

English: GA 3 Written examination

The examination samples appropriate and balanced elements of the *English Study Design 2000-2003* and takes account of the differential development of skills of students as they mature over the Course for the whole of the year. Thus, assessment decisions are made at a time when all students have had equitable opportunities to mature in the skills upon which the *Design* focuses.

As in the previous few years, the Examination Paper consists of two Sections. The first, Text, has two distinct Parts where one response is required from each Part, and the second, Writing Task, has two Parts, the first concerning language use analysis, and the second, where one piece of writing is required in response to three different options in form and purpose.

Assessment is global and norm referenced. It is based upon criterion referenced indicators and applied holistically. The assessment used in this way balances all qualities for worth and awards scores that reflect the assessors' judgment of the *whole* answer. The descriptions of this in the *Expected Qualities for the Mark Range* guided the process. These descriptions are based on the criteria and are general indicators of what might reasonably be expected in the mark range. Specificity and fine judgments are then possible when the exact characteristics of responses for any one year are analysed. The Assessment Criteria for the 2002 Examination are to be found in Supplement 2 of the February VCE Bulletin.

It is felt that overall student performance for the 2002 Examination was sound, with some students of course, displaying skills of an extremely high calibre.

Text Parts 1 and 2

The Questions for Part 1 required a close analysis of the workings of the text. One topic was available for each of the 30 texts.

The most popular texts and their mean scores out of 10 marks for **Part 1** were:

Text	% of students	Mean Score
<i>Cabaret</i>	14.6	5.70
<i>Medea</i>	12.6	5.67
<i>Dead Letter Office</i>	10.9	5.39
<i>Night</i>	8.7	5.67
<i>Only the Heart</i>	5.5	5.40

The least popular texts for this Part included *Frontier*, *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse*, *The Brush-Off* and *No Great Mischief*.

The most popular texts for **Part 2** and their mean scores out of 10 marks were:

Text	% of students	Mean Score
<i>The Divine Wind</i>	16.6	5.25
<i>Medea</i>	9.5	5.05
<i>Cabaret</i>	8.8	5.14
<i>Night</i>	8.7	5.25

The least popular texts for this Part included *Frontier*, *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Dream Stuff* and *Things Fall Apart*.

Most answers to both Text parts were of a generally good standard with the very best responses showing a wonderful spontaneity and confidence in the position taken and the ideas presented. Even middle range students often seemed genuinely moved, changed or inspired by the experiences of their reading. Many students *showed*, as distinct from *said*, that their chosen text, especially in Part 2, had enriched their thinking and challenged their values.

As was the case in 2001, it was noticeable that answers generally were often quite expansive and students displayed a quite solid knowledge of textual content, with questions often acting as a springboard into the answer, rather than an overly surgical compartmentalising of the elements of the question.

There are concerns about other matters. Over the years, there has been a growing anxiety about the average student's somewhat shaky personal confidence in his or her own ideas and a growing dependence on the ideas of others. There is a general timidity on the part of many students, that middle to upper middle group, to trust and use their *own* understandings, ideas and reflections. Perhaps it is a consequence of exposure to the growing assortment of guides, columns and the like seeming to be both formidable and authoritative to younger people, so that by themselves as examination students they are somewhat intimidated away from confident, personally unique viewpoints. Thus, regrettably, for quite a few, text study can become a historiographic exercise. This approach does of course produce

answers (with some pushing and pulling) which hit questions vaguely near the centre, but such answers could be so much better without that excessive dependence on authorial sorting and reconstituting. It certainly has the effect of denying the answer the keenness of edge and the novelty shown in the top responses – but far worse, it dilutes the rich experiences offered by the ways in which we look at texts in the two Parts’ focuses and the reflective growth which is possible.

Instead of summarising, sorting and perhaps memorising a whole range of secondary views, many students would be better off re-reading, or looking at, the text itself again and taking advantage of the very real debate and discussion offered by the classroom, and (ideally) elsewhere. This authorial influence is both subtle and powerful. It is, of course, perfectly proper, and with guidance often very productive, to hear and evaluate as many attitudes towards a text, its workings, its positions and its world view as possible. Indeed, for weaker students, exposure to such material can act as a stimulus and path for coming to grips with the text in respect of either Part 1 or Part 2 emphases. The devil for many however, often the more potentially capable, lies in *leaving it at that*. This danger tends to quietly suggest that there is a right view or answer to an imaginary construction or work of literary art and of course there is *not*.

