

Considering Question 3

Reflect on the way in which at least one literary text has resonated deeply with you because of your own cultural assumptions, social position and/or gender.

Interpreting the question

To successfully address this question, candidates needed to take time to consider the opening word of the question – *reflect*. It is the key to a strong answer. When one reflects, one is thinking deeply about a subject, setting up ideas both opposing and supportive, considering these and coming to some kind of conclusion or judgment. The question invites a particularly personal response where the candidate uses the first person point of view and draws from their life experience and cultural background. The words *resonated deeply* ask that there be some kind of ongoing impact and response on a private level. This could be emotional, enlightening, empowering or confronting. Candidates need to be confident enough to write candidly, making clear connections between their subjective reactions and the chosen text.

Concepts explored within the question are mostly drawn from Unit 3 of the Year 12 Literature ATAR course syllabus. It states the importance of the reader as part of the literary experience, and that they are able to view the contents of a text with their own particular life experience contributing to their appreciation and enjoyment of literature: *'the influence of the reader's context, cultural assumptions, social position and gender'*. During the investigation of literary texts studied throughout the course, candidates should be aware of what they bring to a text and how that shapes their understanding of both content and meaning. They should understand the value of individual reactions to texts from different cultures as well as those representing Australia. Through close examination of language and genre, *'readers are influenced to respond to their own and other's cultural experiences'*. Candidates should be prepared to bring personal cultural background to the table when they consider how meaning can be made.

Strong answers may adopt a critical stance toward a text, whereby their cultural experience challenges, or is even affronted by, the representation of various ideologies. Graphic detail presented in a text can be confronting. A personal response towards the constructs within the text needs to be clearly illustrated, balanced and logically explained. On the other hand, a reader may recognise and accept ideologies that endorse their cultural position and experience of life. It is important for the candidate to take a stance about the *resonance*, or long term impact, of a text and weave it tightly into their own situation and identity. They might demonstrate how it has changed the way they think about the world, how it has endorsed their beliefs or not, or perhaps how it has reshaped their values and allowed them to critique ideas. The candidate's personal voice should be confident, clear and sincere.

Candidates should demonstrate their knowledge of the text by carefully selecting and including pivotal moments, scenes or instances which allow for reflection. They should take time to choose in order to provide base material that allows for that consideration and careful thought. Sometimes a scene, phrase or moment can be subtle and suggest an opportunity for deliberation. A candidate's first response might be obvious, like a knee-jerk reaction. Further thought could open up new responses or allow for different connections between ideas and cultural realities. A powerful answer will allow for the development of fine distinctions between an initial and a more complex and detailed reaction towards what is being presented. Implications can become important and should be included as part of the appreciation of a text.

Question 3: Sample response one

While this candidate demonstrated excellent textual knowledge and wrote their response in an easy and articulate style, they needed to develop a little more detail about their personal interaction with the text. 'Reflect' is the opening word of the question and pondering the impact of the text due to gender, culture and social position should be developed strongly. A reading that addresses author context, while offering valuable insight into the text, is not what the question asks. This candidate did make some references throughout their response to the personal; however, their references were somewhat general. Perhaps explaining how their personal context shaped their reaction would have supported their discussion further.

Reader's interpretations of literary text, regardless of the work's own context of writing, is heavily influenced by their own cultural beliefs and personal context. In my journey of analysing E.E Cummings poem "in just" (1920), I interpreted the poem in a number of contrasting ways by employing various reading strategies, and my personal response to each one of these interpretations has been highly affected by my personal context. Cummings's unconventional poem depicts a scene of children playing, whilst a "balloonman" slowly approaches. The highly idiosyncratic and ambiguous nature of this poem allows for a multitude of readings, each resonating with me in a different way.

Explaining just what that personal context is, at this point, would have heightened the initial thesis.

A purely romantic reading could understand "in just" as a lamentation over contemporary societies loss of natural appreciation, suggesting that the descent of mundane adulthood strips individuals of child-like wonder of our unconventional environment. I achieved this reading through foregrounding Cummings's outspoken love of the Romantic period, as well as his criticism of the monotony of the adult world. This reading was also evident personally due to our current culture's regrets regarding climate change, which now similarly pushes for environmental appreciation. The poem commences with the line "In just Spring", an anaphoric phrase repeated throughout the poem. As spring is a common symbol of new-life, the early reference to the season could be interpreted as establishing the age of the persona - that is, that they are a child. Cummings then establishes a pattern of following "It's Spring" by a child-like description of the

The personal is suggested here, but the candidate generalises 'current culture'. Some specific detail is needed.

Question 3: Sample response two

In this response, the candidate has made clear reference to their personal reactions, exploring gender, class and culture. When discussing West German culture, more explicit detail regarding context and values linked to that context would have helped deepen the response. While there were some good examples chosen from the text to support the candidate's comments, there was room for more. The language employed was clear and to the point, with some inclusion of literary terminology. This could have been further developed. The candidate presented a clear voice in addressing the question and really tried to make continuous links to what was being asked of them.

Western German culture had the ability to strip an individual of their respectability, integrity and independence. The Lost Honour of Katherina Blum, hereafter LHKB, by German author Heinrich Boll endeavours the tarnishing of Katherina's honour by means of the media following her chance encounters with a fugitive. Due to my own gender, social position and cultural assumptions, I am able to resonate deeply with LHKB and perceive the method in which Katherina is marginalised by means of her gender, class and culture. This is highlighted through Boll's creative application of feminist discourse, the style of language used by media outlets and the false characterisation of Katherina. Boll's novella is able to draw attention to the way in which West German society was able to abuse patriarchal structures, such as the media or police, in order to severely marginalise an individual from society.

History, more often than not, presents women as unimportant or powerless, consequently resulting in their suffering. In the novella, there are many suggestions of misogyny that can be exposed, as the novella presents a masculine bias, which can potentially be harmful. As a female reader I am hypersensitive to the misogynistic references that are made and have a well-developed understanding of feminist discourse in conjunction with the principle of a patriarchal society. A newspaper article regarding Katherina states "the wife of one of her former employers, a former country doctor, describes her as follows: 'she behaved like a real little floozy. I had to let her go for the sake of our teenage sons, our patients and my

There is a need for the identification of context, specifically time.

The candidate should have made this statement more specific. What gender, social position and culture?

A definition of the key word 'resonated' would have strengthened the introduction.

The opening sentence of this paragraph is definite, confident and on point.

Here the candidate connects directly to one of the terms of the question.