



GENERAL COMMENTS

Student responses showed improved understanding of how texts are constructed and in 2008 there were again many excellent papers. Teachers are advised to discuss with their students the following qualities required for the best answers:

- detailed evidence of close reading of the set passages
- a relevant interpretation of the text
- a level of complexity
- an awareness of how the linguistic devices used in the passages and elsewhere in the text have contributed to its understanding and appreciation
- an ability to analyse language
- an understanding of how views and values are suggested in the text
- an ability to construct a coherent response
- an ability to express ideas correctly and expressively, and with some level of sophistication.

Many students successfully demonstrated these skills.

The ability to respond to the language of the text is most important, particularly through an analysis of the given passage/s. Literature as a study asks students to consider **how** a text has been constructed. This understanding will then lead to a deeper appreciation of, and response to, the text. Too many students are still writing in terms of **themes**, as demonstrated in the following example. This approach led to the student largely ignoring the set passages and offered little opportunity to analyse language.

There are two main themes in Hotel Sorrento, family problems and culture conflict.

The following examples are responses where students worked perceptively and responsively with language.

In 'Hymn to Christ', Donne's yearning attempts to resign himself to God's protection are persistently undermined by his immense attachment to the physical, sensory world of his past and present loves. The shifting tones and rhythms of the dramatic voice enact a clash of countervailing urges, between hope and despair, submission and rebellion, and acceptance and reluctance. From the very beginning of the poem, the slow, solemn quality of the speaker's words as he proclaims his trust in God is monitored by his intense awareness of the destructive power of Nature, of the relentless, impersonal force of the sea, as it comes in a 'flood' to destroy his 'torn' ship and to 'swallow' him. His insecurities are poignantly communicated in subsequent lines as he states, haltingly and diffidently, that although God does 'disguise his face', he knows that he will 'never despise'. Yet the gathering, billowing scale of 'clouds of anger' ultimately overwhelms the gentle, timid intimacy and trust of 'I know those eyes' to lay bare the full extent of Donne's gnawing anxieties.

The first of the passages presents us with a ruler who is at the height of his power, yet the audience becomes increasingly aware of the underlying irony. On the glazed surface of things, Creon's speech would imply a ruler in firm control of the state he adored. The sweeping, proclamatory sentences are imbued with a natural confidence and the reins of his authority remain firm and visible, so convinced is he that the Polis has entrusted him with a city that 'rides safely.' References to the State are plentiful, the repetition of 'country' and 'policy' underscore the political preoccupation with sovereignty.

Moreover, Aunt Penniman appears to live vicariously through her niece and views her rapid involvement with Morris in her typically vapid and romantic manner as a 'little drama'. The prescient and perceptive Aunt Almond is the only character who truly understands and empathises with Catherine however she is unable to prevent the egotistical Doctor and meddling Aunt from irrevocably damaging Catherine.

Similarly 'Song' explores the beauty of love, although it is a more weathered love that must confront a reality that continually obliterates it. So natural in its musical reflections, the poetic voice creates a harmonious lyrical quality that softens the nature of their parting.

Students should always aim to provide a working introduction, seeing it as an opportunity to set up their interpretation and perhaps to indicate how they intend to use the passage/s to structure their response. Too many students offered only a very general introduction which was far too long and often seemingly prepared prior to sighting the passage/s. It also had little relevance to the concerns and techniques which there were opportunities to discuss. The following is an example of this.



Patchett's novel 'Bel Canto' is an enticing novel about happiness, love and music above all else. Examples of these themes are conveyed successfully throughout the duration of the novel clearly and coherently for the reader to process.

This opening can be contrasted with the following much more sophisticated examples.

The terrible contortion of Yealand's patient as he endures 'shock after shock' of electrotherapy exposes the social demand for adherence to duty and the cultivation of a dignified appearance regardless of the turmoil caused by war. The physical and psychological exhaustion implied by Callan's complete lack of agency as he 'sagged forward in the chair' indicates Barker's deep criticism of the way men are forced to conform. Through Sassoon and Prior also, Barker rejects the Edwardian values that provoked the emotional torture of these men, in the same way in which their actual war experiences did.

The delicate, fragile and 'docile' Catherine is painstakingly described by the narrator in the first passage to portray the cruelty of both her Aunt Penniman and her Father in the second and third passages.

Keats's preoccupation with beauty's truth and its transience in the face of mortality, as well as his concern about the procession of time and mutability, are both distinctly discernable in his sonnet 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' and his ode 'To Autumn.' In the former Keats explores his apprehension of death because of its capacity to negate his ambitions and in the latter Keats has accepted his own mortality as an inescapable aspect of life and nature, whereby his maturation of thought is clearly evident as he celebrates beauty unconditionally and unreservedly.

