# English Studies

2013 Chief Assessor's Report

Government of South Australia

SACE Board of SA

# ENGLISH STUDIES

# 2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

## OVERVIEW

The number of students choosing to enrol in English Studies continues to be robust and the quality of work presented both in the examination and for moderation continues to indicate a high level of engagement with the subject. With an expanding diversity in task design for shared studies, a deepening level of creativity in written text production, a consistently increasing level of awareness of the craft of the author, and an ever-developing familiarity with the process of moderation, the subject — for both teachers and students — is positioned well for the future. The subject is an exciting and challenging one as students have the opportunity to: experience a range of literature from various times and places; tackle texts of diverse types from prose to poetry to film to drama; develop skills in critical reading, analysis, and constructing coherent, logical arguments; read, view, discuss, and create texts; explore the connections between works of various kinds; respond to unseen texts; transfer collaborative exploration to individual study; and develop skills and understanding that are essential to all subjects, future prospects, and life itself. Markers and moderators comment frequently upon the pleasure of reading work that is humbling in its sophistication, creativity, and insight.

## SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

### Assessment Type 1: Shared Studies

The central moderation of shared studies showed how teachers are designing assessment tasks in ways that meet the diverse needs and abilities of their students. Much of the work showed the richness and diversity that are possible in the study of literature and film. Student responses revealed a genuine engagement and interest in many kinds of texts, and in making connections between texts and personal and cultural experience.

This part of the course requires students to convey their insights into the texts studied and how the authors of the texts crafted their content for particular effects and purposes. A good working knowledge of the performance standards is essential in designing tasks that allow students to achieve their potential. It is not necessary, and perhaps sometimes unproductive, to access all specific features in individual tasks. Effective task design should allow students to demonstrate skill in meeting specific performance standards in a range of tasks. When writing on texts, students may need some guidance in considering the scope of their response. General and open-ended tasks may limit the capacity of students to organise their thoughts in a convincing and analytical way. Extended responses were most effective when there was evidence of an organised argument or development of a thesis.

Given that this part of the course requires students to show skills of analysis, essay responses were common. However, students used a range of other forms, including paragraph responses, annotated scenes from texts, multimodal responses, and oral presentations. Although it is permissible to submit work completed under test conditions, it is best for students to have the opportunity to edit and polish their work. A common method is for students to complete a response within a time limit, and then be allowed to consider teacher feedback and submit a drafted copy for assessment. The range of ways in which students can demonstrate achievement against the performance standards should be taken into account by teachers when designing tasks; it is appropriate for teachers to consider the needs of their individual students by allowing choice when applicable.

Whatever types of tasks are designed, consideration should be given to how the students can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the ways in which authors use stylistic features to influence opinions and decisions in readers. This is one of the discriminating factors in assessing those students who achieve at a higher standard. Additionally, in paired responses, the extent to which students integrate discussion of texts and move easily between them is often a discriminating factor that separates students within the grade bands. Simply adding cohesive joining words and writing material that is not clearly based on the analysis and synthesis of similarities and/or differences will not give students the best opportunity to show their analysis and application. Students who recount plot, describe characters, and outline themes will not be able to achieve as highly as those students who use an analytical framework to complete their response to texts.

In this assessment type, students produce four to six responses showing their insights into at least one critical reading study, one study of paired texts, one study of two single texts, and one study of poetry. Work that is to be presented for central moderation should be assembled by assessment type, and individual folios should be clearly identified with registration numbers or names and overall grades by type; such organisation makes the process of moderating more efficient.

## Assessment Type 2: Individual Study

The choice of texts is fundamental to the success of the critical essay. In association with their teachers, students choose two texts for individual consideration. These texts may include extended prose texts, plays, anthologies of verse by single poets, collections of speeches, or film. No text used for the shared studies can be counted as part of the individual study, although students may choose other texts by an author selected for their shared studies. As students have to demonstrate analysis and application, and show how stylistic features position readers to consider ideas, values, and opinions, texts that have little in the way of author craft should be avoided. Texts that may have been studied in past years may be quite suitable provided that students reread them and follow their own train of thought in establishing points of comparison. It is also appropriate for students to study canonical texts, or contemporary ones, so long as there is evidence of the student's own individual study in analysing ideas and exploring links between texts.

Care should be taken in framing a question for the critical essay so that students can best display their achievement of the learning requirements. Past paired text examination essay questions may provide a good starting point in designing tasks that help the students to argue a particular idea, and encourage them to synthesise the texts in ways that address the intention of the task. The critical essay is expected to be polished and must be clearly and accurately written, with a logically developed argument and clear structure. In this regard, students should consider the weighting of the assessment task, and allocate sufficient time to the task itself to reflect its importance in the subject outline.

