

## Considering Question 8

Consider how the application of a reading practice has revealed unexpected ideas in at least one literary text you have studied.

### Interpreting the question

This question asks candidates to explore critical interpretations of texts studied and discuss the application of a particular reading practice. The discriminating term in this question is that of 'unexpected ideas'. It is important to clearly establish the unexpected, surprising or new ideas that are revealed due to the application of a reading practice. For example, a resistant reading of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* could lead to the unexpected idea that Elizabeth Bennet is a disappointing feminist hero as she ultimately conforms to the social expectations surrounding a favorable marriage which she spends much of the novel denouncing.

An articulation of what is expected may be useful before discussing the unexpected. Developing a clear thesis which states what is unexpected for a particular reader – and what made this unexpected – could be helpful in addressing this question. It may be useful to discuss how different readers have differing notions of what the unexpected is, depending on their personal context. Subsequently, there may be a range of unexpected ideas in response to a single text. Stronger responses will articulate how the nominated reading practice itself led to the stated unexpected ideas and provide discussion of the process of reading.

A reading practice can come in many forms. It might be a critical lens such as a feminist reading; it might be a reading with a focus on the representation of religion or a reading with consideration of your personal context; it may even be an allegorical reading. There is no requirement or preference for a particular style of reading practice and candidates do not need to apply what might be considered a 'traditional' reading practice. The choice of reading practice should be focused on that which allows candidates to draw unexpected ideas. A discussion, or even comparison, of dominant, resistant or alternate reading practices could help to delineate between the expected and unexpected; however, this is only one way of approaching this question. The question refers to 'a reading practice' which means that multiple reading practices are not required.

Stronger candidates might provide a short explanation or description of the reading practice being utilised at the beginning of the response. The question refers to one text 'you' have studied which invites a personal response and use of the pronoun 'I'. The verb 'consider' encourages reflection and judgement or evaluation, so candidates should be mindful to express their own thoughts and ideas in their response.

Candidates need to support their reading and the unexpected ideas yielded from this reading practice with a range of generic and language conventions. There should be a clear discussion of the genre of the text, whether it be poetry, prose fiction or drama. It is vital to support every assertion you make with detailed textual analysis.

### Advice from teachers

- Revise the terminology and discourse associated with readings and reading practices.
- Choose reading practices which suit the text studied, rather than trying to force a particular lens, practice or theory.
- Refer to a broad range of language and generic conventions to support your reading.
- Discuss the process of reading itself and how you arrived at the ideas which you took from the text.

### Activity: Reading into your texts

For one of the texts you have studied this year, complete the following table. An example has been included for you.

Text:	
<b>Dominant reading</b> <i>The view or interpretation that is most commonly developed, which often aligns with dominant values and beliefs.</i>	
<b>Alternate reading</b> <i>Readings which are different from the dominant reading without undermining it. Looking at the text by focusing on a particular idea, ideological theory or process for example.</i>	
<b>Resistant reading</b> <i>A reading that contradicts or challenges the dominant reading.</i>	

### Example:

Text: <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> by Jane Austen (novel)	
<b>Dominant reading</b>	The novel can be read as a satire or critique of the social institutions of class and marriage which gave women little power and autonomy.
<b>Alternate reading</b>	A Marxist reading practice can highlight the social conflict between different classes within the text and also draw attention to the silencing of the working-class characters.
<b>Resistant reading</b>	Elizabeth Bennet can be interpreted as a disappointing feminist hero as she ultimately conforms to the social expectations surrounding a favourable marriage which she spends much of the novel denouncing.

## Question 8: Sample response one

This response takes into account what was unexpected in the text's context of production and provides a clear discussion of how a particular reading practice reveals ideas that may challenge the values and ideologies of certain readers. A definition and description of the selected reading practice could have been used at the outset of this response in order to frame the influence of that particular reading practice in generating unexpected ideas. Identification and discussion of a greater range of language and generic conventions would have helped develop this response into a more detailed and thorough essay. There was some conflation between author intent and the role of the reader which undermined the success of the response at times; however, the ongoing focus on the notion of the unexpected was admirable. It would have been pleasing to see the candidate express their personal response to the text also.

Authors often make their works interesting and engaging through the inclusion of unexpected and sometimes shocking ideas. This is certainly the case with Jane Austen's 1818 classic *Persuasion*, which can be read using Marxist criticism to reveal such unexpected ideas. Set in the Regency era of England, *Persuasion* is set in a time of rigid expectations and social rules. As a wealthy and educated member of the upper class, it seems unlikely that Austen should include ideas that aim to subvert the dominant ideologies and advocate for social change. However, through the application of a Marxist reading, ideas such as promotion of the navy, criticism of nobility, and sympathy for the less wealthy are revealed, encouraging audiences of the time to consider the benefits of greater social mobility in their rigid system.

