**Stage 2 English Literary Studies**

**Assessment Type 2: Creating Texts- Transformative Text**

**What's He Building? Tom Waits**

**Transformative Text Task**

Using the song as a starting point, transform it, or an aspect of it, into another written form. You may write in first person, possibly as the narrator of the song, the main character or a more peripheral figure. You could use third person perspective too. Select a form: story, play, media article. You may choose to preserve the central mystery, or reveal it in full, or part.

Knowledge and Understanding

The specific features are as follows:

KU1 Knowledge and understanding of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts.

KU2 Knowledge and understanding of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.

Analysis

The specific features are as follows:

An1 Analysis of ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.

An2 Analysis and evaluation of ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the interpretation of texts.

Application

The specific features are as follows:

Ap1 Use of conventions, and stylistic features to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.

Ap3 Use of accurate, clear, and fluent expression appropriate for purpose and audience.

**The House**

Well, the house is nearly prepared. The windows are fixed, and the leak in the cellar is patched. I pulled up the grimy carpets, and treated the ironbark boards, and now during clear mornings, with the sun rushing through the skylight, their flaxen warmth reminds me of the timber floor in our old house.

Our old house.

The street is quiet and pretty. As they’re keeping a respectful distance I’ve not met any of the neighbours. Their properties are modest with immaculate lawns, hedges and solemn, reassuring facades.

Up on the corner, by the reserve, a car’s parked in a driveway. It is the identical colour and model as Jane’s old car, remember that horrible burnt orange? Can you believe this? I wonder what happened to that Datsun. It defined her in so many ways. For many people a car is just a way of conducting life’s business, an economic necessity in which no personal investment is made, or creative expression is given. But even the dents on the doors echoed Jane’s cheerfully chaotic outlook on life. I’ve never seen someone abuse a gearbox like that! Long before you’d see her you could hear her coming down the road.

I’ve enjoyed working on the house. It’s been calming. Rejuvenating. Dare I suggest remedial? Some heaven-sent physical exertion, during which I’ve used muscles ignored for years. It’s been a transformation from living primarily in the spiritual. I’m finally beginning to understand what Bill meant when he’d say, “People shouldn’t live too long in a single house.”

The front yard might one day become a garden. The shrubs had been pruned towards an irritable death, and they’d been left a crazed mess like a bad Picasso. All jarring angles and stunted, agonised shapes that surely have no place in front of a humble bungalow. A faithful priest, every evening in the fading warmth I’ve been watering them, and some tiny green shoots are emerging; emerald stars in a scorched galaxy.

A man from the telephone company came by just after lunch, and said that the line should be operating by the end of the week. That’ll be good. Another little victory. Isn’t this all we can hope for in life: a succession of little triumphs? Do you think I could call over the weekend? I think I’ve got your number in one of my notebooks. If not, I’ll phone Bill to get your number. He’s sure to have it. He is so very reliable, he’s mechanically sound.

Hidden beneath a sheet in the garage I found an old barbeque. It must belong to the former owners, so given what happened there, I guess it’s now mine. Feeling thrilled with this slight surprise, I took it out the back by the rainwater tank, and hosed it off. Some spiders scuttled off across my lawn while the muddy water cascaded off the metal like toxic rain. Later, the barbeque hissed and spat like a gruff football coach, and cooking my meal, I heard a dog barking in the middle distance, from down near the creek. Its yapping seemed to protest a catalogue of sharp disappointments.

As the dark fell upon me I ate the meat. I thought about how quickly life can change, like an earthquake rumbling up from a previously undetected fault line. The cruel seismology reminding us, as if this was its only function, of how suddenly jolted people can be. Just like spiders sent from a private space, into an unexpected world. I had the radio on and that new song by the Beach Boys came on. God Only Knows. Such symphonic melodies, and handsome singing, as it extends its love, like a heart attack.

I may not always love you
But long as there are stars above you
You never need to doubt it
I'll make you so sure about it
God only knows what I'd be without you

I wheeled the ticking barbeque back into the garage, and like a ghost made corporeal, put the white sheet back over its exoskeleton, and went into the house. Washing the dishes I looked out my kitchen window. Above my fence the neighbour’s back light was on, and it shone warmly, stupidly into the velvet.

I was ready.

**Text type**

I decided to write in prose because I think this offers the most coherent form for transforming this particular song/ spoken word piece. As I was partly inspired by the character of Frank Bascombe from *The Sportswriter* series by Richard Ford, I chose to tell my version in first-person, and aimed to make it well observed, but unsettling, with something vaguely sinister lurking in the subtext (”I thought about how quickly life can change, like an earthquake rumbling up from a previously undetected fault line”). I aimed to invest my text with ambiguity as this would neither validate nor disprove the neighbour’s paranoia.

