



GENERAL COMMENTS

The English examination consisted of three sections. Section A (Text response) offered students the choice of two distinct topics for each of the twenty texts on the VCAA Text List 1 and students were required to complete one response. Section B (Writing in Context) instructed students to compose a piece of writing stemming from a prompt for each of the four Contexts. Section C (Analysis of language use) required students to analyse the ways in which language and visual features were used in an online journal.

Assessment was based upon the criteria for each section, applied holistically and responses were ranked over the full range of available marks. The descriptors of the 'Expected Qualities for the Mark Range' can be found on the VCAA website on the English study page. These descriptors are based on the criteria and are general indicators of what might reasonably be expected for the specified mark ranges in each section of the examination. Assessors used the descriptors to make specific judgments about the characteristics of responses to the examination.

Each student's examination work was assessed by no fewer than six independent markers with no knowledge of any previous marks awarded to the student.

More than 40 000 students sat for the 2009 English examination and assessors were generally impressed with the skills and qualities shown by the majority of students. Most students responded by presenting three completed pieces of writing that demonstrated an understanding of the knowledge and skills required in the study. Both the quality and quantity of work was quite sound and at times impressive. The growing awareness of the value of close textual knowledge and careful management of response structure indicates sound teaching and learning.

The 2009 English examination was challenging, allowed students the opportunity to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they had developed throughout the year and elicited some excellent responses.

Students seemed to have a clear understanding of how to approach the examination and their time management skills seemed to have improved. There were very few incomplete or partial responses.

On the other hand, it should be noted that:

- there seems to be a growing dependence on formulaic responses, which suggests that some students believe that rote learning is sufficient. The English study is concerned with developing students' understanding and confidence in responding to the specific topics and prompts offered in the examination. Active engagement with texts enables students to develop language awareness, articulate ideas and develop communication skills
- some students did not fully engage with the actual elements of the topics and prompts. Greater care needs to be taken in analysing and recognising the specific expectations of each topic or prompt
- this is an English examination and strong language skills (including correct spelling and grammar) are expected and necessary for success
- it is recommended that students organise their time so that enough time is left to proofread their work. While handwriting is not assessed directly, it must be legible. It is accepted that there is obvious pressure in an examination, but there were occasions when words or phrases could not be deciphered.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The student responses provided below are presented for illustrative and informative reasons, and may form the basis of profitable discussions. These examples should not be taken as 'the best' that is possible or as 'perfect'; indeed, none is without shortcomings of one sort or another. In this Assessment Report, however, they have been selected both as typical of better responses and/or material that may be of some use for improving the knowledge and skills in the English study. Readers will obviously be able to make many more observations about the quality of these responses beyond the brief comments offered herein.

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section A – Text response

The two topics for each text in this section enabled students to develop a sustained discussion of their selected text and aspects of its construction. There are subtle but discernible differences in each of the topics and students would benefit



from understanding these variations. All topics required student responses to address the full range of key knowledge and skills and to be supported by detailed analysis and specific reference to the selected text. It is worthwhile commenting that the better responses did not rely entirely on the most obvious scenes from the texts. Their familiarity with the entire text and the discerning selection of scenes to support and explore ideas ensured thoughtful responses that moved beyond predictable and superficial discussions.

There is little doubt that students' development of skills and textual knowledge across all responses has improved significantly. It was evident that most students selected a topic with which they felt they could demonstrate their understanding of the text. There were far fewer responses that simply provided a plot summary, suggesting that students have been well taught how to select relevant supporting evidence. Where this did occur, it was often due to poorly constructed paragraphs where the direction of the topic sentence caused students to simply retell an incident or scene rather than deal with the ideas offered by the topic. Students should not offer a series of examples that support the general premise of the topic without exploring its implications.

Students' ability to understand, acknowledge and explore the genre of their selected text is improving. Responses that focused on Bolt's use of the Common Man in his play, the visual imagery employed by Sarah Watt and even the way characters' names supported a greater understanding in Dickens's novel, suggested that insightful discussions are taking place in classrooms regarding how the construction of a text adds to its meaning and our understanding. This knowledge was particularly apparent in the 'how' topics which specifically dealt with structure, including *Citizen Kane* (i.), *Generals Die in Bed* (i.) or *In the Lake of the Woods* (i.).

Students should be encouraged to have confidence in their own reading and demonstrate a personal understanding of the text rather than relying exclusively on commercially produced material. All texts are complex and offer much opportunity for exploration. There is no 'expected' response to a topic and the most successful pieces were those that were thoughtful and fresh. Assessors do not have to agree with the interpretation of a topic or text but students must be able to support their interpretations with insightful supporting evidence from the text. If students have an excellent knowledge of their text and a grasp of the topic, then they should be confident and bold when constructing their essays and presenting their ideas.

Students' understanding, deconstruction and organisation of responses in relation to the set topics are the areas that require the most work. Students should be taught to look critically at the wording of the topic and to consider what assumptions are being made within it. It is still a problem that too many students want to respond to their own question rather than grapple with the ideas of the set topic. Students should have the confidence to challenge the position of the topic instead of simply accepting or disregarding it. It was evident that students would benefit from more practice analysing and distinguishing different topics and approaches to topics.

Students must also ensure that they explore all of the elements presented in the topic. Too often students took a key point from the topic and produced an essay which did not include discussion of a significant idea that had a major bearing on the topic itself.

This was evident in the following two introductions to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (ii.). The first introduction, while it is fluent and demonstrates good textual knowledge, it does not deal with all elements of the topic. The second introduction is equally fluent and conversant but acknowledges key aspects of the topic: 'engages' and 'disturbing'.

George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four depicts a dystopian society where a totalitarian regime known as the Party monitors the thoughts actions of all the citizens of Oceania. The various methods of control utilised by the Party successfully work in eradicating individual and collective thoughts and memories of the past and of familial bonds of love and loyalty. Orwell warns us of the dangers of a dystopian nightmare through his novel, Nineteen Eighty-Four.

In the dystopic totalitarian world of Nineteen Eighty-Four, the suffering and oppression is inescapable for the citizens who live under the tyrannical rule of Big Brother. As a very politically aware writer, Orwell writes to mainly inform, but also entertain. His fearful insight into the psychology of totalitarianism engages readers on an intellectual level and makes them aware that the corruption of language, risks of conformity and the desire to live above all else are not only disturbing, but it is real and relevant in today's society.

Students must consider how quotations given in the prompt add to the dynamic of the topic and need to recognise the importance of the quotation in relation to the topic.

Students again demonstrated a good understanding of writing a text essay. Clear introductions, appropriate paragraphing and the ability to embed quotations appropriately were features of most pieces. These basic skills must

2009 Assessment Report



continue to be reinforced to students, as well as building more sophisticated vocabulary, continuing to improve grammar and more focus on sentence structure. Teachers are also encouraged to continue to work with students on appropriate quoting as long turgid quoting that wasn't relevant did not add to the success of an essay.

The most popular texts and their mean scores, out of a possible 10, were as follows.

Text	% of students	Average mark
<i>Look Both Ways</i>	24.8%	5.5
<i>The Kite Runner</i>	13.7%	5.2
<i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>	10.2%	6.0
<i>A Man for All Seasons</i>	8.3%	5.9
<i>Generals die in bed</i>	7.1%	5.5

The least popular texts for this part included *Great Short Works* (Poe), *Of Love and Shadows* and *Collected Stories* (Farmer) *Selected Poems* (Slessor) and *Into Thin Air*, each with fewer than 100 scripts.

The highest mean scores for Section A were achieved by students who wrote on *Hard Times*, *Richard III*, *Selected Poems* (Slessor) and *Collected Stories* (Farmer).

The following is an example of a mid-range response.

Look Both Ways

**Nick's mother says: 'Everybody has to find a way to face their own death and life.'
To what extent do the characters in the film achieve this?**

'Look Both Ways' the film by Sarah Watt shows the struggle of the characters to cope with not only death but life in general. Sarah Watts use of techniques including photo montages and animation is used to outline certain parts of the characters lives and also to give insight into how they are coping with death. Through the characters Nick, Meryl and Andy Sarah Watt shows not only how death is taken but how lives can be turned around. 'It doesn't matter how life ends, it matters how it was', this is an underlining message throughout the film that it only matters by having death at mind.

The first time we are introduced to Nick is as he is being diagnosed with testicular cancer that has spread to his lungs. In the first photo montage we are shown that Nick's father had died from cancer recently. After being diagnosed Nick turns into a pessimistic mess that sees death everywhere he looks. The first time he meets Meryl he says 'Do you see it happening to me? Do you see death?'. This shows how Nick is coping with death and how he has little hope left in his life. Nick's way of dealing with death includes looking up testicular cancer on the internet and studying what he is going to go through. After seemingly spiral into the vortex of negativity Nick turns his life around by beating cancer and, as shown in the final photo montage, happily with Meryl.

On the way back from her father's funeral the viewer is introduced to Meryl. The viewer is immediately thrown into her world in which she imagines herself dying in multiple ways. Sarah Watts shows us these thoughts in the form of animations so that we can see exactly how Meryl is coping with life and death. An example of one of these animations is 'Meryl seeing herself being crushed by a derailed train'. When she meets Nick for the first time she says 'I'm seeing death everywhere this weekend'. This shows how she's coping with death. She is a painter and paintings of her dying litter the floor. Meryl is able to face death with Nick and as the final photo montage shows she helps Nick through his battle with cancer.

Andy is a reporter at the local newspaper who has an obsession with male suicide and an overall negative view on life. His girlfriend Anna turns up at his apartment and tells him that she's pregnant. Andy's response to this is 'Did you do this on purpose?'. This shows his stubbornness and how he feels as though everybody's against him. His apartment is a mess with walls covered in male suicide statistics. This is how Andy copes with life and how he maintains his negative look on life. Andy also contemplates suicide but then changes his life around. He decides to take on the baby in Anna's womb which changes his life into positive, as the final photo montage shows. Andy faces death and comes up with a positive result.

