

Stage 2 English Studies
Assessment Type 1: Shared Studies
Study of Single Text : *Psycho*

Using knowledge gained from both the close reading of the text and the classroom discussion on stylistic features, write a critical essay in response to one of the following questions:

1. How does the author of a prescribed text use mise-en-scène to reinforce ideas?

In Alfred Hitchcock's thriller film *Psycho* mise-en-scène, or 'the things in the scene', reinforce ideas through powerful specific scenes. One of these is the parlour scene where Norman Bates' dark side and Mother's power are first hinted at and the idea of the dead holding power over the living emerges. Mise-en-scène arouses suspicions about Norman, which are transferred to Mother in the shower scene where she fatally, interrupts Marion Crane's redemption, Hitchcock's mise-en-scène reinforcing ideas of repression and guilt. Finally, Mother's overwhelming presence becomes clear as Lila Crane investigates Mother's room - every part of the set design and scene construction leading the audience to understand her oppressive influence, even in death. These scenes highlight Hitchcock's directorial skills as his use of mise-en-scène strongly reinforces ideas about death, power and repression.

The mise-en-scène of the psychologically intense parlour scene provides a powerful insight into both Marion's and Norman's lives. Anthony Perkin's and Janet Leigh's performances are both moving in their subtlety. Their oppositional positioning represents a shift from the portrayal of Norman as an innocent man-child, Hitchcock hints sinisterly at the predator beneath compromising the audience's sympathy for the remainder of the film. This is reinforced through props and framing as Norman's stuffed birds loom like predators in the corners behind Norman, while Marion has only a tapestry of fairies behind her. Hitchcock also employs lighting to enhance the scene's subtext: while Marion is well lit, a lamp by her side suggesting Norman being drawn to her, the only light source with Norman is an unlit candle, signifying his life is unlit, his half-shadowed form contrasting with Marion's light. The lighting and props compliment Marion's redemption and hint at Norman's hidden depths, as well as the theme of the dead overpowering the living. Even Norman's dialogue adds to this idea when he says without him the house would become 'cold and damp like a grave'. Hitchcock's camera angles compliment this, as the audience sees Norman from a low-angle giving him an unexpected power, though the camera gradually closes on him as he becomes increasingly aggressive and his mask slips. Additionally, this scene is where we first gain an insight into Mother and Norman's abnormal relationship. The props in the parlour best show this, though Norman has his birds it is clear Mother's out-dated decorations infiltrate shots, giving her an enduring presence beyond the house and intruding into the hotel. Additionally, Mother's paintings of Susannah and the elders clutter the frame surrounding Norman hinting at the link between sex and danger. All of these themes are important in the film, and Hitchcock's mastery of mise-en-scène as a director allows him to highlight them in a pivotal scene.

The most powerful scenes in film are enduring, and this is extremely true of *Psycho*. The shower scene is vital to the film. It depicts Mother's physical introduction, though as required by the film we do not see she is truly a disguised Norman. Hitchcock's mise-en-scène involves bright light that eases Marion's guilt, developed throughout the film, by using water to symbolise catharsis and allow her to wash away her sins restoring her morality, shown by her smiling face

as she steps into the shower. As Marion sheds the heavy dark bathrobe and steps into the shower, the bright whiteness of the bathroom reflects her newfound relief. It is not until the audience is made aware of Mother's shadow that we see the truth behind this scene - Marion, as the subject of Norman's lust must be killed. The score shifts suddenly, foreshadowing and reinforcing, through staccato shrieking violins, the stabbing. This violent penetration allows Hitchcock to hint to the audience about the dangerous nature of sexual repression, and the rapid cuts and perspective changes energise the action. As an audience unaware of *Psycho*'s twists, we see the repressive Mother, but as an enlightened audience we see the repressed Norman. The final shots of Marion's eye linked with the still running showerhead and dark drain reinforce her shift from life to death. The bare bathroom and water at first represent Marion's newfound relief, but after her death they come to symbolise the theme of repression in Mother's domination of Norman.

