

## Text C – Drama

### Catherine Simmonds and members of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Melbourne – *Journey of Asylum - Waiting*

#### Possible readings

Text C was a popular choice for Question One in 2020 and many candidates constructed readings that received high marks. This text is rich in dramatic devices and features themes that are relevant to a contemporary audience. Candidates were, generally, able to discuss the context of production with confidence.

One reading of this extract would be that given it was written in collaboration with a group of asylum seekers themselves, it acts as a voice for this marginalised group and creates agency for their cause. A discussion of voice in the play may incorporate both the physical voice of actors speaking directly to the audience as well as giving this group of people a political or ideological voice within society. Candidates may discuss the function of literature or drama to act as a vehicle for the expression of ideas, political movements or to give a voice usually silenced by mainstream society. Strong candidates may be able to make allusions to other dramas that function as an expression of events or ideas in society, such as *Blackrock*. Adding to this reading, a candidate might note that the asylum seekers themselves discuss their lack of agency. HAYDAR tells the audience that he is ‘sick of telling my story’, suggesting that he has done so many times with little result. Calling the procedures a ‘game’ further explores the superficial treatment that his plight has received.

The text is situated in a contemporary discourse and, through the audience involvement and staging, may be read as an expression of the role that we all play in the treatment of asylum seekers or an implied responsibility for the audience to take action. Asking an audience to ‘switch off your mobile phones’ blurs the boundaries between drama and reality, adding to this sense of involvement. Asking the audience if there is ‘anyone else coming in’ is also involving them and positioning an audience to be a part of the proceedings.

In a reading that privileges ideas about voice, candidates might analyse closely Scene One. The use of stage directions and the role of the PROTAGONISTS implies a lack of voice for this group. They exhibit ‘gestures’ rather than dialogue and their movements are ‘clenched fists’, ‘longing and sadness’, ‘an attempt to strangle’ and ‘a stampede’ which contributes to the idea of a group being frustrated, voiceless and dispirited.

A gendered lens could also be applied to this extract. TRIBUNAL MAN appears to be the most powerful character and could be read as a representation of the patriarchy or masculine power. The other character that speaks in the extract is HAYDAR, another male, which would further contribute to a reading that sees this text as an exploration of male power and control. The female character in the extract is voiceless and is seen ‘tipping blood upon her head’, a highly emotive act that could allude to stereotypical notions of the feminine and women as emotional.

## Close textual analysis

Through the play, the audience may experience some of the voicelessness that asylum seekers experience. TRIBUNAL MAN asks ‘Is anyone else coming in? Okay good’ may function as a lure, especially given the later stage direction stating, ‘He asks the question but does not give the audience a chance to answer’, which denies the audience an opportunity to respond. The audience is also included in the tribunal proceedings, but as the action takes place they do not participate, further reinforcing their lack of agency. HAYDAR enters in Scene Two and speaks at the audience with statements such as ‘Don’t make me do this’ and ‘This is not an act’, but the audience cannot reply, further rendering them inactive observers to the plight of the asylum seekers.

Through the staging and proxemics, the audience is positioned to be complicit in the mistreatment of the asylum seekers in the audience’s closeness to MEMBER. He sits ‘on a high podium chair at the back of the audience’, leaving the audience in an unwitting position of being complicit with the powerful. MEMBER interrupts the action, signifying a lack of respect. He says, ‘I don’t believe you’, which is projected from the same area as the audience, again implying that the audience is a part of the mistreatment of asylum seekers.

The use of multimedia props, the positioning of TRIBUNAL MAN and MEMBER within the audience, as well as the PROTAGINISTS on the stage, could also be read as a tool to confront or disarm the audience. Being a member of the audience may well be an affront to the senses and an uncomfortable experience. This enhances a reading of the play as a political device and contributes to a reading that places the Australian public as inadvertent perpetrators of the mistreatment of asylum seekers.

## Linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology

Strong responses would note the extensive use of detailed directions for staging. The play breaks the fourth wall frequently and this would be an important element to discuss. It is not enough to simply state that the play breaks the fourth wall or that it incorporates extensive directions for the production. A response should then discuss how this contributes to the reading that they have constructed.

When the play breaks the fourth wall, it includes the audience in the proceedings. This could contribute to a reading that suggests the audience are being positioned to feel responsible for the treatment of asylum seekers; a reading that focuses on voice, where the audience is not given the opportunity to respond to questions being asked of them is also valid.