Most students do demonstrate the ability to shape and structure a discursive or argumentative answer to a topic, and their knowledge of texts (as far as content detail is concerned) is quite good. Very few have nothing to say.

The advice remains:

- continue to emphasise the need to carefully study the elements of a question before tackling it holistically. As an example, quite a few last year allowed the ‘social pressures’ element of the *Cabaret* question to be fully ignored for the ‘political’ pressures also referred to. As a consequence answers sometimes skewed away from an important direction taken by the text
- genre sense is a complex matter that, as a rule, needs continuing work. A text should properly be treated as the text it is. As it is written, so it should be studied. A case in point is *Stolen*. It is a play. Answers cannot do its dramatic nature due justice if they remain in their focus at a political level, or if they treat it as an historical essay or a novel. Continuing intensive work on genre and the development of an ease with the forms the texts offer will be well worthwhile
- the capacity to handle the ‘wider reference’ focus of Text Part 2 questions with good judgment varies enormously. Answers need to be driven by the text in the context of the question posed. It is so easy to be sidetracked into a general essay that forgets the text, or to remain at the level of the text and never examine what it seems to be saying about the wider notion posed. Many teachers do spend significant classroom time in teaching planning strategies. It is a practice well worth the effort. For examination orientation, the differences between Text Part 1 and Text Part 2 questions do need to be firmly understood, but in class during the developing year the way in which we both enjoy and absorb a text is a seamless, moving blend.

Writing task

Part 1 (Average mark 5.28/Available marks 10)

The theme and the resource material for the 2002 Question seemed to work well with students showing a general familiarity with what was required of them. The normative bulk did the job in a sometimes heavy but nevertheless business-like fashion, and some students provided quite superlative analyses. It is clear that the teaching for this Part is both effective and informed although there is some feeling that in preparation for Writing Task Part 1 we would do well to increasingly emphasise in our teaching the ways in which language can be so richly and potently used, *in its context*. That potentiality of context is often overlooked in the dogged, mechanical answer.

It is not especially productive to teach ‘English Written Examination, Section 2 Writing Task Part 1’ as if in a vacuum as means of producing top scores, or high level thinkers. *Challenging* students on the conclusions they draw about how the language is being used in any of a myriad of contexts is powerful stuff. Students, for their part, need to talk about what they see and feel and conclude, and hopefully welcome challenges from others. Quite a deal of the work submitted would not stand this sort of scrutiny if read out. It is a confronting and valuable exercise.

Part 2 (Average mark 5.20/Available marks 10)

This part of the Writing Task remains fairly plain in quality. Students can certainly take a point of view and build from that but their acuity regarding forms remains basic. This shows itself in answers to different tasks (which specify different form prescriptions) being difficult to distinguish, especially if, as some do, the actual task number is not indicated. One such answer is included in the samples later in this Report and readers will see the difficulties this poses.

This is not to say that there are not consummately excellent pieces of writing submitted by some students. They obviously understood with real insight the forms indicated in the *Design* and wrote with care and strategy. The middle and lower ranges however were characterised singularly by a lack of clarity and sharpness of focus on the scenario and form given. The sense of purpose, audience, voice and form oriented structure needs continuing work. There are marks to be had, and there is every reason to think that with a sound approach, many more students could access them.

The component choice was as follows:

Editorial 24.3%
Feature Article 37.0%
Submission 36.5%

Examples of answers

These answers are presented for illustrative and informative reasons. The best of them are not to be taken as 'the best' that are possible or that they are 'perfect'; indeed none is without shortcomings of one sort or another. Yet they are typical of a range where students worked under examination conditions to produce and submit first draft writing. Likewise, readers will obviously be able to make many more observations about their qualities beyond the necessarily brief comments offered herein:

Text – Part 1

Dead Letter Office

'Although Alice and Frank both cling to the past, they help each other to move into the future.'

Do you agree?

Sample 1

Comments

- upper-range response
- introduction immediately and succinctly establishes a precise and relevant premise from which to argue
- assured and exacting textual analysis, knowledge quite apparent
- continually weaves a compelling and salient case
- absolute topic resolution
- distinctive and original thinking
- perceptive and informed sense of genre.

