

Classical Studies

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Society and Environment Learning Area



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

CLASSICAL STUDIES

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

GENERAL COMMENTS

This year students undertook an Examination that assessed the focus topics studied in class, with the Special Study forming the moderated component. It was pleasing to note that in both assessment components there was evidence of understanding in relation to the learning outcomes assessed, and engagement with topics studied.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: EXAMINATION

Markers and supervisors noted that most candidates observed essay and examination conventions, and engaged with both the Section A texts and the Section B subject matter in a personal and meaningful way. Responses suggested that the majority of students related positively to the course material, and were able to provide some evidence of understanding and engagement.

It was evident that students had been taught essay writing skills, including the need to address the question in a first paragraph, and to return to the question in the concluding paragraph. Most students demonstrated the ability to construct an argument, while some argued a very sophisticated case after having deconstructed the question effectively. There were a number of essays based on an assertion, which was supported by a proliferation of examples, rather than providing a sustained argument that progressed and developed throughout the essay. This was particularly the case in Section A answers, but it also occurred in response to Section B. There was also an increase in the number of students who had difficulty understanding, and therefore addressing the question. This is a concern. Good learning must incorporate clear understanding; factual knowledge alone is not enough. Some students had pre-prepared answers that did not effectively address the given question.

A few students did not follow the instructions and answered two questions from one topic; however it is pleasing to note that there were fewer instances of this than in previous years. It is always a concern when a student answers a question on a topic that they have not studied in class. This sends a very clear message that a question was attempted on the Special Study topic.

Section A: Literature

Topic 1: Greek Epic

A large percentage of students answered a question on *The Odyssey*. Students had clearly enjoyed aspects of the plot, engaged with the characters, and had a good understanding of issues, and multiple readings. There was however, evidence to suggest that some students did not read the whole of the text, or relied on visual interpretations of the text. Students need to learn key names and concepts and use correct spelling. A reminder: *The Odyssey* is epic poetry, not a novel.

Question 1 was a popular choice. Students explored the relationships between Zeus and Athena, Odysseus and Telemachus, Penelope and Telemachus, and Poseidon and Polyphemus. Some students tended to discuss their beliefs about how these relationships should have worked rather than discussing the textual evidence.

Question 2 was even more popular than Question 1. Including 'to what extent' in the question, encouraged students to formulate an argument. The more successful responses argued both for and against the statement, and the most sophisticated responses explored the tensions between fate and freewill, chance, and selfish divine intervention.

Question 3 was the most popular question. The most successful answers began with an informed discussion of 'xenia', and the obligations and rights it entailed. There were many examples discussed, and all students agreed with the quotation. Students did not always demonstrate a clear understanding of the concept of 'worth'. More sophisticated discussions made links with the honour and heroic codes reflected by epic heroes. Knowledge on the whole was sound.

Question 4 was the least popular question, but elicited the most successful essays from students who discussed a range of examples, intertextuality, multiple readings of the text, and the construction of Odysseus' character in the various settings.

Topic 2: Greek Drama

Greek drama was a very popular topic. The most studied plays were *Antigone*, *Lysistrata*, *The Bacchae*, and *Oedipus Rex*. Most students had a good grasp of the plots (which unfortunately led to some recount and narrative writing), and some understanding of characters' motivations, although few students were able to communicate the deeper intentions of the playwrights.

Question 5 was popular, but not always well answered. There were no problems in choosing and describing appropriate relationships (family and marriage), or the conflicts therein. The most successful responses engaged with the key words of the question and discussed whether the closeness of the relationship was connected with the degree of conflict between individuals.

Question 6 was less frequently answered, and answers tended to avoid explaining how the audiences were encouraged to take sides. The role of the Chorus was used effectively to argue the point. A well-informed understanding of characters' motives assisted the students in making their choices. Some students argued that factors such as characterisation, rather than 'taking sides', intensified the impact of the drama.

Question 7 was not popular, although there were some excellent discussions of how the conflict is established in *Antigone* and *Oedipus*.

