

2009 Trial HSC English – Paper 1 – Reading Task

Examiners' Comments

Text One – Book Cover

- a) i) Identify one aspect of belonging represented in this text (1 mark)

Majority of students were able to identify an aspect of belonging and achieved the 1 mark. Some aspects explored on the book cover were: “Who Am I?”, family and identity and how this impacts on a persons sense of belonging. The idea of not belonging and the emotional impact this has, as well as shared experiences and how history can create a sense of belonging. Many students also commented on Mary’s loneliness, isolation and sadness. It is important that you write in full sentences and not just supply a quote for your answer.

- ii) Identify and explain how one technique represents this aspect. (1 mark)

This question required students to identify at least 1 technique and provide an explanation in relation to the aspect of belonging. Students should clearly identify a technique and ensure they are quoting the correct technique. This answer requires T.E.P. Some examples included:

- Rhetorical question – “Who Am I?” “Who’s gunna hug me here?” - emotional impact of not belonging
- Lines through the title – confusion regarding her identity
- Salient image of blurred face – sadness, grief, identity
- Contrast of top and bottom visuals – separation from family
- Contrast of past and present – words “was...now...” transition from belonging to not belonging
- Blurb/quotes/direct speech/emotive language – back cover
- Repetition - “I miss Matron Rose... I miss my real mum”
- First person pronouns “I”

Text Two – Poem

How does the poet convey his ideas about belonging? (2 marks)

Many students achieved full marks for this question as they identified a technique and example and linked it with a *basic* explanation to belonging. However many of the explanations highlighted that students had misinterpreted the poem. The poem is from the mother’s point of view, not the daughter. Techniques and ideas you could have discussed included:

Please turn over

- Transition from constantly moving places and the symbolic link to belonging – fruit “all the green tomatoes...”, “last shrivelled fruit.”
- Emotional impact of belonging and not belonging “ the bottling-set she never unpacked”
- Contrast of individual attachments to places - older girl unhappy to leave, “is close to tears...”
- Repetition of the word “and”, listing the impact of continuous movement and activities on the family’s sense of belonging.
- The idea of hope for the future and obtaining a strong connection to a place “Make a wish...”
- Negative language “never, won’t”
- Narrative quality – characterisation

Text Three – Web Magazine Article

This web magazine article carries a powerful message about the disaffection felt by young Lebanese- Australians. How has the writer conveyed this message?

Students were required to explain how the composer conveyed the disaffection through the use of techniques. While many students were able to identify techniques and provide supporting evidence, they did not adequately analyse the effect or purpose of these techniques on the overall message.

Techniques and ideas that could have been discussed include:

Text Four – Extract

d) Explain how the composer’s feelings of belonging, or not belonging, are represented in the text.

This question required you to explain how the writer used techniques to represent her feelings. Since it was worth 3 marks, you should operate on the idea of providing 3 techniques, with an example and an **explanation** of the **effect/purpose** of each one. Many students were able to provide techniques but their explanation of effect/purpose was poor and so marks in this section were not very high. This extract was an unusual, and perhaps challenging, piece but you can expect to find at least one of the items in the HSC Reading task will be difficult. Here is a sample answer (courteous of Winsome Walker) which received full marks :

Initially, Elizabeth Gilbert experienced a strong sense of belonging and contentment during her holiday in Italy. This is conveyed through the connotations of the word “happy” suggesting she is comfortable and satisfied, further accentuated by the romantic atmosphere and picturesque image of the setting sun. However, the composer’s initial feelings of happiness are undercut by her overpowering feelings of loneliness and isolation.. This shift in feelings is conveyed through Gilbert’s personification of the emotions of despair and loneliness as if they are menacing stalkers. To emphasise the idea that she cannot escape her dark depression and subsequently feels isolated socially in Italy (and in her wider life), the composer uses a simile to compare her emotions to “Pinkerton Detectives” who constantly pervade her trip.

Note : there were other students who received full marks.

Texts one, two, three and four.

e. Which TWO of these texts would you recommend as most helpful to other HSC students who are seeking to develop an understanding of the concept of Belonging?

There was a definite improvement in the Trial – lengthier responses suggest that people were answering the earlier questions more economically – allowing more time for this question. All four texts were worthy of consideration – each made a definitive statement about the concept of Belonging (and remember that implicit in the concept is the idea of NOT Belonging). **Better answers ensured that they:**

- Identified why the texts they chose were meaningful for a HSC audience **in terms of developing their understanding of the concept** – though some students got bogged down in generalisations about racism and individual experience – focus on the text and the concept!
- Included **skilful analysis of techniques that they linked to the concept**. There are still some of you who ‘shopping list’ techniques with examples in a random fashion. If you have ‘So...’ written on your script I am asking you to link your comment to the concept.

Statements like *‘The use of dialogue makes it feel like they are talking to you personally’* are empty. How does this build an argument regarding the texts’ role in developing students’ understanding of belonging? You could say this about any text! Some of you still write comments that we’d see in Year 9/10 media studies – eg ‘The heading gets the reader’s interest.’ Some of you do not your techniques and label incorrectly – eg identifying metaphors as similes or descriptive language as emotive language. Furthermore you need to revise the range of language and visual techniques that you should be aware of – don’t count on a simile being in every script!

Reliance on quotes – quoting is NOT analysis – it’s filling lines! Quotes need to be selected wisely and used in a meaningful way – link to concept or as evidence of an effective technique in shaping the reader’s understanding.

Some students’ responses were affected by their poor reading – particularly of the poem and the extract. Always choose the text/texts you feel you have the stronger grasp of. Moreover you need to treat the texts in a broader way – don’t just focus on one bit – eg in ‘Drifters’ – people simple focused on the two girls and their feelings about the place = very limited.

Students should be aware by now that they can use material from previous questions but clearly you need to add more detail to demonstrate a comprehensive appreciation of both texts – the concept and TEP which explains how the concept is shaped. **Remember** that a response which requires a consideration of two texts, the treatment needs to be balanced – ie equal treatment of each text

Unlike the Half Yearly, most students considered WHAT their chosen text said about the concept and included textual analysis of relevant language/visual features - the HOW. Well done! The average mark for this section was 3 – not bad! To achieve a 4 or 5 you must analyse each text in more detail – a clear, valid statement of their significance for HSC students studying the concept, discussion of what the texts communicate about the concept and how this meaning is shaped through a skilful analysis of at least three techniques per text. More practice prior the Trials will build your speed and confidence!