Phil is the boss of the newspaper where Andy works. He is a workaholic and puts work before his wife and kids. After Nick came into the office and told him that he had cancer, Phil made a decision. He walked in the door at home and said 'I've quit smoking'. Phil's way of coping with death has made him change his life. He starts spending more time with his family and is seen at his daughter's birthday party smiling and enjoying life.

'Look Both Ways' shows the way that people cope with death. Although the film has a lot of negative themes the message is highly positive and in the words of Joan Nick's Mum 'It doesn't matter how life ends, it matters how it was'. This is Sarah Watts main message. Do not live life encircled in the blackness of death, live life to the fullest.



Assessor comments

This mid-range essay shows a basic understanding of both the topic and the text itself. It is quite mechanical and repetitive in its construction but is able to select and exemplify its ideas through textual use. There is a great deal of simple description which inhibits the possibility of taking a perspective from the topic and thus lacks complexity and detail. While there is a reasonable control of language, there are grammatical and punctuation issues which do not allow the student to communicate in a fluent, precise manner.

The following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

Hard Times

'In Hard Times Dickens suggests that it is through compassionate individuals rather than institutions that people can be helped.'

Discuss.

Through Hard Times, Dickens explores the dehumanising utilitarian regime in Britain, as a result of the rapid industrialisation during mid-19th century. In writing this novel, Dickens attempts to communicate to his audience his political message of the need for social reform. He employs both characters and institutions to embody the ideologies he rejects, whilst he also makes use of other characters and institutions as constructs, through which he is able to convey the values and mores which he endorses, and seeks to establish within society.

Dickens uses the schoolroom and the philosophy of Fact as vehicles through which to convey his critique of industrialised social mindset that serves anything but help people. The institution of Grandgrind's school functions as the root of the efforts to disseminate the philosophy of Fact. The philosophy encapsulates the social, moral, financial and educational problems which Dickens implies accompanies an ideology motivated by profit and economy. The classroom itself is described as a 'plain, bare, monotonous vault,' and could be likened to a jail, where the doctrine of Fact functions as the bars which keep its adherents locked in. The children are indoctrinated to believe 'the Head to be all-sufficient,' to 'stick to Fact' and 'never wonder'. We come to understand that in 'rooting out' the children's natural proclivities, their ability to empathise and feel compassion is enervated; this attempt to eradicate the people's abilities to feel is critiqued by Dickens through the satirical name M'Chookumchild, through which he clearly condemns the attempted suffocation of people's imaginations and sentiments. Bitzer is presented as the system's greatest success. His physical description serves to reflect his mindset; that just as 'his skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge,' so too were his heart and mind been purged of their natural inclinations and abilities to feel compassion. Through the institution of the classroom and Bitzer, we come to understand Dickens' primary concern rests with the industrialisation's potential to dehumanise society, and heavily disable its members from functioning in a contented and compassionate manner.

Through this we are able to see the destructive and unempathetic nature of the industrial mindset. Louisa serves as a depiction of the terrible consequences of the doctrine in regards to emotions and imagination. From her youth, we are made aware of her 'struggling disposition to believe in a wider and nobler humanity.' Her education was premised upon a diet of Fact, and we come to realise that the education and upbringing which she received served to only emotionally cripple her. Her deprivation of all things natural is evident in her fascination with fire; the fuel which is needed for the fire to burn is all the things she has been denied, therefore the embers are emblematic of her lack of reason to live; she was 'a fire with nothing to burn'. Ultimately it is in her cognizance of her deficiencies that we come to understand that the institutions needed in utilitarian ideals prove only to disable people from flourishing, rather than helping them, Louisa cries that she should have been 'a million times happier, more loving, more contented, more innocent and more human in all good respects.' Her father also stands as a perpetrator of Louisa's emotional state, who limited her education and upbringing to the ambits of 'reason and calculation.' Through Louisa, Dickens suggests that it is through institutions and individuals which are concerned only with Fact and statistical analysis that people suffer.

Stephen serves as a martyr of Dickens' cause; as Dickens wrote Hard Times with the aim of social reform. Stephen operates as an archetypal representation of the working poor, through whom we are better able to recognise the dire suffering of the proletariat as a result of the system's inability to view them as human beings, rather than meagre 'figures in a room, or machines.' Stephen exposes how the industrialists and patrons of utilitarianism take it upon themselves to be 'right', evincing that as a result, it is the working class who are therefore 'unnaturally' branded as 'forever wrong', suffering in both social and financial spheres. Through Stephen, Dickens is able to communicate that in continuing to deny that the members of the working-class are individual people with unique 'loves and liking...memories and inclinations,' the disparity between the classes will persist, and if the situation is not solved, the 'middle' will become an irreparable abyss. Stephens is employed by Dickens, in order to highlight that compassion needs to take precedence not only in an individual's mindset, but within social institutions also, in order to prevent the dehumanisation of society; through Stephen, Dickens implores his audience of the need to revise ideologies focused solely on Fact and reason, and warns that if the polarity continues, a 'black impassable world' will be erect between the classes, and society as it stands, will only last, 'as long or as short as stitch-like misery can last.'

Whilst it is clear that Dickens decries the philosophy of Fact, the circus is presented as an alternative social universe in which Fact and Figures work symbiotically. Indeed, Dickens does suggest that people can be helped through compassionate individuals, however, the circus is portrayed as a compassionate institution which also comes to the aid of others. Dickens



highlights the presence of Fancy through likening Childers to the fantastical creature of a 'Centaur' whilst the names Childers and Kidelerminster are themselves reminiscent of youth and innocence; these physical descriptions serve to further highlight that the institution of the circus was comprised of people 'who had a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practise.' Sleary is presented as Dickens' mouthpiece and it is the world view espoused by Sleary which serves to embody the values system which Dickens endorses. Sleary's eyes may be seen to reflect this ideology where Fact and Fancy co-exist is synergy; his 'fixed eye' is suggestive of his understanding for the need to focus reason, whilst his one 'rolling eye' is indicative of his ability to see beyond tangible fact and access imagination and sentiment. It is evident that within the circus, emotion is opening expressed. In comparison to Louisa and Grandgrind's relationship, Sissy and her father overly express their love and loyalty for one another; 'those two were one...they were never asunder.' Through the institution of the circus, Dickens illustrates that empathetic institutions, rather than industrial, oppressed inhumane ones, also are able to nurture people to flourish.

*Sissy is presented as the incarnation of the virtues which Dickens endorses, and the values and mores which he attempts to instil within society. He goes to great lengths to emphasise that it is Sissy specifically, and her subsisting sense of humanity and compassion, who is responsible for the permeation of love and imagination into the doctrine of Fact. Dickens highlights this through Mrs Grandgrind's epiphany, that 'there is something...that your father has missed. I have often sat with Sissy near me and thought about it.' Whilst it is Sissy who is responsible for Louisa's self-awareness and it is Sissy who is responsible for Grandgrind's transformation, it is because of her rearing in the institution of the circus that she is as compassionate and as loving as she is. In *Hard Times*, Dickens demonstrates that it is through empathy and compassion, whether embodied by individuals or institutions, that people can be helped.*

Assessor comments

This upper-range script demonstrates that the student has confidence in their knowledge of the text and aptly uses the novel to support the ideas of the topic. There is excellent control of language and a broad, incisive vocabulary which supports the concepts presented well.

Section B – Writing in Context (Creating and presenting)

The task in each Context required students to write an extended piece, exploring ideas and using detail from at least one text selected from the English Text List 2 published in the *VCAA Bulletin*. In all cases students had something to say and it was clear that some very interesting approaches and interpretations to creating and presenting were studied in classes.

Most students demonstrated that they had gained a number of insights about the Context they had studied and many showed the capacity to present their insights in a controlled, fluent and well-written manner. In 2009 there were far more imaginative approaches to writing and texts were used to inform the pieces of writing in a more evocative way.

Assessment was based on the interrelationship among:

- the quality of writing
- the handling of the prompt
- the quality of ideas (this, of course, is formed by the study of the Context and from the texts studied).

Students presented a range of approaches to writing in their responses. While the 'expository' approach was still the most popular, it was evident that students are being encouraged to choose an approach that best suits their writing and thinking. This year there were fewer bland textual responses. It was pleasing to see the varied and imaginative ways that students were able to explore the Context, the nominated text and the prompt.

Responses showed an increased maturity and receptivity to the human condition, as well as more intelligent insight. The sophisticated use of philosophical aphorism to turn an idea into a discussion was also observed. This is a sound strategy where students understand and can discuss the ideas suggested by the prompt without undermining their own insights.

Students who wrote excellent scripts were obviously thinking about responding to the prompt as written. They used their understanding of the text(s) and concepts from their Context study to inform the ideas they explored within their writing. Weaker students did not think critically about the idea the prompt was communicating or ignored the prompt altogether. Better responses got to the core of the prompt instead of treating it like a text response. Students need to be reminded that there is an important distinction between the Context they have studied and the task they are required to complete in the exam – to use their writing to explore the idea represented in the prompt. Students should not come to the examination with pre-prepared responses relating to the concepts/issues central to their Context study and ignore the idea the prompt is communicating. While the prompt is seen as a springboard for effective writing, the ideas of the prompt must be explored. It is important that students have an exact understanding of the core of the prompt.



Although students were more adventurous in their writing this did not always lead to better responses. It is expected that students will have sophisticated insights into the Context they have studied and the capacity to explore them in the direction dictated by the prompt. Weaker responses tended to be either too broad and neglected discussion of the prompt, or consisted of pre-prepared responses that did not respond to the prompt directly at all.