My language choices are designed to hint at some vague possible danger (“Above my fence the neighbour’s back light was on, and it shone warmly, stupidly into the velvet. I was ready.”) The reader is led to think that the character could be troubled, or recovering from personal trauma. I also wanted my audience to conclude that the narrator might simply possess an unorthodox world view, and is entirely undeserving of the neighbour’s suspicion.

**Audience**

Our writer is male and alone. He appears to be writing for someone he knows well, but doesn’t have their phone number. This is an important detail. He could simply be careless, or their relationship might’ve changed. They might once have been intimate and he is now attempting to recover this. He could be addressing his current wife, but I hope it’s a better story for withholding their identity. He’s eager to share details of his domestic progress, and at selected points he wants to impress this person (“The windows are fixed, and the leak in the cellar is patched.”). I wanted the audience to think that the house is likely being prepared for both characters, but to also leave this uncertain as the nature of their relationship is left ultimately mysterious (“I’ve enjoyed working on the house. It’s been calming. Rejuvenating. Dare I suggest remedial? “) to highlight the likely ridiculousness of the paranoia, the prying, and the anxiety in the original Tom Waits song. How much can we really know of others? How well can we, or should we expect to know our neighbours? As such we cannot tell if the main character has positive, malicious or mixed intentions. He could very well merely be renovating his new house, and quietly going about his private life.

**Purpose**

I began knowing that my transformative text wouldn’t provide obvious answers to the questions raised by the narrator in “What’s He Building?” It would be artless to surrender to this, and present the neighbour as one either clearly motivated by malevolence, or indeed just misunderstood, through no genuine cause of his own. I wanted a sophisticated text, for a discerning and mature audience. I wanted my text to continue asking the questions that Tom Waits forwarded to us in his song, and also aimed for my piece to afford the reader the opportunity to decide, but I didn’t want to leave them with too much work to do. I planned to create an intriguing character, but offer space for the audience’s contemplation.

I tried to generate a distinctive authorial voice for my person. I wanted him to think in richly original ways that might be seen as startling or amusing or both (“He is so very reliable, he’s mechanically sound.”). In part the point of this is to show the unjustifiable intolerance of others, and how threatened many are by the unorthodox. Ultimately, my narrator has only revealed himself to be a private person who is renovating his new home, and as such he’s improving his house, and adding value to the neighbourhood.

I used the Beach Boys’ song for two reasons. As it was released in 1966, and is referred to by the narrator as “new” this establishes the chronological setting. Additionally, it invests the text with ambiguous meaning and is hopeful and touching, or disturbing and foreboding in what it suggests about the story’s central relationship. (1,406 words)

This task is assessed at A+

Performance Standards for Stage 2 English Literary Studies

|   | Knowledge and Understanding | Analysis | Application |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | Detailed knowledge and understanding of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts.Thorough knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.Detailed knowledge and understanding of a range of stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Perceptive analysis of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.Perceptive analysis and evaluation of the complex ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the interpretation of texts.Perceptive analysis of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.Perceptive analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Sophisticated use of a wide range of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.Detailed and appropriate use of evidence from texts develop, support, and justify responses, with textual references incorporated fluently in discussion.Use of precise and fluent expression, which is appropriate for audience and purpose.  |
| B | Knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in most texts.Knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.Knowledge and understanding of a range of stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Clear analysis of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.Clear analysis and evaluation of the complex ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.Clear analysis of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.Clear analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Use of a range of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.Appropriate use of evidence from texts to develop, support, and justify responses, with textual references incorporated in discussion.Mostly accurate and fluent expression, which is appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| C | Knowledge and understanding of some ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts.Knowledge and understanding of some ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.Knowledge and understanding of some of the stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Some analysis of ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.Description, with some analysis and evaluation, of ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.Description, with some analysis, of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.Some analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Competent use of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.Competent use of evidence from texts to develop, support, and justify responses, with some use of textual references in discussion.Generally fluent and clear expression, which is mostly appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| D | Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a narrow range of ways in which ideas and values are represented in texts.Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a narrow range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a few of the stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Description of the ideas and values represented in texts.Description of some ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.Some description of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.Recognition of some ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Use of some language features to create texts that address the meaning and intention of the task in a limited way.Some use of evidence from texts to develop, support , and attempt to justify responses, with use of a narrow range of textual references.Occasionally clear expression, which is appropriate for some audiences and purposes. |
| E | Simplistic knowledge and very restricted understanding of the way in which an idea or a value is represented in a text.Limited knowledge and restricted understanding of a restricted range of stylistic features used by authors. Limited knowledge and restricted understanding of different text types and conventions. | Reference to an idea or value represented in a text.Limited description of a way in which a stylistic feature is used to influence the reading of a text.Simplistic description of a connection between texts in a comparative task.Reference to a critical perspective. | Attempted use of some language features to create texts that attempt to address the meaning and intention of the task in a limited way.Restricted use of evidence from texts to develop and support a simple response, with minimal textual references.Emerging development of control of expression. |