This is the task that allows an assessment of students' ability to integrate and synthesise material that is organised around a central argument. Careful planning of paragraphs is essential. In the more successful responses students went beyond labelling techniques and pointing out similarities and differences. Such essays showed how stylistic features were used to achieve particular effects in readers. Furthermore, such essays were written in ways that carefully used the metalanguage of the respective text types to consider the purpose the authors were trying to achieve in their stories. Such essays were integrated, included an understanding of the form and purpose of the text type, and advanced an argument in each paragraph rather than just revealing points of comparison.

In the most successful essays students established connections between texts by analysing and synthesising similarities and differences in order to integrate their discussion. As can be noted by the exemplars on the SACE website, no particular type of essay is privileged, but

the common feature of the most successful responses is the quality of integration and the line of reasoning evident in student work.

The collection of supporting material, although not required for moderation, provides evidence of the initial working out of key ideas and points of comparison between the two texts. This part of the individual study is an important element in the teacher's verification of the originality of the student's work, and should provide a productive springboard to the design of the question and the organisation of paragraphs.

## Assessment Type 3: Text Production

The way in which teachers approached this part of the course reflects the breadth of options provided by the subject outline. Students draw on what they have learnt from analysing texts in the other studies to demonstrate, in their own texts, the textual conventions and stylistic features appropriate to the form of their choice. Although the texts produced by students may extend or elaborate on ideas, themes, or issues encountered in the shared studies or the individual study, they should not be responses to texts. Most students wrote narratives and persuasive texts, and a number of other text types were also noted, including experimental writing, poems, and personal reflective writing.

The key aspect of this part of the course is again task design. For example, students who intended to write a narrative disadvantaged themselves if what they wrote was essentially a recount, and students who intended to write a persuasive text were similarly disadvantaged if they merely outlined their views on a topic.

Students were expected to demonstrate skills in using the textual, structural, and conventional features of the chosen text types; this allowed them to meet the performance standards at a higher level. Within classes, students may have varying abilities and interests, so it may be possible for the teacher to offer a range of options to cater for their interests and needs. The key point remains, however, that students must attempt to skilfully use the conventional features of the text type that they are trying to create.

Although the two written tasks in the text production folio are not permitted to be responses to shared texts, it is appropriate for the oral presentations to be generated from the shared study of texts. Students are encouraged to use language appropriately to convey meaning in a range of contexts and to use a wide range of language skills in doing so. Therefore, developing both oral presentations around the study of texts may not demonstrate a wide range of language skills. In terms of task design, it is useful to encourage students to think of creative ways in which to produce responses to shared texts, particularly in the higher grade bands. Simply recounting the events of an episode from a text or outlining themes will not give students the opportunity to convey meaning in a range of contexts. Some interesting responses to texts in this section included those of students who adopted a particular persona or targeted a specific audience, and such approaches gave students the opportunity to experiment with voice, context, and purpose. Some students led tutorials on a poet, an episode of a novel, a particular stylistic feature of an author's work, or a scene annotation in a film or play.

Additional oral text production tasks included experimenting with the features of various oral presentations, including tribute speeches, twenty-first birthday speeches, eulogies, and persuasive discourses. An important consideration in submitting work for moderation is to ensure enough evidence is provided to support the student's achievement of the respective performance standard. Cue cards, transcripts, photographic evidence, teacher notes, and recordings can all be used to corroborate the grading of student work. In this section, where multiple sources of evidence may be submitted to provide evidence of student achievement, it is especially important to label student work clearly.

## Assessment Type 4: Examination

### General Comments

The significant majority of students were adequately prepared for the examination and displayed an understanding of the requirements of the different sections, knowledge of the texts they had studied, and the requisite skills to construct fluent, well-supported arguments in response to the questions posed in the paper.

Markers noted in particular the following areas that affected student performance:

