



**2012**

**Literature GA 3: Examination**

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

In general, student responses to the 2012 Literature examination revealed a sound knowledge of the texts and an understanding of the task. The most successful students were able to offer a focused interpretation that was drawn from one or more of the passages provided, and articulated clearly and explored specifically through the response. These responses showed an ability to work closely with the language and to offer a detailed analysis. Many students were also able to offer a broader discussion of the wider text, and showed an obvious control of language and a sophisticated ability to use language. This ability to respond to the language of the passages is integral to this study, and students need to appreciate the ways in which language creates meaning and affects the reader/audience in a particular way. An understanding of the features of the text and the ability to see the texts as something constructed is very important. In less successful responses there was little sense of engagement. Only the best responses had a sense of the student's own voice.

Most students made some attempt to discuss the passages, but the passages were not always used as the basis of the essay. Sometimes there was evidence of a prepared response rather than an attempt to engage fully with the set passages. Many students wrote a prepared introduction that was not necessarily drawn from or supported by the passages. There was a tendency to narrate the content of the passages rather than to apply an analytical and evaluative process. Too often students offered a reductive reading based on themes – such as youth, madness, memory and marriage – and proceeded simply to work through the text, referring to the passages in little detail and drawing random examples from them to support these particular concerns. Students should realise that their interpretation should be developed from the language of the passages and not the other way around. Some students treated the passages as discrete entities and were not really able to move smoothly between them and the wider text. This was especially true of the responses to poetry and short stories.

Some students struggled to express their ideas correctly and coherently, and others showed a very limited vocabulary. The word 'encapsulates' was used ad nauseam and incorrectly. Other common errors were confusion between the words 'simple' and 'simplistic', and 'childish' and 'childlike'. Students continue to confuse the genre of texts; there was an alarming tendency to see *Hamlet*, *Two Brothers*, *Stasiland* and *The Tall Man* as novels and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* as a play. While are perhaps liable to make errors under examination conditions, these mistakes were often accompanied by an inability to fully appreciate the way the particular genre worked, and often students showed little understanding of the plays as drama. Some students placed texts in the wrong century, showed little understanding of historical context (for example, in *Stasiland*) and confused the characters in a text (the most common example being George Knightley and his brother in *Emma*). Students who wrote responses to poetry frequently did not recognise that understanding of the poet's work was required, not three separate analyses of the selected passages/poems. The most successful responses demonstrated an ability to weave the author's views and values through the response, but the less successful students tended to append these at the conclusion of the essay.

The following excerpts are from the start of student responses that were assessed at a high or very high level. These excerpts show students working to draw an interpretation from the given passages and in many cases make an implicit reference to the views and values of the text.

*It is emblematic of the enigmatic Dane's character that he should enter the scene 'reading a book'. Hamlet is a philosopher whose Christian humanist moral framework is based on his ability to interpret the truth through language-once a tool to exact reality but now corrupted under the poisonous and perfidious rule of the 'serpent', Claudius.*

*Through Gertrude's lamentation 'one woe doth tread upon another's heel' Shakespeare illuminates the 'rank state of affairs' that has flourished within Denmark as a consequence of Claudius's usurpation of the throne. This 'unnatural act' of fratricide gives rise to the extensive 'woe' and pervasion of corruption throughout the 'whole ear of Denmark' resultant in the cataclysmic disruption of God's Great Chain of Being.*

*The 'smile of astonishment' worn by Emma in the first extract reflects the tendency of the 'indulged' protagonist to be 'chiefly directed by her own judgement'. Austen employs frequent use of irony and humour to mock subtly the inability of Emma to perceive the 'affections' and actions of her peers, giving rise to frequent faux pas throughout the novel.*

*Throughout these three passages, Austen explores the psychological developments in her protagonist, Emma. Readers recognise a distinct change from the confident personality apparent in Extract One in the assertion 'I assure you you are quite mistaken' as well as in Extract Two in her obstinate opinion of Frank Churchill 'his visit had given...only good ideas' to the uncertain character evident in the third passage through the connotations of epiphany in 'Emma had never known how much...'*



*Gwen Harwood is an Australian poet whose poetry, especially in her 'Collected Poems', holds the power not only to evoke but to influence thought. In exploring the power of relationships and their importance in our lives, pervasive in all three selected poems, Harwood offers her readers a spectrum of different experiences and situations in order to provoke personal reflection on the relationships in our own lives.*

*Beowulf's quest for immortality and fame through his heroic battles with the monsters that cross his path depicts the values of courage and leadership that were praised by the Scop and were worshipped in his culture.*

The following introductions were not very effective and usually did not clearly articulate the student's intention for the rest of the essay. Almost invariably they led to the student offering a summary of the text that sometimes, to a large extent, ignored the set passages.

*Mary Shelley's novel 'Frankenstein' is a romanticist novel which explores the relationship between the enchanting nature and human emotions.*

*In 'Sixty Lights' Gail Jones reflects on a young girl's journey in the Victorian era and how her main character goes through the triumphs and stages in her life.*

*Truman Capote's 'In Cold Blood' is a story about an American family murder and two cold hearted killers in the quest for money. Dick and Perry are their names and Truman is the investigator and author of his novel from this big devastating story.*

*Presented in 'The House with the Mezzanine' are questions about human life, respect and the human spirit.*

*'Hamlet' is all about madness and whether people are mad or not. It also looks at the problems of procrastination.*

*William Shakespeare's play 'Hamlet' is an exploration of Hamlet's delay as he endeavours to revenge his Father and kill Claudius.*

The following examples show a real ability to work with the language of the passage and an awareness of the features of the text.

