



2008

English GA 3: Examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2008 English examination assessed student achievement in the knowledge and skills indicated in the new *VCE English Study Design*.

The examination consisted of three sections. Section A (Text response) offered students the choice of two topics for each of the twenty texts on the VCAA Text List 1 and students were required to complete one response. Section B (Writing in Context) offered students a writing scenario and a prompt for each of the four Contexts. Section C (Analysis of language use) required students to analyse the ways in which language and visual features were used in the newsletter of a local sports club.

Scores were awarded for each response based on the criteria for each Section, applied holistically and students were ranked over the full range of available marks. The descriptors of the ‘Expected Qualities for the Mark Range – Examination’ can be found on the VCAA website by following the link to the Exam Criteria from the English study page. These descriptors are based on the criteria and are general indicators of what might reasonably be expected for the specified mark ranges in each section of the examination. Assessors used the descriptors to make specific judgements about the characteristics of responses to the examination.

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

More than 40 000 students sat for the 2008 English examination and, in this first year of the new study design, assessors were generally impressed with the skills and qualities shown by the majority of students. Most students responded well and presented three completed pieces of writing that demonstrated an understanding of the knowledge and skills required in the course. Both the quality and quantity of work produced was quite sound, and at times impressive. The growing awareness of the value of close textual knowledge and careful management of response structure indicates sound teaching and learning.

On the other hand, it should be noted that:

- this is an English examination and strong language skills (including correct spelling and grammar) are expected and necessary for success
- the importance of engaging with the actual elements of the topic or prompt cannot be overemphasised. Too often students obviously referred to previous years’ topics rather than grappling with the specifics of the topic offered in this examination. Students need to contemplate the specific issues offered by the topic presented to them, considering the implications of the topics before they begin writing. This was true of the prompt in Section B. Students must pay attention and deal with the instructions and prompt, and may not write whatever they wish in an examination
- it is recommended that students organise their time so that enough time is left to proofread their work. While handwriting is not assessed directly, it must be legible. It is accepted that there is obvious pressure in an examination, but there were occasions when words or phrases could not be deciphered. It should be noted, however, that this year there were very few unfinished pieces.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The student responses provided below are presented for illustrative and informative reasons, and they may form the basis of profitable discussions. These examples should not be taken as ‘the best’ that is possible or as ‘perfect’; indeed, none is without shortcomings of one sort or another. In this Assessment Report, however, they have been selected both as typical of the better responses from 2008 and as material that may be of some use for improving learning of the new English study. Readers will obviously be able to make many more observations about the quality of these responses beyond the brief comments offered herein.

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



Section A – Text response

The two topics enabled students to address the knowledge and skills as outlined in the study design. The choice between topics allowed students to develop a sustained discussion from the aspects of key knowledge for Outcome 1 in Units 3 and 4:

- the ideas, characters and themes constructed by the author/director and presented in the selected text
- the way the author/director uses structures, features and conventions to construct meaning
- the ways in which authors/directors express or imply a point of view and values
- the ways in which readers' interpretations of texts differ and why.

These aspects of text study were reflected in the topics offered in the examination, providing students with an 'entry point' for their discussion. All topics required student responses to address the full range of key knowledge and skills, and to be supported by detailed analysis and specific reference to the selected text. There is little doubt that students continue to develop their skills in responding to texts. It was evident that most students selected a topic with which they felt they could demonstrate their understanding of the text. Students showed strong familiarity with the text and demonstrated the capacity to use the text in exploring their ideas. There were far fewer responses that simply provided a plot summary, suggesting that students have been well taught how to select relevant supporting evidence. However, students should also be aware that they should not offer a series of examples that support the general premise of the topic without exploring its implications. An example of this could be seen in responses to *The Kite Runner* (i.) where less successful responses simply offered a series of examples of Amir's experiences with insufficient exploration of his reconciliation with the past.

Similarly, there was considerable improvement in students' understanding of the genre of their selected text. This has been developed demonstrably over recent years. Finally, in regards to the text itself, students should be encouraged to have confidence in their own reading and demonstrate a personal understanding of their text rather than simply writing what they believe the assessor is looking for. There is no 'expected' response to a topic and the most successful pieces were those that were thoughtful and fresh. The assessor does not have to agree with the interpretation of a topic or text, but students must be able to support their interpretations with insightful evidence from the text. If students have an excellent knowledge of their text and a grasp of the topic, then they should be confident and bold when constructing their essays and presenting their ideas.

Students should be taught to look critically at the wording of the topic and to consider what assumptions are being made within it. It is still a problem that too many students want to respond to their own question rather than grappling with the ideas of the set topic. It is evident that students would benefit from more practice analysing and distinguishing different topics and approaches.

Where statements on the topic appear to be absolute statements (for instance, *King Richard III* [i.], *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [ii.], Poe, [i.]), students need to have the confidence to consider to what extent they agree with the statement based on their understanding of the text.

The 2008 course placed greater focus on the ways in which structures, features and conventions are used to construct meaning. Clearly this has been taught and learned well as most students that chose a 'construction' type question capably responded. Many of the more successful responses incorporated sophisticated insights into how the author or director was operating in their discussions of a theme or character. Continued exploration of this in class and improving the ability to incorporate structural features with relevance into the discussion, can only increase the standard of a student's essay. It should be noted, however, that when a topic asks students to look at a film-maker's use of visual imagery, it is not an invitation to simply describe all of the images in the film, but rather to describe how it operates and why it is being used to add meaning.

While there were many examples where students were able to incorporate features and structures developed by the author or director, the following is an example where a student has neatly discussed how Bolt has effectively used stage instructions to add meaning.

The 'pragmatist' Thomas Cromwell is given the task of 'catching the slippery fish, More'. In order to achieve this task, Cromwell conveys that it may not be about 'finding the right law' but rather 'making one'. Cromwell has no respect for the sanctity of the law and this is in stark contrast to More. Cromwell simply acts to do what appears to be most expedient. Cromwell acknowledges that his failure to catch More could result in his death, as Cardinal Wolsey was to suffer this fate. Cromwell intentionally stacks the jury at More's trial, as he cunningly indicates, 'the jury need not retire.' Following this unjust trial, Bolt employs the use of the stage direction 'the trappings of justice are flown upwards' to demonstrate the corruption of men in the self-satisfying society.



Examples of topics which focused on the structures, features and conventions to construct meaning included: *Generals Die in Bed* (i.), *In the Lake of the Woods* (i.) and *Look Both Ways* (i.).

Students must explore and develop **all** parts of the topic. Too often, competent responses did not achieve their potential because they focused on only one portion of the topic and ignored another. Often there is a tension between two or more parts to a topic and, where elements are juxtaposed, students need to look at how they are contrasted, as well as what this might reveal. The most common examples of topics that were only partially considered included the following.

- *Look Both Ways*: Does the film-maker's use of visual imagery and setting help or hinder the viewer's understanding of the concerns of the characters?

In this case too many students ignored the 'setting', which is an important part of the topic.

- *Don't Start Me Talking*: 'Paul Kelly's lyrics demonstrate that a sense of optimism is no protection against the unpredictable world.' Discuss.

Many students discussed and explored the notion of an unpredictable world, while fewer linked the concept of optimism. Few students responded to the notion of 'optimism is no protection'.

- *Maestro*: 'Everything grew larger than life in the steamy hothouse of Darwin, and the people were no exception.' How important is place in this novel?

Students were well prepared in discussing the various settings of the novel ('steamy hothouse of Darwin') but did not explore another key focus of the topic, 'the people were no exception', in the same depth.

Finally, almost without exception, students demonstrated a good understanding of how to write an essay. Clear introductions, appropriate paragraphing and the ability to embed quotations appropriately were a feature of most pieces. However, these basic skills must continue to be reinforced, including the ability to build more sophisticated vocabulary, to improve grammar and to focus more on sentence structure. It is apparent that students who write plot summaries or simplistic character discussions often have not structured their paragraphs adequately and offer a topic sentence that is plot-driven rather than conceptual. This can then send them in an undesired direction. Teachers are also encouraged to continue to work with students on appropriate quoting as long turgid quoting that was not relevant did not add to the success of an essay.

Another important consideration is an understanding of the role of the narrator. Several topics challenged students to consider the impact of the narrator and their perceptions towards other characters and to their world. Most notably, the topics offered for *In the Lake of the Woods* (i.), *Generals Die in Bed* (i.), *Romulus* (ii.) and *A Man For All Seasons* (i.) called for students to consider the role of the narrator and how those perceptions were conveyed to the reader.

The following is a sample paragraph where the insight into narration adds a layer to the student's ideas.

It is also later in life that Amir learns of another secret – that of his father's. While Amir's own secret as a child affected his relationship with his father – guilt overcoming hero worship – it is Baba's lie about Hassan's true identity that can be seen to affect the entire family. The first person narration of the text means that the readers' view of Baba, while Amir is a child, is coloured by Amir's own bias, and so Baba truly appear as 'a force of nature'.

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

Text	% of students	Average mark
<i>Look Both Ways</i>	26.0%	5.7
<i>The Kite Runner</i>	13.8%	5.4
<i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>	9.5%	6.2
<i>A Man for All Seasons</i>	8.3%	6.3
<i>In the Lake of the Woods</i>	6.9%	5.9

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

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



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

The following are examples of high-scoring student responses.

Look Both Ways

'At the end of *Look Both Ways*, the film-maker convinces viewers that the characters are capable of looking at their lives in new ways.' Do you agree?

*Daniel Spagnoli once said, 'Life is but a series of moments put together to form memories from which the essence of life forms beauty and pain.' The essence of this reflection is compellingly portrayed in the award winning feature film, *Look Both Ways*, written and directed by Sarah Watt, which depicts the universality of life experience and how seemingly unrelated lives become intertwined and interconnected and the pain and beauty that ensues. *Look Both Ways* demonstrates that life is an unscripted event of which no one knows the final outcome and we can often become overwhelmed by how seemingly little control we exert over the navigation of our lives. However, by the conclusion of the film, Sarah Watt persuades us that via their own unique coping abilities, be it avoidance, anger or withdrawal, and their ultimate decisions, supported by actions, the film characters possess the ability to adopt a greater perspective of their relationships, health, careers, responsibilities, family and ultimately, their future.*

Unscripted and unpredictable, the tumultuous events of life can force people to re-evaluate their lives. Protagonists, Nick and Meryl, have both experienced the close personal deaths of their fathers and the unexpected public death of Rob and as such have both developed an irrational fear of their own mortality. Nick's fear is heightened by his recent diagnosis of testicular cancer and through their combined fear they develop a connection which is demonstrated by the shared shot of them walking home from the accident scene. The following separate shots, however, demonstrate individual challenges that isolate them from each other. Rocked by an unplanned pregnancy, Andy and Anna hold conflicting views about what this means for their futures, as is conveyed by the often significant distance between them and the varying heights at which they are positioned. They both must re-evaluate where their responsibilities lie. Forced to do some re-evaluating of her own, after the tragic death of her husband, Julia is often viewed framed by windows and doors which accentuates that we are mere onlookers to her isolated and private grief. Grappling with his own grief and guilt, scenes involving the train driver are generally watched in silence, which alludes to the fact that sometimes words cannot express our emotions. While not affected by a personal crisis, Phil is prompted to consider adjustments to his own lifestyle after Nick's diagnosis, which ignites his recognition that he is missing out on seeing his family grow up. Having already experienced her own unpredictable events due to the diagnosis and death of her husband, Joan represents the pragmatic voice of wisdom who recognises and accepts life's uncertainties. When forced to evaluate what lies ahead our ability to cope is imperative.