- *Adhering to the requirements of an essay.* Students who considered the organisation of an argument, and therefore developed a line of reasoning in response to the question, fared best. This obviously requires skills in planning. The more successful students developed a clear direction for their essay in the introduction, signposting the central points of the argument for themselves and the marker. They then organised their main ideas into discrete paragraphs in which they employed useful topic sentences that gave prominence to the point, referred to the question, and developed cohesive links with previous paragraphs in order to maintain a developing argument. The more successful students also used the conclusion persuasively: considering the overall implication of the argument, returning to the heart of the question, and actually concluding their answer. Successful students avoided simply repeating the central ideas of their essay in this final paragraph.
- *Addressing the question.* Application 1 requires students to use 'language skills and techniques to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task'. In the examination this means providing clear responses to an essay question and addressing the individual questions for the critical reading task. Each question in the examination has its particular nuances and requirements, and the more successful students were adept at deconstructing the phrasing, prepared to consider the ideas presented, and able to organise their texts in an argument that responded to the question. Students who presented material that was a response to an examination question from a previous year, with only a cursory use of the words in the current question, did not address the application or communication criteria appropriately.
- *Understanding the requirements of questions involving comparison.* Many questions in the examination included the verb 'compare', particularly questions on paired texts and poetry. Comparison involves an observation of both the similarities and differences in texts and it should be an *active* structural feature of comparative essays. Passively placing texts alongside one another does not produce the most successful answers to questions requiring comparison. The more successful students developed a line of reasoning that was organised around the observation of similarities and differences rather than writing about one text and then the other with a cursory 'similarly' or 'contrastingly' at the juncture.
- *Understanding text types.* The more successful students clearly explored the particular stylistic features of prose, poetry, film, and drama. They used the metalanguage relevant to those particular types appropriately, and in comparative tasks often ensured that observations about the differences in these features were integral to the argument. Similarly, an understanding of the particular stylistic features of shorter texts often provided clear guideposts for analysis in the critical reading.
- *Using textual evidence.* The more successful students employed a wide range of textual examples, integrating quotation into the line of reasoning and selecting pertinent material that clearly justified the point being made. A number of markers commented on the way in which a paucity of textual evidence weakened otherwise insightful arguments. Without evidence, students were reduced to *telling about* rather than *showing* aspects of the text, thus limiting themselves to recount and description.

- *Writing fluently.* Communication is an important criterion and the more successful students adhered to the rules of spelling, grammar, and punctuation in their expression. One marker adeptly commented on aspects of communication: 'Common errors of expression throughout included a significant inability to recognise the correct spelling of words with "ie" or "ei" in them, particularly the word "perceive" in Section C. "Lead" for "led" was also a common error, while John Proctor was "hung" and Owen (sometimes referred to as Owen Wilson!) discusses soldiers who "loose" their lives in war. Students have also taken to inventing or reinventing some literary terms, such as "repitition", "metaphore" and "stylism", pluralising hyperbole to "hyperboles" and alliteration to "alliterations", as well as using the term "exampled" as in "this is exampled in the quotation ...". There were also instances of the "conveyal" of ideas by authors. Another common error of expression was the use of "in which" (or another preposition) for "that". Students also had trouble on occasions with using the adverb "differently", instead using the adjective "different".'

## Section A: Shared Studies

The following section of the report contains specific comments on each of the fifteen questions in the examination. Extracts from the instructions to markers are included, as are comments made by markers about the specific ways in which students responded to the question.

### Questions on Poetry Texts

Students were instructed to refer to a range of poems and poets in their answer to any question in this section. Those students who understood that the specific essay question focussed on poets fared better than those students who compared poems rather than poets. Students who provided the more successful responses also selected the examples of poetry wisely so that there were obvious similarities and differences to explore; simply placing two poems by two different poets in the same paragraph and linking them with a cursory connective did not address the requirements of the questions. Although the comparative approach to the study of poetry is a challenging one, providing tasks during the year that require students to develop paragraphs in which they compare two poets should help them to prepare for this section. Choosing a question that has a clear structural focus is also paramount. Most teachers select poets on the basis of a thematic study and this is often the element that provides structural cohesion to writing on poetry. Many markers commented that students would have fared better if they had selected a question that gave them the opportunity to use that thematic focus as an organising feature of their essay.

Markers also commented on the fact that in the poetry section students frequently explore the works of pre-twentieth-century writers, whereas the paired and single text sections of the course often involve the study of more contemporary texts. Although there is nothing intrinsically right or wrong in this, those markers noted that it is appropriate for students to gain a long-term view of the development of ideas and literary traditions, and that the poetry section is more likely to facilitate this broader view.

There is of course always that perennial question: how many poets and poems should an essay involve? A range can be defined as two or more. Therefore it would be within the rubric of the course to write on only two poems by two poets. However, it is likely that so few poems would limit the scope of the student's response (but that would obviously depend on which poems were actually used; two very lengthy poems may provide more scope for analysis). Conversely, writing about too many poems can fracture the essay and lead to superficial analysis of many poems, rather than an in-depth analysis of a narrower range. It is valuable to consider the comment of most markers who reported that, in the more successful responses, students gave a detailed analysis of individual poems, providing a clear context, a range of quotations, and depth to the discussion. Often these students narrowed their exploration to

two poems in the one paragraph, exploring the similarities and differences between two poets. Although there may be times when a student draws upon a wider range of poems by the same poet in order to establish that poet's approach to an idea in the one paragraph, the detailed exploration of two poems in a single paragraph should generally provide some understanding of the scope of the essay. It is perfectly acceptable for students to return to the discussion of the same poem in subsequent paragraphs as they develop an argument. Generally students explore three or four poets and one or two poems by each, but this is only a very rough guide and students will often adapt their selection of the range of poets and poems to fit the question and their argument.