Student response

John Ruane's romantic drama "Dead Letter Office" is set in the surreal office of misplaced letters and lost dreams. This Australian film explores the characters' progressions from disconnection and dislocation to self discovery and hope. Chilean exile Frank and young and dysfunctional Alice suffer from the loss of loved ones, and they are in turn ossified in the past, unable to explore the opportunities of a better future. However, as love and connection develops between these characters, they help one another emerge as stronger and happier people able to anticipate a bright future together.

The film is introduced by Alice's childhood dream about the return of her long departed father. This scene merges with a voice over of a 'grown up' Alice who expresses her resolution to track down her father and in turn develop some directions in life. The union of these scenes implies that Alice's hopes and dreams have remained in place from when she was a child. Alice therefore appears to have experience little change and growth in her life, suggesting that the longing for her past with her father has confined her within her childhood frame of mind.

However, aside from being confining, Alice's fixation on meeting Gerald, which is mired in the past, causes her to lead a dysfunctional and unproductive life. Her inconsequential relationship with the nameless youth and her dead end career path both reflect an unsuccessful and unfulfilling existence. Furthermore, Alice's messy and cluttered room symbolises her confused and disordered mind state as does her laconic communication with her house mates. Alice thus also comes across as a detached and distracted character, unable to pay attentions to 'peripheral' issues that may actually help wrench her away from her obsession to recreate the past through locating her father. However, as Alice forlornly gazes at a shadowy photo of her father in retreat, she displays her large potential and longing to connect with others. However, her life-long and only passion in life seems to revolve around reconnecting with her father, and so, until Alice comes to the dead letter office and meets Frank, she continues to avoid interacting and connecting with others so as to engage in other engagements and interests.

Until Alice enters into Frank's life, Frank too leads a stagnant existence in which he is unable to forgive himself for the death of his children and look toward the future. The scene in which Frank builds a cage for 'Punt Road' at the back of his isolated house symbolises Frank's outlook in life. There is great irony in the fact that while Frank is encased by the bird wire, the vastness of the surrounding country side and the presence of the train all go unnoticed by Frank. These surrounding symbols represent the available opportunities for Frank to release regrets about the past and move on in life. However, Frank sees only the cage at this time, both reflecting his inability to move on and the idea that he is in fact caged in the past at this stage of his life.

The sterility and the isolation of his home, located along the fringe of society is representative of Frank's efforts to remain desensitised to the pain of losing his children in the Junta. Short of a few Chilean symbols, Frank's house says little about his tastes and style. However, the immaculate order of his 'home' is representative of Frank's need for control-whether it be about his home and office, or his thoughts and feelings. Thus, the remote location and the cold atmosphere, of Frank's neat home alludes to Frank's conscious efforts to distance himself from the others pain, pain which would inevitably evoke memories of his own tragic loss. In effect, Frank does strive to escape entering into a 'submarino' state of attachment to the past. Nevertheless, his isolated and unfulfilling lifestyle powerfully suggests that Frank's pursued growth is in fact hampered by the events of the past.

While Frank is usually unwilling to welcome change in his life, Alice does not intent to continuously dwell in a state of limbo for she actively seeks out her father. Her determination is at last rewarded with the closure of meeting the real Gerald. This meeting is made possible by Frank's help, for he actually locates Gerald. Through meeting the shonky used caravan salesman, Alice's false illusions about 'her father' are immediately abandoned. Thus, Alice is able to move beyond her childhood dreams and develop new hopes and ambitions for the future. Although Alice has lost the ideal image she has lived with all her whole life, through finding Gerald, Frank has helped empower Alice to take control of the future.

As the theme of dancing scenes established in the film, so too does the development of love and connection between Alice and Frank. Both these characters share an emotional connection to dancing. Alice lovingly approached ballet as a child – a time when she was more hopeful about her father's return, and Frank danced traditional folk dances during the 'good days in Chile' – a political act that may have causes his children's death. In one of the more painful scenes of the film, Alice lacking all perception insists that Frank show her his mastery over the dance. In so doing she unwittingly evolves within Frank painful memories about the loss of his children. Thus, as Frank is seen dancing the solitary dance in the warehouse, Alice's world about dancing seems to help Frank accept the events of the past and into gradually look toward the future. Later, when Alice and Frank dance at the Independence Day Celebrations, the moment marks their physical and emotional connection. Frank is no longer dancing alone, therefore Alice's active presence in his life helps Frank confront the traumas of his past so that he can take control of his and connect with Alice.