The ever practical Joan, wisely points out, 'everyone must find a way to face their own death...and life.' Consumed by her fear, Meryl can think of little but death as her idiosyncratic form of animations, featuring train crashes, gunmen, earthquakes and sharks, frequent her conscious mind. Rather than face her fears, Meryl copes by attempting to avoid them. This is demonstrated when she is bombarded by scenes of death in 'The Southern Mail' and she escapes by disposing of the paper. She also runs away after her argument with Nick as she is 'scared stupid' and tries to physically outrun her problems. Both Nick and Andy become very withdrawn from those around them. Nick becomes very introspective and begins to 'see death everywhere' in the form of everyday features including a pig carcass, which is representative of how he views his body, flowers and wreaths and workmen digging holes. The silence that envelopes him during this period is indicative of his internal focus. Angry and frustrated, the extent of Andy's distress over the pregnancy and his preoccupation with suicide is shown as he immaturely pops a bag of chips at the store and tells the gospel choir to 'shut up'. Similarly, Anna feels alienated and alone and is viewed staring wistfully at a world map, pondering escape. Julia's anger is accentuated by a zoomed shot of her furiously destroying a memorial made by Meryl as she attempts to progress through her grief by releasing her pent up fury. We understand that the train driver is attempting to cope with his own grief and guilt by returning to normality as he tinkers with his motorcycle. While all are unique in their quest to cope, it is an essential process towards their healing, and leads towards acceptance.

*In accepting the 'hand they've been dealt' the characters in *Look Both Ways* make their decision to alter their lives, as demonstrated in the final cross-cut editing. In choosing to be in a relationship with Nick, Meryl suppresses her fears in order to make a connection and start a new chapter in her life. Nick makes the decision to fight the cancer as he races the freight train as though metaphorically challenging death. It is not until Andy steps into someone else's shoes, in this case Rob's, that he realises that 'not everybody has an agenda' and 'things just happen'. Together he and Anna choose to share the responsibility despite their differences, conveyed by Anna on the balcony and Andy below. Julia and the Train Driver make the decision to move forward in their lives. She in the form of a memorial and he a condolence card. Phil too changes his perspective on life and realises his family is more important than his job as we see his happiness at his daughter's party. Also featured in this final cut is Joan, who witnesses the miracle survival of a 5 year old girl at the Arnow Hill disaster, which serves as a backdrop to all these private dilemmas, and with a wry smile, indicates she is at peace with the world.*

*As unpredictable as life is, maintaining perspective concerning what is truly important allows life to contain a degree of normality. Sarah Watt demonstrates that despite the challenges presented to them the characters in *Look Both Ways* were able to cope with and accept them and ultimately view their futures in a new light. While happiness and fulfilment is never guaranteed, the final montage suggests that happiness can arise from grief.*

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



Assessor comments

- The student assuredly addresses the topic.
- There is excellent textual support for the student's views.
- The student shows a capacity to explore the way in which the director adds meaning through cinematic techniques. There is nothing gratuitous about the comments relating to camera work, for example.
- The response is crafted so that it builds towards a view in relation to the topic; it is well structured.
- There is perhaps too much emphasis on the characters' problems when balanced against looking at their lives in new ways.
- Appropriate vocabulary is used, and language and expression are strong.
- Some of the paragraphs are quite complex and can feel somewhat convoluted.

Maestro

'Everything grew larger than life in the steamy hothouse of Darwin and the people were no exception.' How important is place in this novel?

Peter Goldsworthy's Maestro demonstrates the importance of setting in understanding characters such as the protagonists Paul Crabbe and Eduard Keller. Written in a retrospective narrative from Paul Crabbe's point of view, the novel is a reflection of Paul's adolescence and how the settings of 'steamy' Darwin, 'suburban' Adelaide and 'hypocritical' Vienna affected him and provided an insight to the nature of other pivotal characters.

Upon moving from Adelaide to Darwin, Paul immediately falls in love with the 'city of booze, blow and blasphemy'. Darwin is the backdrop to the sensual addiction Paul develops and feeds his heightened sense as a 'steamy and lush hothouse'. Radically different from Adelaide, Paul thrives in the new setting, as his character develops. Paul meets Keller, the 'Maestro' in Darwin and is fascinated by the first impression Keller leaves upon him. The formal white suit Keller wears contrasts with the Swan, the dark and casual hotel he inhabits, symbolising Keller's alienation and incongruity in Darwin. Described by Paul as a 'type of monastery...a place for atonement', Darwin and the Swan provide an insight into the Maestro's character. To Keller, Darwin symbolises the social and cultural isolation he craves as atonement for the crimes he believed he had committed.

Keller's history affects him so deeply he was changed by it, and to Paul he is merely a strict, authoritarian 'Nazi' at the introduction of Keller's character. Upon reflecting, Paul found it strange to realise how much he 'came to love the man, depend on him' from his first impressions. As a teacher Keller taught Paul incomplete lessons of music and life that Paul comes to regret not appreciating. On Paul's final night in Darwin he goes to the Swan with the intention of saying goodbye to Keller and then meeting with his girlfriend Rosie. Keller's acceptance of Paul as an important part of his life is symbolised through the new chair and table he has purchased for Paul, finally ready to share his mysterious history. However, Paul doesn't realise the confessional for what it was and with 'the aroused sexual present' overwhelming the past he leaves behind his broken teacher and surrogate father.

Keller's past and transition in nature from a 'romantic virtuosos' to strict teacher is shown through music and his descriptions of Vienna. After the Nazis rose to power, Keller describes the ballroom of Vienna being turned into 'the experimental laboratory for the end of the world' demonstrating that Keller's own world ended along with his love of Vienna. Keller's love for his wife Mathilde gave him rubato, and 'that extra littleness' that Paul could never achieve, which made Keller an exceptional musician. However, it buoyed his arrogance and belief of his own invulnerability which prevented him from realising the danger his Jewish family were in, in Vienna. To Paul, Vienna represents a European city of culture and music but to Keller it is a reminder of his lost family and regretted choices. Their difference in attitude towards the setting of Vienna and even Darwin is important in understanding the characters and history of both Paul and Keller.

Vienna is also the cause of Keller's mistrust and suspicion of beauty, as he says 'never trust the beautiful' is something Paul, as a young and naive man, can't understand. Keller describes Vienna as a veneer, 'hiding the hypocrisy within' in an attempt to teach Paul the lessons he had to learn through awful experiences. Paul and Keller's natures are contrasted by Goldsworthy in Maestro and their similarity is what causes Keller to endeavour to teach Paul. The confessional that Paul snubbed, a privilege that he failed to realise through selfishness and sensual addiction, was Keller's explanation and he told Paul this as he called out 'I tell you this, not for me, but for you.' Paul's rejection of the deep connection he shared with Keller is something he would come to regret as he strove to defy the limits of perfection Keller had shown him.

When Paul leaves the setting of Darwin to attend school, he takes an arrogance that let him believe Keller 'had taught all that was in his power to teach.' In comparison to 'lush' Darwin, Melbourne and Adelaide are mundane and suburban and perhaps symbolise the direction Paul's future will take, as he rejected Keller and the incomplete lessons he strove to teach. Paul realises he can't bridge the tragic gulf between talent and genius in his travels of Europe as he ignored Keller's advice of 'a little hurt now, to save a wasted life'. Vienna is a city of culture and music to Paul and the setting is important in understanding how he differs from his mentor, the Maestro.

The settings of Goldsworthy's Maestro are important in understanding the history and context of each character and their actions. The settings are significant in the novel as they contrast the characters to their surroundings and develop meaning such



as Keller's chosen isolation in Darwin. Each place in the novel symbolises differences and similarities and Goldsworthy positions the reader to observe the way the character understands and interacts with their surroundings, be it Darwin, Adelaide, the Swan or Vienna.

Assessor comments

- The topic is appropriately explored and focuses on place.
- There is a good selection of material from the text to support key ideas.
- The response contains appropriate use of quotations.
- An assured control of language and expression is shown, but not without its problems.
- There is perhaps insufficient development of the 'hothouse' of Darwin.
- There is an assurance about the response, which does not take a simple approach.

Section B – Writing in Context (Creating and presenting)

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

Most students demonstrated that they had gained a number of insights about the Context they had studied and many showed the capacity to present their insights in a controlled, fluent and well-written manner.

Assessment was based on the interrelationship among:

- the quality of writing in relation to the specified purpose
- the handling of the prompt
- the quality of ideas (this is formed by the study of the Context and from the texts).

In 2008 many students either did not read or disregarded the task material, which required writing for publication in a newspaper. Those who did respond with the specifics of the task in mind were awarded appropriately.

It had been made clear before the examination that students were not to offer a written explanation. While the majority followed this directive, some students did write a statement. These statements were regarded in the same way as a student's rough working or plan. They were not read by assessors and therefore not given an advantage over other students who followed the directive. If students wish to jot down a few ideas to help direct their writing then they are free to do so, but it will not be considered by the assessor.

Students presented a range of approaches to writing in their responses; however, overwhelmingly students selected an 'expository' approach. For too many, the approach to writing could be likened very much to a text response. Section B is not text response; it focuses equally on ideas and writing. Overreliance on a text may undermine the capacity to develop ideas that emerge from the prompt. Likewise, when considering the approach to writing chosen by the student, quotations should generally be used judiciously.

The text was often used as illustration to support a conceptual discussion and this worked well in responses which offered excellent insights. Weaker responses relied too much on the text and responded with great slabs of plot. The difference between successful and unsuccessful pieces in this regard was a conceptual discussion versus simplistic storytelling. Many responses leaned too heavily on the text and were not able to use the text as a conduit for exploring the Context. Often the quality of ideas appeared inhibited because students seemed afraid to move too far away from the text.

Weaker responses, on the other hand, also seemed to have pre-prepared introductions, which were obvious as they were often generic discussions of the Contexts. The introductions were followed by a passing recognition of the prompt with a number of examples included from one or two texts. Often the penultimate paragraph discussed a wider 'outside world' example. In these cases there was little engagement with the direction of the prompt nor any attempt to create an authentic piece of writing.

Conversely, a general treatise on conflict or identity with no textual referencing cannot achieve success. While text referencing does not have to be explicit, the piece of writing must be 'informed' beyond the common Context link.

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



The following is an example of a response that was considered too general and did not explore the prompt using the text.

