

**Sample essay 5.1 (Part 5): Paper 1 (Higher Level)****Question**

Write a literary commentary on **one** of the following:

1. The poem *A far cry from Africa* by Derek Walcott – see Text 5.3 (pages 187–8) in the IB *English Literature* coursebook.
2. An extract from the short story *Lessons* by Justin Torres – see <http://www.granta.com/Magazine/Granta-104/Lessons/1>

**Answer**

Derek Walcott depicts a confused half-British half-African man in the struggle to justify the British cause in colonial Africa. [✓] ‘A far cry from Africa’ [Excellent] juxtaposes [✓✓] the authenticity of Africa with the White’s actions and motives forming a basis of discomfort for the narrator. [✓] The idea of primitivity [the primitive, not a word] disrupted is complimented by Walcott’s use of rhyme and form, once again juxtaposing the differences between the two races and highlighting the conflicts of natural instinct.

Walcott enhances the narrator’s sense of confusion and internal conflict through his ambiguity even reflected in the poem’s title: [✓] ‘A far cry from Africa’, in an idiomatic [✓] sense portrays a view of negative change from the traditional ways of Africa, this being supported by the use of verbs [✓] such as inflict [ion]: [✓] implies the British influence in altering the natural habitat. However, this ‘far cry’ taken literally, could also be representative of the British Colonel’s ‘calls [for] courage’ [✓] in the killing of native Africans, whereby ‘statistics [were] justify[ied] and scholars [were] seize[d]; therefore ironically in the poets ambiguity, the ambiguity of the British motive is established. Yet it is evident that through use of Rhetorical question, that the narrator himself is ‘cry[ing]’ out for [✓] an answer of his identity too, subsequently giving rise to the prospect of multiple meanings, [✓] [which are?] complimenting the ambiguity of the title.

Walcott’s ambiguity is continued through his use of metaphor [✓] within the poem, highlighting particular characteristics of both races and depicting further emotion of the narrator. Being ‘poisoned with the blood of both’ races, Walcott introduces ambiguity in his opinions of the British actions [explain the ambiguity], this is supported by the final four lines and Walcott’s use of rhetorical questions in failing to take an opinion.

Through use of juxtaposition [✓], Walcott creates and uncomfortable and unnatural [be specific] image, [✓] supporting the later need for conclusion.

By contrasting ‘corpses’ with paradise; Walcott introduces sin and elements of the afterlife relating death to heaven. This juxtaposition simultaneously indicates the loss of primitivity [the primitive, not a word] within Africa and the consequences of colonial rule.

Walcott enhances the impacts of the white rule in Africa through [✓] the personification [✓] of natural elements showing how the human sin begins to infect the authenticity of Africa [good connective statement]. Through describing the river to be ‘parched’ Walcott introduces the idea of slow deterioration and neglecting of the landscape, as a consequence reflecting the ideas and opinions of the natives.

Rhetorical questions are used within the poem to show the confusion of the narrator and imply his ‘far cry’ [✓] for help. By his division of instinct, Walcott describes the narrator’s feeling to be inconclusive [what are the feelings?] to be inconclusive, as a result allowing the reader to make an opinion of his own. However, Rhetorical questions are used for a justification at the beginning of the poem. By questioning the white’s justification of ‘savages’, Walcott brings in elements of disagreement and misunderstanding [,] consequently disregarding the white views.

Walcott uses the poetic structure of the poem to reflect the ideas and opinions described within it. By using enjambment, Walcott [✓] creates a natural flow and a sense of time passing slowly [,] representative of native Africa and the lifestyle of the culture. This is then juxtaposed through Walcott’s use of a half Rhyme, showing the attempts of order to be inflicted on the culture.

The two-stanza form of the poem is reflective of the two stages [✓] of thought [✓] processes of the narrator and implies an anagnorisis [✓] at the end [which is?]. This is supported by the sudden use of the first person, which forms a reality and sense of opinion [be specific – what is the reality and the opinion?] within the poem.

Overall, Walcott creates a conflict within a man of two cultures, while simultaneously representing a war between two ‘beasts’. Through juxtaposition and ambiguity, Walcott contrasts the desires and impacts of Colonial rule with the primitive nature of Africa, highlighting this Sin through personification of natural elements, and resulting in an inconclusive decision.

### Teacher’s comment

The opening is **so** promising – you just need to improve your points throughout the essay. The introduction is brilliant. Excellent written expression: concise and precise. Good reference to literary terms. Develop and explain/expand on ideas – you sometimes leave your points vague. What are the ambiguities?

<b>Criterion A</b>	Understanding and interpretation	4
<b>Criterion B</b>	Appreciation of the writer’s choices	4
<b>Criterion C</b>	Organisation and development	3
<b>Criterion D</b>	Language	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>15/20</b>