This control becomes strengthened when Frank finally releases regrets about the death of his children. The first stage of release takes place when Frank expresses his unimaginable pain to Alice. Through communicating with Alice, Frank unlocks his heart. However, it is while Frank 'constructs' the letter intended for Alice that can at last part with his children and forgive himself for their deaths. He thus lights candles for their souls and leaves the Dead Letter Office, the films main symbol of disconnection. Therefore, Alice's presence in Frank's life enables Frank to replace his quiet despair with a sense of hope and liberation.

By the end of this gentle film Alice and Frank help each other see the challenges and promises of a life together. Frank aids Alice so that she is no longer imprisoned in her childhood, and Alice prompts Frank to exorcise the demons and atrocities of his past in Chile. They consequently move away from the past and enter into a world of opportunities where love and happiness colours hope for the future.

Medea

'Often tragedies have an heroic but flawed central character, but in *Medea* no character has any admirable or heroic qualities.'

Do you agree with this observation about the characters in the play?

Sample 2

Comments

- middle-range response
- a limited and somewhat superficial response which fails to go beyond an exploration of one character, Jason
- some level of competent textual analysis is demonstrated which quite appropriately examines aspects of Jason's heroism
- broader and more substantial argument is essential to extend the boundaries of this response.

Student response

The play 'The Medea' has its hero in Jason for whom also the play is his tragedy. He was a grand man much respected by the citizens of Corinth with two heirs and a beautiful new wife who was a princess. He is flawed in his inability to understand the extent to which Medea is wining to seek revenge against his breaking of his sacred oaths.

Jason's main flaw is to underestimate Medea's ability to reek havoc on those that betray her. Although he was married to her he still doesn't seem to understand what she is capable of. He even has the audacity to say to her 'I could never bear ill-will to you' when he is well aware of what she has committed in the past. Medea tells us about these things 'my brother shamefully murdered' and Jason also knows about them yet he still is unable to comprehend Medea seeking any great revenge against him. Jason tells us that Medea's anger 'often leads to ungoverned rage – I have seen it before' but he is still unable to understand what Medea is capable of which in the end becomes his fatal flaw. Admittedly it would be very difficult for a person to see anyone sinking as low to commit infanticide also means of revenge but none the less Jason's fatal flaw does come about by underestimating Medea.

As a result of Medea's actions of revenge against him, Jason loses his hero status and becomes a guilt wretched sad man with no heirs and no wife and little chance of ever having any because Medea's actions have severely tarnished his name. He feels 'dead' after his children were murdered 'my children are dead? Those words kill me' leaving him with the guilt of their deaths 'my poor sons, you have died because of your father's treachery'. Medea even goes as far as to seal his loss of heroism by telling him 'you will die an unheroic death, your head shattered by a timber of the Argo's hull

In the play The Medea, Jason is the heroic but definitely flawed character it is tragedy by the fact that his fatal flaw in underestimating Medea contributes to his downfall. The loss of his wife, children and his heroism is what his fatal flaw results in all for underestimating the woman he comes to call an 'abhorrent child murderer'.

Text Part 2

The Divine Wind

‘The Divine Wind shows how difficult it is for communities to accept cultural difference.’

Discuss.

Sample 1

Comments

- upper-level response
- the assured introduction mirrors the closeness of textual analysis to follow, but with the positional focus necessary for a Part 2 answer.
- a high level of conceptual thinking
- the response maintains its focus with sharpness and directness throughout on the actual topic
- the essay builds a complex measure of both textual precision and argument with detailed and exact textual evidence provided
- exceptionally fluent.

Student response

The community of Broome before the advent of World War II in “The Divine Wind” at first appears to be an idyllic town in which Malays, Koepangers, Japanese, Manilamen and Australians all work in relative harmony in search of the elusive pearl. Hartley Penrose, the central narrator of the novel, seems to enjoy describing the tropical existence of Broome and its harmony: “mangoes and barramundi on the table”, “the half-dozen languages, the slap of sandals and bare feet.” But for all its seeming harmony, Broome is a town where racial tensions simmer just under the surface and evolve into blatant racism with the coming of the war. The sadly ignorant and inappropriate behaviour of the community of Broome demonstrates how challenging it is for communities to accept cultural and racial differences.