'We can evade 'reality' but we cannot avoid the consequences of doing so.'

Reality isn't a pleasant thing, we all love to picture the world as perfect and growing up and having that story book life we had always wished for. Although that will never happen, because that's reality. This is the reason most people become miserable and unhappy, because they need to get in the real world and face the fact, reality isn't a nice thing, its dangerous. While everyone is living in a superior world, building their lives upon lies and ignoring the facts about what is really going on around us, when they finally get into reality they cannot understand, they just cant handle the truth. The world is a beautiful place, but then again its also a very scary place. While people are worry about what new car they are buying next, our unrenewable petrol supply is running out. Or how much money they are going to spend on their fairy-tail wedding, when half the world is suffering extreme poverty. This is the reason we are being bombarded with all this bad news, because we have been ignoring the truth and now were having to deal with the consequences. We have come to the point were we have to change our ways, not because we chose to, there is no other choice. Which is pathetic, this world has grown to become dependent on money and greed. But does that really matter, when in a few years time our earth is destroyed. If everyone used their brains and realised what was really important. Reality wouldn't be that harsh, because we would be prepared for it. That's the way it is, as much as you try and ignore it, reality is always waiting for you around the corner.

Stronger responses had a greater conceptual understanding of the implications of the ideas of the prompt, the text(s) and the Context.

Students who attempted a more imaginative approach generally directly employed the text as a basis for their work. Less often students used the text in implicit ways, often beyond, however, their capacity to do so. Some did little more than reuse the basic plot, perhaps in a modern setting. Others created hypothetical scenarios which placed the characters in a different setting and time. While this could be successful, too often in these cases the stories were trite and superficial. Like all responses these were of varying success. Some pieces, however, bore virtually no connection to the prompt or one of the texts.

Some imaginative approaches are included in the samples at the end of this report.

Some of the best responses were imaginative. Capable students demonstrated the capacity to create an engaging piece of writing, weaving insights and explorations of both the Context and the prompt into their story or narrative. This task is equally about ideas and writing, so those students who could produce an artful piece were highly rewarded.

A potential problem, however, is when a student creates an imaginative response using a particular text but then does little more than retell the plot of the story and offer a cursory nod at the prompt. Whatever approach to writing a student decides on, they must explore the ideas of the prompt, the Context and the text.

Use of text

There can be no definitive advice on the success of relying on a single text or employing both (or more). Some students used the two texts expertly to demonstrate exceptions and qualifications while others did little more than use the second text to add more of the same examples.

Some students who relied on a single text were able to develop a more coherent response than those who felt they were required to use both texts, and were unable to make the transition from one text to the other in a coherent, fluent manner.

It appeared that in general, students who used more texts needed to be more skilled in pulling the ideas together seamlessly.

Outside/extraneous material

Similar to the use of multiple texts, students who 'forced' outside material into their writing without considering how it might fit conceptually would sometimes end with absurd scenarios. This use of material needs to be congruent with the ideas surrounding it.

Likewise, the ability to fluently incorporate the material is important and when it works, it is excellent. Far too often responses were formulaic in nature; in many cases, this resulted in writing that was forced and clunky.



Responding to the prompt

Most students were able to consider the prompts and respond to them. Students who seemed to ignore the prompts or come in with prepared responses did not have the same success as those who dealt with the prompt appropriately.

Although a prompt is a springboard for a piece of writing rather than a topic, students **must** deal with and **explore** the central ideas. The prompt ‘angle’ compels students to address the key direction of the prompt; a ‘big idea’ relevant to this Context. For example, in this year’s prompt for identity and belonging, the focus was on relationships. For students to achieve success they needed to have explored the notion of relationships as the principal idea of their piece of writing.

Information on assessing the Context

CONTEXT	%	Mean	Most popular text
Encountering Conflict	37.03%	5.3	<i>The Crucible</i>
Identity and Belonging	30.86%	5.5	<i>Witness</i>
Whose reality?	19.47%	5.5	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>
The Imaginative Landscape	12.64%	5.6	<i>Fly Away Peter</i>

Final advice

- formulaic approaches were limiting, for example:
 - stages such as childhood, adolescence and adulthood, or family, friends, co-workers
 - starting with the questions ‘Who am I?’ or ‘How do we define who we are?’
- avoid memorised responses – working with the prompt is the key
- use texts as vehicles, not as the centre of the task
- avoid narrative retelling of the plot
- teach/learn a variety of approaches to writing
- incorporate texts in ways appropriate to styles of writing
- practise writing in a range of approaches
- explore the context outside the set texts so that students have more to draw on when creating ideas
- work on incorporating material into a piece of writing so that it is not convoluted or loses direction
- ensure there is adequate practice and strategies for exploring the prompt
- assist students to develop greater sophistication with imaginative pieces
- encourage students to develop pieces that are well crafted
- explore the ideas of the Context first, then explore the text – this may avoid the text becoming too much of the focus
- teach the use of text as explaining complexity, not merely as simple illustration

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

Teachers should be aware that the VCAA has published information about the instructions for Section B of the English examination which will apply in 2009. Minor amendments to the exam specifications and sample examination can be downloaded from the VCAA website.

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

It is evident from assessors’ comments and examination responses that the scenario presented in 2008 was both engaging and interesting to students. The piece for analysis was a newsletter written by the coach of a local sports team that promoted good sportsmanship and challenged aggressive parents to consider the impact they were having on their children, the club and the sport. It is interesting to note that the coach uses the very first ‘Club News’ (Volume 1, Issue 1) to voice his dismay at the behaviour of some parents in the previous season.

The material was to be seen as a single piece of writing, but offered students variety in language use within the text. It opened with a personal story from a team member and also contained a poignant cartoon that supported the key ideas the coach was attempting to convince his audience – primarily the parents and supporters of the local sports team. Most students understood this and it was pleasing to see that many were able to offer the appropriate context of their analysis. Very few students failed to understand that the coach had purposely chosen the cartoon to support his contention; however those who did, discussed the cartoon as a separate entity and ignored its place in the newsletter.



The breadth of such material enabled nearly all students to respond to the task, which demonstrates the continued development of this skill throughout Victoria. Most students demonstrated a solid understanding of the task and even the less able students found some words that were used to have an impact on the reader. Simplistic listings of persuasive techniques were very rarely seen in responses. The best responses showed excellent analysis that was quite sophisticated and showed an understanding of the links in language and the construction of argument.

Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement and students should be encouraged to be more specific in their analyses. Too many students offered a general discussion rather than a specific impact on the audience. Comments such as 'grab the readers' attention' or 'to get the reader interested' are far too generalised and vague. Likewise, students need to go beyond statements such as 'makes the reader feel sad' and explore the implication of this intention in relation to the writer's purpose. Teachers should spend time throughout the year drawing attention to the impact of specific words and phrases intentionally selected by the writer to support the purpose of the piece.

The best responses deliberately set out to explore and analyse the way **language** was used in attempting to persuade parents. These students were often able to offer insights into the construction of the newsletter and the way in which the readers' ideas were being directed. Students showed both the capacity to focus on the finer detail as well as the ability to focus more broadly and understand where the reader is intellectually taken.

The cartoon was very popular and virtually all students were able to discuss the ideas with some understanding. While detail is important – and many students studied the cartoon very carefully – it can also be a problem for students who simply describe the cartoon and do not analyse its meaning and purpose. On the other hand, insightful comments and wonderful observations were made regarding the various facial expressions of the audience and how this fit in with the message of the newsletter.

The analysis of visual material throughout the year seemed to clarify the task for students when analysing the written word. This may be an effective means of teaching at younger year levels rather than focusing on language technique identification, which unfortunately still appeared on occasion.

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

In the local sports club newsletter, Coach Sam constructed a controlled, calculated presentation in a column directed to the parents of the club. The coach aimed to express to the parents that they were role models for their children and therefore have a responsibility to demonstrate to their kids what good sportsmanship is and how to behave appropriately.

The structure that the coach employed was effective as it demonstrated in a logical sequence the many different reasons 'good sportsmanship' is necessary on the playing field. He did this through the use of odd sub-headings, segregating each paragraph.

By opening with anecdotal evidence, the writer positioned the reader to become engaged and feel a personal and emotional connection to the issue. By emotively appealing to sympathy, the coach creates a vision of Emily 'failing', or feeling as though she had failed because of her father's inappropriate behaviour. Through emphatic language such as 'desperately' the coach engaged the audience and coerced them into feeling Emily's father's actions were unfair.

After setting up the audience to feel sympathetic, the coach continues to persuade the audience by using the metaphor 'toxic parents are poisoning our club'. The play on the words 'toxic' and 'poisoning' set the reader up to feel that their actions could be killing the club in the same way poison would kill a person. The word 'toxic' also creates an impression that the behaviour of parents such as Emily's is vile and dangerous therefore swaying the reader to feel that they do not want to be associated with or act like those types of parents.

The coach then continues to follow a logical sequence by appealing to the parents' desire to be heroic under the next subheading 'What is good sportsmanship'. Coach Sam plays on the idea that all parents would like to be perceived as heroes by their own children and by acting aggressively and unsportsmanlike they will not be able to accomplish this. The Coach uses words such as 'persevere' and 'behave with dignity – whether they win or lose a game' to paint a picture in the parents' minds of what it means to be 'truly heroic'. This is supported by the evidence of the winner who clearly exhibited true heroism by helping his fallen rival, enticing the parents to believe and remember that acts of kindness and support are far more heroic than degrading and pressuring your own children.

Furthermore, throughout the article the Coach uses inclusive and exclusive language to create a divide between the 'heroic' parents who care for their children and the aggressive unsportsmanlike parents such as Emily's. The emphasis on the word 'you' in the question 'what sort of parent are you?' specifically uses exclusive language to position the reader on the outer if they feel they act like this. By then continuing to use predominantly inclusive language after that such as 'we remember' and 'why waste our Saturdays', the Coach coerces the reader into feeling they would rather be a part of the good side of the coach's rather than a 'lout'. This helps the reader to feel personally involved and therefore feel that inappropriate behaviour is unacceptable.

The cartoon image included in the column works effectively by mocking parents who display bad sportsmanship comparing them to a donkey, hardly a heroic animal. The most effective part of the picture is the expressions on the people surrounding the



donkey who are significantly smaller in proportion. The humiliated and 'distraught' look on the child's face resembles an emotion no parents would want their children to feel, let alone be the ones making them feel like that. While the disgraced behaviour positioning the reader to hope that other parents don't look at them that way. Finally the speech box completes the image as it conveys to the audience that they might be unaware of how vile they appear to the other parents. The picture is intended to be an over-the-top recreation of parents' on court antics to demonstrate in a clear fashion why the audience should feel that this behaviour is inappropriate.

The cliché and exclusive language in the final paragraph sends a clear cut message to all the parents reading the column. By using the cliché 'actions speak louder than words' the Coach is intending to familiarise the reader with the meaning of this saying. As it is a cliché the audience would already associate with it and understand its meaning. After structuring his column to show all the different reasons this behaviour is inappropriate and unacceptable, the final sentences make a direct plea to the parents. The Coach wants the readers to really believe that it is vital the parents' behaviour is that of a good role model.