By applying a Marxist reading practice to the navy characters of the novel, particularly when compared to characters such as Sir Walter Elliot, the unexpected idea that soldiers and sailors should be respected by the middle and upper classes is revealed. This is because such people often came from the working class and were thus not respected by those of "superior" esteem. This is highlighted by Sir Walter's claim that the Navy is a "means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction". However, the way in which the navy characters are portrayed so positively by Austen contradicts this snobbish attitude, as they are praised by Louisa Musgrove for "their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness".

The introduction to this response clearly articulates who these ideas would be unexpected for and why, thus the candidate engages with most elements of the question.

There is concise indication of the unexpected ideas to be addressed which leads into the body of the response in an effective manner.

A definition or description of the Marxist reading strategy would benefit the opening of this paragraph.

The candidate has identified a strong piece of evidence but needed to also discuss elements of characterisation in order to unpack this evidence.

The Harvilles are also described as "kindly hospitable... considering the whole party as friends of their own." This contrasts starkly to the way in which particular members of the upper classes are characterised, such as Sir Walter, whose "entrance seemed to give a general chill". By applying a Marxist reading to the characters it can be discerned that Austen is promoting the navy despite their working-class origins whilst criticising people such as barons who are unable to recognise their service and contribution to the nation. This is a highly unexpected idea as it encourages social mobility, contributing to the disruption of the class system in England which was close to the hearts of many at the time.

By applying a Marxist reading to the Dalrymples, audiences are able to understand the idea that nobility and esteem does not equate to one's value as a person. For example, despite being royals, Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret are described by Anne as having "no superiority of manner, accomplishment or understanding" and Miss Carteret being "so plain and so awkward...she would never have been tolerated in Camden Place but for her birth". Although it may seem logical to contemporary audiences that wealth is not an indicator of a wonderful personality, this is a highly unexpected idea in Austen's time, whose people prized rank and status above all else. This is reflected in Mr Elliot's claim that "good company requires only birth, education and manners" demonstrating that personal characteristics were rarely taken into account when forming associations with others. Thus, it is highly unexpected, outrageous even, for Anne to turn down an offer to visit the Dalrymples and express her opinion that good company is actually "the company of clever, well informed people" which the Dalrymples simply were not. In order to see this idea, a Marxist reading is a useful tool that can be used by audiences to give insight into the social norms of the time, enabling them to understand that Anne's resistance to the Dalrymples promotes social change and challenges the dominant way of thinking about class order.

More discussion of the process of reading these characters using a Marxist reading practice is required here.

More specific details regarding the reader and their context would have been beneficial here.

The clarification of what is expected for the two divergent audiences works to show that what is unexpected for some may affect others differently.

A discussion of class conflict, often considered by a Marxist reading practice, might be a suitable element of the reading practice to discuss at this point.

In analysing the character of Mrs Smith and the ideas she represents using a Marxist reading, audiences are able to understand that Austen is advocating for those who are needy, and poverty stricken, whilst promoting the unexpected idea that people of lower classes can be worthwhile acquaintances. For example, although Sir Walter dismisses her as "mere Mrs Smith, an everyday Mrs Smith" and cannot see her value as a person because she holds "no surname of dignity". Anne praises her for her "elasticity of mind" and chooses her company instead of the Dalrymples. In doing so, Anne symbolically subverts class order, placing the sick and poor Mrs Smith above the rich, esteemed Dalrymples in her own hierarchy. Anne is awed by the fact that "sickness nor sorrow had seemed to have closed her heart or ruined her spirits", demonstrating reverence for personality over class ranking. Through the use of a Marxist reading practice audiences are able to see the idea that Austen is promoting through the character of Mrs Smith- that personality, strength and kindness is more important than your ranking in society- or lack thereof. In such a rigid class system, this idea would have been incredibly unexpected, particularly for those of the upper classes who valued money and status to the utmost degree.

Evidently, Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion* is filled with unexpected ideas, best revealed through the application of a Marxist reading practice. By utilising this lens, audiences are able to understand both the norms of the era and the progressive ideas that Austen subtly promoted to encourage change. As a creator of didactic tales, Austen managed to present ideas that were not only critical to subverting the system of her world, but ones that are still relevant today.

**Hint:** Create a list of synonyms for the key words and discriminators in the question before you begin writing. This will refine your understanding of the terms themselves and provide a bank of useful and relevant words when constructing your response.

Again, more specificity regarding the Marxist reading practice would elevate this response. It may have been helpful to consider how these characters act as metonyms to represent their broader social classes.

Some variation in vocabulary and syntax is needed in these linking sentences so that they do not seem superficial and instead work to cement the candidate's response to the question.

The final sentence of this response is very evocative. Some clarification or an example of this enduring relevance would be beneficial.