“Mangroves, red dirt... pearls” all feature vividly in almost all of the characters’ blood in Broome. The easy life in the wet season and the young kids’ desire to run off to the romantic and carefree world of the cinema in Sheba Lane marks what is lying underneath. Even from the very beginning of the novel, it is clear that racial tensions and intolerance are simmering just under the surface. The mention of the front row of seats set aside for the Aboriginal and Islander customers hints at the racial and cultural divisions between the citizens of Broome. Hart’s realisation of the thoughts of the usher in the cinema also point to some racial intolerance: “What were two white kids doing with a Japanese kid? What were the three of them doing with a drunken Aborigine?” Clearly, this is no multicultural society. Ida Penrose’s pointed dislike of Mitsy and dismissal of Derby Boxer relate more to their ethnicity than to any inappropriate behaviour, like Derby’s drunkenness. Magistrate Killian epitomises the well-held belief of the whites at the time, of their ultimate superiority and control: “Good English stock... not your continental rubbish.” There is a total lack of understanding of other people’s culture and ways of life. People like Magistrate Killian in the novel tend to bundle together anyone of a different race and label them as unintelligent people who can’t “make ethical or moral distinctions.” Hart and Alice alone are perhaps two people who are accepting of the Japanese culture, making trips to John Chi Lane and later helping Sadako and Mitsy to brew soy sauce. These examples of racial intolerance demonstrate how hard it is for members of the community to accept those different from themselves.

Racial intolerance was fuelled and generated by the advent of the war and the behaviour of fear-driven people. When the war came, it truly was a “divine wind”, sweeping everything before its path, “crumbling old certainties” and destroying many relationships. The onset of the war made it impossible for members of the community not to see their workers and friends as enemies. The most important and supposedly noble facets of society are affected by the growing racial intolerance. The Courts of Law, those expected to uphold justice and human rights, falsify evidence to convict Derby Boxer on the basis of his racial status. No one appears to understand the needs of these Aboriginals, except perhaps Michael and Hart who drive six hours in the heat to return Derby to his Aboriginal people, the only people who will accept him. The radio broadcasts propagandist hatred and fuels the fear people have of invasion: “We find the Japanese too loathsome for hatred and we shall not rest until they have been cleared from the earth.” Individuals like Major Morissey and Lester & Olive Webb travel to all the stations nearby to organise a local defence group, against both the Aboriginals and the Japanese. Major Morissey demonstrates a view typical of the ignorant racist “if your Jap painted his face with burnt cork, who would be the wiser?” – and shows a tendency to view people with totally different cultures as one and the same. Such is his belief in his own superiority and the unsuperiority of others of different race, that he neglects to realise that Japanese and Aboriginal cultures are two very independent and separate ways of life. The racially and culturally intolerant behaviour of the community of Broome shows how troublesome it is to accept cultural difference.

Even the two most unprejudiced and open-minded characters in “The Divine Wind” demonstrate the devastating effect of spreading racial intolerance in a small community. Originally, Hart and Michael Penrose are indignant at the treatment of some of the Aboriginals and Japanese. They alone are able to see the idiocy of the interment camps: “Alf? Peggy? What harm can they do anyone?” Michael shows his disapproval in the most sarcastic manner when he comments: “Maybe they think Sandako will send messages out to sea in her soy sauce bottles. Maybe they think she’ll insinuate herself into our lives and commode our will” But sadly and steadily, Michael’s resistance to the racial intolerance decreases and is washed away with Alice officially reported as missing, he feels that Mitsy and Sadako, his two friends are now “two lithe killers.” After his stroke, Michael spends his days desperately trying to understand “the Jap mind.” No better has he than anyone else in Broome recognised the vital importance of cultural difference or accepted their differences.