Through a carefully constructed manner the Coach is able to effectively demonstrate the varying reasons the promotion of good sportsmanship is essential to the wellbeing of their children. By using anecdotes, imagery and metaphors, the Coach, Sam, is able to clearly stress the importance of this issue and coerce the readers into feeling the weight of it as well.

Assessor comments

- The student shows a perceptive understanding of the ways which language is used by the author.
- The response is quite specific in its exploration of language use.
- There is a clear processing of the material and a sharp focus on language use.
- The intended impact of language on the reader, in respect to its context, is lucidly presented.
- The student pulls the various ideas together well.
- There is very good exploration of the cartoon and how it works with the entire newsletter.
- The response is assured and well-written.

Section B samples

The following samples of successful writing cover all four Contexts and a variety of texts used to inform the pieces. A range of different approaches to writing that appeared in the examination is also presented here. While assessors considered all of these pieces as upper range, none is without fault; there is no 'perfect' response. There is, of course, a range of quality, but all were deemed very good pieces in the 2008 examination.

Context 1 – The imaginative landscape

'Events and experiences influence the way we connect to place.'

Context 1, Sample A

The writing in this sample is engaging and effective and draws extensively on the text *Fly Away Peter*. It works with the ideas in the prompt.

War seemed to be Wizzer's salvation. It was a Friday afternoon; he was at the pub after the worst week at work he had ever experienced when he first heard about it. His mate John said that he had read in the newspaper that the 'Great War' had begun. His face was caked in coal dust and his muscles ached after a day on the pick. 'We're going to War.' He remembered yelling and then calling for a toast. They talked about it into the early hours of the morning, slowly becoming increasingly drunk with each successive round. Each man had his own reasons for wanting to go to war, most were in it for the adventure and for the glory, others to escape a failed love affair, but not Wizzer, he had entirely different reasons, reasons which sometimes even scared him.

Wizzer had had it tough as a kid. He was the youngest of five. Always being beaten up by his three older brothers, sometimes simply because he had just enough courage to stand up for himself, but he learnt pretty quickly to be shy. Wizzer was the punching bag who everyone let their frustrations out on, but as he got older he learnt to hit first, and hard.

Brutalised by the landscape of his childhood, Wizzer wanted to go to war because he loved fighting, he relished it. It gave him a freedom which made his soul soar, he loved the fear and respect he earned as another one of his victims slunk away. He'd see a man that he knew he just didn't like, or someone who reminded him of his older brothers and he'd start a fight, even if his victim hadn't done anything other than barrack loudly for an opposition cricket team. Any excuse for Wizzer would do. It was his way of getting even with the world, his way of soaring free from the constraints of his life. And the truth was he needed that escape – especially seeing as he spent the majority of his day trapped deep underground, the black dust clinging to his face, tracing its way into his lungs, leaving grit and a foul taste which he could never seem to be rid of.

The mines were dangerous and suffocating. Wizzer was no coward, not anymore, but the blackness of the mines in the days after it collapsed on him was unbearable, it made him feel as if he was eleven again. The fear, the blind unadulterated fear, the powerlessness. He was going down the shaft in a caged lift when the rocks began to fall. Just a few at first then they rained heavily down. If he hadn't have been in the lift he would have been dead for sure. He was alone, trapped and helpless, stuck

2008 Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



down there for two days, without food or drink. Every second that passed Wizzer became surer that he would not make it out alive.

It was after the accident that Wizzer grabbed the chance of escape that the recruitment posters offered, salvation. It was his dream, a landscape in which the fighting never stopped and neither would the power or the reassurance that he was worth something. The adrenaline surged as he pictured it.

It wasn't what he imagined though. There was no freedom, only death. Bullets came at you from the fog or from the dark that you never saw coming, which caught you in the head or the throat. Fighting where you could never dominate or walk away triumphantly.

He might have cracked sooner if he hadn't found a release, and that came when he dreamt of the sky of the birds, something other than the smell of charred flesh of rotting corpses with rats familiars of death crawling in them. That, and picking fights. He knew other men did similar things to get through the days in the war as well. There was this one bloke, Jim Saddler, who was different though, and Wizzer didn't like that. He hated the way Jim seemed to be able to cope with the fear and the trenches, it was as if he was one with the earth and no longer afraid of the dead. The other thing that irritated Wizzer about Jim was his well known love of birds. They were so different and yet they had one thing in common and that was their love of birds. Wizzer loathed that they shared this, it offended him. He was not gentle or weak like Jim.

Wizzer picked his own enemy, one which he could beat, or so he thought. He remembered the first time he saw Jim, it was before he even knew about the birds. A black anger stirred and he tripped him. The next thing he knew they were face to face and preparing to fight, luckily Jim's mate was with him otherwise he was not sure where he could have stopped, or if he could have stopped.

He remembered the first time he saw snow in the war. He was on a march through the woods somewhere near Armentiere's. The darkness of the woods beckoned him, he had to keep going, he wasn't ready to give up, not yet. He had to keep going so he could inflict as much pain and suffering that he felt and had never been able to forget and that scared him. His hatred for everyone and everything around him scared him.

As the war continued Wizzer lost his love of fighting, he no longer revelled in it. No matter how many fights he picked and no matter how many fights he found, he could not seem to regain the freedom that it used to give him. Ironically, the last fight Wizzer ever picked was also against Jim. The air was tormented as he realised he was not alone. He lashed violently out at his unknown victim, dragged him back by the feet into the shell hole where he began to punch wildly in the dark. It was eerie, nightmarish fighting for your life, not knowing who you were fighting against. As last he collapsed, groggily exhausted.

'Wizzer.' He heard Jim yell just as everything began to close in around him. He began to quake. His shoulders first, then his jaw. An odd moaning sound came from between his clenched teeth. He had drawn himself up into a ball rocking back and forth clenching his fists into his chest.

He was back there, back in his childhood, being abused, back in the mines, trapped underground. His brothers were kicking him, he could feel the pain and hear his own frighteningly real screams, his sister was pleading for them to stop, he knew then that death would be his only escape.

No one could help him now, Jim, that gentle but not pathetic spirit had just crawled over the lip of the shell hole, breathing with relief that he was 'back'. Wizzer fleetingly realised that man's inner strength and courage and realised that he would never have that, not now. With this realisation he gave up, the pain ended, the suffering was over and he was soaring free like a bird with no more restraints, no more need to fight. Wizzer realised that gentleness wasn't necessarily weakness.

Context 1, Sample B

This sample shows good control of writing in persuasive style. It has a very strong sense of the task and addresses the prompt consistently throughout the piece.

THE CAPE BRETON TIMES

We're Doing Just Fine With No Open Cut Mine

Having lived on Cape Breton all eighteen years of my life, I was honoured and delighted to be able to write a column in our newspaper. From the age of thirteen, like many boys my age, I worked on my father's boat, catching lobsters or fish. I can still remember my first expedition in the boat – the rolling ocean, the omnipresent smell of sea-salt. For me today, the sea is symbolic not only of a means to earn a living, but of a way of life. As Cape Breton's other key industry, many of the boys I attended school with were from the mining community. Where salt and lobsters shaped my fraternity with the island, the smell of earth shaped theirs. The mining community has lost husbands and fathers to the mines, and I have heard tales of many a brave evacuation or rescue. But for all its dangers, shaft mining is a part of Cape Breton's rich tapestry. For this reason I feel the need to speak out against the open cut mine the council is seriously considering as you read.

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



Schlectern Enterprises is a German based multi-billion dollar mining company. Its tentacles reach around the globe. Its executives and managers reel in millions of dollars each year, most of them having never touched a shovel or known the adrenalin of lighting dynamite in their lives. For these people, Cape Breton is just a dot on a map, an opportunity to squander even more money. They do not share stories with Cape Breton, the earth holds no memories for them. They say they come to provide employment and to 'boost the struggling Cape Breton economy'. But we've worked the land for generations just fine. We've struggled through the times harder than these without foreign 'help'. Schlectern Enterprises comes to rape and pillage the land, destroying a living culture in the process. Shaft mines will be closed to make room for the ugly machinery and infrastructure – and those that remain will be unable to compete.

Cape Breton may not be as prosperous as it once was, but an open cut mine will only exacerbate the issues we have now. Some say the stream of coal is running low. According to Mr Milicevic, spokesperson for Schlectern Enterprises, 'an open cut mine is the only viable option remaining for Cape Breton... We can offer full employment for the entire mining population.' But I ask of Mr Milicevic, for how long? Eventually, the coal will run out, and Mr Milicevic will leave with his colleagues, leaving behind a gash in our beautiful island, now barren and empty of coal. And with them they will take the profits, leaving Cape Breton unable to be mined. So I urge you, seek temporary labour in Blind Creek if you must, but never low down to the open cut mine. The battle can still be won.

I remember an old miner once told me, 'Once you taste underground water, it's in your blood forever.' Although not a miner myself, his words rang true. For me, the smell of salt will be with me forever, reminding me of my father's salty beard and sun-bleached hair. Mr Milicevic and company share nothing in this. Their history is elsewhere and as such they have no connection with the land. They will use it while it profits them, and discard it without a thought when they are done. The current situation reminds me of the predicament we fisher-people found ourselves in when I was younger. The advent of big trawlers cost us dearly. They were coming into our waters, polluting our shores and stealing our fish. Local father / son fishing enterprises struggled to compete. Each month, one more boat lay unused in the sand. For at time, our boat was one of those while my father was forced to work on a Portuguese ship in distant lands, with sailors he had met in younger days. But we continued to fight for our waters. Women collected and sold clams or yabbies to make ends meet, and when the trawlers moored at our docks they left with nets cut and moorings broken. Desperate measures, but they were desperate times. Finally, the government got the message, and regulations were past keeping the trawlers out of our waters, and today, with the help of improved fishing technology we are able to farm these waters once more, making us complete again.

The same can be done for shaft mining. The mining community must be strong, and the council must oppose the open cut mine. For the sake of our future, and the sake of our history which makes up so much of what we are today.

Context 1, Sample C

This sample demonstrates control of descriptive writing and a clear sense of two people's experiences influencing their connection to place.

I wander through this dying, deserted forest for what must be the hundredth time. So many years have passed that surely something must have changed. Yet it is immutable, immovable and timeless. The birches are still here, the Autumn leaves of red and gold are scattered on the ground and the musty scent of winter lies heavy in the cold air. And there – there are the two paths, still mysterious, still enticing, leading to an unclear fate. I turn towards the lake, it's as if time has stopped. It is still filled with moss, and the empty darkness sends a shiver of fear through my sense and makes my hackles rise. Even as a young boy, I was terrified imagining what monstrous beasts lurked there.

