

## THE READING AND STUDY OF TEXTS

For many of you, I'm sure that the reading and the study of texts are two separate things; however, both VCAA and your English teachers want you to see the two as being inseparable, rather than being mutually exclusive. To effectively study a text, you first need to have read it and understood it. Furthermore, the Study Design provides a wide range of varied options to complete the required outcomes, which have been designed to maximise your learning and enjoyment. Having said this, it is important to remember that the all-important exam still focuses on the traditional essay style Analytical Response and for this reason it is essential that you master this skill if you haven't already done so.

### READING THE TEXT

Before you get anywhere near the exam, you will need to be very familiar with your texts – this means having read them *at least* three times and taken notes. I suggest the following as a guide to your study.

#### First Reading

This is the reading that you do before you begin to study the text in class. This is important, not just so you can get a head start, but so that you can read the text with an untainted point of view. Your responses will be your own and will not be influenced by any criticism or notes that you have read, or by your teacher. It is a good idea to write down your initial impressions after your first reading along with any questions that you may have. You will find it interesting to go back to these after your third or fourth reading and see how your ideas and understanding have changed.

#### Second Reading

This is the one that you will do while you are studying the text in class. Your teacher will probably guide you in your reading here, designating certain chapters or scenes to read and possibly assigning some accompanying questions. These are not designed to increase your workload, but rather to assist you with your analysis of the text.

#### Third, Fourth and Fifth Readings

It has been proven that we only retain a fraction of the information that we see or hear. However, this fraction is considerably increased if we write down this information when we receive it. When reading a text, you need to **read actively**. This means that you need to search for meaning in the text as you read it.

## **THINGS TO LOOK FOR**

### **Plot**

- What are the major events?
- Is there a climax?
- Is there a denouement?
- Are the events in chronological order?
- Is there a sub-plot?
- If so, how does it link to the main plot?
- Are there any parallels?
- Where does conflict occur?
- Is there a resolution? Where? Why?
- Is there any foreshadowing?
- Are there any time changes? i.e. Flashbacks or flashes into the future?
- From whose point of view is the story told?

### **Characters / Characterisation**

- Who are the main characters?
- Who are the minor characters?
- How do the characters develop or change as the text progresses?
- Through whose eyes do we see the characters?
- How are they linked to the plot?
- Do you like them? Why? Why not?

### **Setting**

- Where does the story take place?
- When does the story take place?
- Does the location change?
- How is the setting linked to the plot and characters?
- Does the setting have a symbolic or metaphoric significance?
- Does the setting change with time?

### **Symbolism, metaphor, mood and point of view**

- What symbolism is used?
- How does it work?
- How are metaphors and analogies used?
- How do these enhance our understanding?

### **Themes**

- What are the main themes (or recurring ideas) of the text?

### **Ideas to Help**

Of course, when you're reading your texts, you won't think of all of these things at once; however, here are some ideas to help you to answer the above questions:

- Keep a reading journal
- Keep a note of plot and character
- Turn your questions into statements
- View the film of the text (if applicable)
- Take a creative stance
- Practise writing on it
- **TALK ABOUT IT!**

## CONSTRUCTING A STUDY SHEET

It is extremely useful when studying a text to construct your own study sheet based on these five areas as a summary of the text that you can use to refresh your memory before exams or give you an overview before writing an essay. It helps you reduce key points etc. to the manageable size on one sheet of A4 paper. See example below.

Themes	Setting	Plot	Characters	Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing &amp; perception</li> <li>• Jealousy</li> <li>• Love &amp; adoration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17<sup>th</sup> Century</li> <li>• Delft, Holland</li> <li>• Class conscious society</li> <li>• Catholic, set apart</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 year old Griet goes to work for Vemeer's</li> <li>• Birth Feast</li> <li>• Works as assistant secretly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Griet 'clever one'</li> <li>• Vermeer – brilliant – detached 'he', 'him', 'the master'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Griet is first person narrator</li> <li>• Simple words yet detailed</li> <li>• Symbolism of pearl earrings</li> </ul>

**ACTIVITY**

Construct a study sheet for your text

Themes	Setting	Plot	Characters	Style

1. Use two and three word quotes from text where possible to describe elements of key areas.
2. Write in point form.
3. Include page references for quotes of more than three words.

