

# **Scholarship**

## **2009 Assessment Report**

### **English**

## COMMENTARY

The examination paper provided challenge and scope for candidates to show their potential in line with previous years. All questions were attempted in good numbers, with sections A and C yielding some excellent discrimination and independent thinking. The very best answers were exceptionally skilled and enjoyable both for the quality of their arguments and thinking as well as the mechanical fluency and flair with which they were expressed.

Candidates that used plain, direct and fluent writing which answered the questions in the examination paper successfully showed knowledge and understanding.

This year there was some stunningly good work presented using electronic texts as a studied genre. Students writing about these texts engaged very strongly and demonstrated outstanding understanding of how texts generally work through a careful deconstruction, analysis and synthesis of component parts. These essays were the highlight of this year's marking.

The best and the worst texts continue in line with those notified in the 2008 Assessment Report. *Brave New World* and *1984* seem to be enjoying a resurgence in popularity with some quality teaching to responsive and engaged candidates who show an ability to think beyond (or perhaps through) their studied dystopia theme. Few new films or new novel titles appeared this year.

### Section A

The texts were accessible and challenging, and there were fewer misreadings than in previous years. The downside to this was that with accessibility came an inbuilt 'trap' for unwary or untutored candidates to simply paraphrase content or catalogue features. Better candidates responded to mood shifts and saw the inherent similarities and differences in the passages. Close readers who took the time to consider the passages and their responses to them were rewarded with insights into the rich imagery and relationship analysis. Too many candidates grounded their responses in 'man's best friend' rather than the actual text.

The best candidates performed consistently well in line with previous years.

### Section B

Again, the best candidates wrote confidently, fluently and responsively, demonstrating a quality reworking of learned and taught materials in response to the particulars of the question.

However, some knew only how to work their material in an NCEA Level 3 way. Successful candidates at this level would have been expected to produce essays beyond Excellence at Level 3.

All questions were clear and accessible to students. The repetition of questions 2, 10 and 13 worked well.

Shakespeare, film and novel questions continue to be most popular, but it seems that many candidates choose these options from a sense of needing to preserve any wider reading for section C – rather than any particular affinity with the selected genre chosen in section B. This was indicated by "content dumping" in section B, too much uncritical and extraneous plot and/or paraphrase and/or linear response. In question 6 the very best candidates took on self-delusion in *Lear*, and complexity and 'hard lines' in poetry answers.

### Section C

There were some outstanding answers in this section – focussed and wide ranging, critical and responsive in analysis and evaluation; and some exciting and superb answers using electronic texts. Questions 17, 22 and 15 were most popular – in that order.

Answers were spread across all options, although some candidates missed words like ‘seethe’, ‘territory between’, ‘consequences’ as they launched into their prepared level 3 essay, or into a learnt practice essay from a previous Scholarship examination.

The best answers came from candidates who understood the crafting of genres and could interweave this understanding with examples and references drawn from a range of unrelated texts. In doing this they show detailed and well-nuanced understanding of how a wide range of texts may work to influence an audience or readership, and in the process generated a new kind of criticality about their texts or themes.

## **SCHOLARSHIP WITH OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE**

**Candidates who were awarded Scholarship with Outstanding Performance typically:**

- wrote responses that were lucid, to the point, and ‘fresh’
- wrote energetically in response to well selected topics with which they displayed some empathy.

### **Section A**

- produced a balanced response which dealt with both contexts
- crafted in an analytical and evaluative manner
- considered the texts before writing
- avoided paraphrasing
- demonstrated understanding of how nuance and subtlety in language work.

### **Section B**

- used their learnt material to posit their thesis with regard to the specified question
- quoted appositely to support their arguments
- re-worked learnt materials and re-shaped their thinking to meet the topic as expressed.

### **Section C**

- selected texts that worked well for the topic chosen and created new knowledge as they juxtaposed their texts in response to the topic
- moved through and across their selected texts making connections and generating well-considered thoughts about genre and context
- sustained their material throughout their essay.

## **SCHOLARSHIP**

**Candidates who were awarded Scholarship but not Scholarship with Outstanding Performance commonly:**

- lacked the stylistic flair of the most literate candidates
- did not show ability to think beyond the question or create new knowledge
- lacked apposite or thorough referencing to support their points
- minimised the clever juxtaposition of texts and material to produce critical insights or evaluation in response to the question

- worked well at the level of the question and with their studied texts, but did not go beyond very sound reproduction of learned materials to connect with unorthodox thinking or high levels of evaluation or critical thinking.

## **OTHER CANDIDATES**

### **Candidates who were not awarded Scholarship or Scholarship with Outstanding Performance commonly:**

- did not show ability to sustain a highly evaluative responsiveness across three essays
- did not show ability to work beyond (mostly competent) Level 3 responses
- used ‘faux academic’ writing, perhaps to mask their inabilities.

#### **Section A**

- spent the bulk of their answers on paraphrasing the texts rather than dealing with aspects of crafting.

#### **Section B**

- gave excessive factual information about their text(s) without filtering the extraneous or editing the relevant
- did not make a strong case for or against the thesis set up in the topic.

#### **Section C**

- gave too much information about extraneous matters not required by the question selected
- resorted to cliché, instead of writing responsively or critically
- wrote ‘lightly’ about too many texts.

**Recommendations for 2010, arising from NCEA 2009 Assessment Process:  
Scholarship English**

In their preparation for this examination candidates and teachers need to move beyond merely ‘practising’ with previous questions. Too often, even very good candidates fall into the trap of not discriminating the thrust of the question spine.

Candidates should specifically practice how to go about unpicking questions and to actively consider possibilities of interpretation, and effectively communicating ideas in ways that convey empathy, passion, flair and engagement.

Teaching which helps candidates to ‘juxtapose’ orthodox canon texts alongside radical or divergent texts generally works well as candidates bring to their essays clear insights about how such texts work. This is the ‘stuff’ of Scholarship.

Vampires are not well handled as either thematic or content features at this level, and vampires have been appearing far too frequently. They may be part of popular culture but many candidates display ignorance about how to write about them with intelligence or critical awareness of their symbolic overtones. In short, candidates do not see how vampire characters are in any way significant (as opposed to mere humans). Similar comments can apply to *Harry Potter*. If candidates are to use these texts they should do so from a stance of critical understanding rather than a simple enjoyment (simply expressed).