*In 'The Lamb' Blake uses a child's innocent perspective to express admiration for God's creatures. The simple AABB rhyming scheme and language used gives the poem a whimsical, almost lullaby-like feeling. The poem has a conversational element as the child asks the lamb 'dost thou know who made thee'?*

*Through the poem Blake makes a transition from 'could' to 'dare' reinforcing the tone of awe and fear that is perpetuated in the poem. An element of brightness shines in the undertone of the poem; the tiger, for all its dangerous potential, stands 'burning bright' with God's power in 'the forests of the night'.*

*Permeating the various narrative perspectives of Ian McEwan's 'Atonement' is an undercurrent of longing, a feeling of frustration as characters are inhibited from their ultimate desires. The tactile sensory imagery of Robbie's prison's 'Victorian chill' and his 'thin prison blankets' creates an atmosphere of isolation and sterility in which human comfort and warmth are denied.*

*Through her keen use of streams of consciousness and free and direct speech, Woolf conjures a reality in which her eponymous protagonist, along with others, drifts between the physical and topographical reality and the internal constructs of her own mind.*

*In the description of how the blinds used to flap at Bourton and particularly the use of the verb 'to flap', Woolf recalls 'the flap of a wave' and her metaphor in which life perpetually rolls forward in its peaks and its troughs.*

*As she often does, Harwood uses the metaphor of fabrics, stating that 'when she died she was folding a little towel' suggesting that the life of her mother 'a fabric of marvels folded down to a little space' was the product of many experiences, all compressed in one body. ...She recalls her Mother calling her in 'The Violets', a 'voice calling her in as darkness falls on her Father's house' suggesting through the duality of light and dark that her Mother was a constant source of goodness and direction, allowing her to live her life in light.*

*Harwood uses the metaphor of a boat for the marriage of the couple within the poem and thus draws on the notion that a marriage is something that is built, that experiences, both good and bad, contribute to the strength of the bond shared between the two people, as suggested through the 'sixty pounds of nails gripping her ribs', with the nails conveying a sense of pain in the hardships of the relationship. However, Harwood equally contends that these experiences reinforce ones love - that love is not merely a series of perfect experiences with another person, but rather a mutual respect for, and understanding of, another person, through the use of the phrase 'Ship-shape; an even keel: we understand old clichés truly'. There is a sense of timelessness in the couple's connection suggested by 'the water bears no trace of time or history'.*



*As Gertrude enters the stage, in full anguish over Ophelia's drowning, the colourful and almost lyrical description of 'crow-flowers, nettles, daisies and long purples' of Ophelia's death belies the austere nature of such an act. Rather Gertrude, whether in her love for Ophelia or to stabilise the foundations of the Royal Court, covers up her probable suicide as an accident 'but long it could not be/till that her garments, heavy with drink pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay/to muddy death'. To Shakespeare's contemporaries suicide was an act against God, an act with which Hamlet attempts to grapple throughout the play. However, in Gertrude's lyricism the serious nature of the act is subverted. The real state of affairs is subsequently exposed in the down to earth and blunt language of the gravedigger.*

The following excerpts are from students who are attempting to comment on the language and aspects of the text but lack the analytical ability to explore and substantiate their ideas.

*In Gail Jones's novel 'Sixty Lights' Jones uses imagery and descriptive language to help the audience to feel as though the occurring events are actually happening. Jones uses recurring images and themes in the text to help point out characterisation and character development.*

*Passage Three 'The Spelling Prize' has a completely different feel to it and also comes from a different place in Harwood's life.*

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

**Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual 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 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5  | 7  | 11 | 13 | 15 | 11 | 10 | 7  | 5  | 2  | 1  | 13.2    |

### 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 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 6  | 8  | 11 | 12 | 13 | 10 | 9  | 6  | 4  | 2  | 1  | 12.6    |

## Novels

The most popular text in this section was *Frankenstein*. Responses were often of a high standard and students were able to move comfortably from one passage to the next. Few students attempted to explore the third passage which, with its Gothic language and macabre setting, offered a lot of possibilities. *Mrs Dalloway* was attempted by fewer students but was invariably well handled, with students showing a sophisticated and often complex understanding of the text's construction and ideas. *Emma* was again a popular choice and the passages afforded students the opportunity to consider Emma's moral development but also a chance to consider the many blunders that Emma has made. Some students discussed the world of the text and its values. Unfortunately, some students thought that the Mr Knightley speaking in the first passage was not John but George. *Sixty Lights* was quite popular, but few students looked at the rich imagery offered by the novel. Many of the less successful students tended to concentrate on storytelling. *Atonement* was popular and responses were of a varying standard. Some students did well when selecting particular words or images to explore. The importance of writing, and in particular letter writing, was stressed. Students could well have explored the idea that the novel itself is a coded piece of writing. Some students picked up on the words 'wedged herself in' to show how Briony had effectively wedged herself into an impossible situation in the novel. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* was attempted by few students but was generally well handled. Very few students attempted the other novels. There were some good responses on *The Death of Napoleon* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

## Plays

Many students wrote on plays and showed a pleasing engagement with the text. However, too often they ignored the texts as drama, referring to 'the reader' rather than to 'the audience'. Students could well have commented on aspects of stagecraft, such as setting and lighting, and how events such as those in *The Freedom of the City* and *Two Brothers* are not presented in chronological order. *Hamlet* was by far the most popular choice. Some students offered a complex and sophisticated reading, especially when they worked closely with the passages. Others, however, gave a prepared answer and tried to make their response fit the selected passages or, in some cases, simply ignored the passages altogether. These students wanted to discuss themes like madness, acting and the nature of the Revenge Tragedy, or to give a summary of the play. There were some excellent responses to *The Freedom of the City*. *The Bacchae* was quite popular and generally the responses to this text were quite good. *Two Brothers* was another popular text and the passages offered a variety of possibilities but there were few outstanding responses. *No Sugar* was also popular but responses



sometimes lacked complexity, despite the fact students seemed to have engaged with the play. The very few responses to *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Copenhagen* and *The Tempest* were often competent.

### Short stories

Few students chose to write on short stories. There were some excellent responses on the Carey short stories, although other students found the ideas and settings of the stories very confusing. The Mansfield stories elicited some thoughtful responses and offered students the chance to consider Mansfield's views and values. Few commented on the humour in the third passage. The Chekhov stories were attempted by few students. Their responses were generally fairly limited and offered little discussion of the text as a whole.

### Other Literature

*In Cold Blood* was a very popular text but was not always well handled. Students should have analysed the third passage in greater detail but too often this was ignored. The image of the burning possessions in the first passage could also have been explored in more detail. *Stasiland* was quite popular, but the less successful students needed to clarify some of the historical background and to be clear on the characters. Students could have commented on the absurd humour in the description of the Lipsi dance. There were very few responses on *The Tall Man* and *Istanbul: Memories and the City*.