**Question 1**

*Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year use* one or two *of the following to explore ideas: contrasting elements; point of view; sounds; structure; imagery.*

This was the most popular question in the examination. In particular, students wrote on imagery and point of view. Although the former element created few difficulties, many students focused on 'point of view' as meaning the 'view expressed' and wrote about *ideas* rather than the stylistic feature. Most students adhered to the requirement to write about only one or two of the features. The central challenge for students who chose this question was the structural focus of their writing: those who chose poems because there was a commonality to the technique (both using alliteration, for example) sometimes found it difficult to do more than place the two poems in the same paragraph. Those students who organised their essay around the ideas being explored, integrating the discussion of the particular stylistic features into this thematic discussion, found it easier to develop a line of reasoning and therefore ensure that the essay maintained a comparative focus.

**Question 2**

*Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year find reasons to celebrate life, even in the midst of suffering.*

The phrase 'compare the ways' invites students to explore the poetic techniques used by poets, but also more broadly allows them to explore the 'way' a poet approaches the thematic concept in the question (where applicable). This question presumes that, although poets observe the range of reasons that people (or the environment, or societies etc.) suffer, they do find reasons to celebrate life in the midst of this suffering. Students were expected to compare this concept in different poets and to observe the relationship between suffering and celebration. They may have observed the similarities and/or differences in the causes of suffering, and the similarities and/or differences in the causes of celebration — the balance of this was determined by the poets about whom they chose to write. The more successful responses were those in which students clearly defined the causes of suffering and the reasons for celebration, and explored the relationship between them, thus engaging with the contention within the question. Those students who simply wrote about suffering or celebration were less successful in constructing an argument; and those who selected poets inappropriately found it difficult to explore the relationship between the two elements (those writing on war poetry for example could find few reasons for celebration, and therefore limited the discussion to suffering).

**Question 3**

*Show how comparing the works of the poets you studied this year reveals that, regardless of time and place, human nature remains the same.*

The concept in this question is that there is a universal quality to human nature. Students were required to establish the factors that show the poets they chose to explore were from various 'times and places'. However, the concept is a broad one and markers accepted students' definitions of what constitutes different 'times and places' if justifiable (poets might be from different countries and/or different eras and/or different cultural perspectives — or even just

different places mentally or emotionally etc.). Students were required to specifically define the aspect of human nature they were exploring, and then examine the similarities between poets. They may have explored just one aspect, or a variety of aspects, of human nature but they should always have compared the approaches of at least two poets to the aspects they had chosen. Some students may also have explored a broadly similar idea (human beings demonstrate love, for example) but examined some differences within the scope of that idea (some gave priority to romantic love, others to familial love, and others to passionate patriotism, for example). Unfortunately a number of students ignored the notion of various times and places and wrote about aspects of human nature in isolation from the central premise of the question: universality.

### Question 4

*'Things fall apart.' Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year explore this idea.*

The concept in this question is broad and therefore open to individual definition. Markers accepted students' definitions of 'falling apart' and the 'things' they chose to explore as long as there was a justifiable focus on the overall concept. Once students had established what it is that falls apart they were expected to compare the ways in which poets explore those elements. In the more successful responses the students clearly defined their approach to the idea of things falling apart and then focused on this throughout the argument. Although a range of situations were explored by those students who tackled this question, human relationships (particularly parent–child) and the environment were popular focuses, as was the disintegration of Aboriginal culture.

### Question 5

*Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year focus on the seemingly insignificant in order to explore complex ideas.*

Markers accepted students' definitions of what was 'seemingly insignificant' as long as they were reasoned and linked to 'complex ideas'. Although this was not a popular question, the more successful students recognised the metaphoric nature of objects normally regarded as insignificant (blackberries, a crossroad in the woods, a spider, a nightingale, a glass jar etc.) and explored the ways in which poets use these elements to develop complex ideas. Often the defining structural element for these more successful students was the complex idea rather than the insignificant thing, which poets rarely held in common.