Use of text

The best scripts drew thoughtfully from the text; however, the least successful scripts only used a scene or a feature of a character in a superficial way or retold the plot of the text. This approach was not always relevant to the prompt. There can be no definitive advice on the success of relying on a single text or employing both (or more). Some students used the two texts expertly to demonstrate exceptions and qualifications while others did little more than use the second text to add more of the same examples. While students writing using an expository approach tended to employ both texts, a growing number of students explored only a single text. Some students who relied on a single text were able to develop a more coherent response than those who felt they were required to use both texts and were unable to make the transition from one text to the other in a coherent, fluent manner.

The transference of ideas from the texts is critical. Students who understood and could convey sophisticated ideas from their texts were the most successful, regardless of the approach to writing selected.

While there was an increase in the number of imaginative responses there was also an increase in imaginative responses that did not link the piece of writing to any of the texts on the list for that Context. Students are reminded that they must follow the instructions given on the examination paper: 'Your writing must draw directly from **at least one** selected text that you have studied for this Context and be based on the ideas in the prompts' and that they must show the link between the text and the response. The term 'directly' in the instructions did not imply 'specifically', rather it meant incisively, perceptively and judiciously.

Responding to the task

In 2009 the task was more broad than in previous years. Students were asked to 'Complete an extended written response in expository, imaginative or persuasive style' and appeared to understand the task.

Students and teachers must not disregard the fundamentals of good writing. Students must have a clear idea of the form of their piece, its audience, purpose and voice in order to ensure that these fundamentals are embedded in their writing.

Information on assessing the Context

Context	%	Mean	Most popular text
Encountering conflict	38.18%	5.3	<i>The Crucible</i>
Identity and belonging	31.00%	5.5	<i>Witness</i>
Whose reality?	18.97%	5.5	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>
The imaginative landscape	11.85%	5.6	<i>Fly Away Peter</i>

Some critical advice

- formulaic approaches were limiting
- memorised responses failed to address the prompt(s)
- use texts as vehicles, not as the centre of the task
- avoid retelling the plot
- work on the transference of ideas offered by the texts
- teach/learn a variety of forms of writing
- incorporate texts in ways appropriate to the form
- practise writing in a range of approaches, styles and forms
- explore the context outside the set texts so that students have more to draw on when creating ideas
- ensure there is adequate practice and strategies for exploring the prompt
- develop more sophisticated imaginative pieces
- develop pieces which are well crafted
- explore the ideas of the Context first, then explore the text – this may avoid the text becoming too much of the focus



- discourage personal stories that offer little depth to the piece of writing
- teach the use of text as explaining complexity, not merely as simple illustration

Sample pieces for each Context appear at the end of this report.

Section C – Analysis of language use (Using language to persuade)

Students continue to improve with this section of the examination and most showed a very good grasp of the expectations of demonstrating an understanding of the way language is used to persuade. The content of Section C in 2009 was both popular and accessible.

Students who understood the task did well. Those with a good analytical vocabulary were able to explore language use explicitly. However, some students presented a simple summary and list of the techniques used with little development. These responses did not score well as they did not fulfil the task as required.

The length of the reading material provided a challenge for some students. Holistic approaches to the material were required and those who attempted to work through every sentence found the task very difficult. Students needed to understand the whole piece first, and then decide which parts of the material they would draw on to explore the way in which language was being used.

Students needed to demonstrate their ability to understand how language is used to persuade. Students could select different parts of the material to exemplify and explore language use. They were expected to acknowledge and explore the way visual features were used in adding persuasiveness to the entire piece. This did not appear to be problematic as very few students did not work with the visual material. Many students who struggled to analyse the language were still able to make insightful comments about the visual. It was evident that most students understand the implications of a visual, although some were not able to convey this knowledge using language. Many students treated the visual separately from the text; only the very good responses drew it into the analysis of the written material. It is important that the connection between the passage and the visual is understood and explored.

The context of any piece of writing is crucial to understanding how language is being used and the context for this task was provided for students under the heading 'Background information'. High-scoring responses understood that the opinion piece was in response to the increasing debate about the impact of digital technology; that is, it was defending digital technology against recent criticism. This insight demonstrated a clear understanding of the tone and direction of the piece. Many students made pertinent comments that showed an understanding of how different audiences may respond to the debate differently.

The following is an example of a very good introduction that explores the implications of the title of the article and outlines the direction for the entire analysis.

The adoption of the title 'Keyed In' gives reference to the world of computing and plays on the sense of being 'up with it' or aware of one's surroundings and the progress of technology. This aids greatly in asserting the general topic of the article and the writer's view as the positive spin of being knowledgeable also contains an inclusive aspect, with implications that certain 'tech savvy' people are 'keyed in' and others are not.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

An opinion piece, appearing in the online journal 'Ctrl Alt', was posted earlier this year on the 23rd of May in response to the increasing and conflicting debate about the impact of digital technology on our society. The piece is entitled 'Keyed In', linking closely to the subject material and appeal to the 'digitally savvy' younger generations who are the target audience for this piece. An informative and enthusiastic tone is maintained throughout the piece, asserting the benefits of modern technology with positive connotations.

The outlay of the piece is that of a website, or more precisely a 'live' electronic journal, appealing directly to the subject material on digital technology and complimenting the younger audience, who would be familiar with websites and live journals. The title of the journal 'Ctrl Alt' is visually displayed as computer keys, after their namesake on an ordinary computer key board, while the title of the actual article is undersized and not interesting or assertive enough to spark much interest in the reader. However, the accompanying picture of a human head imbedded with computer micro chips makes up for the title's lack of appeal, because it visually enhances the main contention of the development of human technology, by associating the unique power of the human brain to the power of the micro chip.



The author, Voxi, is using an alias so that his or her real identity remains anonymous, which is a common trend on the internet. Voxi opens the piece by attacking people's resistance to learn new things, because it 'tends to polarise people'; in the effort to persuade the reader into denying that they are one of these people. Voxi describes the people who are 'challenged by the discomfort of being dislodged from the know' with alliteration, placing emphasis upon the 'd' sound, in order to emphasise the denotations of being classified in this group. Voxi then juxtaposes this negative characterisation, with a positive one. Imagery of people who want to 'grab the future with both hands' is energising and evokes excitement in the reader, as opposed to the tired afore characterisation. Voxi is persuading the reader with appropriate positive and negative connotations to want to be able to try new ways of doing things and embrace the technological revolution.

There is a tonal shift from excessively energetic to a more informative tendency, while maintaining the same assertiveness. Voxi uses examples from the Renaissance, the most renowned period in history for the advancement of education, with Copernicus and Galileo who were renowned for 'reorganising the cosmos' and comparing their genius with the power of technology, appealing to the reader's sense of admiration for the importance of great historical figures and linking it to a similar admiration for technology. Voxi uses repetition of the word 'revolution' which asserts that digital technology is a fundamental change and advantage to society, urging the reader to embrace the technological revolution because it is a positive step in the evolution of mankind. Voxi goes on to address the opposing arguments, ironically expressed in the form of a podcast, and dissects the flaws in the discrepancies with digital technology. For example, while 'some fear this will reduce human intelligence', Voxi asserts the absurdity of this and uses listing to highlight all the benefits of digital technology, finding cures faster, find ways of preserving the planet', appealing to both the readers sense of logical thinking and their humanity in wanting to take advantage of technology to benefit mankind for the greater good.

Voxi again uses positive and negative characterisations, but now in a more specific way by classifying the 'older generation' who 'just accept and use with enthusiasm'. This appeals to the target audience, who do not want to be associated with their parents' generation and are persuaded by Voxi that in using digital technology they can avoid this possibility. Voxi incorporates rhetoric language, 'What's to be afraid of?' and imagery, 'zip along the surface like jet skiers', to further enhance the youthful connotations of digital technology and appeal to his young audience. The use of familiar internet related trademarks, such as 'Facebook' and 'Google' gives authority to Voxi, in that he knows what he is talking about, and adds to the colloquial nature of the piece.

Voxi ends his piece on a positive note, 'Let's be excited', again embracing an enthusiastic and energetic tone which excites his readers and makes them want to embrace the technology revolution. He uses jargon, 'loser' and appeals to the younger generation's need to conform to add further persuasion to the piece and advocate digital technology.

Assessor comments

- A thorough discussion, always keeping on track in relation to how language is being used to persuade.
- Covers the breadth of the article but does not become bogged down trying to cover every idea.
- The student includes clever insights into their interpretations.
- Shows a clear understanding of the audience and what Voxi is trying to do.
- Insightful presentation of several visual features and how they contributed to the persuasiveness of the piece.
- Well written using a broad and appropriate vocabulary.

Section B samples

A variety of approaches to writing can be seen throughout the 11 samples. It is worth reading all the English (and English as a Second Language) examples to see the breadth of writing styles that can be successfully employed in the examination.

None of the pieces is 'perfect' and it is important to consider the fact that they were composed under the time constraints and pressures of an examination. All were considered by assessors to be in the upper range of scripts, some at the top end, others just reaching the upper range.

In all cases there is a strong sense of the Context, the prompt and a quality of writing that places them in the top group.



Context 1 – The imaginative landscape

'We live in a specific time and place yet, simultaneously, we experience an internal life that is not limited in this way.'

Context 1, Sample A

Nominated text: *Fly Away Peter*

Jim crawled like an animal across the muddy and desolate field, once it had been crowded with peasants and their crops, now it was strewn with bodies. Every now and then dark and foreboding night sky was split by a blinding light that tore it open and was followed by deafening cracks like thunder following lightning. Each time this happened a shiver of pure fear coursed through Jim and he wondered if he had, in fact, died until he noticed he was still frozen cold and he was still in grained with dirt and how could this be death? As he inched further forward, a shot rang out, startling Jim as the bullet buried itself in a corpse not far from his position. The blackened body jumped then fell still again, the only result being the scattering of the filthy rats that had only a moment ago been tumbling about in the dead soldier's belly, surviving off his death.