Hartley Penrose, the central character of the novel, at first finds that his own convictions are very clear and stands with his father to defend people of different cultures and races – like Derby Boxer and then Mitsy. He endures the ostracism from other members of the community: “Hey Penrose, hear you’re running a brothel. Got a couple of Jap whores.” But he too,

gradually succumbs to the pressures of the racial intolerance in the community when, in his eyes, Mitsy and Sadako begin to look “less benign”. Hart demonstrates perfectly his own confusion and fear, and the feeling that he is trapped between both cultures when he says: “I felt allied to my father, to the memory of my sister, to my lover, to my lover’s mother”. But his desire not to take sides with the onset of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour soon corrodes. His love for Mitsy wanes and eventually destroyed when his feelings explode out as blatant racism: “You bitch”. Hart’s lack of acceptance of Mitsy’s culture and race almost leads to the breakdown of their relationship and demonstrates again how members of a community cannot accept cultural differences.

“The Divine Wind” clearly shows that it is almost impossible to accept differences in culture and race in a small, narrow-minded community. The underlying racial tensions in the community were sparked into action when Japan and Australia become involved in the war, spreading cultural and racial intolerance throughout the community. Perhaps Hart’s sobering comment at the conclusion of the novel best demonstrates the extent to which racism has pervaded the whole community: “We may not make it”.

Night

‘Night demonstrates that the instinct to survive is stronger than any other force within people.’

Discuss.

Sample 2

Comments

- middle-range response
- opening tends to list rather than offer a strategy or position for argument. This suggests a pre-planned or formulaic approach which tends to readily dismiss the actual topic and given contention
- fails to develop a connected or sustained argument
- no real depth or evidence of conceptual thought is shown
- shallow with a veneer of textual awareness.

Student response

In Elie Wiesel’s memoir, “Night” we are consistently presented with atrocities that the Jews face in the Holocaust and concentration camps. Although the instinct to survive, might have been stronger than any other force within the prisoners, there were also other prevalent factors that were in the prisoners. Factors such as faith in mankind, familial devotion, behaving morally despite the treacherous circumstances incurred and hope all were strong forces within the prisoners.

The main contribution which led to Elie’s survival of the concentration camps was the faith and hope he had in life and mankind. Although his instinct to survive was a strong force, his hope and faith was what led to him surviving.

Elie’s father, Chlomo, had a very strong instinct to survive, but he inevitably didn’t. However, it was his love and support for his son, Elie that drove his will to keep a living each day. While they are running through the snow to Buna, and fell asleep, Chlomo tells Elie to “sleep” while he will “stay awake” and look out for him. This demonstrates the fact that his instinct to survive was not a stronger factor than his love for his son.

The instinct to survive is not any strong when seen Juliek plays his violin to a “concerto to dying men”. It his rebellion towards not having been allowed to play the violin that was a stronger force within him.

When a son abuses his father for a piece of bread in a cattle wagon, this truly isn’t the instinct to survive that was within him. It was the instinct of being extremely hungry, not wanting to survive the nightmare of the Holocaust.

Rabbi Eliahau’s son abandons him, not because his instinct to survive was any greater than other instincts in him, but it was his selfishness and the fact that he found his father a liability towards him. This selfishness was what prevailed over his instinct to survive.

In conclusion, the will to survive wasn’t the prevailing factor that was everyone’s instinct. Love and respect for one another is what were main factors.

Writing task Part 1

Sample 1

Comments

- upper-range response
- a neat and succinct introduction foreshadows a well written, well structured piece
- a close and quite detailed examination of the ways in which specific language has been intentionally used
- the analysis is not only thorough but extensive
- calm and balanced in tone
- draws the pieces together for the conclusion, thus creating a structural consistency with the introduction.

Student response

The issue of truancy as raised by Ms. Smith, the Principal of Anyton Secondary College, and the appropriate method for dealing with the problem has clearly provoked a variety a variety of responses from within the school community. These

responses demonstrate in both this context and the manner in which they are delivered, the background and purpose behind the writes/speeches. The forum by which each person expresses themselves, the tone and choice of evidence combine to present (in the case of Tom Frost and Rosemary Collins) the same argument in vastly different ways.