The Bates house overshadows much of the action in *Psycho*, but Hitchcock only offers the audience glances of the interior throughout the film. However, through mise-en-scène Lila's exploration building up to the final, shocking revelation provides an insight into its inhabitants and the ideas Hitchcock is presenting. The house is shut off from the outside world, and Lila's eyes offer us our first chance to see Mother's room - it is isolated from the world, not only spatially but belongs more to the Victorian era than the 1960's suggesting the power of the dead over the living. Lila's shock at seeing herself in the mirror taps into the symbolism of mirrors employed by Hitchcock throughout the film. Her shock foreshadows our discovery of how deeply the divisions in Norman's mind run. The clasped hands on Mother's jewellery box are unadorned, mirroring the sterility and repression in her treatment of Norman - just as Norman is stripped of manhood this feminine symbol is symbolically divorced from femininity. Finally, the imprint of Mother's corpse on her bedspread shows the deep imprint she has left on Norman's psyche. She has imprinted on his mind as her body imprinted on the bed, and the cold indent suggests the sexual aspect of Norman's repression. All of these elements come together in the interior of the Bates house to highlight the powerful ideas Hitchcock has woven into his film.

Alfred Hitchcock's intense film *Psycho* presents ideas of guilt and relief, the bond between parent and child and the dark potential of that same relationship to repress. These ideas are expressed through mise-en-scène in several key scenes in Hitchcock's work. In the parlour scene, shower scene and Lila's exploration of Mother's room Hitchcock subtly uses mise-en-scène, 'the things in the scene', to reinforce the key ideas of *Psycho*.

Assessment Comments

This response is illustrative of an A grade.

Knowledge and Understanding

- KU1 Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of a wide range of ways in which the author, Hitchcock, uses stylistic features and language techniques to communicate complex ideas and to influence the reader's response. The essay addresses mise-en-scène, positioning, props, framing, camerawork, contrast, lighting, symbolism and colour.
- KU2 There is evidence of detailed knowledge and understanding of the ideas, values and beliefs in the text. The response shows a detailed knowledge of the film and its themes (for example, appearance and reality, the connection between sex and death, redemption, repression and the power of the dead over the living).
- KU3 Evidence of knowledge and understanding of the ways in which creators and readers use conventions of the text type is strong in sections e.g. paragraph 3 discusses mise-en-scène very well. The evidence shows an excellent grasp of the film but is not fully confident in discussing mise-en-scène as a device.

Analysis

- An3 There is some perceptive analysis of a range of ways in which Hitchcock uses language techniques to influence opinions and decisions. Evidence examines how the viewer is positioned and the effect key scenes have on the interpretation of the scene/film.

Application

- Ap1 A wide range of language skills and techniques is used to create a sophisticated and coherent text that shows a perceptive engagement with the film.
- Ap3 Detailed use of evidence from the film (not always appropriate regarding mise-en-scène) supports response. Textual references are incorporated fluently into the discussion.
- Ap4 Evidence demonstrated of strong skills in using the textual, structural, and conventional features of the text type for a range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts, audiences, and purposes. The piece has a solid essay structure which directs the reader.

Communication

- C1 Writing is fluent and precise using an appropriate style and structure for a range of mainly unfamiliar audiences and contexts.
- C2 An appropriate and sophisticated use of form and register to convey mostly complex meaning in a range of unfamiliar contexts.