I gaze up at the all-seeing moon, that shimmers silver though the darkness of the night, providing hope for every individual on the planet, who gasp at its silent beauty. Ah, yes, Robert, my boyhood friend. He knew how to capture nature's essence in his poetry that will enthrall people for eternity. Poetry? I thought that was for sissies. We were just children, thrown together by fate, as our parents were neighbours. We would hurry down here in our free time to escape the dull routine of school. We would climb the birches and discuss our futures, what we'd become and what conquests we'd make. He was the poet. I was stubborn as hell when he tried to express his love for 'nature's miracles' – as he put it. Frost charged through these woods like he owned them, weaving a fantasy world around these trees, these leaves, these paths and this lake. He imagined that lonely boys like us bent the birches, swinging on them from side to side till they collapsed. He knew the importance of place to someone. 'What nonsense.' I'd scorn. The birches were bent because of the howling winds that tore at their roots till they hit the ground. Poetry? Bah!!

He knew though. He knew that his imagination would last longer than my rational belief that a wood was just a place. It has no meaning other than somewhere that has trees, leaves and a lake. Why I could be somewhere else altogether and not care at all. 'You're wrong.' I remember him arguing impatiently. 'This is our place. It's our friendship. It's where we belong. It's where I learnt the beauty of nature and how to put it into words. One day people will understand. Wherever we go, we will always be here and one day we'll return. You'll see.'

October 9th 1899, the fateful day. By now we were young men. It was time to decide our directions in life. Would we travel life's journey together? He wanted to study literature. I thought that was for fools. No, a military life for me. Glory, fame and honour. The wind bent the trees, not some foolish imaginary boys. So we had to separate. Two truths lay ahead that would lead us to our destiny. The power to decide was in our hands. The track to the right was dark, gloomy and uninviting, frightening even as a brave budding military recruit like myself. The trees arched malevolently over to the Earth, as if testing my courage in the eerie



darkness. No, this path was not for me. I tore my mind away from ever having to trample this silent road and turned my attention to the other.

It was lighter, warmer, it seemed safer. Blue wild flowers and yellow buttercups poked their heads along the verge tempting me with their innocent prettiness. The trees here were upright, like soldiers, welcoming my arrival. It was a grand entrance fit for a would-be general like myself. Why, I could see clearly ahead. My future was mapped out straight as an arrow. No, I was no poet. Facts! I would take this safe route, and Frost could take the road less travelled. He could write away to his heart's content, about beauty and nature and whatever else he fancied. I could go anywhere, it didn't matter, a place is just a place!

I turned to Frost. ‘What will you take,’ I asked my friend.

‘You choose first,’ he responded enigmatically.

‘I’ll go straight and direct,’ I answered gratefully. ‘After all, a place is just a place.’

‘Yes, but this will always be ours. One day I’ll immortalise these trees, this lake and the leaves and when you read the poem you will remember me, your boyhood friend. If our paths never cross, just know that I will always be here, look up at the stars and know that I will be watching out for you.’

We shook hands manfully but our boyhood tears were in our eyes as we set off.

There was no turning back.

What a choice! What a fool I’d been to be tempted by security. The road led to hostility, violence and war. Everything I was afraid of in the road not taken was right here before my frightened eyes. I killed and brought suffering wherever I trod. The path was deceptive, luring me towards disaster. Amongst my pain, I looked up at the sky and remembered his final words. I read his poetry about the ‘freedom of the moon,’ the birches, he even wrote a poem about ‘The road not taken’ a deliberate message for me. It was so simple, chiding my shallowness to the place that meant so much to me.

Now at the end of my journey, I’m back at the beginning, looking at the road which led to success and that which led to failure. He wrote about our life changing positions. He knew all along what would help me and what wouldn’t. Still he let me make my decisions and control my fate. The experiences I had, really influenced my view of this place. The lessons he taught me will never be forgotten. This is the landscape where it all began, here also, it where it will end.

Context 2 – Whose reality?

‘We can evade “reality” but we cannot avoid the consequences of doing so.’

Context 2, Sample A

This sample works with the ideas of the prompt and presents a well thought-out conclusion, drawing evidence from two texts.

In our quest to determine and shape our perceptions of the world, we as individuals are inevitably guided by our own self-interests and desire to see ourselves in a positive light. Consequently, we frequently immerse ourselves in particular behaviours or construct facades to avoid the bleak and mere confronting aspects of reality. Yet, in doing so, we create an alternate reality which can spark heated conflict with those around us, or risk plunging completely into a make-believe world which appears much more enticing and palatable than realism. Moreover, for those seeking to mask and bury a past riddled with pain and suffering, the heavy burden of guilt cannot be infinitely escaped. Thus, for those individuals who endeavour to avoid confronting the true nature of their actions by constructing a fantasy world, conflict is inevitably triggered with both those around us, and on an internal level.

*Following involvement in tragic and painful events, we frequently seek to avoid our exalting feelings of remorse, but in the process, only heighten the turmoil we must endure. Guilt revealed and examined often in literature as an emotion and sensation of such an unfathomable potency that it will inevitably defy our efforts to the contrary, and encroach on our present reality. In *Enduring Love*, Ian McEwan draws on the notion of uncleanliness in describing Joe’s guilt after the traumatic ballooning incident, ‘like the feeling of not having washed.’ Without doubt, Joe’s ‘manic obsession with researching Jed’s condition can be seen by many, including Joe’s wife, Clarissa, as stemming from a desire to absolve his deep-seated remorse. Moreover, in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare draws on a similar motif of dirtiness in his portrayal of the heavy sense of responsibility plaguing Lady Macbeth for her role in Duncan’s murder. Despite having initially scorned her husband’s softness, belittling Macbeth as ‘too full o’ the milk of human kindness,’ Lady Macbeth is quickly reduced to a state of lunacy, feverishly scrubbing at invisible marks on her hands, crying ‘out, damned spot!’ Blanche too, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, attempts to avoid memories of her role in Allan’s death by frequently indulging in the escapism of bathing. Yet, Stanley, who is presented in dialogue and appearance as in binary opposition to Blanche, allows Williams to highlight how we cannot avoid haunting past experiences because they will be exposed by those around us. Therefore, the notion of uncleanliness as a metaphor for guilt encapsulates the extent to which*



processing our remorse is an unavoidable, if difficult, process. Knowledge of our past wrongdoing is so enduring that not even the most desperate actions will cleanse it from our minds, and failure to confront it can have disastrous repercussions.

*Often, in our relations with those around us, our attempts to avoid reality can undermine our ability to co-exist harmoniously. By evading elements of the truth and creating false, deceptive facades, we can appear threatening and even dangerous to those who possess divergent outlooks. Certainly, the famous declaration made by T.S. Eliot in his poem 'Burnt Norton' that 'human kind cannot bear very much reality,' encapsulates the lack of tolerance within society for the existence of realities which deviate from our own. Stanley Kowalski exemplifies those individuals in society who favour realism and factual evidence about all else in achieving vindication for their view point. By consequence, Blanche's demure facade and false pretences about her innocence and purity, confessing, 'I don't want realism' immediately come into conflict with Stanley who revels in being as 'common as dirt'. The rape at the culmination of the play allows Williams to convey to his audience the suffering and pain inflicted upon individual who seek to avoid the dominant reality and immerse themselves in a make-believe world. Indeed, Stanley's conflict with Blanche is in many ways, reminiscent of the schism which emerges between Joe and Jed in *Enduring Love*. Paradoxically, both are convinced that the other is evading reality, at the detriment to their personal growth and rationality. On one hand, Joe is convinced that Jed is crouched in 'a cell of his own devising', yet to Jed, it is Joe who is 'trapped in a cage of reason'. The violence that erupts between the two men further typifies the conflict generated by individuals who are convinced the other has abandoned reality. Thus, our efforts to escape an unpleasant perception or outlook are ultimately rendered futile, as they will be painfully shattered by those around us.*

In attempting to ease the suffering and turmoil that we experience within reality, we often draw upon fanciful illusions, yet simultaneously risk losing touch with reality altogether. Certainly, the figure of Blanche epitomises the dangers of dabbling too heavily in fantasy. Initially constructing an 'incongruous' appearance to avoid descending to the squalor and poverty of Stanley and Stella's lifestyle at Elysian Fields, Blanche quickly comes to rely so heavily on the illusions she creates that by the play's end, her entire grasp of reality has been corrupted, reduced to an almost comical, pathetic figure who is portrayed as 'murmuring excitedly' to her 'spectral admirers'. In a similar fashion, Jed Parry also loses the capability to discern the difference between fiction and the truth, even constructing evidence to validate his distorted view. 'Great idea with the curtains', he congratulates a baffled Joe in his letter, creating physical symbols of their love to convince himself of the truth in his obsession. Above all, Auden's poignant, questioning words in his poem 'September 1, 1939', 'who can live for long in an euphoric dream', illuminates the utter unsustainability of a fantasy world. Thus, despite the alluring nature of illusions, which offer an escape from realism, it is easy to become so reliant on their comforting presence that reality is completely and disastrously abandoned.

Within our existences, haunting and traumatic experiences often have such a disturbing and unsettling effect that we are tempted to bury them under a layer of illusion or directed through. Yet, in turning to fanciful constructs, we render ourselves vulnerable to conflicts with others, who do not comprehend our internal turmoil and the reasoning behind our alternate reality. Moreover, we risk either spiralling completely out of control into a world of delusion or facing an even more potent sentiment of guilt and remorse than we would have otherwise. Thus, our efforts to evade and escape reality are ultimately rendered both futile and dangerous, as we will be forced to face both external and internal retribution.

Context 2, Sample B

This sample uses the prompt to explore personal denial and consequences. It shows control in writing and draws appropriately from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Shark Net*.

The other day as I sat completing one of those quizzes that promises to tell you what personality you have and how your life will turn out, I was confronted with a question that truly perplexed me. Now, unsurprisingly it was hardly the question itself that I found challenging but rather what it demanded of me; What is your worst childhood memory? I sat dumbfounded, unable to think of a single memory. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm sure I have encountered many experiences which would fit the bill here, I did have to survive as the youngest in a family of karate kids mind you, (black belts nonetheless!). But despite racking my brains so diligently that I was in desperate need of a panadol afterwards, the now overly blank page stared back at me. Why can't I remember? Does it mean that I have no personality? That my life lacks meaning?