## Question 8: Sample response two

The text selection in this response is to be commended as *Hamlet* can be accessed by a myriad of reading practices, each yielding interesting and, in some cases, unexpected ideas. The response articulates some of the unexpected ideas that can be uncovered when applying reading practices, although the candidate could have more clearly outlined the difference between the dominant reading of the text and those ideas which are more surprising. This essay is detailed and applies a broad range of theoretical ideas which are relevant to both the course and the question. The thread of the argument could have been clearer at times; perhaps with more careful planning, greater clarity of expression could have been forged.

One of the most invigorating aspects of engaging in literary analysis is the discovery of unexpected ideas by applying different readings practices. This is made clear when studying William Shakespeare's most renowned play, *Hamlet*. First performed at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *Hamlet* dramatises the tragic story of the young prince of Denmark, whose country is under the threat of invasion, yet he remains obsessed with the recent death of his father and the subsequent marriage of his mother, Gertrude, and his uncle, Claudius, who has become king. This play has undergone intense prolonged analysis and by applying the reading practice of theoretical and evidence-based approaches, we can uncover unexpected ideas surrounding Hamlet's emotional and inconsistent character.

Upon reading *Hamlet* for the first time, one easily overlooks his emotionality as a simple character choice. However, by applying the theoretical psychoanalytic approach to literary analysis, as developed by Sigmund Freud, we can reveal surprising ideas explaining Hamlet's emotionality. Freud outlined that one's emotions are a result of the conflict between internal impulses and what is deemed acceptable by society. He also defined the Oedipal Complex, based on Sophocles' play *Oedipus the King*, where a son experiences jealousy toward his father due to unconscious sexual desire for his mother. By using these approaches, we understand a deeper meaning behind Hamlet's character. Act 3 Scene 4 is often referred to as the "closet scene" where the private nature of the setting suggests intimacy between Hamlet and Gertrude deeper than what is considered normal. Their relationship is again reinforced through

The opening of this response shows clear engagement with the question and the relevant ideas from the syllabus regarding texts being read in multiple ways.

It would be helpful to delineate the difference between the dominant reading and the then unexpected ideas which are discovered.

The descriptor of the theoretical reading practice works well to open this part of the argument.

The synonym 'surprising' works well to avoid repetition when addressing the notion of the unexpected.

The candidate refers to the 'deeper meaning' of the text numerous times which indicates that their response is focused on addressing a previous exam question and has not fully been adapted to suit the key ideas presented in this question.



Hamlet's obsession with Gertrude's sex life, evocatively describing her "making love" in "the rank sweat of that unseamed bed." His passion is again shown through the vivid imagery of Claudius' "reechy kisses paddling in [Gertrude's] neck." By applying psychoanalysis, we can also attribute Hamlet's oversexualised treatment of Ophelia, asking to "lie in [her] lap" as an attempt to transfer his sexual desires to a more normal subject. Psychoanalysis highlighted that King Hamlet's premature death did not allow for Hamlet's Oedipal Complex to be normalised, resulting in his excessive emotionality as he struggles with his impulses. By applying the theoretical approach of Psychoanalysis as a reading practice we now reveal unexpected reasons for Hamlet's emotional character.

To improve this argument, further identification and analysis of dramatic and language conventions is needed.

A strong hook back to the idea of the unexpected is provided here.

This idea is less unexpected than the one outlined in the first body paragraph and needs to be more strongly aligned with the question.

The candidate identifies a number of notable language conventions here. However, they need to more effectively utilise these conventions within their argument.

We can again apply the reading practice of a theoretical approach to reveal unexpected ideas surrounding Hamlet's emotionality by using a New Historicist approach. Historicists valued understanding a text as a product of a particular set of social, historical and political circumstances. They emphasised the influence of the "Great Chain of Being" on Elizabethan society. Any disruptions to the natural order would have significant consequences. They outlined that it was believed that incest, even marrying one's siblings-in-law, would upset this order. This approach thus outlines that Hamlet's emotionality towards his mother and uncles reflected the binding moral codes of the time. In Act 1 Scene 2 the disturbance of the natural order is made known through the metaphor of an "unweeded garden" and sickening imagery "rank and gross" with an uneasy tone. The severity of the King and Queen's actions are highlighted through Hamlet's violent language with harsh consonants, "wicked" and "incestuous sheets". This is followed by a tone of fear in the repetition of "not" in "it is not, nor it cannot come to good," conveying the foreboding finality of their actions. By understanding the text through the lens of the Historicist approach we reveal the new ideas that Hamlet's emotionality was reflective of and justified by Elizabethan culture.