### Poetry

The poetry of Harwood and Blake were the most popular choices. There was a range of responses, but generally students attempted to consider the views of the poets and to consider the body of poetry. It was pleasing that students were aware of the unprinted section of *The Spelling Prize* and could include references to it. Some of the Blake answers were very simplistic: seeing the Lamb as good and the Tyger as bad without showing an awareness of the poem's complexity. This would seem to ignore the vitality and energy in *The Tyger*, and many saw the creature as only a representation of the industrial revolution. Students were not required to discuss the images. However, if students made reference to the images as part of a discussion of the poetry, this was perfectly acceptable. The less successful students tended to ignore the third passage. There were some outstanding responses on the Eliot poetry. There were some excellent responses on *Beowulf* that were very well informed on the text's background and were able to explore the language well. The selected Adrienne Rich poems proved challenging for some students, many of whom tried to impose a reading that showed Rich's social and political concerns but that were not specifically stated in these poems, especially in her very early work, *Storm Warnings*. Students are advised to concentrate on an analysis of the language of the poems. The Porter poems were attempted by very few students.

### Student responses

The following are samples of student responses. The first four all meet the criteria at a very high level. The fifth and sixth meet the criteria at a high level and the seventh at a medium level.

#### Student example 1

**Nominated text:** *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, TS Eliot

*For Eliot, the increasingly secular forms of fulfilment in the modern world has torn society from its spiritual moorings. Following the industrial age, and our burgeoning reliance on materialism, our metaphysical buttresses of the past have withered away. Culminating in the sexual anxiety of 'Prufrock', Eliot foreshadows a movement away from the 'agape' love that is evident in the untainted mythology, literature and religions of the past, towards the sexually depraved world of 'Lil' and 'Albert' in his dystopian masterpiece – 'The Wasteland'. Spiritual abandonment and thwarted sexual desire dominate his Pre-war and post-war poetry as Eliot himself attempts to gauge the temptation of the material world. However, the hesitant deliberations of Prufrock 'And would it have been worth it after all' is translated into a medium of hope as the social poet turns to Christianity. As modern society remains encapsulated in the spiritually and morally desolate landscape of 'The Wasteland', we are unable to be saved 'by this grace dissolved in place'. By the end of his years, Eliot seeks enlightenment in the form of a deeply conservative religious faith, where 'agape' or Platonic love transcends the sexual profligacy of the modern world.*

*Prufrock's feckless anguish is representative of his simultaneous desire to avert the material world and his infatuation by it. Yet as Prufrock attempts to seek the answer to 'some overwhelming question', in order to elevate and diagnose the malaise which paralyses him, he eventually finds himself return to the trite and comical anxieties of 'shall I part my hair behind?' and 'do I dare eat a peach?' It is striking that the plethora of questions in *Prufrock* is emblematic of a very modern anxiety. The anaphora of 'after' in Prufrock's attempt to build himself up to 'so much more' is promptly undercut by his inability to communicate – 'it is impossible to say what I mean!' Instead in this new era of corporeal greed, 'After the cups, the marmalade the tea' has rendered human connection irrelevant, disposed in favour of a solipsistic abandon. The playfulness of Prufrock's dramatic monologue, however is undeniable as he is armed with a battery of artistic references to Marvell, Donne and other symbolist poets. His reference to Marvell's poem – *To His Coy Mistress* – as Prufrock attempts to 'squeeze the universe into a ball', is symptomatic of*



*the inert man's vain attempt to find a form to sense his purpose. However lacking the cocky reassurance of the symbolists, Prufrock's desire to obtain enlightenment in the form of 'rolling (the ball) to some overwhelming question, once again is reduced to his awareness of vapid popular culture – 'I shall wear my trousers rolled.' His sexual anxieties reach their pinnacle as he playfully refers to 'the mermaids singing, each to each'. The break up in line serving as a break up in rhythmic cadence, before the revelatory 'I do not think that they will sing to me' is undeniably representative of the disconnection of emotional bonds in modern society. Prufrock like the feline 'yellow fog' remain on the outskirts of the 'room', 'where the women come and go talking of Michelangelo', is unable to infiltrate the exclusive upper class. Prufrock is inert and proceeds to commit a fit of self loathing, descending into the spiritual abyss where 'human voices wake us, and we drown'.*

*Eliot focuses his disdain towards the insipid nature of modern living through the loss of sexual depravity in the 'Wasteland'. Though in passage one, Prufrock foregrounds a rather innocuous form of sexual impotence as he refuses to 'eat the peach' – the chinese symbol of femal sexuality' – this depravity reaches its nadir in 'A Game of Chess'. Where Prufrock's poetic voice was jazzy and buoyant, Eliot puts on an extremely patronising voice of contempt towards the sexually fertile but morally racuous lower class. The repetition of 'What should I do?' commencing the passage serves to underline the lack of spiritual direction which has both haunted and confused the poetic voices of his earlier poetry. However, quite perturbingly for his readers, the answer to the question 'what should I do?' is placed solely on sexual gratification to fill the vacuum of time – 'he wants a good time,/And if you don't give it to him, there's others will'. The bluntness of such prose severs all sense of hope that lies beyond materialism or sexual gratification. The anaphora of 'I said' is another technique employed by Eliot to underscore the sheer sohpriism which has encapsulated modern man – he no longer can recognise the 'sign' of God as alluded to in Gerotion, but merely 'fake it for money'.*

*As the abhorred image of Lil taking 'them pills' filters through the audience's mind, we become aware of our spiritual desolation. Emotions closely associated with sex or other forms of human connection have been transposed into another vehicle to drive our excessive hedonism. The continual ringing of the bell 'Hurry up it's time', of the pub scene is microcosmic of the extent to which we have descended 'the stairs' into a moral and spiritual abyss. Not only is it time for the drunkards to leave the pub, but Eliot here foreshadows the 'good night' of all spiritual consolation. The lugubrious tone in which Eliot finishes this second part of his showpiece – 'The Wasteland' – is revelatory in explicating Eliot's own despair at our appetancy. Whilst this extract of the 'The Wasteland' is undeniably gloomy and ostensibly lacks hope, by the end of the poem, he hints towards 'shantih, shantih, shantih', and salvation through culture and religion.*

