



GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2007 there were again many excellent responses and fewer very brief or incomplete responses. Most students seemed to understand the nature of the examination task.

The best responses demonstrated an enviable facility with language and the ability to work closely with the given passages, analysing the language in the passages in detail. Such answers were perceptive and showed an overall understanding of the text and its concerns and values and of the way in which the text had been constructed. However, too many students failed to respond to the question, which requires students to **base** their discussion on one or more of the selected passages. They should aim to develop their discussion from the passage(s) given rather than imposing a prepared reading on the passages or even, as happened too often, ignoring the passages completely.

Many students demonstrated poor English skills. Literature is a subject which requires careful analysis and response to language. Sadly, some students used none of this attention to detail in their own writing.

There were some, fortunately very few, students who wrote on two novels. It is difficult to see how teachers can allow this to happen. The study design, past examination papers, assessment reports and the VCE Literature Assessment Handbook make it abundantly clear that in the examination students are required to write on two different kinds of texts.

Students should be discouraged from referring to the authors of the texts by their first names. It is not recommended that students write in the first person, as this is not the accepted convention. They should also be advised not to place a number of single words in inverted commas, often doing so several times in one sentence. This tends to make the essay somewhat incoherent. Similarly, there is little point in students quoting at considerable length; some students quoted for over half a page, which did not advance their interpretation very far. Students should also be discouraged from writing in pencil; after the script has been handled by two or three assessors the writing begins to fade and is difficult to read.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Essay 1

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

Essay 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	3	5	6	8	11	13	13	10	9	6	4	2	1	12.7

Novels

There were some very good answers on all of the novels, but by far the most popular choice was *The Great Gatsby*. Strong responses here were able to draw a parallel between the manipulation of Nick by both Daisy and Gatsby and their respective uses of their smile and voice. *Regeneration* answers were almost uniformly strong; some students chose not to discuss the Sassoon poem in passage three, but others were able to construct their answer around it most effectively. *Ragtime* responses were often excellent and some students were able to reflect something of the tone and movement of the text in their answers. The *Washington Square* essays were very good, with many students seeing an opportunity to work closely with the language in the second passage. Students working with the de Kretser and Patchett texts offered a range of readings but these were generally well supported. There were only a few responses on *The White Earth* and these were of a rather mixed standard. Students generally wrote well on the Austen and Garner texts.

Plays

There were very few answers on *Art* and *Under Milk Wood* but all other texts were popular. It is important to have a sense of the text as drama when writing and some students demonstrated this very well, as the following example shows.

In the first passage the stage directions depict Hedda raising her arms and clenching her hands in fury, creating an image of Hedda pacing through her marital home like a caged lion. Ibsen subsequently uses the glass door to show Hedda's lack of satisfaction with her married life; it is both a symbol of her imprisonment and acts to shut her off from the gaiety of the outside world, a masculine world of parties and singers of dubious repute.



Many answers on *Antigone* were excellent; students clearly responded very well to this text. Answers on both of the Shakespeare texts were mixed. There were fewer essays on the Ibsen and Chekhov texts this year, but these were generally well handled, particularly *Hedda Gabler*. In general, the responses on *Hotel Sorrento* and *Honour* were good, although some of the weaker responses to the former text offered only very slight and superficial essays, sometimes drawing on the film version.

Short Stories

Carver was the popular choice here, and overall was second only to *The Great Gatsby*. The text produced some excellent responses but also some very poor ones. Too many students commented on one or two of the stories in isolation, without any real sense of the whole text, as the question required, and many limited their discussion only to what was printed on the paper. The best students were able to write about Carver's techniques and concerns, drawing on the passages to support their views. Responses on *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* were generally able to offer this overview, perhaps because the first passage itself set out many concerns of the text. There were hardly any answers on the Byatt stories.

Other Literature

There were very few responses to texts in this part. The few responses to *Bypass: The Story of a Road* tended to be less concerned with close textual analysis; however, the description of the picnic atmosphere among the striking truckies in the second passage did lend itself to some good discussion. Students sometimes used the first passage to lead into a discussion of the more philosophical concerns of the text.

Poetry

The popular choices here were Wright and Donne and there were excellent responses on both. Students found plenty of opportunities to discuss Wright's views and values in their analysis. Some clearly found the third extract challenging, and it was sometimes ignored, but those who attempted it, especially if they were familiar with the ending of the poem, often wrote very well. Similarly, students who wrote on Donne seemed to find *Satire 3* more difficult and many therefore concentrated on the other two poems, perhaps mentioning that Donne also wrote religious poetry of which the *Satire* was an example. A detailed discussion of two extracts with some general comments about the body of work studied can be perfectly adequate. The poems by Auden and Larkin, in general, proved far too challenging for some students and there were some very garbled and fairly incoherent attempts. There were a few Kinsella responses and these were competent, and a very few on Adamson.

Student examples

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

The following excerpts from responses show the different approaches to starting the essay and clearly signpost how the student intends to use the given passages.

Sophocles constructs 'Antigone' through sharp clashes and contrasts in characterisation. Paradoxically through these he affirms the danger of a polarised world view, in favour of one that does justice to the full complexity of human experience.

Physicality centres the meaning of Donne's poetry. In these three given poems he conveys the doubt and passion of the speaker through central tensions between, and patterns of, physical imagery.

The image of 'The boy ran through the house on silent feet' suggests an almost Gothic sense of mystery, uncertainty and lost innocence which comes to shape this child, Sam Obeyesekere, into de Kretser's protagonist, whose distorted values and cultural confusion serve as a metaphor for the catastrophic results of the British colonisation of Ceylon.