Jim continued his crawl. He saw others in the dark like him. They barely moved, because those who moved too fast were picked off by snipers or machine guns and never given the chance to move again. Barbed wire suddenly caught at his ankle and he tore the mud-caked material of his uniform away from it in a hurry. The ringing sound of the wire echoed as Jim stumbled in a panic into a shell-hole he had not even been aware of. He rolled down the side and made a splash at the bottom as the stagnant and glinting water seeped into his clothes, stealing any last miraculous traces of heat from his body.

He suddenly heard his name and, looking up, frightened at first, his eyes clapped on Bobby Cleese and relief washed through him. The familiar face, though tired and smeared with mud like his own, inspired a little joy in his heart, or as much joy as one can feel when in his situation. Jim approached him and in him saw a friend, not merely another soldier.

Crouching together in the shell-hole as the sky regularly lit up and explosions sounded all around them, the two accepted that they would need to stay there until it was safer. When the fighting above them eventually subsided they realised how close they were to enemy lines. German voices drifted over the frozen rim of their refuge and through Jim knew he should be numb with fear, he maintained some composure and he listened as Bobby continued to speak about his home at Deception Bay. The story had a way of pulling Jim out of the nightmare of his reality and into the bay described by Bobby. He saw the gentle waves and foam swell in Bobby's eyes and sensed that he too was experiencing some form of escape inside his own mind. Jim could almost smell the salty air as he watched Bobby's lips move, blue from cold.

It was enough to transport him straight from his friend's fishing paradise to the coast that Jim called home. His body remained crouched in the putrid water at the bottom of the shell-hole in n-man's land, but he himself could see a white coast stretching before him, glistening under the warm Australian sun as sparkling waves crashed on the shore. Miss Harcourt was there with her tripod and camera, setting up her equipment as Jim watched a gorgeous sandpiper through his field glasses. Ashley Crowther was there too, crouched next to Jim with an expression of pure amazement plastered across his face.

Although he stared at Bobby Cleese's sullen defeated face and sat in near frozen water in a muddy hell, surrounded by death, Jim could hear the wind rushing through the trees and the scrub along the coast of his home, not blasted to wooden skeletons but brandishing thousands of fluttering green leaves and providing homes for all the birds of his childhood. They sang and danced and glided across the sanctuary that now existed for him only in dreams.

Back in France, the first signs of a light that wasn't a fiery explosion glinted off the water in the shell-hole, announcing the coming of the sun like a fanfare announces a King. Bobby was silent now, as was Jim. He waited impatiently until it came and brimmed with what little joy he could muster when it did; the first bird call of the new day. It was that little sound that assured Jim he was not in hell, he still existed on earth and it strengthened his internal connection with home. His body may have been filthy, exhausted and crouching in a shell-hole surrounded by death, but right now, he was somewhere else.

Assessor comments

- An extremely well-written and controlled piece of writing, sustaining an evocative and dramatic tone throughout.
- Embedded nicely in the textual world of *Fly Away Peter*.
- Highly literate.
- Conceptualises richly using the prompt as a springboard.

Context 1, Sample B

Nominated text: *The Poetry of Robert Frost*

People are able to expand their internal mind and knowledge no matter where and when they live. Our minds can take us places unreal, such as into dream homes, even if we live in completely different places. Similarly, we have the ability to take any



opportunity offered to us no matter where our lives start. Our ability to change our minds about certain things is in on way limited by where we live or when we choose to make the change. Although our minds are not limited, some of us choose to limit our knowledge about the world and live in isolation. The Poetry of Robert Frost demonstrates how people are not limited in their minds, no matter where or in which era they live.

Human have many different opportunities offered to them and most of those opportunities are taken. It depends on who we are not where or when we come from that determines whether we expand our minds to experience an exciting life. For example, in Frost's 'The Road Not Taken' the narrator chooses the unknown path that 'wanted wear' so he can experience a different life to everyone else taking the easy, well-known path. The path the narrator took 'made all the difference' in his life because he took opportunities and did exciting things that were unpredictable. Even if the narrator started his life miserably and lived in an unhappy environment, he was still able to expand his internal mind and not be limited to standard, 'normal' things. Some people throughout the world are hesitant before they take opportunities because they are afraid of failure. For example, 'The Lockless Door' the poet lives in isolation and is afraid to answer to the 'knock' at her door. The poet eventually takes the opportunities offered to him and decides to 'hide in the world'. The narrator once lived in a 'cage' and resisted change but in the end, that did not limit his internal mind to take opportunities and experience an exciting and open life. Our internal life gives us the ability to take opportunities and make the most of our lives instead of limiting ourselves just because of our previous life.

Our ability to change our minds about previous decisions is not limited by where we live or when those decisions were made. We live in an unpredictable world which means things must change to adapt to the current situation. In some cases, people may have lived with certain things in their lives for so long that they cannot change it, even if they question the certain object, For example, in 'Mending Wall' the narrator and his neighbour lived with the theory that 'good fences make good neighbours'. The wall has separated the narrator and his neighbour for so long that he has never thought of why the wall was there in the first place. The narrator finally questions why the wall is there because it is not separating anything in particular. This questioning of the wall means that narrator has the ability to destroy the wall and just because it has been in that same place for a long time hasn't limited the narrator's internal thought for change. Some people find it hard to change their minds about their current situation because they are fearful of the unknown world. However, this fear of learning their stable environment does not limit their ability to change their mind and live a more exciting future. For example, in 'The Lockless Door' the narrator does not want to leave his safe 'cage' but eventually decides that his environment needs to be different so he takes the opportunity to leave. This decision means his once safe home did not limit him to stay in that place but enabled him to move on and pursue an exciting future. Even if we have lived in places for a long time, our ability to make change in life is not limited.

Although our minds are not limited by where we live and the era we live in, some people choose to limit their knowledge and live in isolation. All over the world there are people who have the ability to expand their minds and be open to new ideas, but they choose not to because they are resistant to the concept of change. For example, in 'The Black Cottage' the old woman lived in isolation and had little knowledge of wider society and ethical issues. 'Black she had scarcely seen and yellow never.' Her lack of knowledge of the world caused her mind to be closed and limited to what she had been previously taught. It is not because she grew up in an era that thought the white race was superior, or the fact that she lived in a small cottage, because there are plenty of older people around the world who live with open minds. The woman chose not to expand her knowledge because she was afraid of unpredictable events overwhelming her. Although many people in the world have the ability to expand their minds and not limit their knowledge based on where and when they live, some choose not because they are afraid of the impact it will have on their lives.

Although we live in a specific time and place, our minds are not limited by this and we are able to expand our horizons. People may start off their lives at a specific point, however, this does not determine which opportunities they take to open their minds and lead exciting. Lives. Some things in life have been present for a long time so it is hard to change. However, this should not impact our ability to be open to different things. Although people have the ability to expand their minds, some choose not to so their knowledge of wider society remains limited. The Poetry of Robert Frost opens a window for us to gain insight into how different people are resistant to limiting their minds and taking opportunities and how some people choose to close their minds.

Assessor comments

- The student shows an understanding of how the text works in relation to the prompt and the Context.
- It is somewhat repetitious in its construction but there is still a solid control of language.
- Links to the ideas of the prompt can be slightly strained and this demonstrates the risk of using a text too literally.
- Weighing up all aspects of this piece of writing, it is still a successful piece that is in the lower end of the upper range.

Context 2 – Whose reality?

'We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.'

Context 2, Sample A

Nominated text: *Enduring Love*



Musical Chairs

'Do you think it was a safe day to be out flying a balloon, Mr Gadd?' the man asked, surveying through clear spectacles James Gadd, who was sitting at the front of the room.

'I – well, yes,' Gadd replied, sweat shining off his forehead. 'I mean, I knew there was a bit of wind, but obviously I didn't expect – well, nobody expects something like that to happen to them.'

'And was the balloon in good working order?' the man with the glasses inquired.

'Yes, absolutely,' answered Gadd firmly. 'I've been flying for years, I wouldn't – I couldn't – make a mistake like that. It just all happened so quickly, and I tried to organise – but it was chaos...and then it was just Dr Logan hanging on ...until he couldn't hang on any longer.' There was an audible sniff from the seated crowd, and a pale woman with dark hair pulled back blinked back tears. On either side of her, two small children watched their legs swinging under the bench. Forwards, backwards. Forward, backwards.

'Thank you, Mr Gadd,' began the man with the glasses. 'I would now like to hear from Harry Gadd, grandson of Mr Gadd.'

A young boy made his way up to the seat at the front, replacing Gadd. He was accompanied by an older woman.

'Now,' said the man with the glasses, adjusting the volume and pitch of his tone. 'Can you tell me what you saw?'

'I was going for a balloon ride and it was fun but it didn't stop and I was scared, and it kept going higher and I got more scared...'

'Yes, yes, that's how you felt,' interrupted the man, 'but what did you see?'

'Nothing...I was in the basket and I shut my eyes because there was so much screaming...' he trailed off, his voice choking with remembered terror. The woman next to him shushed him and rubbed his arm.

'Very well...you've been a very brave boy,' sighed the man with the glasses automatically. The boy was led back to his family, who were waiting to catch him with tissues and words of comfort. It was like a game of musical chairs, where nobody knew when to stop, and each time the music played, it was slightly different. In the front row a woman with startlingly green eyes held the hand of a man next to her.

'All I know is, if we'd sorted ourselves out and banded together, we might've been able to sort it out,' Greene said, running a hand distractedly through thinning grey hair. 'But that Gadd pilot panicked, and only me and Lacey kept our heads together. Then people started to let go...not me!' he added hastily. 'But other people were acting funny afterwards,' he finished evasively.