In 'Hymn to Christ,' 'To his Mistress' and 'Song' the densely textured irregularities of tone, pace, diction and imagery enact Donne's conflicting impulses as he grapples with the problems and the paradoxes of the human condition.

DH Lawrence's three novellas 'The Fox,' 'The Captain's Doll' and 'The Ladybird' are, on the surface, an exploration of the tumultuous nature of sexual politics amidst the shifting social climate of the Great War. However, just as Lawrence so prevalently explores the surfaces and sub-surfaces of human beings, these novellas possess a much more essential and deeper level. Through the psychologically conflicted natures of his central characters, Lawrence invokes the eternal battle between society and nature. In the passages under discussion Lawrence conveys his opinion that society has repressed and manipulated individuals, just as Captain Hepburn has been made 'such an abject specimen.' This social repression is also seen in March's 'strange mindlessness' and her seeming detachment from consciousness. Essentially, Lawrence suggests that our innate selves can never truly be expressed in Today's world, as seen in Daphne's desire to enter 'the dark depths' of her innate, animal self.

Students demonstrated complexity in many ways, for example, their own use of language and their detailed understanding of the text as a whole. Others were able to show a sophisticated ability to move around the text and to make links within and outside the given passages.

Patchett manages through her work to engage the reader with different narrative techniques. Her attention to detail, such as Mr Hosokawa's wife's 'long dark hair spilling over the pillows' has a tactile effect on the reader, her words often used in the novel to evoke sensations of touch, colour or sound. In Passage 3 this is shown again in 'his warm blood soaking her shirt, wetting her skin' and in Passage 1 when 'the great metallic click stilled them all like a film spliced into one single frame.'

Complexity may also be demonstrated by a critical appreciation of texts, which often allows for some discussion of the author's views and values.

In spite of the Terrorists' previous ignorance of music, Patchett allows them to be converted by it, made awe-struck by it, and eventually they become seemingly better people as a result of the sheer beauty of it. Patchett appears to be making a claim for a kind of cultural superiority out of her intent to make us all see the value of art and appears not to see the other side of these views, made more obvious as the Terrorists become more Western; Carmen through languages, Cesar with opera and Ishmael with chess.

Weaker responses showed a limited understanding of the features of the text. Some students appeared to believe that simply mentioning assonance, iambic pentameter, enjambment, onomatopoeia, etc. was adequate, without offering any sense of how these features contributed to the meaning and appreciation of the text. Other students, particularly those writing on Keats and Donne, were able to show how the poet's use of language was integral to the work's meaning.

Some essays continue to read like a reworked 'views and values' exercise from earlier in the year and often concentrated on these aspects at the expense of the set passage/s.

The following is an example where the discussion of values was integrated into the analysis of the passages.

The degrading behaviour of males is condemned by Bronte, but Helen's determination and fierce independence are praised. Feminist radicalism is not endorsed by Bronte as is shown in Helen's sense of duty to 'soothe and comfort' in passage 3. However, Helen's dignity and proud determination almost undermines the 'evident delight' of Hargrave at Helen's loss in

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Passage 2 but Helen acknowledges his superiority only as a chess player and this stubborn strength is shown as more desirable than Millicent's subservience.

Other general problems encountered in weaker responses included:

- an inability to write coherently. Some students started their discussion of each poem or passage on a different page and made no attempt to see them as part of a whole. Others could do little more than offer a few isolated comments on each passage
- a tendency to paraphrase
- confusion over the form of a text. *Washington Square* and *Under Milk Wood* were often referred to as plays, while some play texts and the work by Wolff were described as novels. *To Autumn* and at varying times, all three of the Donne works, were referred to as sonnets, or occasionally, as blank verse. There was also an inability to distinguish between the poet and the persona, hence Larkin at times became the next tenant in Mr Bleaney's room
- many students writing on *Antigone* misused Greek terms and often showed that they had little understanding of them; for example, 'Creon being the hubris he is. Creon realises his anagnorisis. Antigone is guilty of *sophrosyne*'. Historical terms and periods were sometimes confused, with Lear occasionally being part of a feudal society and Elinor and Marianne living in a Regency society.

Spelling continues to be a concern. Perhaps students would be advised to leave time to re-read and edit their work in an attempt to eradicate some of the more obvious mistakes. The names of several authors were incorrectly spelt, especially Austen and Beveridge. Students often confused similar sounding words such as: human/humane; simple/simplistic; material/materialistic; authority/authoritarian/authoritative; heroin/heroine; descent/descend.

The word 'juxtaposed' was used too frequently and usually incorrectly. Clichés and jargon are best avoided. Some students used language totally inappropriate to the text and the task, for instance:

Claudio is a love chump - he thinks its all rainbows and unicorns.