## THEMES AND ISSUES

- The themes are messages of a text and are central to the purpose of the text.
- Issues differ from themes in that they can be argued because there are two or more sides.
- The writer, filmmaker, playwright or poet selects and arranges material in the text to support and develop their themes and issues.

These themes or issues may be stated directly by a character or in the author's introduction or title or they may be implicit in a character's action, etc.

### For example:

In *Wuthering Heights* the themes include:

- Love
- Betrayal
- Class and inheritance
- Revenge
- Death and the afterlife

In *All About Eve* the themes include:

- Fame
- Aging
- Ambition and success
- Relationships and marriage
- Power

## **THEMES AND ISSUES IN TEXTS**

Betrayal of friends and/or family

Change vs. continuity

Importance of courage and determination

Conformity vs. individuality – one character standing alone

Conflict: Cultural, religious, political, etc.

Effects of death on characters

Dependence vs. independence

Family relationships – destruction of or building of

Illusion vs. reality

The effects of a patriarchal society on women

Personal journey

Discovering identity

Jealousy vs. trust

Man's justice vs. God's justice

Power and politics

Role of the King

Legal and moral justice

Humanity

Racial prejudice

The influence of religion on a society

## CONTEXT

Context refers to the surrounding circumstances and influences on the author and the creation of the text. Often this is referred to as the 'Background'.

These circumstances include:

- Political
- Social
- Educational
- Religious
- Family
- Cultural
- Influential people
- Work and travel experiences
- Economic factors

Knowing the context of a set text and the author before you read it provides you with an insight into:

- The background of the texts and the factors that influenced the construction of the text.
- Views and values of the author.

You also need to consider the actual context within the text.

Geographical location of story/cultural, political and social setting and how it affects the issues and development of the text.

### For example:

*The War Poems* by Wilfred Owen were written as a result of the English poet's experiences of trench warfare in France between 1915 and 1918. Many of Owen's poems reflect the desolation and destruction of the French landscape with which he was so familiar as well as the carnage of war.

*Brooklyn* is a novel set in the 1950s. It contrasts two settings; a small town in Ireland and Brooklyn in the USA. It presents two different cultures.

### ACTIVITY

List points about the contexts of your texts.

## SETTING

### SETTING = TIME + PLACE

The setting helps the reader visualise the characters in their environment and can create expectations and understanding about why characters behave as they do.

This is done more easily in plays and films where you can actually see the setting. When studying novels it is a good idea to draw labelled sketches of written, physical settings or arrange your classroom furniture where possible if the text is set indoors. The setting influences the characters and plot.

## PLOT

The plot refers to the events of a text and their order. A plot usually contains some basic elements and these elements can occur in a variety of structures.

### BASIC ELEMENTS OF PLOT

<b>Action:</b>	Introduction of key characters.
<b>Exposition:</b>	Background material provided so that reader feels knowledgeable about what is happening in text.
<b>Conflict:</b>	Argument, fight, dissatisfaction, unhappiness etc. with another character. It can also be internal, e.g. character arguing with his conscience about something he has done or likely to do.
<b>Complication:</b>	When a character is suddenly confronted by an unexpected problem or unfortunate turn of events, e.g. sudden illness.
<b>Resolution:</b>	Coming to terms with problem either by self or with help of others, difficult choice has been made, e.g. friends helping you get over a death in the family.
<b>Rising action:</b>	Events that lead up to climax.
<b>Climax:</b>	The 'highest point' of a single action or story, the big moment preceding events seem to lead to, e.g. the death of a villain. There can be more than one climax in a plot.
<b>Denouement:</b>	The 'unknotting' – the events following the major climax. Sometimes this may occur only in the final scene.