The naming of the group of asylum seekers as PROTAGINISTS is significant. It develops irony in that while being the main characters of the play, they are constantly being interrupted, left without voice and rendered powerless. The TRIBUNAL MAN does appear to drive the proceedings and be the more powerful character, adding to this sense of irony because he is not the protagonist of the narrative. The naming of this group as PROTAGONIST is unconventional in that an audience would usually, subjectively, evaluate which character/s would be the protagonist. Again, the audience is lacking agency as this decision is made for them. Furthermore, if the asylum seekers are the PROTAGINISTS then the TRIBUNAL MAN and MEMBER must be, by default, antagonists. Candidates could consider how this might affect the audience in that they have been positioned to feel complicit with TRIBUNAL MAN and MEMBER.

Candidates may look at the voiceless action that has been used on stage. This mime could contribute to a reading about lack of voice or even the barriers of communication. The PR applications that are discussed are written documents and the mimed scenarios could be representative of the barriers to communication between the two groups; so too could the Perspex screen props that are used as divisions on stage. The mimed action, such as ‘tipping blood on her head’ may also confront an audience by its level of emotion. The use of a pot of blood on stage would be disarming for audience members to experience, further supporting a reading about the plight and trauma experienced by asylum seekers or an interpretation that explores ideas about communication.

Further to the use of mime, a candidate might look at the juxtaposition of HAYDAR as an individual and the PROTAGONISTS as a group. PROTAGONISTS ‘move in unison’ and move their feet ‘like a stampede’ which could be representative of the view many Australians hold that asylum seekers are a homogeneous group that represent a threat to the Australian community or way of life. This is juxtaposed with HAYDAR addressing the audience with an impassioned, accusatory statement. Dialogue like ‘you have power’ and ‘you can talk... but I can’t’ explores the idea of voicelessness and a lack of agency as well as being an accusatory and confronting attack on an audience’s role in the treatment he has received.

### Contextual considerations

When candidates consider the contextual information that is given at the beginning of the extract, they might explore why the members of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre have remained nameless. This could be read as an act of resistance or because they are frightened to be involved in such a political play that may harm their chances of being granted asylum. Candidates may also consider the collective nature of the construction of the play. It is the culmination of many voices and, as such, could be read as an exploration of voice – voice for this voiceless group in Australian society today. Further to this, candidates could examine that it is with an Australian playwright that these ideas have been constructed, further contributing to the idea that, on their own, asylum seekers experience a lack of voice and agency.

The play was published in 2010 and during this time, Australia’s political zeitgeist was fraught regarding asylum seekers and the detention of ‘unlawful refugees’. Candidates may discuss the turmoil of Australia’s view on ‘stopping the boats’ or the tumultuous transition from Kevin Rudd to Julia Gillard during this time. The political and social discourse surrounding detention centres and the treatment of asylum seekers was extensive and divisive; candidates could view this text as a representation of the social values and attitudes of that time.

Candidates could also suggest that the ideas explored in the play – especially some of the more disturbing and confronting themes of disempowerment, mistreatment and voicelessness – are made more confronting to an audience when they consider that this play was written and produced in consultation with a group of asylum seekers. This contextual information adds authenticity and contemporary relevance to the scenes.

## Activity: Preparing for drama – know the discourse

A dramatic text is written so that it can be performed on stage to a live listening and viewing audience. Therefore, as readers, we must consider how the text will appear in performance.

Convention	Technical terms related to drama conventions
costumes	period contemporary minimal realistic
props	symbolic realistic objects set design
stage directions	on-set off-set front of stage upstage/downstage stage left/right
lighting	blackout fade spotlight colour wash high/low key
sound	music sound effects (SFX) soundscape silence/lack of sound
style and form	minimalistic symbolic naturalistic realistic abstract
movement	energy gait expression posture proxemics
dialogue	monologue soliloquy accent inflection diction
vocal technique	articulation tone accent projection pace

## Activity: Creating the set

Select the exposition from a play you have studied this year. Read through the stage directions, regarding details of the set and important properties. Draw your own version of the set, including all the exits, furniture, visual properties and, where possible, lighting.

As you place each part of the set, think about your audience. Where are they sitting? What can they see? What kind of stage is being used? When the set is complete, consider whether there is room for your characters to move both on and off stage.