Mr. Frost's speech to the school council is clearly delivered with passion and personality in an effort to persuade others members of the council to agree with him. He begins by setting himself in clear opposition to Ms. Smith and categorically condemning her proposal as getting "too carried away with this truancy issue". His aim, whether he is aware of it or not, is to personalise the issue, to appeal to the humanistic side of a group of people who have all "wagged school without coming to grief or causing trouble" and presenting Ms. Smith as a representative of the repressive bureaucracy that everyone remembers from their own school days. He uses a colloquial, personal tone to win over his audience, and also was a great deal of inclusive language: "let's not get too carried away"; "most of us have wagged school... haven't we?" Colloquial expressions like "ton of bricks" and "wagging" are effective in engaging the audience rather than using more formal words like "absenteeism", as is his humorous reference to "mental health days".

Mr. Frost establishes an authority by saying "I've got three kids here" and he feels personally that they don't need to be "chained to their desks all day". This loaded statement is designed to illicit sympathy from his audience, as is the rhetorical question "Is it so bad to wag school?". It is notable that his point that Ms. Smith appears to be unmarried and (we assume) childless, thus providing a reason for Mr. Frost to feel he has greater insight into the problem and for him to appeal to others parents to see the truth. He continues to appeal to his audience emotional intelligence with a series of anecdotal evidence. The story about his daughter apparently provokes lots of understanding from other members of the council, and Mr. Frost gears up for another assault on Ms. Smith argument. As he progresses he becomes less interested in proving his point and less coherent in his line of thought. He seems to suggest that truancy can be connected to kids trying to "find out about life first hand" in a way the school should support in the name of "independent and flexible learning". He ignores the reality that truancy is more closely related to juvenile crime than responsible self-education.

His speech rises in passion and he compares the school system to a prison in a climactic Jibe at "paranoid shopkeepers" who pick on our children without good cause. He finally makes some vague suggestions about tactics he has heard about that would be better than "hounding students endlessly". His speech is passionate but lacks any detailed suggestions for improvement, or any real evidence to support him.

In direct contrast, Rosemary Collins' letter takes a very formal tone – "I am writing as a parent in response to the issues raised concerning school attendance" – and establishes a rather more academic authority. She relies on her "research as a consultant" to convince the reader that she knows what she is talking about, and describes Ms. Smiths model for solving the problem as "a punitive model of discipline, one which is both ineffective and alienating".

Mrs. Collins use of statistics to support her argument is extremely effective in demonstrating her in depth understanding of the problem, for example she notes that "absenteeism is most common among boys at Years 9 and 10". She also makes a moral argument that "every student ... is equally deserving of attention according to their needs". She thus changes the schools approach to the issue, saying that children who wag require help, not punishment, and we have a moral obligation to provide it regardless of our perception of the character of the student. More to the point, Mrs. Collins subtly accuses Ms. Smith of dismissing truant students as "bad kids" who need discipline and don't deserve understanding.

Despite the veiled criticism, Mrs. Collins remains scrupulously polite and reasonable, suggesting that "given these facts" her own ideas are more appropriate than Ms. Smith. She even offers her assistance in a practical capacity in implementing some new strategies, a doubly attractive offer given Mrs. Collins professional capacity.

Both these writers present the same or similar argument is (that the schools hard-line approach is flawed), but from vastly different ends of the spectrum. Mrs. Collins' is rational and well thought out, while Mr. Frosts' is emotional but lacks evidence. In some ways, in their persuasive capacity, it would appear both are effective in achieving their aims.

Sample 2 Comments

- middle-range response
- tends to list and identify persuasive devices and techniques
- does not *explain or analyse* language
- does not get to the heart of the writers' intention and effect in their use of language.

Student response

In the speech given by a parent, Tom Frost, at the School Council Meeting, Mr. Frost has attacked the school principal Ms. Smith on over reacting to the issue of truancy. Mr. Frost is knowledgeable of the issue as he has "three kids" there. The rhetorical question asking "Is it so bad to wag school?" is designed to make the council think.

Mr. Frost criticise the school for not understanding why the children wag. Mr. Frost attacks continue claiming "school isn't always a safe happy place". In an effort to appeal to the listeners sympathy Mr. Frost discusses the stress his daughter has endured at school.

By stating what schools have become Mr. Frost appeals to the listeners sense of guilt and uses inclusive language to put forward a different approach for ending truancy.

In the letter sent by Rosemary Collins to the principle of Anyton Secondary College Ms. Smith, Collins appeals to the readers sense of knowledge has she has shown she has done research. A definite strong tone is used when discussing “the complex issue”. An appeal is made to the reader to be sympathetic to why in fact the children are wagging.