Question 8 was a popular question with students generally expressing very strong opinions. Most agreed that while suffering was deserved, it was, in fact, too great to match the mistake made. Good insight was displayed in recognising that fate led to much of the suffering, and to the concept of justice, in a Greek context.

Question 9 was answered on *Lysistrata* and most students mentioned the concept of women being given power, as well as the effect of costuming and language. However most students needed to pay a little more attention to the notion of 'confront', and the intellectual appeal, as well as the more obvious physical humour. The more thoughtful responses considered both ancient Greek audiences and modern audiences.

Topic 3: Roman Poetry

There were only a few answers to these questions. Questions 12 and 13 were tackled by students who were very well prepared; they gave many quotations and displayed knowledge of a wide range of the stylistic features of the poems of Catullus. These discussions engaged fully with the requirements of the question.

Section B

Topic 4: Greek Society, Fifth Century BC

This was a frequently studied topic. The students seemed to have sound knowledge, and responded to the questions appropriately. The more successful answers displayed a command of Greek terms and the ability to argue a case.

Question 14 was applied to Athens and Sparta, with most students choosing to write on two *poleis*. All agreed that in Sparta the obligation was primarily to the *polis*, while in Athens it was to the *oikos* despite the important civil duties of the Athenian populace. Knowledge of obligations to the *polis* was clearly evident; obligations to the *oikos* were often dealt with in a more generalised way. The more successful responses were organised into political, social, economic, military, and religious/cultural responsibilities. As with many questions, key words are sometimes overlooked. Students needed to argue whether one set of obligations was in fact 'overshadowed' by the other.

Question 15 gave rise to long discussions of how the Spartan and Athenian boys were raised, with much briefer discussions about how girls were raised in each *polis*. Most agreed that while the girls were treated in different ways their education or training served the same purpose. Knowledge of the Spartan system was stronger than that of the Athenians. Many agreed uncritically with the statement, when in fact the raising of females differed substantially.

Question 16 caused difficulty for some. Students mainly described the restrictions placed on women, and while this knowledge was commendable, the issue of 'potential to threaten' was generally inadequately addressed. The most successful students understood the place of Athenian women and were able to discuss the often subtle and indirect power they wielded. Comments on legitimate children, property, and lineage suggested a confident understanding of these women. Students are advised to consider the broader range of women within a *polis* and not just those of the citizen group.

Question 17 answers were well-prepared, with most pointing out that the picture was not as 'black and white' as the quote in the question suggested – that there were advantages and disadvantages of being a slave in both societies. The most successful responses used relevant examples to explore the respect and contempt towards the enslaved of both *poleis*.

Topic 5: Greek History, 500-479 BC

There were more answers this year on Greek History than in the past few years. Students seemed to have quite good knowledge of specific battles, Marathon and Thermopylae in particular, and could discuss tactics and weaponry knowledgeably. Students must pay careful attention to the requirements of the question: when 'two or more' battles are asked for, then this is what must be presented. Battles need to be chosen carefully; often students gave details of battles they had learnt, even if they did not suit the question chosen.

Question 18 was a popular question that generally allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge of weapons, and tactics in particular. The most successful students put these into perspective with other factors such as treachery, loyalty, morale, geographic location and weather conditions.

Question 19 elicited some strong responses that were clear about the right and wrong decisions of leaders. Some students did not specify individual leaders, or could not make value judgements about their decisions. There were some interesting interpretations of Leonidas' stand at Thermopylae, with some students praising and some condemning his actions. Miltiades at Marathon and Themistocles at Salamis were the most popular choices, and from

the Persian perspective Xerxes was universally condemned for taking on the unified might of Greece.

Question 20 responses mainly centred on a description of the two battles. Some students struggled to engage with the question, and showed gaps in their understanding of the notion of a 'turning point'. There was little insight into the consequences of either battle in the context of the Persian Wars overall.

Question 21 was not a popular choice. Of the few responses received, there were some insights into the narrative, bias, and exaggerations of Herodotus' approach, but not enough of the other entertaining aspects, such as the anecdotes.