*These were the questions that plagued me long after the quiz-bearing trashy tabloid had been sent to the recycling heap so I sought out some trusted friends to help with my dilemma and discovered that such lapses in memory, particularly with respect to difficult or unbearable circumstances are perfectly normal. In fact psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud discovered this tendency to evade difficult realities many years ago – it's called denial. Many literary texts and psychoanalytical journals have since dealt with the ideas which underpin such a desire to evade reality and examined the reasons behind this tendency. Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* is one such literary text, wherein the romantic protagonist Blanche DuBois presents a falsified image of herself so as to create 'magic' and portray 'what ought to be the truth' rather than truth itself. Blanche seeks to gloss over aspects of her past which she finds unappealing or difficult to deal with, a practice that many psychologists believe to be not only natural but also a crucial aspect of our humanity, enabling us to overcome the challenges with which we are invariably presented and persevere in life. We need to be able to withdraw from our reality sometimes, to regain our strength and to cling to the hope and optimism that the harsh external world threatens all too often. Uncertain of mind, feeble of body, our capacity to control, to some extent the reality in which we find ourselves, our opportunity for escapism may sometimes prove the only thing from which we are able to draw strength.*



But how far can this withdrawal from reality be taken before it represents our submitting to a fictional existence? How far can Blanche go in upholding her fraudulent portrayal before she begins to believe it and accept it as her actual reality? For Blanche, a denial of reality leads her to spin a web of lies and deceit and though she herself recognises the differences in her constructed and actual reality, acknowledging that she is motivated in her actions by an innate desire to reignite the spotlight of love which she so suddenly discovered in her husband, and later, so tragically lost, does that make the trickery acceptable? How can others recognise what aspects of a person's character are genuine and which are fabricated when such a meticulously construed image is so diligently projected? Will reality invariably catch up with Blanche or is it actually possible to completely evade our true reality?

Psychologists concur that to seek to completely reconstruct reality is a perilous endeavour and one which will invariably result in a cruel awakening. Even if a person is aware that they are misguiding others, psychologists argue, the disappointment which they will inevitably feel when those who they have sought to deceive discover that truth, is not something that this awareness prepares them for. Indeed this proves eerily true in Blanche's case as her hopes are dashed when her brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski sees through Blanche's fragile veneer and conveys the truth of her past to his friend. But is Stanley right in his desire to completely destroy the reality which Blanche has created for herself and in doing so force her into the cruelly bright light of truth? Is it true that the truth is always better?

*Indeed, where do we draw the line between fact and fiction? I am reminded in my musings here of another literary text, Robert Drewe's autobiographical memoir *The Shark Net* which attempts to reconstruct his childhood experiences growing up in Perth at the time of the Nedland Killer, Eric Edgar Cooke. Drewe believes that Cooke had denied his reality to such an extreme that he was leading a life of fiction, trying to repress the reality of his physical deformity and the pain of a life wherein he was constantly excluded from society. The ramifications of this descent into denial are undeniably and starkly clear in Cooke's case and lead him to wreak destruction and pain on others so as to alleviate his own feelings, but where does this leave the rest of us?*

Perhaps the best that we can do is to seek to deny only the most difficult, the most painful memories, momentarily. When we allow ourselves to contemplate hardships, without allowing these hardships to overwhelm us, we are left with a healthy balance and one which is constructive in contributing to our ability to meet and overcome hurdles in our life. Following my contemplations of the way that we evade reality, I myself proved able to recall difficult childhood experiences from the dark recesses of my mind and if you prove similarly able to demonstrate an awareness of the difficulties you have endured, you may find that you are able to look back and smile at your strength.

Context 2, Sample C

This sample includes highly effective writing. The shape and structure of the piece work to a conclusion that clearly addresses the prompt and draws evocatively on the text *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The paper lantern cast a deep lavender silhouette across the room. Ruby sighed to herself as she took in her reflection, barely a shadow in the stage mirror. People would often ask why she preferred her make-up room so dark but what did she care? She had make-up artists to do the job so why should she worry? Besides, it gave the room an atmosphere of mystery and intrigue.

She looked to the wall and saw the framed newspaper cuttings of herself smiling her brilliant smile back at her with the title; 'Lights! Camera! Action! Young, beautiful and talented Ruby Rouge takes the spotlight!'

She had loved; she still loved the feeling of adrenaline pulsing through her as she entered the stage; the audience waiting in hungry anticipation ready to devour every morsel of her body, her voice. And to think that after all these years no one suspected her of being over 30! (Well, she hadn't put on an ounce in over 15 years!)

She stood up and watched her silhouette turn to the side. She examined her legs, her back and then her arms, carefully not to frown so as to preserve that beauty which she had maintained so well for over 50 years. Still perfect, she thought.

Sighing with satisfaction, she drew a key out of her purse and swiftly opened the bottom drawer of her desk, searching for what she needed. It was her refuge, a retreat into a pool of memories; of youth, of young love. She began to pour the whiskey into an unremarkable blue mug. She reminisced gleefully; the sensation, the colourful and bright lights pouring in at you from all sides, until you were illuminated in light and it was just you and the spotlight, you and your world. She would often delve far into the minds of her characters without a thought of ever surfacing. It was just one character to another; there just wasn't time to be 'out of character'. She laughed lightly, now that was show business, she smiled.

It was curious though, the act of performing. There was a definite sense of pretending, of fabricating life into the world of the make-believe. Of drawing audience members in, the tale of the hero indulging their inner most passions and desires...

Had life been a lie? Had we been lying or just telling little white lies to help us on our way? And if we were lying, who was it that we were really lying to? The audience? Each other? Ourselves?

She dismissed the topic abruptly and poured another mug of whiskey. She sipped it slowly, like sweet syrup, soothing golden and light.

2008 Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



The audience would never know she had drunk before the performance, they never did.

She just felt safe in this world. She didn't live for the outside world anymore, just the thrill of the past, the real magic within. Being able to retreat back to the 50's, the time of glamour, spotlights and fame. Her time.

The drug would work quickly, lubricating her mind in the comforting liquid shield of her memories. Sometimes, it just helped to simply numb the pain; all the pain, of loss, of love...

No. She wouldn't think of that now. She hastily wiped away the signs of wetness before they smudged her mascara and smiled in the mirror.

'I used to be Tennessee's favourite,' she said to the fading shadow.

Suddenly, she caught a glimpse of something red hiding in the shadows. It was her first stage dress, ruby red with a lace bodice at the back. Why! She even had the same pearl necklace to wear!

This dress had made her, had given her the name 'Ruby Rouge'. She smiled a devilish smile and quickly slipped into the red dress. It was a bold, dark flame, screaming sexuality and seduction.

Clipping on her pearl necklace and sliding on a white feather boa, Ruby began to glide unevenly across the room. 'No, no please don't stand up for me,' she said to her admiring audience. 'What? Roses, for me? Why, now that is extravagant.'

She stumbled to the desk and this time picked up the whole bottle, tossing it down in one swig. With faintly hysterical humour she began to dance the two step, a quick rustle dance, tossing her feather boa around her. Surrounding her was the chorus, her orchestra, her audience, cheering her, applauding; 'Encore! Encore!' they shouted.

Around and around she spun, until all the colours of the room became one; a fusion of lilac and darkness. Laughing hysterically she danced, the bottle nearly slipping from her grasp. She raised the feather boa above her head twirling it around in rhythmic movements as the world around became darker and darker.

In a matter of moments Ruby fell, the scarf wrapping around the paper lantern and tearing it off, the violent harsh light rippling through the lavender mist.

Crippled by the sudden brightness, Ruby staggered to her desk. Grabbing hold of her mirror she hauled herself up to see an old woman, staring back, mascara smudged and streaming along her worn face.

Suddenly this face was contorted with rage, as she threw herself against the horrifying image. For a moment glass hung, suspended in the air and glittering like fairy dust. And then, nothing. Clutching her bleeding hand she looked up at her broken reflection.

Context 3 – Encountering conflict

'In times of conflict ordinary people can act in extraordinary ways.'

Context 3, Sample A

This sample works with the ideas of the prompt. It is controlled and well structured writing that is appropriate to the task and shows understanding of complex ideas and associated texts.

In the realms of conflict, extraordinary things can happen. Adversity brings out the best, and worst in us, and it is a fine line that distinguishes between heroism, and terrorism. One person's hero might be another's villain, and the objectivity of thought required to transcend the barriers of discrimination and identify a true hero often eludes us. For how long can our ordinary human being assume the mantle of a hero? Conflict is the true test of this, and is the true compass by which heroes are measured and judged.

Nowhere does a more unlikely hero arise than in Peter Travis' Omagh. Michael Gallagher is the softly spoken, middle aged man who is the protagonist of Travis' film, and whose real-life equivalent was the protagonist of the corresponding events in real Ireland. The car bomb in the town of Omagh, detonated by a terrorist organisation called the Real IRA, killed 29 people, and injured over 220. This atrocity was the spark for the forming of the Omagh Self Help and Support Group (OSHSG) by Gallagher, whose son Aiden was killed in the blast. In the film and in real life, Gallagher becomes a hero, his quiet words bringing order and construction to the conflicting families of Omagh, and bringing him leadership of the OSHSG, the organisation devoted to bringing those responsible for the bomb to justice.

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



*The Real IRA was a terrorist organisation, and like most, committed atrocities in the name of 'the greater good'. The forming of an independent Ireland, the glory of some higher power, these idealistic goals never spawn heroes, only tyrants. When human suffering is discarded as a by-product of the method to assuming power, the compass to the hero leads us only to the victims of such a terrible crusade. The RIRA's bomb, rather than forging an independent Ireland, and more importantly, in *Travis'* film, a small group of people, arrayed against them. Michael Gallagher and the OSHSG, encountering opposition at every turn, manage not only to expose the truth behind the bomb, but manage to maintain their resolve and heroism in the face of adversity, both from foes unseen, and those close at hand.*

When the terrible truth is discovered about the bomb, that the Irish police knew the blast was imminent, and refrained from action to discredit the RIRA, it is a solid blow to Michael Gallagher and the inhabitants of Omagh. This resolution was not the one they had looked for, for so long. It takes true heroism to continue beyond adversity, and defying the RIRA, and in spite of dire police negligence, at the end of the film Gallagher embarks on a mission to press independent charges against the RIRA. The power of people over lies and hardship is shown strongly here by Gallagher's actions. No evil deed will go unpunished, when the ordinary person rises up, and strikes back at the system that opposes them. Gallagher shows us that we need heroes. We need heroes to lead, to inspire, and to make us realise that any person can become something beyond the norm, a conduit of the extraordinary human spirit.

'Game Theory' is a branch of thinking that attempts to rationalise and predict conflict. Does this kind of reason eliminate the need for heroes? It does not. Humanity is defined not by its reasoning ability, but its morality. To attempt to eliminate morality from conflict, and operate on cold logic is a step too far from the determination and humanity exemplified by Gallagher and heroes everywhere, and at the opposite end of the spectrum from the idealistic fantasies of the RIRA and 'the greater good'. Within proper morality lies the rationality and proper ethical decisions necessary to resolve conflict, and it is here that heroes are actualised, and their necessity apparent.

Michael Gallagher, the hero, was born not from the death of his son, but from the need for an individual to rise up and become something more, to lead the common people in saying, 'This is not right.' Heroes achieve the mean between ideals and reason, and in conflict, show us that it is humanity that is extraordinary, not some abstract idea.

