

## Considering Question 5

Consider how at least one literary text has shifted or confirmed your ideas about important issues present in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia.

### Interpreting the question

This question requires candidates to examine how texts can provoke us to assess the circumstances of our context – the time and place in which we live. It draws on a key point from the Year 12 Literature ATAR course syllabus: *‘how readers are influenced to respond to their own and others’ cultural experiences’*. The reference to ‘your’ in the question indicates that candidates should adopt a personal voice; the use of the pronoun ‘I’ is acceptable and encouraged in the context of this question.

Your response should be built on a discussion of social issues which exist contemporaneously; the phrase ‘21<sup>st</sup> century Australia’ is specific and denotes the time period from 2000–2020. ‘Issues’ may be broadly defined as matters of public concern which directly affect members of a society. Some 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia issues might include: bullying and harassment, climate change, public health, Indigenous rights and job security.

To answer this question effectively, you must do more than discuss topical issues – you must reflect on how ‘your ideas’ have been ‘shifted or confirmed’; in other words, you need to detail how your view of particular issues has changed or been strengthened by studying a particular text/s. The term ‘idea’ is a broad one, and might be loosely defined as opinions, suggestions, thoughts or beliefs. Ouyang Yu’s poem ‘Alien’ might change your ideas about multiculturalism; though you might initially view Australia as a welcoming country, after reading it your opinion might shift to perceiving Australians as unfriendly to foreigners.

The term ‘how’ is a common feature of examination questions and suggests that your answer should include an analysis of your text/s construction. That is, you should explain how the composition of your text (e.g. its language, structure and/or generic features) contributes to shifting or confirming your ideas about particular issues.

### Advice from teachers

- In discussion of issues, you might choose to mention topical events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests and the 2019/2020 bushfires in order to illustrate your knowledge of the world in which you live and show your engagement with current affairs.
- Though this question references 21st century Australia, there is no requirement to write on an Australian text, or one which was written in the last 20 years. You may choose a text by any author or era, so long as you answer the question. For instance, *The Lost Honour of Katerina Blum* offers an indictment of the press and might shift your view of the media and its influence in Australia today.
- The conjunction ‘or’ invites you to choose only one approach – focus on how a text has shifted your ideas, or how it has confirmed your ideas, but not both.

## Question 5: Sample response one

The strength of this response is its concise analysis. The candidate demonstrates a sound understanding of each poem's construction and is able to deconstruct the effect of both language and form devices. Each paragraph references most aspects of the question and the candidate has been able to explain how texts written last century resonate today. The response could provide a much more convincing engagement with the question; the candidate generally only discusses the question in the final sentences of each paragraph and thus the contentions are somewhat tenuous and lack substantiation. This suggests the candidate needed to take more time to plan their response to ensure all components of the question were addressed in detail.

The 19th-20th century marked a movement towards literature that depicted a transient existence in a nihilistic society. Kenneth Slessor, a Modernist poet, constructs a vision of a society greatly influenced by the unprecedented global suffering of World War One (WW1 - 1914-1918) through his literary works. His poems "Last Trams" (1939) and "William Street" (1944) reflect an honest and evocative image of human experience and modern living. "Last Trams" portrays a city at night from the window of a metal tram from which the person views a society that is hollow, void and drained of spiritual grounding. A vision of urban living that is alienating in its ability to isolate individuals from nature and each other. This issue resonates with me as a reader of the 21st century Australian audience, who is familiar with the movement of society towards an increasingly technologically reliant future. "William Street" published five years later invites readers to engage in a process of introspection by providing a divergent outlook on urban living and the war impacted society, which the person claims to find lovely. "William Street" and "Last Trams", through vivid and confrontational imagery, recall cultural and historical truths of 21st century Australia's identity, shifting the reader's ideas of issues relevant to a 21st century Australian reader.

Slessor's "Last Trams" depicts the persona's journey on a metal tram which can be read as an allegory for a journey through modern life, separated from others by the cold harsh "metal" of technology. Dystopian imagery of "bodies" which "pass" the window assists

The candidate begins their introduction with a lucid overview of the poet's oeuvre and the ideas contained within it.

The candidate has chosen texts from the 20th century. This is acceptable, as long as the response examines the texts' relevance to our society today.

The candidate links these texts to a relevant contemporary issue, but needs to outline their argument to all parts of the question; in particular, whether Slessor's poetry shifts or confirms their ideas.

The candidate begins by focusing on the text's construction, but needs to provide a better engagement with the question by signposting the key terms contained within it.

## Question 5: Sample response two

This response exhibits many admirable qualities and a few areas which could be improved upon. The candidate has chosen an Australian text which comments on social issues and is thus appropriately suited to the question. The response maintains focus on the first half of the question throughout and the paragraph organisation is clear and effective. The candidate could spend more time developing their argument to meet the specific requirements of the question; the response is a bit brief and would benefit from more discussion of the difference between the context of production and reception. The candidate could also write more fluently by varying the length of their sentences.

Theatre is a site where First Nations people have been able to develop and express their political voices. Jack Davis is a celebrated Indigenous Australian playwright whose works often highlight Aboriginal issues. Jack Davis' The Dreamers (1986) confirms my perception of contemporary Australia as a nation that maintains a system of oppression which subjugates Aboriginal people. Davis' use of song and soliloquy assert the inequalities that First Nations people continue to face today. The characterisation of Peter and Meena reveal the complex layers of colonisation that are embedded within Australian society. As a young Australian, Jack Davis' harsh portrayal of the reality of Australian society deeply resonates with me.

Song and soliloquy in The Dreamers assert the inequalities Aboriginal people face in contemporary Australia. In the first Act of the play, Uncle Worra speaks in a soliloquy to the audience. He says that, "You have turned our land into a desolate place". Uncle Worra clearly states the destruction of sacred Aboriginal land is due to colonisation. Soliloquy is a powerful tool which Davis uses to direct at the audience. This dialogue encourages the audience to think about their own lives. What have we contributed to the destruction of Aboriginal land? I find myself thinking of the current Adani coal mine. Not only does the government allow the Adani group to desecrate and destroy sacred Aboriginal land, they endorse it. Although The Dreamers was written decades ago, the issues it explores still resonate with 21st century Australia. During the end of the second last act of play, when the Wallitch family is waiting for news of Uncle

Here the candidate delves straight into addressing the first parts of the question.

These sentences, which state that the candidate will discuss song, soliloquy and characterisation, address the 'how' aspect of the question.

This statement is vague and the candidate could elaborate further.

Here the candidate links the discussion of soliloquy to the relevant topical issue of coal mining.