'Can you please explain what you mean by –'

'Well he laughed!' Greene exclaimed, pointing an accusatory finger at a man in the front row. 'Joe Rose, he bloody well laughed! Now that's odd, if you ask me. There's Logan, hanging on for life, and he laughs!'

Joe rose to speak, but the woman next to him placed her hand on him, wary caution in her emerald eyes. 'Please, Mr Rose, you will have your chance to speak shortly,' stated the man with the glasses. 'Is there anything else, Mr Greene?'

'Well...no. I didn't let go, but...no, that's about it.' And so the music died away, and another person was called to be the focus of the bespectacled man.

'It wasn't like that!' burst out Joe angrily.

'Very well. Please explain the, in your own words, what it was like.'

'There was no chance, no time...it was surreal, as if watching something in a cartoon. That's the laugh. Adrenalin, danger...we all perceive and respond to these stimuli differently...and that was just...my response.' There was a pause. 'And I didn't let go first,' he said suddenly, looking out at the crowd as if for validation. But this was nothing new to them. That statement, 'I didn't let go first,' was one of the few elements consistent with each witness; even if, under the microscope of reason, it obviously could not hold true for them all.

'Please, need I remind you all, that this is an inquiry,' began the man with the glasses, with some exasperation. 'And the aim of an inquiry is to obtain an objective account of what happened. Free from speculation or innuendo, and removed from personal



bias as far as possible. It is not, however, a goal to portion blame. Rather to conclude whether or not changes to current procedures are necessary in order to avoid accidents of a similar nature occurring.'

And so the game continued. More players were called. A pair of lovers sang of a guilty affair, a professor of aerodynamics hummed about laws of physics, and a meteorologist whistled about high pressure systems. All melodies combining, joining together in contrapuntal dissonance and harmony, to create a symphony of truth, a synthesised reality, woven from many disparate threads to form a whole. This continued until the man with the glasses decided that the symphony was complete. And so the music ended.

'No single action brought about the death of Dr John Logan,' he began. 'His death was the result of a series of events which regrettably culminated in the loss of a brave man.' He paused, looking down at his musical notation of the symphony. 'But it is clear to me that some stops must be taken. Firstly, the flying of a balloon in such dangerous conditions constitutes a severe lack of judgement on Mr James Gadd's behalf. I therefore call for the revoking of his piloting license. Furthermore, it behoves to ensure...'

On either side of their mother, two young children lost the rest of his words. The world of adults was a confusing and painful place. Their attention was held by something much more interesting. Under the bench, their small legs continued to swing like pendulums. Forwards, backwards. Forwards, backwards.

Assessor comments

As well as dealing neatly with the key idea of the prompt and exploring its ideas, there are many other profound ideas embedded within the story. There is a wonderful control of language, the piece is colourfully decorated, has a nice use of metaphor and well-developed characters in relation to the Context and the prompt.

There are, however, some problems with its handling of the prompt. While different characters offer different realities about the same situation, dependent on who the individual is, this idea is not explicit enough.

Context 2, Sample B

Nominated text: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

The grey car screeched to a halt, stuck in the rush-hour traffic of Melbourne on a drizzly, grey winter evening. In doing so the cd scratched, the music momentarily pausing before the street melody picked up once again. As the soft piano chords and acoustic guitar filled the silence, I turned and remarked, 'Salvador Dali once said that the only difference between him and a mad man was that he wasn't mad.' I laughed, thoroughly amused by the distinction.

'Oh yeah?' the driver replied. 'Well, the only difference between me and Salvador Dali is that I know the definition of mad.'

Looking out the window at the myriad of cars surrounding me, all cloaked in darkness as the sun said its last faint goodbyes, I wondered if the distinction could really be that easy.

Salvador Dali, a master of the surrealist school, was a man who devoted his life to questioning and challenging our perceptions of normality, of acceptability and most importantly of beauty. He took the mundane, the ordinary, the simple and sometimes the rather ugly and he transformed it all into something with meaning. Or after something that escapes our conventional understanding and forces us to look beyond what we expect and try and comprehend what is outside of ourselves. Maybe the man who turned lobsters into a telephone or – as legend has it – saw the disintegration of time in the melting of cheese was right in arguing that 'what we christen to be reality may turn out to be a more elaborate illusion that the world of our dreams.'

As I stared out into the indiscernible darkness, humming the piano chords that had been accompanying my musing, I wondered just how much of my reality exists external to me. How much of what I know can actually exist and be comprehensible outside of my own experience?

Blanche DuBois once said, 'I want magic – yes that's what I want, magic'. Tennessee Williams' delicate heroine lived out 'what reality should be', But hers was a different experience to mine. Her life was polarised between desire and death, love and money. Blanche has known sorrow, death, love and sexual desire beyond my limited experience. Hers was a reality once illuminated and then dimmed. If she were to spring out of the majestic literature of Williams and experience the reality of the modern world, would our realities be congruent? I think not. She and Dali are two souls that enable their emotions, desires and experiences to manifest themselves within their realities to the point of distortion.

They have both known death, Dali through the death of a young brother whom he tried to encapsulate and Blanche the death of a lover she could never replace. Both have known sexual desire; Dali painted lamb shops hanging in equilibrium on his lover's body to subdue his appetite whilst Blanche lost herself in 'intimacies with strangers'. Beyond this though, both have felt forces exerted upon their realities to change. Dali painted himself blue to explore who he thought he was inside, whilst Blanche clinging desperately to what others perceived of her put on 'pastel colours' and tried to 'glow'. And they have both encountered



conflicting realities; Dali's isolation from the surrealist school and the overwhelming of Blanche's glowing pastels by Stanley's discordant bold primary colours.

Still humming the sweet melodic song to myself, the car lurched forward breaking away from the busy night streets of Melbourne and into the enveloping darkness of the suburbs. The question, I thought, was not only what I defined madness to be, but also – and maybe more importantly – how Dali's reality defined madness for him. For the collapse of Blanche's external understanding into the dream-like reality within her, has long been viewed as one of the most beautiful disintegrations of literature. We all rely on the kindness of strangers in one way or the other to reaffirm our own belief in our realities. We must all know reality through the lenses of our experiences and our values. Blanche could not tolerate deliberate cruelty, whilst Stella happily continued to live with a physically abusive husband. Whilst we may question Stella's reality we can never understand them for Stella's reality is fixated upon the love she feels and not the pain.

It is the role of artists such as Dali and female heroines such as Blanche and Stella not to simulate a reality for me, but rather to enlarge my understanding of myself and my reality through my own interpretation as distinct from a movie adapted, an art critic and indeed the author itself. No I do believe, dear reader, that your understanding of the piece I have just written will be quite different from the experience I had writing it.

The only difference between me and Salvador Dali is that...I am not Dali.

Assessor comments

- A wonderfully fluent piece of writing that unites outside material and pulls it neatly with a prescribed text.
- Pleasant segues between the narrative and introspective reflection with no strain.
- Very clever insights and excellent control of language.
- A satisfying sense of completion.

Context 2, Sample C

Nominated text: *The Shark Net*

Millions of years ago, we were nothing more than microscopic amoeba, floating in blissful thoughtlessness over the surface of the earth. Eventually, we began to change. We grew gills, and we swam. We grew arms, legs, and began to walk. We stood up straight – and learned to walk all over again. Soon we even began to resemble those incredible, terrible creatures that would one day create works of science and art – along with destruction on a grand scale.

Or so an evolutionary scientist (along with many others) would have it. If you were, for example, an Orthodox Jew, last month would have, in fact, marked the five thousand, six thousand, six hundred and seventieth anniversary of God deciding it was just about time to switch the lights on. Sure, there's less scientific evidence backing up this version of events, but to this certain group, it is reality pure and simple.

The Irish Modernist playwright and poet Samuel Beckett once wrote that 'Life is habit. Or rather, life is a succession of individuals; the world being a product of individual's consciousness.' While Beckett obviously wasn't the sunniest of personalities, this concept of individual, evolving realities is one that is particularly apt. While there may be a truly objective reality out there somewhere, humans view objective reality through their own, intrinsically subjective filter. Take the recent arrest of celebrated director Roman Polanski into consideration. One might venture that the rape of a child is objectively and always wrong; yet Roman Polanski stands today under house arrest in Switzerland, and international petition bearing famous signatures calling for his release. Interesting that this petition originated from and is signed by so many of Hollywood fame; for some, it seems, shared experience or affection can negate what we would normally view as inherently evil. As Rousseau noted, 'Nature never deceives us – it is we who deceive ourselves.'

*Indeed, self-deception is an extremely human way of coping with factors that we simply deem too difficult to deal with. Emotion can simply override reality, to influence our perception of it. Robert Drewe's deep and unabiding guilt over the death of his mother permeates his memoir, *The Shark Net*. Though from an objective standpoint it is clear that no murder was committed, Drewe goes so far as to feel there is some comparison to be made between himself and Eric Cooke, the 'Nedlands Monster'. Guilt guides his responses, and effectively builds within him a reality that is objectively incongruous; that he murdered his mother. Our emotions have enormous power over us. Dr Helen Fisher's work in studying the chemical science of love shows us that, with enough dopamine, love is less an ephemeral, than a chemical reaction. Hence, our realities are informed not only by what we know intellectually to be real, but perhaps to a greater extent by what we feel to be real.*

This in itself is problematic. Considering the subjective nature of reality, along with the social tendencies of humans, it is clear that various, generally accepted social realities are formed. What, then, when someone breaks the norm? Caster Semenya, the South African woman runner recently outed on a global stage as intersex gives us some insight into how we react to alternate realities. From her competitors cruel snarl before she was even tested – 'She's not a woman just look at her' – to the insensitive, blaring international headlines – 'Semenya found to have seven times a woman's normal testosterone levels!' – Caster was immediately relegated to the status of an outsider or a freak, her personal business public before she was even aware of it.



