on the themes of the texts, but also the meaning that was invited by them, considering how text creators composed a ‘message’ on their chosen theme for the audience. Markers looked for responses that identified not only broad themes but specific ideas in texts and those that evaluated ‘how’ and ‘why’ these change in the adaptation process, acknowledging composers’ motivations. Knowledge of genre and form is essential to doing this well, particularly the limitations and opportunities offered by different forms.

Stronger responses on *The Shawshank Redemption* contained many examples of synthesised characters and condensed action which were well argued. Markers were looking for detailed discussion of how and why these changes were made and their effectiveness in positioning the audience. Despite this film being loved for over 30 years several outstanding responses successfully criticised its melodramatic style, slow pace and saccharine ending. Some pairs of texts lent themselves to sophisticated analysis of how changes in societal attitudes and values had prompted extreme changes in the concerns of the hypertext. *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* responses were particularly strong in this regard, arguing that Capote's challenge to societal norms in his novel were subverted into them being confirmed in the film to gain popularity. The most successful *Jindabyne* responses pointed out the ways in which the change in setting dramatically affected the themes. An initial focus on the effects of domestic violence and fear of serial killers was transformed into an examination of race relations in Australia. There was convincing analysis of the effects of changing the central character in *The Hunter* from a cold, detached killer to a more rounded, sympathetic protagonist in the film. There were also some very strong responses to *The Rabbit Proof Fence*.

Weaker essays in this section were memorised and held no relevance to the question. Some were not comparative in nature and wrote separately on the texts. Responses that retold the plot and did not draw comparisons between the texts, or failed to identify a change in meaning, were difficult for markers to reward. They also omitted or misused the metalanguage of adaptation studies. Weaker responses identified key themes without articulating the composers’ ideas in relation to these themes. For example, they might name ‘hope’ or ‘corruption’ as an overarching theme with no elaboration. Some noted changes but were unable to identify the impact on meaning or evaluate why these changes were made.

Section C – Close Text Study

The discussion of perspectives was handled well in strong responses, with insights drawn directly from the text. They also utilised a broad discussion of characterisation and setting from the question as a springboard to exploring the larger ideas and invited meanings of the text studied. In composing their own personal interpretation, this was sometimes added to the end of paragraphs or a paragraph of its own, but it was often more successfully embedded as a strong position on the text throughout the essay, with a unique personal point-of-view and argument embedded in the entire discussion, even if this was not expressed in the first-person voice. Rather than offering simplistic statements like 'I think violence/racism is bad,' these responses presented mature and insightful connections to the text, drawing on lived experiences and observations. Teachers and students are reminded that Section C responses may be completed in either first person or third person.

Responses of a commendable quality touched upon context, while the strongest responses went beyond, delving into the intricacies of the context in which the text was set, written, and consumed. Some even demonstrated an exceptional ability to seamlessly weave together context and setting, showcasing a level of expertise. For instance, references to recent societal events like the Voice to Parliament referendum added a sophisticated layer to this, such as some of the *Jasper Jones* and *The Secret River* responses which made connections to the issues raised by their respective text composers. The most sophisticated interpretations of the texts were justified through discussion of complex points and the judicious reference to textual evidence. These responses also effectively evaluated the effectiveness of the techniques used to convey perspectives. Capable students were able to apply literary perspectives in a measured way to increase the depth of their analysis. The application of psychological and gender perspectives in *The Eye of the Sheep*, *Eleanor Oliphant* and *The Light Between Oceans* were managed well in strong responses.

Some of the best responses focused on several characters who represented a range of perspectives, examining how their attitudes were related to their setting in place, time and the social hierarchy. There were some insightful responses to *The Light Between Oceans* that examined how contextual forces and personal experience shaped the characters' perspectives concerning the mysterious baby. *Black Diggers* prompted many perceptive discussions of dominant perspectives including racist colonial mindsets, Anzac Day mythology and indigenous attitudes to identity belonging and war. Students that were able to show how the text's context of setting and composition shaped the attitudes and values within the text. For example, in analysing *Jasper Jones*, they showed how racism was normalised in the 1960s as opposed to gestures towards reconciliation with Keating's Redfern speech and Rudd's apology speech.

Responses that demonstrated an understanding of characters' perspectives, more than external perspectives of reviewers and academics were rewarded; stronger responses were able to demonstrate how characters might grow and change their perspectives and, unwittingly, embody harmful stereotypes. Sophisticated responses were able to articulate how texts can reinforce harmful stereotypes through the trajectories of characters like Eliza, Charlie and Mad Jack in *Jasper Jones*. Likewise, responses that were able to justify any shortcomings in the representation of perspectives demonstrated independent and original thinking and were rewarded; students are encouraged to synthesise external perspectives to justify their interpretations. Responses that referred to specific examples of how their text conveys perspectives through language devices; for example, discussion of gothic atmospherics, intertextuality and symbolism of

Queen Elizabeth roses, peaches and boots in *Jasper Jones*, were rewarded. Responses that used clear and fluent sentences with sophisticated vocabulary and metalanguage were rewarded.

The Close Text Study again proved to be the most challenging section for many, despite the question being very inviting. The question asked students to explore the role of characterisation and setting in the representation of perspectives. For some students, this translated into only two paragraphs; one for characters and one for setting; for others, the paragraphs related to chosen characters and their perspectives and values. The inclusion of student interpretation, either via first person or inferred discussion, was not evident in several responses. Students need to remember that Element 4 of Criterion 3 requires them to 'develop (defend/justify) their own reasoned interpretation of the text'. A reliance on plot recount and character traits featured in many responses. Markers were disappointed to find that many students appeared to run out of time and some failed to complete more than a page for this section. Candidates should be reminded to give themselves long enough to complete their Section C essay.

Weaker responses also did not address the context of the text which gave rise to the key perspectives. Own perspectives were general and not linked to a discussion of the attitudes and values in the texts. Characters were described rather than characterisation which required identification of techniques used to represent them. Details of dates and historical context were incorrect or left out of less successful answers.