The use of statistics allows the reader to be confident in what Collins is saying. Collins attacks saying absentism is often linked to other causes. A call for individual assessment “according to needs” is in a sympathetic tone that appeals to the readers sense of obligation.

Group, loyalty is appeared to by saying the whole community should get involved, and furthermore a futuristic approach is taken in the last paragraph about how attendance can be improved. In the left bottom corner Collins knowledgeably asserts that she herself is a mother of a year eight girl which leaves the readers with the ease that Collins understands the subject.

Part 2

(Write an **editorial** for a national daily newspaper presenting the paper’s position on the issue of dealing with truancy.)

Sample 1

Comments

- a strong and compelling case logically developed and presented
- the approach taken, language utilised and persuasive forms employed are totally compatible with that of an editorial
- voice and tonality very appropriate.

Student response

THE AGE

7-9-2002

Don’t let our children go.

Once more the issue of truancy has been raised in the larger Victorian community. New research has found that truancy is on the rise once more, particularly only among boys in Year 9 and 10. Parent groups are in turmoil over the night response – from the “coddle your child position to the harsher models of discipline. But the main question that must be answered in attempts to stop the problem is why are children not going to school?

The public school system has a lot to answer for, as for as truancy is concerned. The number of teachers is steadily decreasing, while class sizes creep up to 30. Harassed teachers cannot cope with the number of students, let alone focus on the individual problems of one child. Thus leaves the gate open, quite literally, for students to play the truant. Children are not being seen or heard in class. For average and bright pupils this is problematic, but they do manage to cope. For the children with other issues already – such as literacy, problems keeping up in class, social problems at school as well as a difficult home environment – the situation becomes disastrous.

These students find themselves falling further and further behind the rest of the class. Not only is their no-one to help, but often students’ problems are not even noticed. Their solution is to ignore school all together rather than deal with the problem. This solution can be expected of 14 to 16 year old boys. However, our state seems to be talus exactly the same response by simply punishing the students, and this is inexcusable.

The state government needs to spend more money on the public school system. The financial incentives for teachers need to be increased so as to encourage more ex-teachers in the workforce to return to their past profession as well as increase the number of new teachers. In addition, money needs to be spent on setting up programs to battle the reasons students fall back on truancy in the first place. These include counsellors discussing home and social issues, as well as out-of-class help to bring these pupils up to the average academic standard. Trouble students need to be identified early-on, and problems dealt with immediately, before the situation rages out of control.

We, as a state, cannot afford to allow our youngsters to fall into this trap, leading a large amount of the time, to unemployment. Education is what keeps our society progressing, in fact, running at all. It has been said many times that the ‘youth are the future’. This future needs to be given the chance it deserves to do whatever it desires. The state government needs to realise the vast importance of this issue and act now, before it is too late. Truancy isn’t going to go away if ignored, but Victoria’s children are.

Sample 2

Comments

- just middle-range – significant numbers of answers, like this one, fail to indicate topic choice and are vague enough in structure to make a topic decision difficult, if not impossible, for assessment
- such answers therefore pose enormous problems for assessment since the student’s intention can only be guessed at and performance against appropriate indicators can only be estimated.

Student response (no task nominated)

The issue of truancy is ever increasing in today’s society and it clearly needs more attention. The absenteeism, most common among boys at Year 9 and 10 level, needs to be a major issue within both the schools and the community to provide support

for these children. Legally all children must stay in school until the age of 15, but obviously there is an issue if they are not willing to further educate themselves after this age.

To get to the stage where police need to interfere shows the escalation of this problem, and disciplining them will not break the trend.

The issue needs to be met, where it starts: out home and in the school yard. Why are these students 'wagging' classes and school: And what can we do as a community to address the issue? Obviously not a lot is being done to provide safe and happy places at school where the students are inspired to learn and exercise their minds. Attention to these students needs has to be met and having parents or teachers forever on their backs about the amount of time they spend out school will not help the situation.

These children are our future and schooling has to be seen in a positive light to provide our society with well educated, happy, adventurous people. Truancy must reduce in schools and be dealt with in a positive, encouraging and supportive manner to work.