Caster has always identified as a woman. Openly rejected from her sex, and her reality of 18 years standing, Caster broke down, and is still on suicide watch. As humans, we have a horror of the uncategorisable; we like to try and contain the world, messiness of life into neat little boxes. If we cannot understand something, our first impulse is to reject it. Sadly, when we reject an entire person's reality, we reject the possibility to expand and augment our own. The person rejected, moreover, is consigned to a certain degree of unfulfillment. Rita Hayworth, star of the beloved Gilda bemoaned the fact that 'men fall in love with Gilda, and wake up with me.' Though we many view people subjectively, if we do not to some extent acknowledge their own self-perception, we disallow for who they may, in reality, be.

Sometimes, however, this self-perception can be so wildly distorted that it cannot be viewed as real by anyone but themselves. Eric Cooke's 'Joe Cool' persona and 'Saturday Night Boy' behaviour are not only pathetic in his attempts, a short, disfigured man, to chat up women he both wants and despises, but are moreover disturbing in their desperate rejection of concrete reality. Despite his harelip, and his wife and children at home in bed, Cooke knows himself to be the smooth, sexy, single man that he tries so desperately to create. He is not, however, as strong as the social reality that he denies. Darwin said that 'Ultimately, survival is dependent on an ability to change and evolve.' Cooke, unable to change how he looks, or acts, is thus doomed to clash with the reality of his situation – and lose.

Humans, in effect, need to feel purpose, and will construct a reality to effect this. Existentialist French philosopher Jean-Paul Satre contended that, 'Life has no meaning once you lose the illusion of being eternal', and more often than not this is how we choose to act. We intellectually comprehend warnings about global warming, for example – yet when it comes to switching every plug off at the socket, or taking 3 minute showers, we so often fail to make the connection. Ultimately, the people we are, and the realities that we construct, as tangible as they may be to us, will never be more than a factor in how others perceive us, and thus how we are accepted into a wider reality. Considering the transience of our existence, we can never truly be remembered thought he reality we constructed, but rather in how we fit into the reality of our times. Our perception of reality is effectually less pertinent than others' perceptions of us. Roman Polanski will forever be remembered as a child rapist, Caster Semenya as a cheat, Eric Cooke as an inhumane monster. Whether or not this is fair, the way we perceive others, and the way others view us, create how our realities will be remembered. Thus in the worlds of Oscar Wilde, 'Does biography lend to death a new terror.'

Assessor comments

- A contemplative dissertation using the text and external material in a thoughtful and supportive manner.
- While there are some rambling sentences, there is nonetheless a control over the language and ideas and the piece grows and develops from the prompt.

Context 3 –Encountering Conflict

'It is the victims of conflict who show us what is really important.'

Context 3, Sample A

Nominated text: *Omagh*

Priorities in life are rather variable – they differ between cultures, religions and individuals. Some, however, are universal in their importance. Priorities are often revealed in conflict partly in that one only appreciates what one has when there is so little left. While those who benefit or initiate conflict often have priorities quite distinct with universal concepts of importance, victims stop taking things for granted and demonstrate what truly should be priorities.

In a conflict there is much to gain, but ever more to be lost. Struggles for land and independence often last generation, and while justified to some, others bear the physical burden and reconsider the necessity. Peter Travis' film 'Omagh' documents one saga in the drawn out battle for Northern Ireland between Irish Republicans and British Nationalists. To simplify this complex conflict to just two groups is inaccurate, Travis' main focus is the large group in between, who while possibly holding one opinion, are fed up with military actions for no change. The protagonist, Michael Gallagher, is a real life victim of the RIRA bombing of the titular town. His son, Aiden, perished in the explosion, and while politicians and authorities passed the buck on responsibility, his priorities had been highlighted to him. The RIRA seek to gain a Republican Ireland supposedly, but their actions hindered the formal peace process. They gained notoriety and not much else from this incident, while so many lost so much.

In the wake of the conflict or disaster, victims cease taking things for granted. The Gallagher family, in a variety of ways, found new and simple methods to pursue their priorities. Michael, the softly spoken Mechanic, was galvanised into action by Aiden's death. After doing nothing in the wake of his brother's death in another IRA incident, he sees no value in not pursuing justice, and plenty of good to be found in discovering the truth. His leadership of the Omagh Self Help and Support Group helped them to organise themselves better, and push for convictions. Despite his best efforts, the inertia of the collective authorities was too much to overcome and all suspects were released. In the wake of a blunt ombudsman's report, he announced the families would press civil charges. At that point, the film ends, but in reality those charges were both laid and successfully executed, meaning in one sense responsibility was laid on someone for the deaths. While so drastic, and providing little actually material gain, this was done for its virtues – Gallagher's top priority was justice and he achieved a sense of that through legal action.



A different change in priorities was yielded in his wife Kathy, in the wake of the bombing. She wanted only the safety and unity of her immediate family. Unlike Michael, she was not fussed about justice, knowing nothing would bring back her son – ‘He’s dead!’ Michael’s pursuit of political and legal responsibility actively stopped her priority from being achieved – his perpetual absence or business through commitments prevented him from always being there for her. While transnational debate raged over the Republic, the bombing and the ‘peace process’, Kathy simply wanted the remainder of her family to be safe and well; to her this was truly important.

When one has nothing, it is clear what is of innate importance. In an analogous struggle to that in Northern Ireland, the independence movement in India likewise pitted one group for an independent republic against those for British administration. Beyond the British link however, this has many differences but also some similarities. The Northern Irish conflict could not be described as racial, as the differences between English and Irish, are indeed Catholic against Protestant, the conflict is blurred after centuries of inheritance. In India, British rulers were still British while Indian citizens were clearly not. The religious aspect is echoed however, in the difference between Hindus and Muslims similar to that of Northern Ireland’s Protestants and Catholics.

The ability to bridge the gap between religions in Northern Ireland has proven impossible but in India, albeit for only a brief period, Hindus and Muslims alike united for independence. The reason for this unity can be reduced to one man, Mahatma Gandhi. His philosophy and exemplary leadership attracted people of all faiths to follow him. He is the embodiment of having nothing and truly knowing what is important, symbolic of the destitute poverty of his compatriots, he had an incredibly frugal existence. He wore simple clothes, lived in communal quarters with anyone who wanted a place to stay, and ate and drank minimally, often starving in protest. His foregoing of material wealth favoured by the Imperial British and the extravagant Indian royalty past (Taj Mahal etc) indicated clearly his desires, - peace and independence. Indians, as a whole the victims of a harsh occupation, denigrated to second-class citizens in their own country, collectively stood with Gandhi for independence in a decidedly non-violent manner, what’s more they achieved their goal. They knew from previous disadvantage that violence only spread the suffering; and of the greatest importance was ending suffering.

Gandhi’s assassination ended the brief period of religious unity, but did not hinder the move for independence. India was granted independence in 1949, not two years after Gandhi was shot by a fellow Hindu. Many in India did not support Gandhi’s unified movement, preferring the old partnership. Only those who had truly learnt from persecution discovered that the best way was to eliminate rather than perpetuate it. Gandhi’s great humanity, combined with his priorities informed by injustices past, achieved independence in India, and showed true importance of freedom to us all.

Whether in Europe or Asia, conflicts all over the world create victims. While victors and aggressive initiators enjoy superficial benefit, the victims gain perspective through their loss. It is with this new perspective that life and the world is viewed through this lens of past suffering and true importance understood. Generally simpler than grand material superficialities, these things are nevertheless almost universally agreed upon as important. Tragically, those who have not suffered often cannot see these things and continue causing conflict, creating victims. Whether it is truth, peace, justice, unity or safety, true importance is seen through the eyes of conflict’s victims.

Assessor comments

- Extremely well-controlled use of language and the response is well structured.
- The use of the text to support the ideas is strong and carefully selective in respect to the prompt.
- The focus of learning from victims was not as strong with the India discussion but is still relevant.
- Strong in imagery.

Context 3, Sample B

Nominated text: *The Secret River*

The history of our nation is crippled with bloodshed, wounded by immorality. In a blind quest for power, for ambition, for land, the colonisers left their decency behind and brought with them prejudice and hatred – the tools of conflict. Year twelve students, I think of my past and all that it entails and I am almost brought to tears. I think of families torn apart, I think of dying mothers, dead fathers, lost children. These are my ancestors. And when I look at their graves all I see is the product of a ridiculous conflict, the consequence of an ambition. And I see that amongst it all, somewhere, somehow, we lost sight of what is truly important.

Young Australia was spawned on the bloodshed of the innocent. Armed with their roving ambition, colonisers tore down the very fabric that constituted humanity. No one was spared on their quest for ownership. Innocent children, my ancestors, were killed and murdered, they watched their families, their friends die in a frenzy of indecency. If these colonisers looked, if they truly looked at these innocent people, they would have seen that in every blow that killed an innocent, they killed their own morality. If they had looked at the innocent, they would see the comparative insignificance of land. Sometimes all it takes is to look into the eyes of the innocent, to realise we have lost sight of our own innocence.

*Today we face the brunt of our murderous past. With art like *The Secret River* the immorality of early Australia is displayed in the naked form of words on a page. Novels like this show us what is truly important when we see the innocent, and how they*



were treated in the quest for a piece of land. We see an entire tribe beaten to death in one murderous massacre, a bloody culmination of anxiety, of fear. We see a squealing baby clubbed to silence, the innocent brought down in a rain of bullets. Thornhill, on his quest for land compromised his relationship with his son Dick and created a void in his relationship with Sal. And after gaining this piece of land, we wonder why he could not truly be happy? The answer lies in the dead eyes of the innocent, because besides his yearning for land, his nagging guilt that he sacrificed the souls of the innocent, ate away at his conscience. Indeed, the victims of *The Secret River* show us what is really important – humanity.