Context 3, Sample B

This sample is an internal monologue from the perspective of one of the young girls in Salem. It is a sophisticated interpretation of all aspects of the prompt, with a strong command of style, vocabulary and writing.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to go. In part I was afraid, but mostly I thought that it was wrong. But Abigail can be really persuasive. 'There's nothing to worry about. It's just sport is all,' she says. 'Trust me. No one will wise up to it, she says. 'It'll be fun,' she says. And, foolishly, I believed her. I wholly believed in what Abigail told me. That night, when we danced under the cover of the trees and Tituba chanted her Barbados songs, I thought that it was fun. When I cast a spell to make William Smith love me, I knew that I wan't really witchin' him – I was only playing is all. And when Abigail drank the blood – a charm to kill Goody Proctor – I only thought it to be some kind of strange sport. 'It's just sport is all.' We thought that we was having fun. But how fast our fun turned sour. And once our fun had gone bad we had to fix it for ourselves. We only thought about doing the right thing by us, didn't worry none about the others. I don't understand how we allowed ourselves to become so corrupt. Or why they did not see us for our fraud. I may not fully understand how we came to ruin everything – but we did...

There was Tituba. She was shaking. As she cowered down on her knees her hands trembled like she had caught some kind of fever. Tears poured down from her wild eyes. And there was Reverend Hale. He stood over her asking her questions. All that Tituba could answer was, 'I love God with all by bein'', and, 'Bless him – bless God.' Then out of the hysterical woman's mouth came the name 'Sarah Good.' That was the moment. That was the beginning to all this deceit – all this evil. Those two words were about to destroy the people of Salem. Only we didn't know it. We naively thought that we had saved ourselves in that flood of names. Goody Good, Goody Howe, Goody Sibber, Goody Hawkins, Goody Osborne. We kept on naming innocent names. We did it because when panic knocks you off your feet and fear tries to force you to stay down, you will do anything to get back up again. When trouble comes your way all that you want to do is stand up and walk away. And that's just what we did. We walked away from the accusations of witchcraft, but only pushing others under suspicion. We couldn't see that our lies were about to ruin Salem, only I should have seen it Tituba's face. As we blackened the names of so many pure women, Tituba's face began to lighten. Tears that had once drowned her expression were now seeming to glisten. A smile had set on the spared woman's face. It was the smile of the lamb that had just escaped the slaughter. It was a smile that we all shared. Aye, we rejoiced because we had saved ourselves from death. But little did we know that there would be a fate much worse awaiting us. I remembered hearing after Giles Corey's death that someone had thought him admirable for upholding his words and asking for 'more weight'. We too had asked for 'more weight' – only there was nothing honourable about our request. With every innocent name that we called upon, we could carry the weight of a neighbour's death on our shoulders. Only, at that moment, we couldn't feel the weight. We did understand the moment we was creating. We couldn't see that the very words that had saved us would also destroy us.

*

As I gazed up at Goody Nurse, I realised just what I had done, what I had become. I stood amongst the crowd; joined them as they watched on. I found myself staring up at Salem's most godly woman. The most pure woman to have ever graced Salem was standing on the gallows with a noose hanging by her side. And all that any of us could do was watch. There was something

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



frightfully disturbing about the scene before my eyes. And as the rope was brought up over her head and left to rest around her fragile neck, I remembered the question, 'Do you not know that God damns all liars?' Rebecca Nurse was about to hang from her neck and I was responsible. Our testimonies – the ones so far removed from the truth – they was killin' the people of Salem. I was now beginning to see the weightiness of our ruinous ways. I could feel the weight of the twelve dead resting on my conscience. Twelve dead and three more to soon join them. I could now feel what Giles felt – the life was being forced from me under the pressure of too much weight. We had allowed for our own obsession – our greed – to condemn the lives of innocent others. Aye, we had saved ourselves – our mortal selves. But of what good was it when we had first fed our soul to the Devil? As I looked up at Goody Nurse, I was not only looking towards the death of an innocent woman, but the destruction of Salem's good spirit. A darkness was coming over Salem. A darkness blacker than any black magic that we could have ever envisioned. We had destroyed Salem with our mendacity. Our actions had become poison. Our self lust had turned neighbours against neighbours. We had removed God's love and loved contempt in its place. I was now beginning to understand the truth in what an enlightened man had said of our actions - that through our lies we were 'pulling Heaven down and raising up a whore.' And what frightened me the most was that there would be no soothing lullaby to awaken us from this nightmare. A troubled feeling swelled within me. We were to blame for this torment. I was responsible for this pain. I had let myself become the flame under the crucible of Salem. And as Rebecca Nurse fell and the noose tightened around her neck I realised that she – the one accused of being a witch – was not damned. Nay, Goody Nurse was not the damned – I was.

Context 3, Sample C

This sample explores the prompt and has strong control of language and a clear structure.

ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY ACTIONS

What is it about conflict that results in a change in human nature? In recent times we have seen people acting in inhumane ways, both overseas and in our own country. For years Australia has been burdened by people's inability to accept that the indigenous people have inhabited this country for tens of thousands of years. We have seen attempts made to resolve this conflict, but continually, we see ordinary people acting extraordinarily when faced with conflict.

Many people may hold the belief that Australia is a country free of struggles and fights, but for years there has been an underlying battle for reconciliation between the Indigenous and the settlers. For some this reconciliation is long overdue. The experiences these people have had as a result of our ancestors settling here is almost incomprehensible. While many have had land clashes, perhaps the most memorable is the Stolen Generation. Something that could be viewed as irreconcilable. However, in recent times we have seen the likes of former Prime Minister Paul Keating and current Prime Minister Kevin Rudd address the issues faced by many Australians. At Redfern in 1992, Paul Keating said 'We cannot simply sweep injustice aside,' meaning action must be taken in order to resolve disputes. In February this year, Kevin Rudd addressed the issue again with a formal apology, in which he apologised for the degradation of the Indigenous race, and for the suffering that has been caused. This, I believe, is something that was long overdue.

Both of these actions showed the nation that extraordinary things can happen if people allow them to. The thing to remember in the case of the Apology is that the extraordinary thing is not that it happened, but the resolution it is aiming to achieve, similarly with the Redfern Speech, the extraordinary thing to come from that is the desire for equality and justice.

*This need for equality can date back to when the first settlers arrived in Australia. They came believing this land was theirs. However, as I found out when I explored the ideas presented by Kate Grenville in her novel *The Secret River*, the original Indigenous did not view things this way. What I discovered by reading this novel was that it was not the Indigenous who acted at all out of the ordinary, all they were trying to do was protect what they believed to be rightfully theirs. Rather it was William Thornbill, a convict, who, when in England did not trust the gentry, so when in Australia saw the Aboriginal people as below him – a threat to him. He did not know how to trust people, nor how to build people's trust. This inability to trust led him to act in an extraordinary manner.*

It led him to participate in a massacre that would change him forever. The fact that he consciously participated in a massacre is something of human nature I will never be able to grasp. Was it because he felt he did not fit in? Or was it because he was unable to be at one with the land as they were? The actions he performed in the massacre were not only extraordinary they were unfathomable. They were not his usual character.

*Times of conflict do change people's characters; an ordinary person one day can be completely transformed as a result of contradicting beliefs. As is the case of the Stolen Generation, ordinary mothers were happy one minute and in ruins when their children were taken. Similarly, we witness characters transformed into different beings when investigating Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. This play presents the events of witchcraft in the town of Salem and how quickly a town can be torn apart as a result of conflicting ideas. We witness this through the transformation of Abigail Williams, who conjures spirits to try to cause a conflict between John Proctor and his wife Elizabeth. However, John is able to break free of Abigail's powers and come to a realisation; he resolves himself pleading guilty to adultery. At first, he acted in an extraordinary way, committing the sin of adultery, allowing himself to be changed into someone he does not want to be, but he was able to find it within himself to plead guilty, he found justice and aimed for equality. From an anonymous farmer to a man who extraordinarily stood up to the evil of the girls and the court and giving his life for his name and his family, Proctor showed how the heat of a crucible can transform a person.*



These actions can be likened with those of the Indigenous, they did not look to cause conflict, they acted merely to protect their own beliefs. They did want conflict to arise initially; they did not want people to have to change their actions. In times of conflict, they acted on their traditional values. People who act unusually are often the ones who cause the conflict. The white settlers were viewed by the Indigenous as the ones who initiated conflict. They saw setting as a struggle, and, to me, it seems they did not want to be the only ones suffering. They wanted life to be a struggle for others. Why did they act in this way? Was it because they did not want to be ordinary? Was it because they had come from a place where they were nothing but ordinary? This we may never know.

What we do know, however, is that resolutions can be reached even if struggles are the only way to reach them. Sometimes ordinary people do have to respond to conflict in extraordinary ways. But not everyone's actions are viewed as extraordinary. Some are feeble. This, however, will never be a trait of the Indigenous.

Context 4 – Exploring issues of identity and belonging

'Our relationships with others help us to define who we are.'

Context 4, Sample A

This sample is a personal piece. It is effective, engaging and has a good control of language and ideas.

I stare into the mirror, touching the cold surface with my finely polished nail. I sighed and slinked back to my bed, covered in frilly lacing and plump, heart-shaped pillows. I felt relaxed yet my mind was racing. It had been two days since the news, but I couldn't get over it. There was another me in this world. My Dad, whom I had only seen in pictures hiding behind a bushy moustache, had a daughter named Grace – my identical twin. My Mum broke the news after 17 years of lying. I knew she wasn't telling the truth but this... THIS was bigger than I had expected. My room was tidy, I had put on my favourite white dress and curled my hair. My strawberry perfume lingered in the air. I had isolated myself in the attic bedroom due to Mum's whirlwind behaviour. She was the most frantic and erratic person I knew; friends and family reckon I've learnt my nail-biting, can't-stay-still stress from her. We're very similar and I think it's due to it only being us in a household. We tell each other everything (Well...so I thought!) and spend our lives being as girly as possible.

I skip downstairs to see if she could be wound down from her anxieties. She was vacuuming profusely, as though she was trying to suck off the carpet to reach the cement underneath. I smiled at her amazing focus- another Davenport characteristic, passed on to me. 'Mum, do you need any help?' I squealed, trying to battle over the constant sucking of the infamous vacuum. She didn't hear. I attempted again. 'Mum!? Mum!? Mum!?' No answer. One last attempt, 'MERYL LOUISE DAVENPORT!' Her eyes flicked up and caught me. I giggled and pointed at the clock: 11:58. The clock ticked loudly as the vacuum switched off. 'They're arriving at 12:15, Mum. Go get ready.' Mum's eyes frantically went from the clock, the vacuum and to me: back and forth, until she dropped the vacuum and sprinted to her room. I packed up the room and did a quick dust-over of the house. 12:16. It was time.

Mum was in a panic trying to get ready. I was yanking her hair while she was applying mascara. The gravel driveway crackled as Mum and I both gasped. I ran to the mirror, flattened my dress and tried to calm down. 'Mum, put some lipstick on. Lippy makes you look in control.' I yelled, ready to grab the door. She toppled down the stairs and nodded for me to open the door.

There she was. Grace.