*Indeed as the Christian poet didactically explicates in his latter poetry, it is not until we sublimate our material self conscious can we truly obtain Enlightenment. The condescension evoked through the cacophony of unnerved voices in the second passage and the palpable angst... in Prufrock dissipates into a melodious cadence of 'what seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands.' Here a clear sense of progression is achieved in Marina, where instead of the circumlocution experienced in Prufrock as he builds himself up, 'to have...to have' the liturgical voice in Marina, embarks on a journey to 'What images return/O my daughter.' These images already alluded to in 'The Wasteland' as Eliot attempts to salvage meaning through 'these fragments I have shored up against my ruins' reappear in the form of platonic love. The seven deadly sins embodied by 'the tooth of the dog', 'the story of the hummingbird', the sty of contentment' and 'the ecstasy of animals', respectively gluttony, pride, sloth and lust are indeed renounced, 'become unsubstantial' as we return to the kingdom of heaven. However as our moral turpitude of industrial society would not allow us, this journey is neither simple nor clear; in fact it is rather painstaking as this metaphorical ship has 'bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.' The half line 'I made this, I have forgotten' concludes with a caesura, a pause which allows the audience to ponder on the innate connection with God – inviting us to 'remember' what we have 'forgotten'. As 'this form, this face, this life' uses the forced consonants of 'this' in repetition, the poetic voice certainly embodies a palpable liturgical presence as it proselytises the community to rekindle our love with God – to 'resign my life for this life'. The sexual profligacy of the earlier poems as we renounce our sins quickly forms into the lyrical image of 'my daughter', a pure and true form of love that is elusive to modern man. For Eliot, it is only as we set out 'the new ships' can we truly find moral and spiritual salvation in this urban morass.*

*Oscillating between abject despair and a doubtful consolation Eliot's pre war poetry reflects his own desire to transcend the banal but is subsequently unable to. The frightening metropolis of this 'unreal city' reflects a spiritual desolation which has engulfed the modern man. Whilst he proves quite cynical towards the human condition, in the midst of the shallow rituals of 'a game of chess' lies esoteric messages which eventually become explicated in his Christian poetry. Whilst we 'have forgotten' it is not too late to repent as Eliot suggests the sooner we can recalibrate our moral compasses, the sooner we can, together, move towards 'the hope' or that 'infinitely suffering, infinitely gentle thing' alluded to in Preludes.*

## Student example 2

**Nominated text:** Collected Poems 1943–1995, Gwen Harwood

*In confessing her desire that 'I want to understand the continuity of human experience', Gwen Harwood could be seen to express the core of her works as she examines the ostensibly linear progression of life through the cyclical patterns of memory and experience. The strong matrilineal theme that may stem from a strong biographical influence reveals the core of Harwood's poetry as the patterns of life, through childhood, adolescence and motherhood lead to a confrontation of death as the 'encroaching darkness' that threatens the transient beauty of the natural world.' Yet her Wordsworthian ability to inspect human experience through 'patches of memory' demonstrates the power of memory to illuminate not only the past but the future as well.*



*No longer is life a single journey from birth to the inevitable 'darkness' but a treasure, a marvel, a gift as she, like Blake, sees life and death as two sides of the same reality in the same way that 'joy and woe' are co-dependent in all our life's experiences.*

*Harwood's use of pseudonyms and 'masks and disguises' provided discussion on the nature of perspective in interpretation. Her vehemence at being dubbed 'a lady-poet' lead to a plethora of nom-de-plumes that allowed her to distance her personal life from her work as she remained adamant 'I am not a confessional poet and would not want to be'. Presenting an unsentimental yet affirming image of marriage in her poem 'Iris' Harwood, in one of her rare, self-associated poems, acknowledges her own marriage to Bill Harwood as the subject of this poem. Taking its title from the Greek etymology of the word for 'rainbow', 'Iris' is imbued with religious imagery as the building of our 'ark faithfully' to sail over the seas 'wave after wave' is reminiscent of Noah's Ark as the literal ship is used as a metaphor for achieving 'buoyant ease' in the tension of two individuals, coming together as one in the union of marriage to achieve the 'even keel' of the balanced, sea-worthy ship. Balanced in the centre of the poem both structurally and theoretically the parenthesised line – 'husband and wife so long we have/forgotten all singularity' is both a lament and an affirmation as the 'lost self strives' as one must sacrifice elements of individuality, of what Harwood sees as 'my original estate' if one is to survive in marriage 'where none can stand' alone. However, in the transfer from the singular pronouns of 'I am I' to the collective pronouns of 'our ark faithfully' and the 'sea shall comfort us' confirms the poem as together, with the invisible wind of love as the 'light burden in her sails' the ship survives 'wave after wave', 'hand in hand' under the rainbow that signifies the end of rain after the floods. In this poem, Harwood exemplifies how the capacity for despair is comparable with the capacity for love as we come to see these seeming dichotomies as two sides of the one reality.*

*Deeply influenced by the philosophy of her 'beloved' Wittgenstein Harwood was able to reconcile herself with death through the realisation of the continuity of existence that surpassed the loss of the individual. In her poem 'Mother Who gave me life' the patterns of 'daughters becoming women' are drawn 'backward in time' through the evolution of our human existence as the continuity of life is celebrated in a poem that is ultimately concerned with the ending of life. In enumerating the 'thirty thousand days' and the 'fabric of marvels folded down to a little space' Harwood illustrates the profundity of death in reflecting on life as we come to see the two states joined in the cyclical patterns of life. The metaphor of the fabric of life is continued through the crumpling of the 'fine, threadbare linen' in grief gets them to 'smooth to a smile' as death is the ending of one life but also an affirmation of what life is to the living. Memory of 'our last meeting' is seen here as a way to revisit our past experiences and to prolong the lives of lost loved ones and friends in the memories of others. In the 'Anguish: remembered hours' 'Mother who gave me life' secures memory as a means to transcend the boundaries of time and space. In her autobiographical article, 'Lamplit Presences' and replicated in 'The Violets', Harwood states that 'Time cannot move, Nor death's disorienting scale/distort these lamplit presences' as a metaphor for the liminal nature of memories in overcoming the forces that seek to destroy them. As the 'darkness' of death falls upon the heavenly allusions of 'my father's house', Harwood once again highlights the continuity of life as a recurrent theme of her poetry.*