## STRUCTURE

The structure of the text is the order in which these events happen. This is deliberately planned to emphasise the message(s) in the most effective manner.

Possible structures include:

**Chronological:** Events arranged according to how they would occur in 'real time'.

**Retrospective:** Events arranged so story begins with final moment.

**Flashbacks:** Providing background information where necessary.

**Traditional linear:** Beginning, middle and end.

**Complex/non-linear:** Doesn't follow traditional linear.

Subplots may be parallel stories. They involve secondary characters and contain the same basic elements of plot that the main plot does.

## CHARACTERS

Characters are persons or creatures that do and say things in text. They help communicate the author's messages and point of view and help develop themes through their actions, thoughts, feelings, descriptions and dialogue.

Character types you should know include:

**Protagonist:** Most important character, usually hero, in a drama (play, film) or narrative (story).

**Antagonist:** Name given to describe character that is in opposition to hero (protagonist) in a drama or narrative.

**Rounded characters:** Fully developed individuals who are capable of complex emotions and actions and can be unpredictable.

**Flat characters:** One-sided and are based around a single identifying trait.

A character can be the narrator of the story. For example: In *Gattaca*. When this is the case the reader is presented with only one perspective and it is important for the reader to be aware of the possible limitations of this.

For the difference between **Characterisation** and **Character development** see the Film section.

## STYLE

Style is made up of the following elements and they all influence one another.

- Language
- Tone
- Form and genre
- Point of view = Whose voice? Narrator. Authorial voice

Authors write using the elements of style that enables them to convey their message(s), to the audience they want, in a manner that is effective.

Style refers to how a particular writer expresses ideas, observations and concepts.

It can be analysed in terms of:

- Word choices
- Figures of speech
- Figurative language/imagery
- Sentence structure
- Patterns of speech
- Rhetorical devices
- Grammatical features

Bruce Dawe, the poet, writes in a direct, uncomplicated style using a lot of Australian vernacular. This gives him what is termed a 'common man' voice, which can enable a larger audience to relate to his messages.

Authors from the nineteenth century employed a far more wordy style with emphasis on description rather than action. *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens is an example of this style.

## LANGUAGE

The intended audience and purpose of the text influence the author's style by determining the choice of language needed to suit the audience so that it understands the purpose and messages conveyed.

Authors can choose to use colloquial, jargon, personal or formal language depending on their audience and purpose. To make their characters convincing they choose language people from that time would have spoken. Authors may incorporate symbols and/or motifs. Their words may contain a rich subtext that requires you to 'read between the lines' to find the subtle meanings.

## CONVENTIONS AND METALANGUAGE

Conventions are the customary practices concerning form, structure and language that people expect when reading or watching a text. **For example:** A play will be structured using scenes and stage directions and when it is performed there will also be dramatic features like projected voices of actors, **asides** and **soliloquies** in Shakespeare when one character speaks and the other characters act as if they don't hear him.

Knowing the guidelines for conventions makes it easier to follow and understand a text. Knowing the metalanguage used to discuss these conventions helps with your Analytical Response.

## NOVELS

Novels are written in **prose** and are **narratives** (tell a story). They are usually divided into parts and/or chapters. Novels can be structured in a variety of ways and be told from different points of view.

## PLAYS

Plays are no more difficult or easy to study than novels, poems etc. As long as you realise that a play needs to be studied as both an aural and visual form, and are familiar with dramatic conventions used in plays you will have no trouble.

One of the most important things to remember when you are studying a play is the form and staging devices that are part of style. You need to pay attention to discussing the **form** (dramatic techniques) and not just the **narrative** (story).

## **TONE**

Tone indicates the author's attitude towards his subject matter including characters, themes, institutions, etc. Tone is a characteristic of voice. In plays and films this can be demonstrated by changes in an actor's voice and manner. In writing the author uses language to indicate tone.