It is my endeavour today to show you, year twelve students, the moral responsibility with which you must carry our country forth into the future. Prejudice, arrogance, ignorance – these are the sicknesses of the past that threaten to resurface if we do not cure them now. Look to those buried in their graves, my ancestors to see the product of the evils of the past. Their graves tell us the story of a nation which lost sight of its humanity, the importance of compassion, of understanding, of morality. These are the graves of the innocent, the victims of the conflict. Take them as an example of what is truly important, and never lose sight of it, and their deaths will be vindicated, their deaths will serve a purpose.

Indeed, my timing is purposeful, my intent is deliberate, because already I see the tell-tale signs of an old story of jaundice seeping its way back into a modern society. Indian students in our city are being attacked. It seems the faint outline of an old prejudice remains. Where have we heard this story before? Old inhabitants. New inhabitants. Innocence. Victims. Bloodshed. It seems we have failed to see the error of our ways, we fail to see that humanity, understanding and morality should rise above all else. We fail to see this, because we fail to look at the victims of our conflict. And in failing to do this, we fail mankind.

I leave you now, year twelve students, with one final, solid reminder. Look to the past as reference to the product of our conflict, the product of prejudice. In the graves of the innocent you will see that humanity, decency, morality should override all exterior factors. Fail to see this and my ancestors have died in vain. Don't let yourselves become Thornhill, and have the deaths of the innocent, gnaw away at your souls.

Thank you.

Assessor comments

- An interesting approach, taking on the qualities of a speech and maintaining a style and tone that works well as a speech.
- The audience is evident and the language, style and presentation support this intention.
- Provocative.
- The use of text is selective in respect to the intention of the piece.
- Explores the concept of victims and what can be learnt well.

Context 3, Sample C

Nominated text: *The Crucible*

It's Un-American to Condemn Kazan

How is it that a solitary choice can condemn a man to such hatred and despise? I am, of course, referring to director and storyteller, Elia Kazan, who in decades since his decision to 'name names' to the House of Un-American Activities Committee, has been the pariah of Hollywood, despised by many for placing self-preservation above what many today consider to be the moral right. However, while we may demonise Kazan even today, it is important to realise that he, like the rest of us, was also a victim of the madness during those years, and that we are also partly to blame. We dealt with the conflict in absolutes, unwilling to view an opposing idea as legitimate and possibly reasonable due to the fear which clouded our judgement. As a result, we sit here today, scarred by the shame of the gruelling trials which saw reputations trashed with little evidence and huge consequences, and we must learn from those victims if we are to move forward and begin the process of reconciliation.

By looking at Kazan's supposed betrayal, we see only a small fragment of a much larger picture, which includes the American Government's clear abuse of their position of power. While HUAC claimed it was their 'duty' to investigate the communist movement in our country, it is obvious that they unfairly targeted the Hollywood motion picture industry, exposing what was viewed as 'celebrity scandals' in order to gain attention for their cause. From those like Kazan who fell victim to the government's lust for power – or just plain paranoia – we as a nation can learn that what is really important is not the ability to remain in the middle ground, rather it is the ability to make a choice and stand by that choice no matter what. If grudges should be held, it should be against our government. The paranoia and 'prodigious fear' they generated during those years veiled by the transparently feeble excuse of protecting our country from a looming Communist threat has tarnished this once-great nation's reputation.

As in most instances of conflict, individuals in McCarthy's America were compelled to respond to the growing madness, the way they reacted, revealed the secrets of who they were and what made them tick. From this we can learn that making a choice, no matter what that choice is, is crucial if we are to define ourselves by our morals. Identity is an integral part of who we are, and instead of condemning those like Kazan who made a choice, we should praise them for their efforts. Like most faced with



difficult decisions, either choice Kazan made he would lose. He and many others at the time were forced into making a choice between their livelihood, and their convictions, there was 'no road between'. It was a choice that would leave them as scarred and affected as our nation today, yet unlike our nation, they made a choice and demonstrated to the world that they were not afraid to reveal who they truly were. Refusing to co-operate with the Committee would have surely meant the end of Kazan's filmmaking career, and those closest to him know he was nothing if not a filmmaker, which is why, in the end we believe Kazan did what he did because of the more tolerable of the two alternatives that were both painful, and some may say morally wrong.

Kazan also made it clear that while he did indeed join the Communist Party, after several meetings, he was left with an 'abiding hatred of Communist philosophy'. With this in mind it can be said that Kazan acted, in part, out of conviction. There was nothing venal about it as critics suggest. As a man who became disillusioned with Communism and then disgusted by its methods, it would have been wrong for him to have sacrificed the career he loved in defence of the very ideology he had grown to hate. Kazan is correct to value equality and individual rights, and as a nation how can we claim to fight for a democracy and the rights to exist as a nation if we do not respect Kazan's right to have, and act on, his own opinions? We can learn from his example as a victim of a conflict to respect free will, for if we don't are we truly any different to those who destroyed lives in the name of a cohesive and ideologically impenetrable America?

The public has always drawn for many parallels between Kazan and former friend and playwright, Arthur Miller, who unlike Kazan, refused to testify to HUAC, is seen by people to be like his 'hero' John Proctor in his play *The Crucible*. However, while Miller's willingness for self-sacrifice is commendable and demonstrated to the public what is really important in that he refused to yield to corrupt morals during the heat of battle, it is also equally as important to learn from this that not everyone responds to conflicts in the same way. A different response by Kazan, in a similar situation to Miller, does not necessarily warrant the title of 'traitor'. Kazan is not Miller, nor is he modern America's John Proctor, and while he may have initially had the strength to refuse to name names, he like the rest of us, fell prey to a greater power.

If we are truly honest with ourselves, if in the same situation as Kazan most would have betrayed their friends and loved ones if it meant saving themselves, for survival is always the strongest instinct. And although there will be some, like Miller and his Proctor, who are strong enough to withstand the immense heat of conflict, the majority will bend under pressure, for true heroes are rare. While it is vital to learn from people like Miller, his example showing the importance of retaining our morals in times of madness, it is equally as important to learn from victims like Kazan, who demonstrated the need to define where they stood by making a choice. We sit here today, refusing to acknowledge the great work of a Hollywood artist, demonstrating to ourselves and the world that we have not learnt from any of those examples and are therefore doomed to repeat the same mistakes when conflict is encountered once more. However, it is not too late to change, we can still learn and grow as a nation due to the victims in the 1950 who showed us what is really important. We can redeem ourselves from the guilt and shame by improving the way we deal with conflict so that we may be proud to call ourselves Americans once more.

Assessor comments

- The student uses his/her text in an interesting manner.
- Demonstrates that a persuasive approach can work well.
- Is well written and persuasive in presenting its point of view.
- Consistent tone and good selection of language.
- Responds very well to the prompt and explores ideas with relative profundity in relation to the Context itself.
- Is convincing as an authentic piece of writing, with excellent control.
- While we may not totally agree with the ideas, it is legitimately presented and supported.

Context 4 – Exploring issues of identity and belonging

'To be true to yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest achievement.'

Context 4, Sample A

Nominated text: *The Catcher in the Rye*

So, I won't say that I'm proud of myself. It's more like, a happiness, I suppose. I stuck to my guns, no matter what those belligerent bucks said, and look at me now. Jobless, poor, a nobody. In my eyes though, I'm a somebody. They can never take it away from me. They tried everything, and I mean everything, to make me like they wanted me to be. Did I change, though? Damn straight, I didn't. Damn straight!

'Dear Miss Palmer,

We regret to inform you that as a result of in-office conflict, management has decided to let you go.'

I got this letter yesterday. Found it just lying on my desk. Not a single one of those spineless managers could summon up the strength and self-respect to hand it over personally. Such is the life at a newspaper, I suppose. We all hide our insecurities behind the words we type up at our desks, saying what we're required to say, what the public 'want' to hear. Occasionally



someone will lace it with a little bit of genuine opinion, but really, how often will that ever happen? What our bosses want is a paper that's popular, and popularity is related to pleasing the people, and to please the people, apparently you need to tell them exactly what they want to hear. So, day after day, we sit at our desks and type up stupid, soothing non-sequiturs which sound of so very sweet to the ear and eyes of the reader. Then I came along. Fresh out of school where opinion is everything, where you define yourself, with the choices you make, and that to be unique was the way to succeed. Sure, it flies well in interviews. Once you get in the work place though, it's insidious, uninspired, underpaid, and basically filled to the brim with pusillanimous ignoramuses who are the product of constant repression. That was who they wanted me to be. Hell, no!

My father used to read me this book when I was a little kid, every night before I went to sleep. The *Catcher in the Rye* it was called. Not the greatest bedtime story, but it was either that or the Bible. Catcher won ninety-five percent of the time. I guess I could say that Holden, the main character, taught me how to be just me. Not to be a 'phoney'. Of course, he wasn't too good at it, he'd lie through his teeth, 'shooting the old bull' he'd call it. What a hypocrite. Of course, when I was eleven years old, I never really understood it. I spent more time giggling when I heard the word sex, made my night. That's another thing. I'm a virgin. Yeah, that's right, twenty-five and sexless. It's the reason all my girlfriends broke up with me. Well, blame the Bible, and the rare occasion it was read. Everyone goes on about how great sex is, even in *Catcher*, Holden's 'really sexy' friend Stradlater. A commodity, that's what sex had become. 'Five for a throw, ten for the night' as the hooker said. What a joke. What an utterly ridiculous joke.

It coursed through our workplace like dirty blood. Sex. 'You want a promotion? Let's discuss it in bed.' 'Want you piece published? Put it like this, I'll publish you if you 'publish' me, deal?' Sexist pigs! Chauvinist animals. I refuse to sleep my way to the top. 'Stay true to yourself' as Geel Piet said in Bryce Courtney's, *The Power of One*. Me? I won't give myself away like some old sock. Basically, all I was expected to do was write what I was told, then jump into bed and hope that I was a better screw than the ten other women before me. Sorry, I actually brought my self-esteem to work today. Try Lindy, she hasn't had anything published in months. In every sense of the word.