## Section B: Shared Studies

### Part 1: Questions on Single Texts

### Question 6

*How does the author of a prescribed text explore the idea that a preoccupation with the past affects the present?*

In this question it was not sufficient for students to merely describe the *effects* of the past on the present in (for example) a cultural setting, a historical period, a family context, or a fictional character's life; they were expected to address the concept of 'preoccupation' in the argument. Students were also expected to show *how* the author conveys the idea rather than simply noting its presence in the text. The more successful responses to this question were the ones in which students tackled the more complex aspect of preoccupation and were cognisant of the author's stylistic choices in conveying this in the text.

### Question 7

*Show how the author of a prescribed text uses setting in a range of ways to explore ideas.*

Although this is a question about setting, it requires students to explore the *range of ways* in which the author uses a single setting or various settings to explore ideas. In the more successful responses the students explored a variety of ideas presented by the author through the use of setting; in the less successful responses the students relied upon a description of the setting and either did not explore a range of ideas presented through it or discussed only one way in which the setting is used.

**Question 8**

*'The good, the bad, and the ugly.' How does the author of a prescribed text present these three aspects of humanity?*

This question allows students to apply the text they have studied in a lateral fashion, using the terms as a guide to structure an argument. Markers were instructed to be very open to student interpretations of the three broad labels; however, they were to expect students to tackle all three and to address the 'how' at the opening of the question which assumes an understanding of the author's use of stylistic features. In the more successful responses students clearly defined 'the good', 'the bad', and 'the ugly' and then focused their argument on the devices that the author used to explore these. In the less successful responses students struggled with the concept of 'the ugly' and tended to write only about 'the good' and 'the bad', focusing mainly on the exploration of characters rather than concepts.

**Question 9**

*Show how the author of a prescribed text explores the idea that what is considered to be honourable or dishonourable depends upon one's point of view.*

Few students tackled this question. However, the advice to markers was: 'The proposition that "what is considered to be honourable or dishonourable depends on one's point of view" is not open to debate — students are expected to discuss *how* the author explores the concept, not *whether* the author explores it. Markers will need to accept the student's interpretation of the concepts of what is "honourable" and "dishonourable" provided these are grounded in the text. The "point of view"' is not that of the reader; for the question asks how the author explores the idea that one's point of view shapes that which is considered honourable or dishonourable.'

**Question 10**

*Show how the author of a prescribed text uses* two *of the following to explore ideas: structure; symbolism; contrasting characterisation; foreshadowing; juxtaposition.*

This was a popular question. Most students adhered to the requirement that they explore *two* elements on the list, the most popular being contrasting characterisation and symbolism. Many students integrated their discussion of both elements although this was not a structural requirement and most students maintained a focus on the author's use of the device and produced successful essays in which they analysed stylistic features. Markers were provided with the following list, indicating possible features that students may have explored in each of the elements:

- Structure: this includes any of the features that are used to build or organise a text. It may include, for example, the use of time changes, flashbacks, different narrative perspectives, subplots, organisation into parts or chapters, use of a prologue or an epilogue.
- Symbolism: students may explore only one symbol, or they may explore many. Their interpretation of the term 'symbol' can be quite broad and may include, for example, the representative aspects in a setting, the meaning of recurring images, visual motifs in films.
- Contrasting characterisation: students should not simply describe how characters differ but explicitly demonstrate how the author has constructed them with contrasting features for the purpose of exploring ideas.

- Foreshadowing: students should not slip into lengthy description of what is being foreshadowed. Rather, they should focus on how the foreshadowing occurs in the text and the purpose it serves in enabling the author to explore ideas.
- Juxtaposition: students may interpret juxtaposition as 'contrast'. Markers should be flexible in accepting what is juxtaposed or contrasted. This may include, for example, settings, characters, ideas, subplots, symbols, time-frames. The main thing is for students not to describe what is juxtaposed but to show how the juxtaposition enables the writer to explore ideas in the text.

## Part 2: Questions on Paired Texts

In this part it is important that students refer to both texts in approximately equal proportions, and ensure that comparison is the driving structural feature of the argument. This is an essential element of Application 2, 'Recognition of connections between texts, and an integrated approach to comparing and contrasting texts'. As previously mentioned, comparison is expected to involve an exploration of both similarities and differences. However, the extent of either of these will be determined by the texts chosen, and the argument developed by the student.

It is important for students to understand that when a question is worded 'the ways in which the authors explore the idea…' the statement does not need to be accepted as a truism. Authors may explore an idea and draw a conclusion that resists the statement (for example, people may be able to achieve freedom, or conflict may not be a catalyst for change). Of course students need to explore the concept explicit within the statement and not argue on a tangent (for example, arguing that no one is ever truly *happy*, or that it is *time* that leads to change).