### **Adjectives to describe tone:**

Curious, joyful, cautious, regretful, guilty, thoughtful, aggressive, positive, negative, fearful, bored, shocked.

## **POINT OF VIEW**

Point of view is the perspective from which a text is seen or told. You need to ask yourself, 'who is telling the story?'

Three principal points of view most commonly used are:

1. The first person narrator in which the point of view is solely that of the character telling the story.

They may be a central or minor character who either observes or participates in the action. A first person narrator cannot see into the minds of the other characters. This device significantly reduces the reader's sense of author's presence in the text.

2. The point of view of a single character who is used by the author as a central observer or participant in the action (third person narrative).
3. The omniscient (godlike) point of view enables the writer to present the inner thoughts and feelings of his characters. The narrator has no part in story e.g. *Ransom*.

**What is the authorial voice in your selected text?**

## FORM AND GENRE

An author chooses the form and genre/text type that enables them to best communicate their message(s). An author needs to know the conventions of their chosen form and genre and to feel comfortable writing in it.

### ACTIVITY

List as many different (a) forms and (b) genres as you can.

Form:

Genre:

### ACTIVITY

Select one of your texts and describe its:

- (a) Form
  
- (b) Language
  
- (c) Tone
  
- (d) Genre
  
- (e) Point of view (Who is telling the story? Is narrator reliable?)

## **WARM AND FUZZY**

**BY JENNIFER BLACBURN**

Where I grew up there were no such things as pets. Plenty of animals but no pets.

The dogs were chained up and savage. 'Don't go near them, they're working dogs, not pets!' Dad would say.

I couldn't have cats because the foxes ate them. '... and stay outta the paddocks, those bullock will go ya,' my Dad would yell.

'Keep away from the sheep.' When the poddies [handfed calves] were born I was allowed to feed them with buckets.

Then they would disappear.

'Gone to market,' Mum would say.

I knew what she meant.

'Keep away from that horse, it kicks,' my dad would say.

I liked collecting the eggs from the chooks until my brother told me that Dad chopped their heads off if they stopped laying. I never collected eggs after that.

Once I was allowed to keep an orphaned lamb. I called him 'Lambchops' and fed him with a bottle. When he got bigger, he mowed the lawn on the end of a long rope.

One day I came home from school and he was gone. I ran and found Mum and asked her where he was.

'In the freezer,' she said.

## **PERSPECTIVE**

### **ACTIVITY**

Write your perspective on the previous text.

## HELPFUL GLOSSARY OF TERMS

(source: [http://higher.ed.mheducation.com/sites/0072405228/student\\_view0/drama\\_glossary.html#recognition](http://higher.ed.mheducation.com/sites/0072405228/student_view0/drama_glossary.html#recognition))

### **Allegory:**

A symbolic narrative in which the surface details imply a secondary meaning. Allegory often takes the form of a story in which the characters represent moral qualities. The most famous example in English is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which the name of the central character, Pilgrim, epitomizes the book's allegorical nature. Kay Boyle's story "Astronomer's Wife" and Christina Rossetti's poem "Up-Hill" both contain allegorical elements.

### **Alliteration:**

The repetition of consonant sounds, especially at the beginning of words. Example: "Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood." Hopkins, "In the Valley of the Elwy."

### **Antagonist:**

A character or force against which another character struggles. Creon is Antigone's antagonist in Sophocles' play *Antigone*; Teiresias is the antagonist of Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.

### **Aside:**

Words spoken by an actor directly to the audience, which are not "heard" by the other characters on stage during a play. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Iago voices his inner thoughts a number of times as "asides" for the play's audience.

### **Assonance:**

The repetition of similar vowel sounds in a sentence or a line of poetry or prose, as in "I rose and told him of my woe." Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" contains assonantal "I's" in the following lines: "How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick, / Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself."

### **Catastrophe:**

The action at the end of a tragedy that initiates the denouement or falling action of a play. One example is the dueling scene in Act V of *Hamlet* in which Hamlet dies, along with Laertes, King Claudius, and Queen Gertrude.