I don't care that I lost my job. No, I'm not just saying that to make myself feel better, and no I'm not going to go and cry in my closet. Hell no. Everything I say is God honest truth, as sure as my name's Sarah Palmer. Everyday I'd walk into that office, and without fail, some degenerate would make a pass at me. Ignoring them should have been a tax deductible part of my salary. It happened that 'often and took that much effort to put up with. All the other women loved it, though. Oh and they'd reciprocate, as readily as a pick up line would be passed out. An extra inch off the skirt, a blouse which looked like it could barely contain its contents. Great work, girls. I'll stick to my cargo pants and Target-brand skirts and blouses. I don't have anything to hide, I'd just rather work in comfort than three-inch stilettos.

OK, so maybe I am a little proud. Proud and happy that I'm still me, the girl who expressed herself, lost her job because her pieces had opinions, because she didn't sleep around. I can walk out of here with pride, and know that what I am is better than everything they wanted me to be, and everything I could have been if I'd done it. Winston Churchill said 'that kites fly highest against the wind.' Right now, I'm flying pretty high. Try to take that away from me!

Assessor comments

- Fluent, lively and engaging writing.
- Maintains the tone throughout.
- Using the dissenting voice of Holden Caulfield as a model.
- Explores the ideas of the prompt – especially to the consequences of being oneself.
- Although somewhat clichéd, explores the difficulties in an office environment with being true to oneself.

Context 4, Sample B

Nominated text: *Sometimes Gladness*

'Till Death Do Us Part

I will always remember the first night I wanted to die. Frozen, I lay in bed. Bobby Dazzler was asleep at my side, snoring like a freight train on its final route. The darkness enveloped me. It stole my oxygen and refused to share. I couldn't breathe. Fear placed its icy, sharp hands around my neck; squeezing and squeezing, cutting and cutting. I gasped. 'Jesus, woman! Do you mind? I have that meeting with Leo tomorrow and if he thinks that I'm not focussed...'

One constant in a world of variables; my husband's ability to scathe. I turned on my side and spent the rest of the night staring at the photo on my bedside table. I remember the exact moment it had been taken. We'd just moved into the house and I'd run to the berry tree in the front yard, filled my hands with plump, bright juicy berries and showed Tom. 'Make a wish, Tom. Make a wish.'

'Honey, why don't you try some of that Revlon the t.v.'s always jabbering on about? Huh?' Bobby said, his Anthony Squires suit pressed to perfection.



'Sure,' I said, trying to mask all disgust. Responding truthfully would cause his Adam's apple to enlarge. Sometimes I wondered if it was his Adam's apple at all, but instead the last morsel of life I had left in me. He'd swallowed it in his rage but it had got caught on the way down; making him all the more resentful.

I'd tried everything to be what he wanted. I had bought cookbooks, pearls, everything. I had cooked three course meals every night for him. I'd heat it up when he came home at nine...ten...eleven o'clock. Sometimes he'd eat one bite, but most of the time he would not even look at it. Or me. I even bought miniskirts – the young woman's staple. It didn't work; none of it worked. But wasn't that what he wanted? Wasn't that what this society wanted? An economy-sized, Aussie suburban wife?

We'd been trying for a family for over a year and after each, and what we both knew was an unfruitful attempt, Bobby would look at me with undisguised disgust. I, lying there naked, could offer no more than myself – love, hate, time, age, death. Sometimes I wished he's just get it over with; kill me. His love was like a razor blade; it cut so deep. 'So kill my lips and my neck; give me eternal sleep,' I'd think to myself.

I felt like all the soldiers coming back from Vietnam in the body bags; empty, worthless and with nothing left to give.

I had thought about divorce. Mick and Jan down the street had gotten one last year and the old ladies down at Coles were still talking about it. I'd decided I could never file for one though. Bobby did drive me up the wall – but no. Not for my parent's reputation, my – and not for Bobby's job. Divorce was not an option.

Bobby wasn't always Bobby. He was Tom. Then he got a job at the law firm. At around about the same time he fell down the blackest hole – never to be seen again. He never saw the sun again, either. Or perhaps that was the thing that blinded him – making him conform to a money-hungry, narcissistic society of suits. Whatever happened, Tom's gone. It's just me and Bobby Dazzler. 'Til death do us part.

I will always remember the first night I wanted to die. I will always remember the last night too. Frozen, I got out of bed. Bobby Dazzler made no sound, this time I was on my final route. A glint of a knife against the black velvet of death caught my eye. The pure darkness offered me a smorgasbord of oxygen...too much...I couldn't breathe. I walked over to where Bobby lay asleep. I placed my icy sharp hands around the knife, squeezing and squeezing, cutting and cutting. I reached out towards Bobby, lifting his pillow. I snatched the piece of paper and slit it to death. 'Til death do us part. I was finally free.

Assessor comments

- A provocative, well-written piece.
- Explores the main concepts of the prompt but is not enslaved by them.
- Careful use of the text is neatly embedded into the piece in a conceptual manner.
- A well-shaped piece of writing with an engaging ending.

Context 4, Sample C

Nominated text: *Witness*

In our everyday life, the pressure to conform is always surrounding us. Pressures from our job, or from our school. Pressures from friends or from family. No matter what decisions we make in life, we are always carrying the weight of the things around us. It is therefore our greatest achievement when we remain true to ourselves in a world that is constantly trying to make us something else.

Conformity has both advantages and disadvantages. When is it desirable to stand out? When is it desirable to blend in? The only way to ensure you remain true to yourself, is to always follow your heart. The choices one makes in life determines the person you will become. Perhaps not all choices, like whether you like 'ketchup' or 'ketchup' but the big decisions, the ones that aren't so easy to make, they are the decisions that really matter.

In my own personal life, the presence of conformity and pressure is permanent. At my school, with my friends, even at work, I have to become a slightly different version of me, sometimes more diligent, sometimes more fun, sometimes more professional. It is important, however, to know who you truly are inside, and recognise that that is what defines you. Not what you wear, or where you work. It is possible to think you know everything about someone from these external factors, and find out you were wrong.

In the Amish community, although they dress like one another, they do not dress like the general population. In leaving their sheltered, protective and comforting pastures which they have become so familiar to enter modern society, is a great feat. To have people continually stare and whisper, or even point, shout or tease, are factors they must accept in life.

There are people in the world who hate individuality. To be different to them, is to be a 'freak'. I never truly understood how much pressure was on the Amish community to conform, until about two weeks ago. In celebration of the end of year twelve



classes, we were permitted to dress up in whatever costume we could think of. Collectively, with friends, we decided to dress as the Amish characters in Witness.

The need to find fake beards, to die shirts, and source some Amish hats was vital but difficult. From every two dollar shop to the internet for further research, it was essential that we perfected our attire. We did decide to tweak the idea just a little, riding scooters on the day. It seemed like a great idea, so to top it off, we decided that just like Rachel and Samuel, we too would catch a train to our destination.

Arriving at the station we heard the words ‘has been cancelled’. Of late, Connex’s reliability has diminished steadily. The platform was quite full, and because of the cancelled train, would now be doubly crowded. Six girls dressed as Amish men, stood out like a light in the pitch black darkness. Children stared and pointed, while a man cried ‘Abraham Lincoln’. It seemed like from every direction people were watching us, analysing us, judging us.

8:07 am. The lights sounded and the boom gates began their descent. The train was here. As it slowed to a stop, all our jaws dropped the instant we saw how full it was. Utter horror. We gave each other an awkward glance, took a deep breath and confronted the door, and every commuter on that carriage. ‘Here we go,’ and a nervous laugh.

As we moved from station to station, feeling increasingly awkward and out of place, we also began to realise that being stared at wasn’t fun. In fact, it was quite off-putting, and could open a deep feeling of insecurity never felt before. By Reservoir Station the train was full. Whatever dignity we may have had, we left it at home.

Almost simultaneously there was a general unspoken understanding between us. People could stare all they wanted, so long as we were having fun and not doing anyone else harm, nothing else mattered. We began conversing in our well rehearsed Amish accents, growing more and more confident along the way, until our station was announced. Although we were able to feel some joy, well, a lot of joy actually, from the experience.

We needed to find the confidence inside ourselves and self-knowledge of our identity, before we could have fun. We had to accept the attention we received, and ignore the negativity. In those first few moments the pressure to take off our beards and hats seemed so appealing. I do not regret that I kept them on. None of us does. We felt society belittling us, but collectively we fought back. I realise that this is only a small comparison of what the Amish community feel on a regular basis, but it was enough. To be so different from society’s expectations takes the support of others around you and a great deal of personal reflection. It takes an individual with a strong sense of self to do something or wear something that is not accepted and fit in with everyone else.

Perhaps our greatest achievement was the joy we ended up receiving from that train ride. A one-of-a-kind experience that I wish I could repeat again. ‘Do not regret the things that once made you laugh.’ Getting off the train, to all of us, we felt both pride and hysteria.

As we stood together and sang the song we all knew so well;

‘We are modern Amish, we sing and dance

We have extravagant, buttons on our pants...:

To the tune of ‘I’m a Little Teapot’, that experience was one that I will remember fondly and laugh about but also remember as one that offered life’s lessons about identity and the inner strength needed to be so different from your society’s demands.

Assessor comments

- While the anecdote itself is somewhat simplistic, it is told well and shows an exploration of both the Context and the prompt
- This is a real life experience borne from the study and written in a consistent narrative tone after setting the scene
- The language is not sophisticated but is consistent with the story itself.
- This may not be the strongest of pieces, but is successful nonetheless.