Dr Sloper is so far up himself...

There was insufficient awareness that plays are written to be performed and that movement on stage, lighting, costumes and other theatrical devices are relevant to the audience's appreciation.

A positive achievement this year was that no student wrote both responses on the same section of the paper.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Essay 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	4	6	8	10	13	15	12	10	7	5	2	1	13.3

Essay 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	11	12	14	10	9	7	5	2	1	12.8

Novels

This year there were responses to a much wider range of novels and several proved popular choices. Most answers on *Sense and Sensibility* were competent but tended to focus almost exclusively on Elinor and Marianne and what they represented. Very few students responded to Austen's wit and playfulness. *A Passage to India* and *Regeneration* saw some excellent answers. Students who started with the third passage of *Regeneration* often produced an effectively crafted essay. Not many of the responses to *A Passage to India* went much beyond the court scene but some students were able to construct a plausible account of the endemic British prejudice. *The Hamilton Case*, *Washington Square* and *Bel Canto* generally saw some very good answers. Again, not many students picked up on the humour in James's work. There were more essays on *The White Earth* this year and the passages provided students with a range of possible ideas to develop. Students seemed to have enjoyed the gothic elements in the novel. Students appeared a little tentative about the two novels offered for the first time this year, *Bleak House* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. There were some good responses on the latter, although some students seemed unsure of the historical setting. There were very few responses on *Bleak House*. These essays tended to be very general without close attention to the passages. The crackling tension evident in passage two between Lady Dedlock and Tulkinghorn was missed.



Plays

King Lear was again the most popular choice. There was a range of answers across various levels of ability but some were impressive and showed an enviable level of sophistication and engagement. Weaker responses tended to move dutifully from passage to passage, discussing each in isolation and showed difficulty in incorporating the first passage into a wider discussion of the text. Responses on *Hotel Sorrento* did not score highly, although some students conveyed the sense that they had enjoyed this text. While the play is not especially challenging, there were opportunities to discuss the staging and dialogue, which many students ignored. Too often these responses became a discussion of themes in the text and there was insufficient attention to the passages. Students who chose to write on *Three Sisters* and *Hedda Gabler* made good use of the passages and demonstrated a sound understanding of the text. Responses to *Antigone* tended to be either very good or poor, with some specific problems mentioned above. The weaker responses often ignored the importance of irony in the play and did not discuss the role of the messenger in any detail. The rich theatricality of this text could also have been discussed more fully. The other play texts were less popular, although in each case there were some competent responses, particularly to *Honour*. There were very few discussions of *Under Milk Wood* and some students seemed unsure as to what sort of text it is.

Short stories

Arguably the text that generated the most consistently rich responses was *Three novellas: The Fox/The Captain's Doll/The Ladybird*. Students were able to draw on the passages to develop a coherent response and support particular points, and to demonstrate how Lawrence's views permeated his writing. The answers were usually sophisticated and suggested that capable students will respond well to a challenging text. There were some thoughtful essays on *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* and students responded to the setting of the stories. There were almost no essays on *Sugar & Other Stories*.

Other literature

This Boy's Life worked well and seemed to be appealing to students. Many seemed to have engaged with the author and were able to draw on the passages to produce a coherent response. Better use could have been made of the first passage and of the role of the narrative voice. Students could have perhaps paid more attention to Wolff's economic use of language. Responses to *Bypass* were generally not particularly polished and often lacked coherence. There were many strands that could have been more effectively teased out. There were virtually no responses to *Timepieces*.

Poetry

There were several high-scoring answers in this section, particularly those on Keats and Donne. Students need to be able to incorporate their recognition of the technical elements of a poem into an understanding of its meaning and of how these particular aspects add to an engagement with the text. Many answers on Donne missed the wit and playfulness of some of his work. Most of the answers on Keats were able to combine an appreciation and analysis of the language with an understanding of the central concerns of the text. With the Beveridge poems, some students were able to make good use of the author's ideas in a close reading of particular passages. Most responses to the Auden poetry were disappointing. *Look, stranger, at this island now* was subject to some serious misreading. The delicate atmospherics of the first two sections was often handled in tedious technical detail, cast adrift of any meaningful link to the poem. Few students apparently **listened** to the poem's musicality. Many of the responses to Larkin tended to focus on the theme of death without commenting on the elegance and invention in the poet's work. There was confusion with the poet/persona in some cases. There was a range of responses to Kinsella's poems. It was troubling that so few students considered the title of *Wheatbelt Gothic or Discovering a Wyeth* and linked it to the ideas in the poem. Some of these responses lacked coherence and did not demonstrate a real understanding of the poem's major concerns.