### **Catharsis:**

The purging of the feelings of pity and fear that, according to Aristotle, occur in the audience of tragic drama. The audience experiences catharsis at the end of the play, following the catastrophe.

**Character:**

An imaginary person that inhabits a literary work. Literary characters may be major or minor, static (unchanging) or dynamic (capable of change). In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona is a major character, but one who is static, like the minor character Bianca. Othello is a major character who is dynamic, exhibiting an ability to change.

**Characterisation:**

The means by which writers present and reveal character. Although techniques of characterisation are complex, writers typically reveal characters through their speech, dress, manner, and actions. Readers come to understand the character Miss Emily in Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" through what she says, how she lives, and what she does.

**Chorus:**

A group of characters in Greek tragedy (and in later forms of drama), who comment on the action of a play without participation in it. Their leader is the choragos. Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King* both contain an explicit chorus with a choragos. Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie* contains a character who functions like a chorus.

**Climax:**

The turning point of the action in the plot of a play or story. The climax represents the point of greatest tension in the work. The climax of John Updike's "A & P," for example, occurs when Sammy quits his job as a cashier.

**Comedy:**

A type of drama in which the characters' experience reversals of fortune, usually for the better. In comedy, things work out happily in the end. Comic drama may be either romantic – characterised by a tone of tolerance and geniality – or satiric. Satiric works offer a darker vision of human nature, one that ridicules human folly. Shaw's *Arms and the Man* is a romantic comedy; Chekhov's *Marriage Proposal* is a satiric comedy.

**Comic relief:**

The use of a comic scene to interrupt a succession of intensely tragic dramatic moments. The comedy of scenes offering comic relief typically parallels the tragic action that the scenes interrupt. Comic relief is lacking in Greek tragedy, but occurs regularly in Shakespeare's tragedies. One example is the opening scene of Act V of *Hamlet*, in which a gravedigger banters with Hamlet.

**Complication:**

An intensification of the conflict in a story or play. Complication builds up, accumulates, and develops the primary or central conflict in a literary work. Frank O'Connor's story "Guests of the Nation" provides a striking example, as does Ralph Ellison's "Battle Royal."

**Conflict:**

A struggle between opposing forces in a story or play, usually resolved by the end of the work. The conflict may occur within a character as well as between characters. Lady Gregory's one-act play *The Rising of the Moon* exemplifies both types of conflict as the Policeman wrestles with his conscience in an inner conflict and confronts an antagonist in the person of the ballad singer.

**Connotation:**

The associations called up by a word that goes beyond its dictionary meaning. Poets, especially, tend to use words rich in connotation. Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" includes intensely connotative language, as in these lines: "Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright / Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay, / Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

**Convention:**

A customary feature of a literary work, such as the use of a chorus in Greek tragedy, the inclusion of an explicit moral in a fable, or the use of a particular rhyme scheme in a villanelle. Literary conventions are defining features of particular literary genres, such as novel, short story, ballad, sonnet, and play.

**Denotation:**

The dictionary meaning of a word. Writers typically play off a word's denotative meaning against its connotations, or suggested and implied associational implications. In the following lines from Peter Meinke's "Advice to My Son" the references to flowers and fruit, bread and wine denote specific things, but also suggest something beyond the literal, dictionary meanings of the words:

To be specific, between the peony and rose  
Plant squash and spinach, turnips and tomatoes;  
Beauty is nectar and nectar, in a desert, saves--  
...  
and always serve bread with your wine.  
But, son,  
always serve wine.

**Denouement:**

The resolution of the plot of a literary work. The denouement of *Hamlet* takes place after the catastrophe, with the stage littered with corpses. During the denouement Fortinbras makes an entrance and a speech, and Horatio speaks his sweet lines in praise of Hamlet.

**Deus ex machina:**

A god who resolves the entanglements of a play by supernatural intervention. The Latin phrase means, literally, "a god from the machine." The phrase refers to the use of artificial means to resolve the plot of a play.