Performance Standards for Stage 2 English Studies

	Knowledge and Understanding	Analysis	Application	Communication
A	<p>Knowledge and understanding of a wide range of ways in which authors use stylistic features and language techniques to communicate complex and familiar ideas, and to influence the reader's response.</p> <p>Detailed knowledge and understanding of the ideas, values, and beliefs in familiar and unfamiliar texts.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which creators and readers of familiar and unfamiliar texts use a range of textual conventions to make meaning.</p>	<p>Analysis of complex connections between personal experiences, ideas, values, and beliefs, and those explored in familiar and unfamiliar texts.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, a perceptive analysis of connections between texts, based on analysis and synthesis of similarities and/or differences.</p> <p>Perceptive analysis of a range of ways in which authors use language techniques to influence opinions and decisions in familiar and unfamiliar texts.</p>	<p>Use of a wide range of language skills and techniques to create sophisticated and coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, a perceptive recognition of connections between texts, through responses that integrate discussion of texts and move easily between them.</p> <p>Detailed and appropriate use of evidence from texts to support responses, with textual references incorporated fluently in discussion.</p> <p>Skills in using the textual, structural, and conventional features of text types for a range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts, audiences, and purposes.</p>	<p>Fluent and precise writing and speaking, using appropriate style and structure for a range of mainly unfamiliar audiences and contexts.</p> <p>Appropriate use of form and register to convey mostly complex meaning in a range of unfamiliar contexts.</p>
B	<p>Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which authors use stylistic features and language techniques to communicate complex and familiar ideas, and to influence the reader's response.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of some ideas, values, and beliefs in familiar, and some unfamiliar, texts.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which creators and readers of mainly familiar texts use some textual conventions to make meaning.</p>	<p>Analysis of some complex connections between personal experiences, ideas, values, and beliefs, and those explored in familiar, and some unfamiliar, texts.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, a clear analysis of connections between texts, based on analysis of similarities and/or differences.</p> <p>Analysis of a range of ways in which authors use language techniques to influence opinions and decisions in familiar, and some unfamiliar, texts.</p>	<p>Use of a range of language skills and techniques to create clear and coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, recognition of connections between texts, through responses that compare and contrast texts in an integrated way.</p> <p>Appropriate use of evidence from texts to support responses, with textual references incorporated in discussion.</p> <p>Skills in using some of the textual, structural, and conventional features of text types for a range of mainly familiar, and some unfamiliar, contexts, audiences, and purposes.</p>	<p>Mostly fluent and precise writing and speaking, using appropriate style and structure for a range of mostly familiar audiences and contexts.</p> <p>Appropriate use of form and register to convey complex and simple meaning in a range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts.</p>
C	<p>Knowledge and understanding of a narrow range of ways in which authors use stylistic features and language techniques to communicate mainly familiar ideas, and to influence the reader's response.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of some ideas, values, and beliefs in mainly familiar texts.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of some of the ways in which creators and readers of a range of familiar texts use textual conventions to make simple or factual meaning.</p>	<p>Analysis of simple connections between personal experiences, ideas, values, and beliefs, and those explored in familiar texts.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, analysis of connections between texts, based on some understanding of similarities and/or differences.</p> <p>Descriptive analysis of a number of ways in which authors use language techniques to influence opinions and decisions in familiar texts.</p>	<p>Use of language skills and techniques to create texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, recognition of some connections between texts, through responses that compare and contrast texts, usually in a sequential rather than an integrated way.</p> <p>Competent use of evidence from texts to support responses, with some use of textual references in discussion.</p> <p>Skills in using some of the textual, structural, and conventional features of some text types for familiar contexts, audiences, and purposes.</p>	<p>Generally fluent and functional writing and speaking, using appropriate style and structure for familiar audiences and contexts.</p> <p>Appropriate use of form and register to convey simple meaning in a narrow range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts.</p>
D	<p>Knowledge and restricted understanding of some simple stylistic features and language techniques used by authors to communicate mainly familiar ideas, and to influence the reader's response.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of some familiar ideas, values, and beliefs in familiar texts.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of a restricted number of ways in which creators and readers of a narrow range of familiar texts use some textual conventions to make simple or factual meaning.</p>	<p>Reference to simple connections between uncomplicated personal experiences, ideas, values, and beliefs, and those explored in familiar texts.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, answers that make partial comparisons and contrasts.</p> <p>Reference to some ways in which authors use a range of language techniques to influence opinions and decisions in familiar texts.</p>	<p>Use of some language skills and techniques to create texts that partly address the meaning and intention of the task.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, some awareness of connections between texts, through partial responses that mainly deal with texts separately.</p> <p>Some use of evidence from texts to support a response, with use of a narrow range of textual references.</p> <p>Skills in using some of the textual, structural, or conventional features of a text type for a familiar context, audience, or purpose.</p>	<p>Achievement of a level of fluency in writing and speaking, in a mainly appropriate style.</p> <p>Occasionally appropriate use of form and/or register to convey simple meaning in familiar contexts.</p>

	Knowledge and Understanding	Analysis	Application	Communication
E	<p>Knowledge and understanding of a restricted range of simple stylistic features and language techniques used by authors to communicate familiar ideas, and to influence the reader's response.</p> <p>Identification of an idea, a value, or a belief in familiar texts.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which a creator or reader of a highly familiar text uses textual conventions to make factual meaning.</p>	<p>Recognition of a simple connection between a straightforward personal, experience, idea, value, or belief, and that explored in a highly familiar text.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, answers that make a simple comparison or contrast.</p> <p>Reference to the way in which an author uses language techniques to influence opinions and decisions in a highly familiar text.</p>	<p>Attempted use of a restricted range of language skills and/or techniques to create a text or texts that attempt to address the meaning or intention of the task.</p> <p>In comparative exercises, identification of limited connections between texts, through fragmented responses that deal with texts separately.</p> <p>Restricted use of evidence from texts to support a simple response, with limited textual reference.</p> <p>Skills in using the textual, structural, or conventional features of a text type for a highly familiar context, audience, or purpose.</p>	<p>Emerging development of fluency in an occasionally appropriate style.</p> <p>Occasionally appropriate use of form and register to convey literal meaning in highly familiar contexts.</p>