What you have created is a physical representation of a set, which should clearly demonstrate the practicalities of performance. Does it answer what the author wanted to be included and how it would work to create background, build understanding and set a distinct mood or feeling about the play's beginning?

## Question 1 Text C: Sample response one

This is a very strong response that asserts a perceptive reading of the text while featuring clear and effective expression. The structure of the response is methodical and supports the analysis. The candidate has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the dramatic conventions employed and managed to convey an understanding of both the way the play would appear on stage and the intended effects on the audience. The textual examples are incorporated well and support the reading while also being effective examples of dramatic techniques. One of the most common critiques of readings of drama texts is that they fail to address the text as a drama; this response is an excellent example of how drama readings should be constructed.

Journey of Asylum - Waiting (2010) is a confrontational drama written by Australian playwright Catherine Simmonds exploring the fear and intimidation thrust unto Asylum seekers to examine the hypocrisy and insensitivity in having to 'prove' ones fear. The thoughtful choices in design and setting work together to create an audio-visual space designed to reflect the stripping of security and safety that seeking asylum burdens one with. Furthermore, the playwright's choice in dialogue and gesture of the 'Protagonist' character moves to bring to life the fear and trauma suffered by thousands of Asylum seekers entering Australia. The opening finally concludes with a confrontation monologue where in which the audience is led to consider the injustice in the Australian tribunal system and the suffering of Asylum Seekers is given a personal and compelling voice.

The thorough description of the audio-visual space created on stage works to set the scene for Simmonds exploration of the harsh and stripped back journey of asylum. The stripped back nature of the set is best reflected in the use of "exposed scaffolding" and "clear portable Perspex screens" which embody the instability in the mental state of asylum seekers caused by the gruelling and harsh journey to Australia and treatment upon arrival. The visual space is further defined by "The MEMBER sits on a high podium chair at the back of the audience and interjects from there throughout the performance", to assert a proxemic on stage that visibly places the asylum seeker on stage below this

This is a very well-constructed introduction.

The candidate includes a clear thesis statement.

The candidate goes on to include the ideas they will discuss to support their thesis.

The reading acknowledges the text as a drama and discusses dramatic conventions. You can appreciate that the candidate is able to visualise how the stage would have appeared.

This is a good example of the way quotes from the text should be embedded within the discussion.

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'member'. Considering that the member is part of the Australian Tribunal system, this choice in proxemics reflects the inferiority that asylum seekers are often treated with, and aligns that superiority complex with an official arm of Australian government. The audio space further supports this notion of government versus asylum seekers, by featuring "sound bites taken from interviews with politicians, reporters, as well as advertisements and television shows", to inundate the audience with the plethora of opinions and biases held against asylum seekers televised in day to day life. Simmonds choice in featuring sound bites from politicians may be intended to examine how the issue of seeking asylum is often politicised to a point where it no longer becomes about human rights, but instead political point scoring. Thus, the audio-visual space created on stage through design and setting is instrumental to Simmond's exploration of seeking asylum in Australia and further confronting the audiences with the faults in our system.

The drama's choice in dialogue and gestures furthers this expose on the fear and intimidation that underpins seeking asylum and furthermore the hypocrisy of having to prove said fear. The tribunal man's explanation of the hearing as a way to "determine if our applicant is a refugee", establishes the purpose of the scenes we are witnessing and later leads us to focalise on the aspects of fear and persecution that would qualify this applicant as an asylum seeker. The 'protagonist' (asylum seekers) then enter the stage in a huddled group with "tense arms and clenched fists" and "head down holding stomach with a sense of longing and sadness," to visually depict the obvious fear and instability among the group. The words of the Tribunal Man in founding reasons for asylum are seemingly answered entirely through the timid and fearful gestures and movements of the group, implying a hypocrisy in having a tribunal hearing to prove such fear. The words of the 'member' prior to this entrance enhance this notion of hypocrisy with "I don't believe you" when observing four asylum seekers "tipping blood upon her head", an obvious and exaggerated

The discussion of the drama includes effective use of dramatic techniques and literary terminology relevant to the text type.

Here the candidate effectively discusses the impact of the staging upon the audience to convey the themes and ideas of the play.

Here we can see a link back to the candidate's thesis and ideas without sounding repetitive.

The topic sentence makes the subject of the paragraph obvious and develops the candidate's reading.