'Washington Square' tells a poignant tale of how Catherine Sloper's naivety and innocent ignorance are played upon by her lover, her father and her aunt. Henry James paints a complex picture of a young girl who is taken advantage of in a most cruel and scathing way.

Judith Wright's poetry is permeated with the elemental connection that exists between humans and the natural world, as demonstrated in 'South of My Days', and she often employs images of the landscape to express human emotion as in 'Some Words'. There is a strong sense in her work of intergenerational links, whether through the stories of 'Old Dan' or through the conversational and wry voice of Eve addressing the next generation in 'Eve to Her Daughters'.

The ability to respond to language, to work closely with the text and to analyse the ways in which words have been used, and to what effect, is really what defines the Literature study and differentiates it from other subjects, such as



English, where more emphasis is placed on studying the content and themes of a text. Certainly, this ability separates the average from the excellent Literature response. Below are some examples of responses which demonstrated this excellent understanding of language.

In 'Satire 3' the passion of the speaker's plea for a rational search for Truth is conveyed through the force of the poetic imagery. The poem bursts into being with 'Kind pity chokes my spleen'. The reference to 'spleen' is simultaneously and ambiguously physical and psychological, reflecting the emotion of the speaker. 'Chokes' dominates the opening line; the kindness of pity seems merely descriptive. Donne employs a central tension between hot and cold to build upon this conflict. The static 'frozen' is woven with the slimy chill of 'thrice /Colder than salamanders'.

'The Flea' is infused with its sheer liveliness through a central physical conceit. The physicality of 'It sucked me first and now sucks thee' is defiant and playful. The alliterated audacity and rough physicality of 'sucked' and 'sucks' challenges, yet the language of the opening stanza, with its references to 'swells' and 'blood' bespeaks life.

Ismene begins with a tone of desperation 'O think, Antigone,' the fragmented rhythm conveys a feeling of frustrated emotion. In contrast to Antigone, she espouses the common values of the time, where as women it was unfeasible 'to fight against men'. Ismene throws light on the character of Antigone, highlighting her as the protagonist. Antigone's speech begins with a clipped, fragmented rhythm with 'No; then I will not', the sure, resolute tone contrasting with Ismene's desperation. Her values are revealed through the imagery, heavily inscribed with love and her sense of family.

In Passage three Lear enters the stage physically burdened with the body of his dead daughter in his arms. His suffering is so great that he can only speak animal utterances, 'Howl, howl, howl!' Shakespeare clearly shows us how language can be insufficient to express deepest emotions. The animalistic noises serve to emphasise the ultimate tragedy; Cordelia's gratuitous death seemingly extinguishes any chance of justice. As much as the raging Lear desires it, Heaven's vault will not crack.

Some students continue to struggle with the requirement to demonstrate a subtle understanding of how the author's views and values are implicit in the text. Too often they fell back on a mechanical approach, sometimes tacking on a covering comment at the end of the essay or adding extraneous details about the author's background. The best answers were able to incorporate comments on views and values through the essay as part of their analysis, as the following examples demonstrate.

While the unwitting harm humans have inflicted on the landscape is hinted at in 'South of My Days', with the use of the negative verbs 'choked', 'silenced' and 'blotched', used to suggest the incursion of European exotics on the Australian landscape. In 'Eve to Her Daughters' the harm inflicted is much more directly stated and is seen as a result of Adam's hubris. Wright is seriously critical of the consumerism rampant in our society and her views are expressed, albeit in a light-hearted and humorous way, through the conversational voice of the long-suffering Eve.

In her novel 'Bel Canto' Patchett presents the reader with an image of the potential beauty of humanity; yet she shows us that such beauty is, and can only be, transitory, unable to overcome the power of political and social structures the 'intractable' government, the 'firing of guns'.

Through his collection, Kinsella seeks to depict the importance of finding 'clarity' and actively attempting to see the reality of the environment which surrounds us. His poetry challenges our assumptions and inverts our expectations so that we may view our society from a new perspective, in a 'peripheral light'.

Throughout the play, Creon stubbornly denounces the idea of allegiance to divine law as sacrament; he asserts that the 'common weal' of his state is dependent on devotion to the regulations and laws of one's country. Yet Sophocles demonstrates that for the Ancient Greeks it was the law of the Divine, the 'ancient law' that was held in the highest regard. It was however, necessary to discover an appropriate balance, to act with 'wisdom' yet to 'hold the Gods in awe'.

Doctorow shows the significance of discovering one's true self in his novel in passage two, not only does the sexuality of Evelyn come forth but also that of Mother's Younger Brother, which emerges, literally, from out of the closet. Within this passage Doctorow highlights the different representations of women that Emma and Evelyn offer.

In the third passage Doctorow ironically juxtaposes Father with the embracing man. Father, 'on the floor with his back to the marble wall' is a lonely figure, one representing the conservative values of the old world, set in his ways. The passage has an even more symbolic close as if conservative America resigns itself to its fate 'against the wall' a black man will stand with his 'hands poised on the plunger' of a bomb, literally moments away from obliterating the old world.

Students should be encouraged to develop their own writing skills. Some responses made little sense because of limited language and grammatical skills or inappropriate clichés. Many students were able to write concisely and to make a good point in a few words, such as, 'Carver articulates what his characters cannot' and 'This passage is an example of Elinor's method of navigating her social world'.

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Capable students demonstrated an understanding of the whole text. Good answers on Wright's poetry were able to refer to the final stanza of *Eve to Her Daughters* and to the other sections of *Some Words* which gave their answers greater complexity. Similarly, the unprinted sections of *Sixty Acres* and *Neighbours* would have offered further insights into the characters within the Carver stories.