Choosing Questions

Because they have to cater to a large volume of text types, some questions will in fact fit your texts better than others. As such, choosing the right question (or not choosing the wrong one) is essential to scoring for Paper 2.

Breaking down the question

Generally, questions broadly focus on five main areas of a text, or PACTS:

Plot

Author's style

Character

Theme

Setting

Obviously, some of these work better than others. For example, discussing the historical setting in *Macbeth* likely would be difficult to frame, while discussing the concepts of morality would likely be a lot easier. The less of a reach your essay is, the easier your life will be.

Let's take a question like this for example:

How do two of the works you have studied portray the struggle to be understood?

First, we want to start off by identifying the key terms:

How do two of the works you have studied portray the struggle to be understood?

Then, we want to break down exactly what these key terms mean (or what we want them to mean):

The key terms "How" and "portray" demand an explanation of the techniques used so we know we will have to discuss the literary features (these are authorial choices or Criterion B of our rubric). This is pretty standard stuff, so we haven't narrowed down our analysis much yet.

The next key term, "struggle", links to internal and external conflict, and can also refer to the tension created as a result of that conflict. Now we know that we want to look at how literary features contribute to the portrayal of internal and external conflict in the text.

Finally, our last key term "to be understood" aims our analysis toward the relationship between characters. Taking a look back at PACTS, we can see this is a "Character" type question. Fundamentally, understanding hinges on similarity, so we can ground our analysis on how the differences between characters cause conflict. With this new information, our analysis is now focused on the conflict that arises from the inability of two characters to understand one another.

Outlining your Essay

After establishing an understanding of the question, we've established the demands and scope of our analysis. All that is left is to decide what specific parts of the text we want to focus on. So what *do* we want to focus on?

The Proof is in the Packaging

When it comes to literary analysis, what you say matters very little compared to how you say it. There is no one 'right' answer. The most 'correct' answer, rather, is the most compelling and coherent one. All that to say that you should be picking which parts of the text you reference based on the question and its demands.

Planning is half the battle

Alright, now that we've highlighted the importance of having a congruous essay, how exactly do we achieve that? Let's look back at our earlier question.

> How do two of the works you have studied portray the struggle to be understood?

Rephrased, it becomes:

> How do two works you have studied use literary techniques to create conflict between two characters that stems from their inability to understand one another **due to their differences**?

While this rephrased version is a little wordy, the gist of the question is a lot clearer. Our aim is now to search for character relationships that can fit this description in two works of our choice. Let's start with Macbeth.

Obviously, we ideally want to look at relationships that contain the eponymous character. Right off the bat, we have:

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

Macbeth and Banquo

Macbeth and Macduff

And for good measure:

Macduff and Malcolm

Now that we have all of the significant character relationships listed out, we now have to select the ones that best suit us. We can eliminate Macbeth and Macduff off the bat, as that is a pretty straightforward hero/villain foil relationship. That leaves us with three character relationships. Now, we could potentially explore the relationship between Macduff and Malcolm using the very lengthy Act 4 Scene 3 conversation, but that would be difficult considering that would be the only textual evidence we have. For the sake of efficiency, we thus focus on two relationships. Macbeth and his Lady, as well as Macbeth and Banquo.

Now, that we have the two relationships to explore, let's find something to anchor our analysis. Here, we can centre it around the common denominator of Macbeth. So for our analysis, we first have to contextualise what kind of character Macbeth is, so we can contrast his true character with how he is misunderstood.

So we have three main points we need to speak about:
1. Macbeth's true character
2. How Lady Macbeth and Macbeth differ and the conflict that arises
3. How Banquo and Macbeth differ and the conflict that arises

Now that we have our points, let's look at our textual evidence for it.

1. Macbeth's true character
    a. Indecisive character who vacillates between ambition and paranoia
        i. Taken from his monologue in Act 1 Scene 7
2. How Lady Macbeth and Macbeth differ and the conflict that arises
    a. Macbeth's hesitance and caution against the Lady's resolution and ambition
        i. Taken from their argument in Act 1 Scene 7
3. How Banquo and Macbeth differ and the conflict that arises
    a. Macbeth's ambition and confidence in the prophecy against Banquo's caution
        i. Taken from their discussion in Act 1 Scene 3

So now, we can search for a unifying theme to tie our argument together. Here, it is Macbeth's character trait of vacillating between ambition and paranoia (introductory point). Then, we delve into how his paranoia influences his relationship with Lady Macbeth (point 2), and how his ambition is at odds with Banquo's caution (point 3).

Now we do the same for *Salesman*:

Willy and Biff

Willy and Linda

Biff and Happy

In *Salesman*, the focus given to the family dynamic allows for rich relationships between all the main characters of the cast. As such, unlike our analysis of *Macbeth*, we do not have to ground our analysis around the protagonist.