*Whilst memory was seen as a manner in which we could comfort and reconcile ourselves with the realisations of the impermanency of life in her early poems, her later collections see memory as a source of disturbance as the 'encroaching darkness' of death emanates through Harwood's later work with the fears of mortality. Her collection of 1988 'Bone Scan' has a pervasive elegaic tone as 'memory broods' and instills her with regrets made in life. The reflection of childhood experiences is explored in the four-part series 'Night and Dreams' and 'Class of 1927'. Embedded with the inherent capacity for unadulterated cruelty that children possess, Harwood's exploration of the innocence of childhood can be seen in her poem 'The Spelling Prize' in which she acknowledges that 'sixty years/can't change it'. Foregrounded with the sweet innocence of Ella's existence in a 'house where nobody owned/a corner', establishes the cause of her classmates whispers 'Let Ella win the prize', as the memory of childhood regret in the 'sheer reflex' of innocence invokes the recollection of Ella's 'red-rimmed eyes' as it rhymes poignantly with the speakers 'coveted, worthless prize'. The imagery of Ella's 'red-rimmed eyes, reflects the 'velvety fan of blood' and the 'calf's eyes watching' from its severed head at the betrayal of 'the hand that fed'. The recollection is clear and the pangs of guilt strike at the now elderly mind of the speaker as they remark 'why, now, does the memory brood?' The awakening consciousness to the adult world from the innocence of childhood returns to the speaker as memories of regret returns to the speaker which reinforces the cyclical patterns of our existence, looped by memories that connect past and present.*

*It was Harwood's view that the role of the poet is to use 'mans most precise and inclusive tool', as said by John Fowles, to explain the profound experiences of life that cannot be explained through logical discourse. Paradoxically, the poet's objective is to express what cannot be said in word's but through language and music as art forms. Heavily infused with the words of Byron 'If I laugh it is so that I may not weep,' in her article 'Lamplit Presences', Harwood explains that it all we have is our 'laughter and our language to set against the existential chaos'. Through the power of memory, language, music and art, Harwood sought to express an inexpressible truth about the patterns of our existence from the light-filled images of childhood to the darkness of death.*

### **Student example 3**

**Nominated text:** *The Bacchae*, Euripides

*The Bacchae demonstrates the wild power of nature that can not be controlled or contained by any force of civilisation. Through the inversions expressed in the following passages, it is shown that the forces of nature (physis) and civilisation (nomos) are interwoven in a way that balance must be found in order to avoid chaos.*



Passage 1 depicts Pentheus upholding all the tight restrictions and control that is expressed through civilisation, also known as nomos. As being the ruler of Thebes, Pentheus in his youth lets anger take control of him and demonstrates the leadership of a tyrant who will not listen to his people and will act in an extreme manner in order to impose order once again to the city of Thebes. This is demonstrated through his angry and passionate reaction to his grand-father and the blindseer Teiresias who have shed their respected clothes in order to take up the Bacchant worship. Pentheus' claims to 'tie him up' and for Dionysus to be stoned to death' express an extreme side to nomos, where control and rationality has been replaced by an irrational text in an inversion that demonstrated civilisation at its worst. Pentheus' strong outburst towards the two men that he should most respect is the foreshadowing of a nasty ending to befall the inexperienced Pentheus who creates the most atrocious sins of all by angering the gods by calling Dionysus an 'instructor in lunacy'. The tragic fate that is already established through Pentheus' wild errors is furthered by Cadmus who shows less than pure reasons for submitting to Dionysus. Cadmus' words of 'lie royally' and 'credit come to us and all our family' demonstrate that he has only political rewards in mind that will be given with his family's support for this popular cult. By acting in such a way Pentheus and Cadmus both set targets on their backs for being the characters who will experience the wrath and revenge of the gods which is befitting in a Greek tragedy. With their foolish words, the Greek audience now expect the punishment of these two unholy men who put their self before the gods. This punishment is confirmed when Cadmus is brought the head of Pentheus by his delusional daughter after the blood dismemberment of the Sparagmos.

Passage 2 demonstrates the power of nature and Dionysus as even the angry Pentheus is seduced by the idea of 'frenzied Bacchic Woman'. Dionysus demonstrates his power of seduction as the now 'entirely subservient' Pentheus fusses about his woman's clothes that depict everything that he had hated in passage 1. The sexual notion of Dionysus dressing Pentheus and tucking in a 'curl' that has slipped out of place bring up sexual images. By using the sexual notions of the 'thyrsus' that represents the Phallic and Xonic symbols, further shows the enticement of the Bacchant worship as the sexually repressed people in Thebes find liberation through the cult that frees them from the restraint and control that nomos presents. Dionysus not only shows his power of seduction, what he also shows his power in the forms of illusions and theatre as he changes Pentheus' mind from one that is 'sickly' with the confines of nomos to one that has become docile towards Dionysus and his control. The notion of illusions is enhanced by Pentheus' comment that 'I seem to see two suns' encouraging the idea that Pentheus is no longer in a rational mind but in a dreamy stupor where he is seeing multiples of the same thing. This trance is similar to the one expressed during Bacchant rituals where people let go of their sanity in order to enjoy the bliss of ecstasy. Dionysus' power of illusions is also confirmed in passage 1 as he makes fools out of the supposedly wise old men. Teiresias speaks like a true sophist who has only words with no rational wisdom behind them, as he shows that he is blind to the future and the ridiculous state he is in as he states that 'it would be scandalous for two old men to fall' when they have indeed fallen to an all new low of dressing as Bacchant worshipers that would look nothing less of ridiculous.

Pentheus, Teiresias and Cadmus' delusional states expressed in passage 1 and 2 show the true power and threat that Dionysus and nature can be to civilisation as respectable men who made tools of by the god. Passage 3 confirms the dangers of nature by depicting the aftermath of the horrific Sparagmos where Pentheus is torn apart by his mother and aunts who are closest to him. This horrifying and bloody ending depicts a scene that even shocks the faithful Bacchant worshipers from the East who make up the chorus. With Agaue in her deluded state stroking her child's hand with her 'defiled hand' depicting nothing but a gruesome and unnecessary punishment that Dionysus has created. The notions of the 'hunt' become strong in passage 3 as words such as 'kill', 'blood' and 'slaughtering' depict what should have been a sacred ritual. In this way Euripides demonstrates the worst of natures where everything has fallen into chaos (oistros) due to the seduction of Dionysus' cult. In this way Dionysus depicts how people can be turned into 'frenzied' animals that have lost all humanity due to the lack of control and order applied by nomos.

Euripides' depiction of Pentheus and his family's grim down fall demonstrates that when nomos and physis strive to conflict they end up destroying everything in its path. In this way Euripides does not praise Dionysus for his cruel punishment but suggests that a balance must be found between nature and civilisation.