### Question 11

*Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts explore the idea that no one is ever truly free.*

This question requires students to contend with the idea that no one is ever truly free; an analysis of stylistic features will highlight how this idea is expressed in the respective texts. There may be subtle emphases in the way in which this central idea is presented. Of course, it may well be that there is some capacity for the individuals to choose freedom and, since the question asks how the author explores the idea, it is possible that the author concludes — after exploring it — that it is possible to achieve freedom, or at least some aspect of it. Students who chose this question generally explored texts that dealt with societal restrictions, whether futuristic or historical. The less successful responses focused on exploring characters; the more successful ones explored concepts.

### Question 12

*Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts use the interplay between the strong and the weak to explore ideas.*

Markers were advised to be ready for a wide interpretation of the phrase 'the strong and the weak' as long as the approach was justified by the text and the argument was established by the student. Students generally analysed aspects of character interaction, but some moved beyond this and provided an assessment of social, political, and environmental elements. In the more successful responses students explored the notion of the interplay between what is 'strong' and what is 'weak', and analysed broader ideas rather than limiting the discussion to a description of the actions of characters.

**Question 13**

*Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts use stylistic features to position the reader to respond to ideas common to both texts.*

Understandably this question was very popular. However, the discriminator was whether or not the student understood the notion of the reader being *positioned*. In the more successful responses the students showed how the reader is influenced and manipulated to think about the issues through the author's use of structural and textual features. Those students compared the similar issues, and then commented on how authors position readers to respond to the nominated issues.

**Question 14**

*Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts explore the idea that conflict is a catalyst for change.*

This question focuses the student on the notion of conflict, and the idea that it is a catalyst for change in some way in each text. In some texts conflict leads to submission; in others, conflict results in revolution. Markers were instructed to be open to a wide assessment of the effects of conflict. Although few students chose this question, the more successful responses moved beyond a description of the conflict and explored the broader idea that conflict is a catalyst for change and analysed *how* the author uses stylistic features to explore the idea.

## Section C: Critical Reading

Both texts were accessible to the significant majority of students, although a few struggled with contextual features of the narrative (knowing whether $2000 was a lot or only a small amount of money; and whether having two false teeth was a tragedy or an inconvenience), and some thought that Robert Burns was the author of the Archie comic. Nevertheless, most students were able to address all questions and provide reasonable material in response to them. Question (a) allowed students to explore the content of the texts and most commented on the falsity of perception and the way in which it may affect people's actions; although some students missed the irony in the final panel of the comic and therefore accepted Archie's argument that Burns was wrong as the point of the text. Question (b) provided some discrimination between students; in the more successful responses students observed a broader range of elements, exploring the techniques in the written and visual elements of the text. In question (c) most students commented on Miss Martha's 'sympathetic heart' and the effect of the draftsman's outburst at the conclusion; however, only a few of the more successful students explored the nuances of characterisation, the juxtaposition of omniscient narration with the internal monologue of Miss Martha, or the power of some of the symbolism. Although most students understood the requirements of question (d), many felt that they had plumbed the depths of the texts in previous questions and relied upon repetition or brief responses. As the notes provided to markers indicate, there are a wide range of alternative features to explore but these were observed by only the most successful students who moved beyond the confines of the earlier questions. It is a salient reminder that those students who are familiar with the features typical of various text types are able to approach pieces more objectively and look more broadly for a range of techniques. It is by accumulating lists of textual features of the variety of text types that students can prepare for the critical reading exercise.

The following notes are provided on the critical reading. However, it is essential to realise that these are only a guide. Students were not expected to observe all the elements listed, and some students made observations not included in these notes.

**Critical Reading Notes**

(a) This question asks students to demonstrate their comprehension of similar concerns in the texts. In the most successful answers to this question the students will be able to integrate their discussion of the similar ideas about perception and reality. The 'what' in the stem asks for a discussion of the ideas, rather than an analysis of how they are conveyed. However, it is not inappropriate to address components of techniques in response to this question. Also, the question asks the students to explore the similarities rather than the differences; however, those who explore the nuances of difference within broader similarities will still be responding within the scope of the question.