Topic 6: Roman History, 70-28 BC

This topic was rarely studied. Question 22 was quite popular, however there were gaps in student knowledge of the topic. Questions 23 and 25 were not answered. Although Question 24 was attempted, some students struggled to demonstrate just how the second triumvirate had learnt from the first.

Topic 7: Greek Religion

Students studying this topic seemed to be well prepared, and had a depth of knowledge and high level of understanding.

Question 26 responses showed that while students knew of a variety of rituals, they struggled with their contribution to personal identity. Reasonable knowledge of some rituals was demonstrated.

Question 27 was the most popular choice for this topic. 'Desire' caused difficulties and was interpreted in a number of ways, but not always convincingly. Students referred to prayer, festivals, sacrifice, and oracles as the main means of communication.

Question 28 was answered less frequently, with most students agreeing with the quote. The most successful responses challenged the quote, and argued for the importance of personal celebrations as well. Responses considered sacred times such as birth, marriage, death, festivals, and celebrations of the mysteries. Stronger arguments considered family and community celebrations separately.

Question 29 was a popular choice. The most successful responses linked the mystery religions with specific traditional faiths, and avoided listing features of the mystery cults. Students are reminded to avoid generalisations.

Topic 8: Greek and Roman Material Culture, Seventh Century BC to Second Century AD

This topic was not selected for class study this year.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 2: SPECIAL STUDY

Moderators commented that most Special Studies were well written, carefully edited, and provided evidence of independent research skills. Many students explored original topics and areas of personal interest, taking advantage of the opportunity offered to investigate a topic that began in the classical world but extended beyond the classical world.

Although there was a broad range of studies representing all topics, Section A: Literature was under-represented, with few students completing Special Studies based on literary texts. Students are reminded that their Special Study can be drawn from a broad range of options, and is not limited to Section B: Society, Culture and History. In fact, students can complete a Special Study on *any aspect* of the classical world not listed in any topic. At least 50% of the Special Study should be located in the Graeco-Roman classical world.

Teachers and students are reminded that the quality of the question is highly significant in determining the success of a Special Study. The question or proposal needs to lead the student towards developing an argument or point of view. Teacher guidance is imperative. Assistance needs to be given to each student to ensure that the question does not lead to a narrative approach. Students need to be able to engage in critical analysis, and develop a point of view, to meet the 'argument' criterion of this assessment component. Teacher guidance is also needed to ensure that the topic selected by the student is not too broad, which can lead students into developing arguments that lack evidence and/or depth. Students should be encouraged to narrow their focus as this makes the research process more manageable and provides an opportunity to develop and sustain a point of view. There were several studies that did not include a question. As well as indicating the broad topic, students must include their actual question – which should be clearly stated in the opening paragraph.

Students generally did well in the 'communication' criterion, writing accurately and clearly in the correct essay format. Moderators commented that teachers should use the full range of marks available when judging performance against this criterion to acknowledge high levels of communication. There were some obvious errors that detracted, which suggests that more care was needed in the editing process. Students should refer to the criteria for judging performance and the clarifying questions for the Special Study to ensure that they provide evidence against all the criteria. As well as demonstrating an ability to write clearly and accurately in essay format, the communication criterion also addresses performance in relation to the integration of relevant illustrative material. This year there was an increase in the number of students who included poorly integrated or irrelevant illustrative material in their Special Study. This had a negative impact on marks for communication. Students are reminded that illustrative material should only be included where it adds to the argument or development of a point of view, and should not be included just for aesthetic purposes.

Most students demonstrated their independent research skills through the appropriate use and acknowledgment of sources. Teachers are reminded that students continue to need guidance in sourcing reliable, high quality resources. Sources such as *'Trivia.com'* or *'My Little Golden Book of Myths and Legends'* are not appropriate resources for a Stage 2 Special Study about Greek religion. Students are reminded that they must acknowledge sources using in-text referencing whenever they refer to, or use, the words or ideas of others.

Chief Assessor
Classical Studies