She jumped out of the car, readjusted her cap and turned around to a man smiling. Grace smiled as she wiped her dirty hands on her tight worn jeans. The smile seemed familiar, it was as though I was in front of my mirror. She blew an enormous bubblegum bubble as she teased her long copper hair. Mum and Barry (as I'm supposed to call him) went inside. I was still in shock as to someone being so unimaginably similar, yet at the same time, totally different. Grace and I spent the afternoon together and tried to think of things that we had in common. The frightening part was, there wasn't much. She had grown up in outback Queensland on a farm with Barry. I had lived in a house a few blocks away from the beach on the Gold Coast. Grace had grown up spitting, riding tractors and acting like Barry. I had grown up singing, riding horses and acting like Meryl.

I asked Grace whether we could do an experiment and reluctantly she agreed. I made her take a shower, curl her hair, put on make-up and wear one of my outfits. She came out of the bathroom after getting changed and I fell onto my bed in shock. Grace looked uncomfortable to say the least yet there was no difference between us to the naked eye. I had proved my point. The only difference was we grew up with people who formed us. Grace is laid back, Tom-boy behaviour could have only resulted from her Dad and living around other farmers. I was Mummy's little girl through and through. I smiled triumphantly while Grace got over her new look in the mirror. 'Can I, can I take this gunk off my face now?' she asked. I laughed and pushed her back into my bathroom to get ready. 6:30. Time had flown past like one of Mum's late morning routines.

Both Grace and I sprinted down the stairs to the dinner table, hungry as ever. Barry laughed at Grace's fight to tease out the soft curls I'd given her while Mum fetched the pasta. I sat watching Grace and Barry eat. It was a shovelling motion, chomping down hard and swallowing. Mum and I ate like normal too: fork vertical, twirl, lift, chew, swallow quietly. The difference (although no one else was noticing) was astounding. Just to think if Mum had Grace and I was with Barry. I could've been Lily – the loud

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



mouth sweet Aussie outback girl while Grace becomes the girly city shopping fashion loving, sun-baking teen. Although we had plenty to talk about, we truly were different people just because of the relationships we'd grown up with.

9:20. *The end of an era.*

Grace crunched her boots on our gravel and looked up at the starry sky. Mum and Barry smiled, hugged and went their separate ways. Grace smiled and whispered ‘see you soon, Sis?’ punching my shoulder lightly. I giggled and gave her a quick hug and said, ‘Yes, very soon, Sis.’ As quickly as she came, she was gone. Same bodies, different personalities. All to do with relationships.

Context 4, Sample B

This sample uses the prompt to show understanding of the text, brings knowledge of various texts to the discussion and shows good control in the writing.

*Bruce Dawe suggests in the introduction to his anthology of poetry, that ‘Each of us is both a private person and a public person.’ Despite this simple truth, our personal sense of identity and individuality is under serious threat from two entirely separate, though equally negative entities, alienation and conformity. Holden Caulfield, the protagonist in J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* struggles to find a sense of belonging in a world that he feels is increasingly demanding conformity, resulting in his self-imposed isolation and lack of genuine sense of self. As a young person, about to embrace a largely foreign world, it is imperative for myself and other young people to find a balance between our own individuality and the concession we choose to make in regards to our individuality when seeking connections or relationships with others. Everyone must realise that while we are each unique, we are also members of the human species, sharing universal characteristics and experiences. Therefore, the relationships we have with others will inherently help determine much of who we are. Only once we have made these realisations can we begin to gain a coherent understanding of the functioning of society and avoid Holden’s predetermined fate of loneliness.*

From birth, we are assigned concrete features of our identity. We cannot control the family or culture we are born into, but the relationships we form with our immediate family, at least initially, will define certain aspects of who we are. Bruce Dawe’s ‘Life-Cycle’ discusses the revered cultural icon that is the Australian Rules football supporter. Every child born into a football-mad household in Victoria is instantly given a focus and a structure to their lives. All over the world, fanatics are inextricably tied by the fortunes of their team. Even those who choose not to belong and rebel against their families have consequently shaped elements of their identity.

Holden Caulfield for instance, does his best to alienate himself from the people closest to himself, even the person he loves most, Phoebe. Despite this, Holden still strives from a sense of belonging and though he feels he has a strong sense of genuine individuality, it is severely restricted by his lack of proper relationships with others. But in most cases, our immediate family will provide protection, nurture and love giving us a stable platform from which we will begin our eternal quest to discover more about our ever-changing identity.

Many people will mask, or even forfeit, their true sense of self, in order to gain acceptance, but this will only lead to the dangerous notion of conformity and ultimately superficial relationships. This is extremely common in school situations. Holden Caulfield’s teacher, Mr Antolini, describes him as ‘falling and falling’, acting out, metaphorically, the fate of James Castle who was driven to suicide by his peers, demonstrating the high cost of not fitting in. Though this is an extreme case, a lack of relationships with peers and teachers at school will almost always result in isolation and perhaps even depression. As John Donne writes, ‘No man is an island entire of itself’ as we cannot identify who we are alone. Similarly, Bruce Dawe states that we are all ‘part of the shimmering web’ whether we are ‘vast’ or ‘small’, meaning that we must learn from those around us in order for society to function as a whole. Thus, we must identify our individuality through both introspection and from the things we learn from our relationships with others.

It is necessary to adapt our identity to our milieu, but it must not come at the cost of conformity. In the poem, ‘Enter Without So Much as Knocking’ Dawe illustrates the inherent dangers of conforming to the ‘Americanised’ values of a consumerist, capitalist society. As a result of the trepidation of alienation and loneliness, too many people sacrifice too much of their individuality to find belonging. However, it is crucial that we always maintain a connection to our inner core strength of self. The power of the group can be hugely overwhelming, at times resulting in the severe repression of minorities and extreme violence and brutality, as evidenced by Hitler’s Germany or Stalin’s USSR. To evade these tragic consequences the solution is simple: retain a sense of self whilst creating the relationships necessary to strengthen it.

A dimension of the private self may need to be sacrificed so that we can build strong connections to those around us, but that does not mean that we can afford to lose sight of who we really are in the process. All of us need to be respectful of the rights of individual, not only for the sake of the individual but for the benefit of society as well. Finally, Bruce Dawe encapsulates all of these ideas by stating that our character is constructed in ‘the stream of the world’ and that while ‘talent is built on solitude’ it cannot be wasted in isolation.

2008

Assessment Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



Context 4, Sample C

This sample is a fictional story that explores relationships with others and a sense of who we are. The two main characters from *The Catcher in the Rye* have been employed at the centre of a controlled and highly descriptive piece of writing. In addition, the letter from Holden's psychoanalyst allows for a more detailed exploration of the Context, the text and the prompt.

'Holden? Holden!'

The sweet cadences of Phoebe's voice floated from the kitchen, up the stairway and along the corridor, to his room.

'Phoebe? What the hell is going on down there?'

The slight pout that heralded her reply made him restless.

'There's something here I think you oughta see. It's...it's a letter to Mum and Dad. I opened it by mistake. I think you'd better see it.'

'Why don't you come on up here and read it to me then?' He replied, anticipating the time it would take for his voice to reach the bottom of the stairs where she now stood. He waited for the dark shadows of her feet to interrupt the slice of yellow light in the gap between the base of his door and the floor. It was taking longer than usual this time.

When she opened the door, her head bowed over the open letter, Holden could see that she had been crying. 'Phoebe? Wassa matter?'

She handed him the letter without looking at him. 'Is it from Pencey again? Look, if they're giving us hell about those goddam unpaid fees again – '

'Just read it, Holden.'

The crisp white pages of the envelope crackled and groaned as it unfurled in his fingers.

'Dear Mr and Mrs Caulfield,

I write to inform you of the results of Holden Caulfield's formal psychoanalysis at the Herbert D Reisner Institute of Psychology. As you will be aware, Holden has participated in a schedule of interview-based sessions with me following his internment at the Institute. These sessions have revealed a great deal about his character and condition that I anticipate will assist you in your understanding of how a nervous breakdown manifested in his case.

In psychological terms, it is understood that our relationships, bonds and connections with others help us to define who we are. Drawing upon this, the formation of our personal identity is additionally attributed to two inter-related factors – nature and nurture. This means that, whilst it may be argued that some parts of our identity, such as personality, are innate, others, such as our perceptions of ourselves and our place in society, is formed through our encounters and experiences with the beliefs of others. It is these fundamental relationships, bonds and connections that I feel Holden lacks and this has led to a profoundly confused sense of his own identity, for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, Holden has expressed a strong contempt for disingenuousness as a character trait of adult society. In our sessions, he repetitively reinforced his dislike for 'phonies', being those who reveal a willingness to conform to social norms and expectations at the expense of their individuality. This contempt, however, is not restricted to a specific faction or group in society but adult society in general. I feel that Holden fears and resents the pressures that society's expectations place upon him to be 'normal' and conform to the social mould, particularly regarding sex and relations with the opposite gender.

Initially, our analysts believed Holden to be a classic case of the superiority complex or he appeared to hold himself above the trivial concerns of society. It became increasingly apparent, however, that Holden fears the corrupting power of adult society and so retreats into an exclusive realm of moral absolutism and alienation as a form of self-protection.

I also feel that Holden has been unable to successfully make the crucial developmental transition from childhood to adulthood. Whilst most of his peers in his age group have matured to accept the challenges of adulthood, Holden has remained distinctly childlike in attitude, leaving those around him unable or unwilling to form a relationship or connection with him. Holden has expressed an understanding that his infantile behaviour or tendency to 'horse around', as he says, leave him unable to form level and equal relationships with his peers yet it adamant in maintaining his childhood identity, naming his younger sibling, Phoebe as the person to whom he can relate to the most. Holden remains in a transitional phase of the formation of his identity and I feel that, until he can come to accept the challenges and expectations of adult society, he will remain an outsider.

2008

Assessment Report

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Most interestingly, in our sessions, Holden spoke of a peculiar metaphor that brings great insight into his condition. He spoke of his desire to be a 'catcher in the rye' – saving children from falling off the 'cliff' or innocence and into the corrupt, adulterated world below. From this, we can surmise that children appear to be the only social group with which Holden can form a relationship on a common level of emotional maturity and so he strives to prevent children from becoming adults so that he can finally belong in society, although one of his own creation. This also reveals the primary obstacle in Holden's understanding of his own identity and a major conflict in his troubled psyche – he feels he cannot 'save' the world and be part of it at the same time.

I anticipate that our formal evaluation will assist you in understanding why Holden struggles to belong in a society with which he feels little connection.

Please continue to keep in contact with the Institute so we may monitor Holden's progress in the future.

Regards,

Dr M. Hyde

Chief Psychoanalyst'

Holden looked up from his position on the bed to Phoebe, who was curled up on his desk chair. She hadn't stopped crying since she came into the room.

'Holden, I –' she started.

'It's all right, old Phoebe. I don't want you getting all upset over a stupid letter.'

She wouldn't think differently of him, he knew. As he got up and started across the room, she jumped to intercept him and wrapped her body around his thin frame.

'I know who you are, Holden. You're my big brother and you belong right here. Right here with me.'

He embraced her.