Both texts present the idea that what we perceive to be truth may not be the reality. In 'Witches' Loaves' Miss Martha has formed a supposed love interest from conclusions drawn from a series of brief meetings. Clues such as the customer's clothes being 'worn and darned in places', the fact that he only ever bought stale bread at reduced prices, and his apparent interest in her painting and its poor perspective lead her to believe he is a 'poor artist'. Her affections are stimulated by these perceptions and she believes that he craves her 'cheerful words' and that she could therefore be the one to provide for his financial and emotional needs. Archie similarly explores the idea — in more didactic fashion — that people's views of us are distorted, and are affected by stereotyping. He explores a range of examples from Chip, who views Archie as being '10 feet tall', to Big Moose, who views him as tiny, to Betty, who views him as a knight in shining armour. Archie's point that we view others through the lens of our own position is demonstrated in Miss Martha, who develops a distorted picture of the customer according to what she *wants* to be the reality. Ironically in the comic strip even those who are aware that our perceptions of reality may be distorted — in this case, Archie himself — may still be subject to erroneous judgment. The final frame indicates that Archie also has a distorted perception of himself, thus demonstrating his interpretation of Robert Burns's words: 'we never get to see ourselves as we really are'.

Yet perception does not change reality in either text. In the narrative, reality is brought home through the inclusion of the third character — 'a young man' who reveals the truth about the German and shatters all Miss Martha's illusions. Similarly in 'If you knew Archie like I know Archie', the visual representation reveals things as they actually are. In the final frame, although the mirror reveals Archie's distorted perception of himself, he remains to the reader of the text the same average young man.

Students may also point out that perceptions can make reality seem better than it is: Miss Martha is hopeful that she may have found a love interest; Archie believes he is a muscular Adonis. Also, people may act on their perceptions and thus make mistakes: Miss Martha inadvertently destroys the draftsman's plan; in the comic strip, the way people relate to others is based on their misconceptions.

(b) Students need to recognise that the reader is positioned to view the character Archie as confident through a range of stylistic features and devices. Their discussion may include:

- relaxed conversation with the reader. He uses colloquial language and brings in his own opinion in dialogue such as 'the way I dig it…' and 'personally, I disagree!' Also, in the way he 'breaks the fourth wall' and talks to them/us directly; students may cover the device of breaking the fourth wall in part (d).

- his question-and-answer style. He poses a hypothesis at the beginning of the comic and then provides evidence to support it throughout the text, and is confident in the accuracy of his observations.
- his body language, which suggests confidence. He has a laid-back sitting position in the third frame as he rocks back on the chair and begins to expound his theory; he walks, hands in pockets, with a strutting gait; in frames that have a close-up image he often raises his index finger to emphasise the point he is making. Also, in most of the frames he is depicted smiling and even the angle of his eyebrows is manipulated to suggest his confidence.
- the instructional tone he uses to directly address the reader (giving a sense of authority).
- his refuting of the perceptions of Robert Burns (a renowned poet), as if he knows better, casually calling Burns 'Robbie' and asserting that 'Robert Burns was wrong', the 'wrong' in bold. Other words in bold type throughout the text also reinforce this confidence.
- the very confident character shown in the final frame (even though we laugh at him).

(c) The author of the narrative positions the reader to sympathise with Miss Martha through a range of stylistic features and devices. Students' discussion may include:

- her circumstances, being unmarried at forty when 'Many people have married whose chances to do so were much inferior to Miss Martha's' and the early description of her as having 'a sympathetic heart' (a phrase that recurs through the text).
- her genuine interest in the German man — she has no hidden agenda and wants only his admiration.
- the author's sharing Miss Martha's hopes and dreams with us, through a third-person narrative position — 'Miss Martha's heart, as you have been told, was a sympathetic one'; and also the misguided, yet admirable, determination that leads her to 'seize the opportunity'.
- as Miss Martha is the protagonist, she is developed more fully than any other character; we keep coming back to her view of the situation and her hopes. The reader is also given access to her imagination.
- the abrupt ending, which creates sympathy — the narrative has progressed very slowly to create a sense of connection between the reader and Miss Martha, whose illusions are abruptly shattered through the dialogue of the 'young man'. The fact that she is disappointed also affects the reader.

(d) The most successful answers will integrate a comparison of the stylistic features used in both texts to convey ideas (the plural suggesting more than one idea will be covered, such as perception and reality, misunderstandings, the desire for connection, the confidence of youth etc.) and discuss the effect of the devices in the texts. It is possible to consider separately the features used in each text, but the comparison element must be explicitly attended to in some way and the discriminator will often be the quality of the integration in the answer. Students may have covered a number of stylistic features in their previous answers and should be given credit for this.

Some of the stylistic features students might explore include the:

- structure of both texts. O. Henry builds up the character of Miss Martha from the beginning of the text before adding any complication; in contrast, Archie ponders a philosophical question, using evidence from his own life in order to explore the idea of perception and reality.