## Student example 4

**Nominated text:** *Collected Stories*, Peter Carey

Through his *Collected Stories*, Peter Carey exposes the harsh yet unrelenting truth behind the modern tragedy. Carey provides us with an augural lens through which we can observe the tragedies of fictional characters who are subject to disorientation, and thus enable us to question our own sources of orientation in life. When we lack a fundamental basis of existential purpose due to the corrupt modern world manifested into institutions such as 'The Company', we are disorientated, and thus succumb to similar tragedies to Carey's characters as a result of our inherent frustration. Furthermore, Carey proposes that the mutability of a corrupt society explored through the concept of 'revolution', and our inability to change the past we 'had thought long gone', further disorientates us and condemns us to tragedy.

Carey suggests that an understanding of existential purpose is crucial in life, and it is when we are denied such knowledge that we are isolated and disorientated. The narrator in 'Life & Death in the South-Side Pavilion' is assigned as a 'Shepherd 3rd class' to watch over the horses for 'The company', which Carey presents as paradoxical because his subservience to 'The company' undermines his status as a 'shepherd'. He is denied even the opportunity to know the name of the 'The Company' who keeps him in the pavilion, as well as his 'responsibility' towards 'the horses', which isolates and disorientates him. The etymological definition of a 'pavilion' is that it lacks walls, but the narrator is confined to it as he has 'no wish to be responsible for so many horses', but cannot 'leave the pavilion' until he determines whether he is to drive them into the pool and satisfy their



*'[dreams] about death' or further isolate them in the 'grey nights and yellow days' of the pavilion. The narrator acknowledges that he is 'responsible' for the 'death' of the horses, yet fails to acknowledge death as a viable escape to his disorientation as he lacks a conceptualised view of the modern world due to the isolation inflicted upon him by 'The Company'. The narrator's attempts to acquire a sense of purpose in the pavilion all prove to be futile, as The Company 'has never deigned to answer his letters' and his act of '[making] love' to Marie, which Carey presents to us as an archetypal source of existential purpose as it leads to conception, also proves to be utterly futile. 'A horse falls into the pool' whenever he does so, and thus he is denied the ability to understand his purpose. Frustration results as he expresses his willingness to 'kidnap a member of The Company's staff' when the narrator realises he is condemned to tragedy through his inability to acquire a concise interpretation of 'the beaches' outside his 'grey... and yellow' pavilion.*

However, Carey suggests that even if we were to gain a concise understanding of the modern world, these comprehensions would be short-lived due to the mutability of society. The title *'The Fat Man in History'* itself implies this, as we are given the story through present tense by Carey yet are told to view it through a historical lens. The story's protagonist Finch is disorientated as he recalls his identity as 'Teddy the cartoonist' prior to the 'revolution', but is now subject to 'the exclusion' of it as he and the other 'Fat Men Against the Revolution' are condemned to isolation, which exacerbates their disorientation. Carey presents us with the opportunity to see such disorientation through the 'Rationale by A. Finch', which is not very 'rational' in itself as the notion of 'the bodies of Fat Men... [purifying] the revolution' is an absurdity. Carey explores the concept of 'revolution' as the primary antagonist of disorientation in our lives and Finch's life, as a previously prestigious and wealthy social class such as the 'fat men' are soon made the bottom social class, and thus we are disorientated as we can never rely on society to define ourselves. Much like the narrator in *'Life & Death...'*, the disorientation resulting from this culminates in frustration as Finch 'shivers violently although it is very hot' and May throws 'his bowl of goldfish against the wall' as the two come to realise that they will never be able to rely on a mutable society as an orientation point, and thus rely on absurd and oxymoronic concepts such as 'militant love' as futile attempts to orientate themselves.

Carey suggests that while we are distanced from the past through the mutability of society, it is also the mutability of ourselves and our inherent inability to change the past which disorients us. Carey encourages us to view *'A Schoolboy Prank'* as reminiscent of the past as the 'prank' implies childish activity, yet involves serious lamentations of Turk Kershaw and his students who remain intertwined in the dialectic between the past and the present. When Turk Kershaw's dog dies, one of the very few remaining elements of his past that he wishes to remember is severed, and it is his attempts to rekindle the past through arranging a meeting with Davis, Sangster and McGregor which serves only as an evocation of 'reserves... he had thought long gone'.

Carey's commentary of the modern world is ultimately nihilistic. He allows us to witness the isolation of the 'Shepherd 3rd Class', the absurdities of Finch and the lamentations of Turk and his students in order to enable us to question if we too lack orientation in our lives. Do we really know what our purpose is in life, or what we will be if society changes? Do we have 'reserves in the past we'd choose to forget? Even if we were to satisfy these questions, we'd sorrowfully still be condemned to tragedy as the corrupt and vehement modern world prohibits us from ever finding the answers to our most brooding questions.

## **Student example 5**

**Nominated text:** *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley

Written in the 1800s during the rise of the Enlightenment movement due to the leaps of scientific advancement, Mary Shelley's cautionary tale *Frankenstein* explores the tensions between the Enlightenment values growing in the era and the Romantic qualities ingrained in society from a rich history. Essentially, her two protagonists represent each side of the argument – Frankenstein symbolic of Enlightenment and his monster being Romanticism. This is particularly ironic considering Frankenstein's birth into the Romantic world and the monster's creation as a product of Enlightenment ideas. Shelley endeavours to portray the human lust for power through the gothic trope of the doppelganger effect, condemning monomaniacal pursuit and endorsing the humanity so revered by Romantic scholars, encouraging her readers to find idealism in Romanticism and not Enlightenment.

Shelley portrays Frankenstein and his monster as doppelgangers of each other through the creation of the monster as a version of Frankenstein out of his own physical body. It is in the pursuit of self-discovery in narcissistic arrogance that Frankenstein describes his journey of affording life as the 'most beautiful season'. However the contrast between the beautiful descriptive language of nature is abruptly interrupted by the clause, 'but my eyes were insensible to the charm of nature', emphasised by the colon preceding it which breaks the melodious flow of the previous content. This elicits Shelley's authorial message, that Frankenstein's pursuit of the 'unhallowed arts' has similarly interrupted the beauty and flow of nature. Spoken in hindsight to Walton near the beginnings of the novel, passage one illuminates Frankenstein's remorse through his lament of the things he could have possessed in an alternate universe without his 'ungodly sciences'. The formal tone in Frankenstein's father's letter that they 'shall hear regularly from [Frankenstein]' and that Frankenstein must 'pardon [him] if [he] regards any interruption in [his] correspondence as proof that [his] other duties are equally neglected' evokes an ominous sense of foreboding, especially lucid in retrospection. The words 'shall' and 'must' convey an authoritative command, which Frankenstein at that time saw as 'unjust' and a way to 'procrastinate' his blindly grandiose goal. Shelley's authorial voice is highlighted in this omen as Frankenstein's father, symbolic of God – everyone's 'Father', warns his child, his Frankenstein, that is all of humanity, of the need to 'think of [loved ones] with affection', which Frankenstein ignores monomaniacal pursuit.