Here is a clear analysis of dramatic techniques and the effect they may have on an audience. The candidate is assertive in their reading and supports their analysis well.

gesture to symbolise persecution. The assertion of the member that he does not believe her suggests the unbelievable and unjust nature of having to prove your fear of persecution, when you have actively lived through that persecution yourself. Thus, the dialogue and gestures used in this extract verbally embody the hypocrisy of the Australian Tribunal System and the injustice asylum seekers are subjected to.

Relevant examples with clear links to thesis and dramatic techniques are featured throughout this response.

Finally, the poignant monologue at the end of Scene Two serves as the extract's most confronting call to action on the issue. As HAYDAR moves to exit the stage, he "turns to confront the audience", signifying the drama's shift in lending voice from the 'collaborators' to the 'protagonists.' HAYDAR continues in monologue with "I already told Immigration, Refugee Review Tribunal; they took two years", to express HAYDAR and many other asylum seekers frustration with the process. He goes on to address the abuse of asylum seekers within the system in "without PR they can play me like a ball, kick me here, here, here", to suggest he feels less like a human and more like an inanimate object due to the degradation the system has incurred on him. This final monologue as the end of the extract allows for a compelling and passionate voice of an asylum seeker to be heard and powerfully confront the audience's security and complacency.

The candidate has identified the monologue and discusses its relevance to their reading.

Catherine Simmonds 2010 play Journey of Asylum - Waiting, is an enthralling dramatic work that sheds light on the injustices suffered by Asylum Seekers in Australia. The design and setting work cohesively with dialogue and gestures to create a stage space that confronts the audience to consider the hypocrisy of having to prove your own fear after living through it so vividly. Ultimately, the extract gives a voice to a group who have been deprived of one for quite some time and disrupts the complacency of Australians towards our most marginalised people.

This is a perceptive interpretation of the event in the text. The ideas discussed are further developing the candidate's thesis.

The conclusion includes a concise restatement of the thesis.

The candidate links the significance of the text to the contemporary political context.

## Activity: Weaving in evidence from the text

The inclusion of supporting material from the text is fundamental to a convincing literary response. It provides the underlying proof or evidence of your understanding. Selecting the right example is therefore paramount. When you give a reading of an unseen text, you have the material in front of you. As you read, start looking for the information that will be the basis of your reading. In a drama text, this information includes stage directions, details about the set, action, costume and properties and, of course, dialogue. Incorporate examples from the entire text, not only dialogue.

- Selected text should not be in large chunks that fill up space on the page.
- The practice of making a statement then stating 'For example' can be clumsy.
- It is preferable to incorporate small phrases seamlessly into your discussion.

Work through an extract from the play you are studying. Select examples that offer some insight for you regarding events or concepts and practise inserting these into a meaningful sentence. The more you practise looking for and weaving in evidence, the more your writing will have impact.

Chosen example	Practice sentence
<i>View from the Bridge</i> Opening scene:  'This is Red Hook, not Sicily. This is the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge.' -Alfieri	As a narrator, Alfieri is able to inform the audience of exact setting details. 'This is Red Hook, not Sicily' reveals to the audience that the play is set in America, where old ideas regarding justice do not apply.

## Question 1 Text C: Sample response two

This is a very strong response that demonstrates a perceptive and sophisticated engagement with the text and an understanding of the role drama plays in political activism. This candidate, having resisted 'naming' their reading, rather clearly asserts their interpretation of the text and supports it with a discussion of the dramatic techniques and their effect on the audience. They have chosen evidence from the text carefully and used it to highlight an excellent understanding of the way the play would appear on stage and the ideas it would convey.

This excerpt from Journey of Asylum - Waiting, by Catherine Simmonds, and anonymous asylum seekers and refugees follows the tribunal of a refugee, Haydar, in an attempt to gain permanent residency in Australia. Published in 2010, this text is a study of the subversion of justice and rights in modern Australian democracy and when read politically, highlights the gaps in the Australian legal system that do not support asylum seekers and refugees. This realist drama uses symbolism, characterisation and stage directions, and directly involves the audience to call people to examine the injustices faced by asylum seekers as a result of a harsh and silencing legal process inviting them to reflect on the democratic society that we live in.