- ending of both texts, which reveals the central idea of perception versus reality (the young man's revelations in O. Henry and the final frame in Archie). Both endings then undercut the position/view that was established earlier. Miss Martha's changing of her dress and disposing of her 'quince seed and borax mixture' and Archie's final frame, where the real Archie and 'Archie's view' of Archie are presented, reinforce the characters' misguided points of view.
- way in which O. Henry creates sympathy for Miss Martha, in order to explore the idea of perception and reality, so that the reader feels for her when her dream of romance falls apart. Imagery of Miss Martha's heart occurs several times in the text: her 'sympathetic heart', her 'heart ached', her 'fluttering of the heart'. Her change in appearance, her blushing, and the comments 'her artist' and 'these were day-dreams' all create sympathy for the lonely woman. These images also convey the theme of romantic illusion and potential (and inevitable) disappointment. However, Archie does not need our sympathy (he is secure in his own sense of self) and this serves to humorously reveal his own illusions. The authors make us feel differently for the characters in order to convey a similar idea.
- structural element of having the young man in the O. Henry text as the 'revealer' of the truth, taking us out of Miss Martha's view momentarily and reinforcing the idea of perception and reality. The reality of the situation, and her misreading of it, hit her in Blumberger's tirade, his ferocity as he calls her a 'meddlingsome old cat', his 'blue eyes blazing'. The young man's factual account brings us back to reality and away from Miss Martha's romantic illusions. Archie is similarly a young man who acts as a 'revealer'; yet he is in the foreground of the entire piece rather than being an emissary of reality who appears at the end. Ironically, he is subject to the same flawed perception that he has revealed in others.
- way in which bread is used as a thread throughout O. Henry's narrative and helps to explore ideas. Beginning with the foreshadowing title 'Witches' Loaves', the recurring image of bread at first relates to the 'artist' and Miss Martha's perception of his supposed lonely, impoverished existence in the descriptions 'two loaves of stale bread' and 'his dry crust'. The reference to baked goods then extends to include her romantic desire to share her 'chops and light rolls and jam and tea' and climaxes in her providing a 'generous quantity of butter' in the hope that 'He would slice into a loaf — Ah!' The bread imagery continues as her romantic dream is destroyed by the reality of the young man's comment 'well, you know, ma'am, that butter isn't — well Blumberger's plan isn't good for anything now except to cut up into railroad sandwiches'.
- slow revelation via the imagery of bread, contrasting with the philosophical question posed by Archie in the comic as we follow his argument, which he attempts to answer by using evidence from his own life. Both are structural elements that give shape to each text.
- imagery and formal, almost old-fashioned, figurative language that O. Henry uses (for example, the politeness of 'Butter was no emblem of maidenly forwardness'), helping to convey the idea of romantic illusion. This contrasts with the colloquial language in the Archie comic and the slang used by the protagonist (such as 'I dig it', 'c'mon', 'I flip') which build the reader's sense of his confidence and emphasise the idea of the bravado of youth.
- comic and symbolic use of visual imagery in Archie to convey ideas such as perception and reality and the (often false) confidence of youth, as in the following examples:
  - Archie looks in the vase and sees himself reflected in a distorted manner.
  - The stance and costuming of Archie as a 'playboy', a man of the world.
  - The mid-shot framing of Archie's mother holding him as a swaddled baby with 'Goo! Goo! Gurgle! Burp!' written above him.

  - The ‘low-angled shot’ looking up at Archie from the perspective of the small boy, Chip, and the reverse to a high angle when he is talking to Moose.
  - The positioning of Archie as if he was a wind-up toy as Veronica turns the key in his back.
  - The image of him literally melting to a puddle, suggesting his reaction to her.
  - The depiction of him as a knight on a horse, with the surrounding clouds suggesting an idealised view, and hearts over an adoring Betty’s head.
  - The image that juxtaposes the real Archie — an average teenage boy — with the idealised view of himself as tall, handsome, mature, and muscular, with the two Archies placed on opposite sides of the frame.
- use of bold type for certain words in the Archie comic, helping to stress the central idea in the piece, that of perception and reality. The words that are in bold often stress the point that the character or the text is making; this is then subverted in the final frame where ‘**I**’ and ‘**REAL**’ are in bold.
- limited third-person perspective of the O. Henry text, giving us glimpses into Miss Martha’s thoughts; however, at the end we are also given a sense of Blumberger and the young man which reinforces the idea of perception and reality and the fragility of romantic illusions. This is in contrast to the breaking of the fourth wall when Archie speaks directly to the reader. Archie is also often positioned at the front of the frame, looking directly out of the frame at the reader.

English Studies
Chief Assessor