The exact opposite is reflected in passage two through the monster's narrative. Essentially a 'new-born child', the monster represents the most innocent and primitive thought of humans, untainted by social conventions and culture. He 'performed... Offices that [the] had seen done by Felix' not for the sake of recognition, elucidated by how he 'did not then understand the signification of [the words 'good spirit', 'wonderful']'. The child-like inability of language evokes the readers' admiration to the inherent good-will and compassion of the humankind – all of which Frankenstein himself lacks. The 'fresh ardour' harboured by the monster to 'acquire the art of language' despite his 'harsh' voice is reflected in pathetic fallacy as 'the pleasant showers and genial warmth of spring greatly altered the aspect of the earth'. The sublimation of Mother Nature in accordance to the 'effort hints at Shelley's support of the monster's humane pursuit of knowledge that is indeed worthy of 'favour' and 'love' as the monster imagined. The monster describes his current situation as 'tranquil', having 'been hid in caves' but now 'employed in various sorts of cultivation parallel to the 'men' he speaks of. All these compound to draw parallels to that which Frankenstein lacks— 'a calm and peaceful mind' and 'tranquillity'. Interpreting this parallel through the notion of doppelgangers, readers are invited to view the monster as embodying the inherent and celebratory humane spirit that Frankenstein in fact lacks. This raises a further question of the possibility of doppelgangers in readers own lives and if they, too, behold that which we ourselves do not have, and on a subconscious level, want.

Frankenstein's story begins with the lust for self-discovery and the power to create life, but ends in the pursuit of power over what he had created, that is, revenge. This is particularly pervasive in passage three, filled with eery syntax of the dark, supernatural powers as Frankenstein, fuelled with 'deep grief' turned into 'rage and despair', calls on the 'night and the spirits that preside over thee' in order for more 'power' to 'pursue the daemon'. This draws intertextual links to Lady MacBeth in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, sending chills down readers' spines in the dabbling with the dark spirits. Besides evoking fear and terror through Frankenstein's dark language of the summoning of the 'wandering ministers of vengeance' to destroy 'the cursed and hellish monster', the monomaniacal pursuit of revenge already starts to take its toll as Frankenstein is 'possessed' and 'choked' by his mad ways. This foreboding omen allows readers to rightly imagine the tragic ending of Frankenstein which portends that of Lady Macbeth – the intertextual link epitomising the universal condemnation for the pursuit of such of powers, testament to Romantic qualities characteristic of Shelley and Shakespeare. The monster's pursuit of revenge towards Frankenstein is also mildly evident at the end of passage three especially in his ominous threat, 'I am satisfied: miserable wretch! You have determined to live, and I am satisfied'. These menacing words can be seen as the glue of his further opportunity to torture and plot further revenge against Frankenstein, but also holds a duality in allusion again to the doppelganger effect: if Frankenstein and the monster are in fact the same being, Frankenstein's death would be equivalent to the monster's death, which readers eventually discover at the end of the novel. Shelley thus questions the lust over the power over one's doppelganger in fear of what the other can – or cannot do, as Frankenstein fears the monster's murderous deeds and the monster fears the creative control of Frankenstein to deny him a female companion. Hence, readers are positioned to consider their own doppelganger and their possible reactions to them, as Shelley discourages the fight for power and revenge against each other, and essentially, in one self. This elucidates again the initial issue – Enlightenment verses Romanticism. Frankenstein and the monster represent these movements respectively, and also the doppelgangers in a single being. Shelley therefore prompts readers to contemplate our very own human nature and the values most important to us – is it that of Enlightenment and/or Romanticism? The story of the protagonists to originate from the opposite notion as mentioned in the introduction which they represent enhances the issue that everyone is in fact capable of the two, and it is a choice not a factual decision from the beginning.

Mary Shelley's fictional novel, *Frankenstein*, offers many complex matters for reader consideration, including the possible existence of doppelgangers and also the ever-present tension between Enlightenment and Romantic values. Through the symbolism of her protagonists, Shelley suggests that the latter in fact should prevail, in line with the natural world. Readers are subsequently prompted to think about their doppelganger and their own struggle between Enlightenment and Romanticism.

## Student example 6

**Nominated text:** *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

*'One woe doth tread upon another's heel'*

Hamlets paralysing intellect and stagnation of action has detrimental effects on those around him and the collaboration of his misdemeanours where he stains his hands with innocent blood through usurping action along with the 'unweeded garden' of Denmark culminate in the death of his beloved Ophelia – conveyed in the third passage.

Hamlets intellectuality, the working of his mind, is largely at the service of attitudes of rejection and disgust which are indiscriminate in their working. His exclamation to Polonius in the first passage, condemning him a 'fish monger' denotes his superior intellect as Polonius is ignorant to the insult, replying 'not I my lord'. Hamlet is intellectual, but he does little enough effective thinking on the moral and metaphysical issues that beset him: his god-like reason is clogged and impeded with emotions of disgust, revulsion and self-contempt that bring him back, again and again, to the isolation of his obsession.

Central to the thematic concerns of all three passages, is the notions of the mystery of death and impossibility of certainty. The depressive and contemplative tones throughout *'Hamlet'* denote the vehement anguish and paralysing mindset the man himself endures.