By applying the reading practice of a theoretical approach, we can gain deeper insight into the surprising duality of literary meaning. This is made clear in the contrasting psychoanalytic and Historicist interpretations of Hamlet's hesitation. Hamlet is shown to have a resolute attitude towards revenge with violent language, "O from this moment my thoughts by bloody", yet when faced with a prime opportunity to kill Claudius he hesitates. His excuse "now that I might do it pat, now he is praying" conveys a contradictory character. Psychoanalysis explains that Hamlet's jealousy toward Claudius prevents him from acting. In the 'closet scene' Hamlet's command "do not go to my uncle's bed" is a passion similar to a jealous lover. Freud thus pointed out that he is "no better than he who had to kill" and killing Claudius would be like killing a part of himself, so he hesitates. The Historicists however argued that it was the overarching Elizabethan value of family honour which prevented Hamlet's action. The ghost's firm command "do not let thy soul contrive against thy mother" highlights the only way to redeem their honour from incest is to save Gertrude. However, by killing Claudius Hamlet would contribute to the cycle of "foul murder" already staining the family name. Therefore, Hamlet's hesitation is due to him being caught between two wrongs difficult to reconcile. These two ideas, psychoanalytic and Historicist, highlight how the application of a reading practice can reveal unexpected, multifaceted ideas in a text.

A comparison of expected ideas with unexpected ideas could have been undertaken in this paragraph, given the choice of subject matter, and would have made for an interesting and suitable approach.

This is an effective hook back to question as it frames the subject around the notion of what is unexpected.

This is a focused and concise conclusion and makes for a clear and articulate end to the response.

Through the application of a theoretical approach to literary analysis, psychoanalytic and Historicist, we can reveal unexpected ideas and reasons for Hamlet's emotional and inconsistent character. This highlights the value of various approaches to literary analysis and varied reading practices in gaining a deeper understanding of the complexity of literature which remain surprising and unexpected.

### Activity: Reading processes

When developing a response about reading practices it is important to discuss the process of reading. Below is a list of sentence starters which provide examples of this. Add SIX more sentence starters to this list in preparation for your exam.

- Readers that share the text's feminist outlook are likely to...
- A reader opposed to the dominant ... discourse in this text would develop a resistant reading...
- My own value of ... allows for this text to be understood as...
- Considering the structure of this text rather than the content, one could infer that this text represents...
- If read from a Marxist perspective, the text can be seen as representing...
- This metaphor could be understood by readers focusing on eco-critical theory as...
- The use of this archetype could be seen by a reader as...
- Focusing on the sub-generic construction of the text would see this text as...
- Familiarity with archetypal representations of masculinity may mean readers would see this text as representing...
- A reader familiar with the Civil Rights Movement may infer...
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### Considering Question 9

Explain how the construction of imagery has enriched your understanding of a human experience. In your response, make primary reference to at least one poetry text.

#### Interpreting the question

This question asks candidates to consider how the experience of reading a poetic text rich in imagery has enriched their understanding of an element of the human experience. The command term 'explain' requires candidates to *relate cause and effect; make the relationships between things evident; provide why and/or how*, which encourages responses that articulate and describe elements of textual construction, thus inviting a close discussion of language techniques. 'Enriched' is an important term in this question and candidates should consider how the construction of their studied poem/s has deepened, furthered, developed or expanded on their understanding and should seek to interrogate this term closely. For example, candidates could discuss how reading Carol Ann Duffy's 'Warming her Pearls' enriches their understanding of the human experience of forbidden love or how Dylan Thomas' poetry can be read to further our perception of the process of finding one's identity and sense of self.

'Imagery' in this question can refer to the evocation of senses. Sensory imagery can include visual imagery, olfactory imagery, auditory imagery, tactile imagery, gustatory imagery and techniques which appeal to the sensory experience. A discussion of synesthesia and the interplay between senses could also make for interesting discussion.

The term 'construction' asks for discussion of how imagery is developed through language and generic techniques; clear analysis of how devices create imagery would make for a successful response. Candidates should reflect on the idea that imagery is developed through the manipulation of many language features in combination, such as figurative language, sounds and metre, amongst many other devices. Stronger responses may offer a discussion of a range of sensory imagery rather than focusing on just one of the senses. For example, Robert Frost's 'After Apple-Picking' uses language techniques to construct visual, olfactory, tactile and auditory imagery to reflect upon the human experience of a wearying day's work followed by unsettling restlessness.

A 'human experience' is a phrase which could refer to aspects of life such as childhood, grief, the desire for change, a sense of personal stagnation or something more specific, such as the first day of school or any other experience linked to the human condition. The phrase 'human experience' is a broad idea and can be approached and defined in a number of ways. It is vital that responses connect the imagery within the poetic text to the enriched understanding of the human experience presented in the thesis.

The term 'your' invites a personal response and use of the pronoun 'I'. An articulation of your understanding prior to reading the poem, followed by a discussion of how the development of imagery in the poem has deepened your understanding of the human experience is a possible approach.

Given this is a genre-specific question, it should be clear throughout the response that poetry is the subject matter. Consideration of the imagery-rich and dense nature of poetic texts should