Through the direct involvement of the audience, the drama invites them to reflect on the democratic treatment of asylum seekers and calls them to examine their roles in this issue, by making them part of the action. The stage directions of the member sitting in a "high podium chair at the back of the audience" immediately involves them. By placing the member in the audience, his actions symbolise the actions of the Australian public. When he tells the asylum seekers "I don't believe you" the audience feels a sense of guilt, as though it was them who rejected the refugees. They are simultaneously involved, but not given a voice, which allows them to empathise with the asylum seekers, like when the Tribunal Man asks a question, but "does not give the audience a chance to answer," even though previously he "wait(ed) for the audience to answer". The stage directions could be read to be representative of the experiences of asylum seekers, leading the audience to sympathise with the treatment they faced.

This is a perceptive and clear thesis statement and demonstrates a sophisticated engagement with the text.

The candidate has supported their thesis, acknowledging the current societal and political environment.

The topic sentence identifies the dramatic device that will be discussed as well as the effect of it on the audience.

Here we can see clear evidence that this candidate is approaching the text as a drama through their discussion of the audience's role.

They are allowed into the country, only to be silenced in detention centres, and are given a false sense of security. The direct involvement of the audience highlights the double standards of the Australian democratic system, highlighting emphasising that it is not representative of the public, who are mostly unaware of the issues facing refugees.

Here the candidate makes a clear link between the text's construction and the political purpose.

The injustices faced by the asylum seekers are also explored through the characters of the protagonist. The protagonists do not have any dialogue, except for Haydar. This is symbolic of how the asylum seekers are silenced, and is even more prevalent in the fact that the co-authors who are asylum seekers remained anonymous because of their "current immigration status". Instead, the stage directions used indicate to the audience the struggles of the refugees. They are immediately dismissed by their member despite not speaking a word. Vienna's stage directions in particular are symbolic of the sacrifices made to come to Australia and the pain and fear that is still felt by many asylum seekers as through the action of "tipping blood on her head." Indeed, their stage directions including "an attempt to strangle the self," and a "gesture of silence" through hands over the mouth are reflections of the injustices faced not by outside threats, but the politics and injustices of Australia. This calls into question the belief in the fairness and democracy of the Australian government by the audience, as they witness these graphic and confronting acts.

Here we can see an analysis of particular stage directions and the effect they have on the action. It is much more effective than discussing 'stage directions' in broad terms.

Similarly, Catherine Simmonds addresses the inequality between the asylum seekers and the "permanent residents." The drama satirises the legalistic discourse of the Tribunal Man, calling the audience to question how personal decisions like whether someone is a refugee, are often treated clinically and with a lack of compassion. He says "not all reasons make a person a refugee," which is somewhat humorous, as refugee status is not as black and white as he makes it out to be. This inequality is further addressed during Haydar's monologue. He "confronts the audience" and in doing so, calls out the privilege of the audience as

Again, we see clear support of the candidate's thesis in the concluding sentence of the paragraph, without sounding repetitive.

Satire is a very difficult technique for candidates to identify – here it is done very well, explained and supported.

citizens. He says "You can talk, you're free, you can say whatever you want, but I can't." The fact he does not have the basic right to free speech in fear of being deported is confronting, and questions the fairness of the democratic system if it tends to this extreme. The simile of "they can play me like a ball, kick me here," is even more powerful in realising the inequality and expresses the overall lack of democracy.

Journey of Asylum - Waiting is a thought provoking drama about the realities of being an asylum seeker in the Australian legal system. It works to call into question the equality behind Australian democracy, and the actions of the audience members in this contemporary issue. Through the direct involvement of the audience, symbolism and stage directions, Simmonds and the asylum seekers highlight the injustices faced by refugees that is a prevalent issue in Australia, and inspire the audience to reflect on their role as an Australian citizen in raising awareness of such an issue.

Here we can see an analysis of language conventions to support the dramatic techniques discussed.

The conclusion includes a brief restatement of the thesis.

The dramatic techniques that have featured in the candidate's analysis are also summarised, along with the current societal relevance.

### Activity: Preparing for drama – imagine the performance

Now, using the drama extract from the 2020 examination, assume how a director might actualise each dramatic convention for this scene. Use the technical terms from earlier activities to support your analysis.

Convention	Evidence	Translation on stage
costumes		
props		
stage directions		
lighting		
setting		
sound		

#### Apply to your own text

The only way you can prepare yourself for the unseen dramatic text in Section One is to compare written drama texts with their performances. YouTube is a great resource for watching theatrical performances if you cannot get to the theatre to see a live show.

Create a table like the one above or another graphic organiser that suits you and closely examine your own choice extract. Mine the auditory and visual elements that make extra meaning in the dramatic text you choose.