*Hamlet's superior scholarly intellect is exemplified through his continual questioning of the ghosts validity – central to the inquisitive second passage where Hamlet, through the plays performance, aims to come to a conclusive answer regarding his father's death. He instructs Horatio to 'observe my uncle' and examine him for any signs of distress or unsettling displays throughout its duration. The ghost is real, or in fact the vehicle of realities. Through its revelation the glittering surface of Claudius's court is pierced. In one sense the ghost is representative of the supreme reality, the ultimate, hidden power. Yet the man who has the ability to see through to this power the Queen condemns as 'mad', a notion that further permeates the sequential passages.*

*Polonius states 'though this be madness, there is method in it' and Hamlet depressively concludes that there is nothing he would 'more willingly part with; except my life'. This denotes the receding depths of his extreme anguish at the loss of his father, and how Denmark has become a sterile promontory. Hamlet at the beginning of the play is single-minded, all melancholia, but then he puts on the mask and plays the antic; carrying his buffoonery almost to the point of hysteria. His disposition is antic when he is in company, and depressive when he is alone. His father's death and the rapidity of his mothers incestuous wedlock has reduced Hamlet to a deplorable mental state that he himself so vividly depicts; there is nothing he will not openly part with except his life, and even that he agonisingly questions the moral legitimacy of leaving through suicide. He cannot prevent himself from probing and lacerating the wound in his soul.*

*In order to avenge the death of his father, Hamlet must reduce himself to the level of the cunning and treacherous, though if he does not avenge his fathers death he must torture himself with his seething incompetence. Claudius' vile nature is demonstrated in passage three where he is devising a plot with Laertes to kill Hamlet. This portrays to the audience how tormentingly difficult it would be for Hamlet to watch his mother infatuated with a man that clearly possesses some qualities of the 'satyr' Hamlet attributes to him. Not only must Hamlet see his mother's displays of astounding shallowness of feeling, but further her imperious eruption of coarse sensuality, speeding poste haste to its horrible delight. Claudius's deceitful nature is made ostensibly clear in the third passage with the juxtaposition of his evil murderous scheming with the intent to eradicate Hamlet, with his seemingly 'caring' facade he adopts around Gertrude, manipulating her into believing he is good natured – 'How much I had to do to calm his rage!' – a blatant lie. This suggests how in Hamlet challenging Claudius he is not merely seeking personal revenge, but fighting the source of evil he deems to be destroying spirituality in Denmark.*

*The roles of men and women are highlighted with Gertrude exclaiming 'But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them' denoting the sexually repressed nature of women. This is consistent with the first passage whereby Hamlet views Ophelia as the symbol of innocence and purity advising Claudius that he should not 'let her walk in the sun'. But this further poses a dilemma for Ophelia is of the sex for whom Hamlet has already found the name frailty. Moreover, Laertes wishes to much 'forbid my tears' for otherwise 'the woman in me would be out' – his unsuccessful rejection of tears depicts how it is viewed as 'unmanly' to cry in medieval Danish society.*

*The question Hamlet is continually asking himself is 'what shall I do to rid myself of these numbing feelings of meaninglessness brought on by the knowledge of corruption?' Even throughout his bitter reproaching of himself he acknowledges he is at least one-quarter wise for thinking so precisely on the matters. 'Hamlet' is a triumphant assertion of what Shakespeare deems to be a consolation in life's uncertainties. The play dramatises the perpetual struggle to which all civilisation that is genuine is doomed. Once Hamlet commits to devoting his life to revenge, the rest of the play exhibits his vain efforts to fulfil his duty. Shakespeare uses a series of references to the world, the nation and the individual to denote Hamlet's disillusionment in all three spheres. The three forementioned passages show the sequential escalation of Hamlets agonisingly scholarly mind that causes him to relentlessly question logic and is the catalyst for his stagnation.*

### **Student example 7**

**Nominated text:** No Sugar, Jack Davis

*'Another bloody troublemaker' mumbles Neal, merely beginning to show the mistreatment of Aborigines throughout the play. Transferred to the Moore River Settlement from Northam, after being considered 'rotten with scabies' – mistreatment begins. Jack Davis has portrayed mistreatment of 'natives' as a key concern within the play, and is a concern that is often challenged, by 'black' characters, or endorsed subtly by 'whites'. The third passage is indicative of this, in Billy's belting of David. Even though Billy is a 'blackfella', working for Mr Neal ensures him safety, an opportunity to earn money, which was rare for Aborigines during the 1930's – when the play was set.*

*Along with a lack of jobs available, very little education was available for 'blacks', which is illustrated by Davis in the language and grammar commonly used by 'natives' within the play. This includes things such as 'missus', 'goin'', 'Chunday', 'stinkin'' or 'S'all'. This demonstrates this lack of education that is evident, also meaning that they are stereotyped as lazy or stupid, due to this, which also shows that the 'natives' can be seen as an easy target, because they have no knowledge of any ability to fight for themselves. However, this is merely a stereotype, and is not true.*

*The second passage illustrates the character of Mr Neal as a demeaning, but powerful man with no respect for his wife, any other woman, or himself. The conversation, or borderline argument between Neal and his wife Matron, reveals this lack of respect, while the stage direction 'Mary brings him tea on a tray. He leers at her body' reveals a lust for women in general, those who have no power over him. This begins to show Neal as a misogynist, using the females in the settlement for his own enjoyment, rather than seeking a loving relationship with his wife.*



*There is also an interesting relationship between Mr Neal, and Billy – yet on a very different level to the female ‘blacks’ of the camp – which is important to note. Even though Billy is in fact ‘black’, Neal holds some respect for Billy – or possibly just the strength and respect that Billy can represent to the other ‘natives’ in the camp – and uses Billy to do his dirty work for him. The closing of passage two also demonstrates this, calling Billy to resolve the matter of ‘one too many’ dogs ‘per family’ by violent means. Billy is seen as a disciplining character forcing families in the camp to attend particular events or act in a certain manner, such as attending ‘Chunday school’.*

*At the Moore River Settlement, Christianity is forced upon the ‘natives’ in an attempt to assimilate them into white society, culture and beliefs. This becomes evident in the third passage where the playwright shows the audience Sister Eileen’s choice of stories – King Herod orders soldiers to ‘kill every first-born baby boy’ – and hymns – ‘There is a Happy Land.’ Whites attempt to make ‘natives’ believe that they will become part of ‘white society’ if they believe in God, behave in particular ways, and sing hymns that this will lead them to a life where they are not stereotyped, or discriminated against; a life the Millimurra family dreams of.*

*The Munday and Millimurra family endorses Davis’ key theme of the play – family. The final passage shows Cissie’s anger toward the mistreatment of her older brother, with directed hatred toward a particular ‘rotten stinkin’ mongrel’ named Billy. Throughout the play, this is a family that sticks together, provides for each other as well as fighting for each other. A particularly violent member of the Munday family is Jimmy Munday, always known for standing up for his family, and his not very subtle insults toward white authority figures, such as Neal or Sergeant.*

*In all, Davis reveals to the audience the way Aborigines were mistreated and stereotyped during the 1930’s, as well as the struggles they faced. The Munday and Millimurra family battles all of these problems, and does show that with family by their side, they can get through anything.*