

English Studies

2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

# English Studies

# 2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

The range of tasks presented at moderation — both those analytical and those creative in nature — and the quality of answers presented in the exam indicate that students choosing English Studies are thriving in response to the opportunities the subject provides to develop their skills and understanding. Teachers are increasingly aware of the possibilities that the subject outline affords and are developing a range of diverse tasks in the shared text and text production folios, and students continue to explore an exciting variety of texts in the individual study. Underpinning the study and creation of texts in the course is an awareness of the function of stylistic features and the ways in which authors use these to position and influence the reader. Questions in the examination require such an awareness, task design in the shared studies leads to greater success when such aspects are foregrounded in the criteria, and text production is most successful when students apply their understanding of the conventions of the text type with which they are working. Continuing strong enrolments in the subject indicate that students are drawn to this subject that requires the exploration of a range of texts, insightful analysis, argumentative writing, communication in a variety of modes, and creativity.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Shared Studies

In this assessment type, students produce four to six responses showing their insights into at least one critical reading study, one study of paired texts, one study of two single texts, and one study of poetry.

It is clear from the central moderation process that schools are tailoring curriculum to meet the specific needs and interests of students. This assessment type showed diversity in how students can insightfully analyse literature and film.

An interesting observation at moderation is that fewer schools are using traditional essay responses for the majority of tasks in this assessment type. Nonetheless, the central focus on analysis, and a clear, articulated argument or focus, were the key features of the more successful responses. Effective task design was critical in allowing students to achieve their potential. Providing open-ended tasks, or ones that only focused upon plot or theme, were not as successful as those that addressed specific performance standards. For example, in some assessments it would be advisable to create tasks that require students to analyse a range of ways in which authors use language techniques to influence the reader’s response. Such explicit task design can help students to frame their analysis and address specific performance standards of analysis. Teachers should bear in mind their respective cohort when addressing specific performance standards in respective tasks. It is not necessary to assess all performance standards in each task, and it may be useful to highlight particular specific features in various tasks that allow students a greater opportunity to achieve their potential over the range of tasks.

In addition to essay responses, schools chose other forms of responses: paragraph responses, annotated scenes from texts, blogs focusing upon author craft, multimodal responses, and oral presentations featured among the submitted work. Of course, it is useful — and sometimes advisable — to start work as a timed response, but allowing students to revise their work after receiving teacher feedback provides greater opportunity for them to successfully achieve the requirements of the specific features. It may of course be necessary to require some students in a class to submit timed work if that means they will meet school deadlines for assessment.

The requirement of students in this part of the course is to bring their skills in textual analysis to the fore; it is not necessary, and is sometimes counterproductive, to write on literary and social contexts that draw students away from the key focus of how authors position audiences by the use of stylistic features to adopt particular ideas, values, and opinions. Rather than conduct wider study that leads to research pieces, the most successful tasks were ones that were responses to the texts themselves. In addition, some tasks were too closely focused upon the task of storytelling, by way of plot recount (some poster tasks exemplified this approach); again, the more successful responses were grounded in the task of arguing an idea and exploring the effects of techniques.

Another feature of more successful tasks was apparent in the comparative responses. Rather than segmenting one’s analysis, more successful responses integrated either texts or authors within paragraphs. A note here should be made about the study of poetry: as this course examines the role of authors, the better poetry responses were ones that examined poets rather than focusing on the poems without explicit reference to the respective decisions of the authors within the poems themselves.

Assessment Type 2: Individual Study

It is clear that the selection of texts is very important to the overall success of the students’ critical essay. Students need to choose two texts that can be studied in relation to each other, and make comparisons that highlight an understanding of the similarities and differences between the texts. The critical essay, while under the supervision of teachers, is student directed, and therefore a range of texts should be expected in samples of student work. Some texts work better than others; texts that are overly plot driven, and have little that students can analyse in terms of the writer’s craft, should be avoided. The best combinations were those in which students could highlight specific points of contention that could be explored through the interrogation of an argument about a particular idea, value, or opinion. Texts selected by students included extended prose texts, plays, selections of verse by single poets, collections of speeches, films, video games, and graphic novels. The wide variety of text types selected by students is to be encouraged as it is in the spirit of the individual study for students to develop their skills in analysis and application. Whatever the text type, it was noted that the more successful students were very confident in using the correct nomenclature and were able to be clear about how authors use the conventions and the stylistic features of the text type. No text used for the shared studies can be counted as part of the individual study, although students may choose other texts by an author selected for their shared studies.

The careful construction of a guiding question is important in encouraging students to develop a cogent point of view in comparing the two texts. The more successful critical essays had a clearly articulated line of argument, and involved the examination of a point of tension, rather than simply outlining observations around character or theme. Some critical essays seemed to be very much scaffolded (consecutive paragraphs on titles, characters, settings, symbols, etc.), and, while some degree of such instruction may be useful, it was noteworthy that the more successful critical essays were those that clearly developed an argument and analysed the texts in an integrated manner. It is worth noting that this one task constitutes 20% of the subject’s grade, and therefore sufficient time should be allotted to the careful preparation of the task. This is the task in which students can best demonstrate their skills in analysis and in creating a sustained argument in which each paragraph adds depth to the response, rather than just pointing out observations about techniques, and character and plot development.

In the most successful essays, students established connections between texts by analysing and synthesising similarities and differences in order to integrate their discussion.

As can be noted by the exemplars on the SACE Board website, no particular type of essay is privileged, but the common feature of the most successful responses is the quality of integration and the line of reasoning evident in student work. In fact, the driving force of the critical essay is the insightful comparative analysis of texts that develops a contestable point of view. It can be useful and appropriate to provide supplementary visual material (for example, the inclusion of stills from a film) as long as such material is connected to analysis and provides additional evidence of achievement against the performance standards.

The collection of supporting material, although not required for moderation, provides evidence of the initial working-out of key ideas and points of comparison between the two texts. This part of the individual study is an important element in the teacher’s verification of the originality of the student’s work, and should provide a productive springboard to the design of the question and the organisation of paragraphs.

Assessment Type 3: Text Production

Much creativity and flair were noted in this section of the course, in which students have the opportunity to demonstrate their language skills in a range of contexts and to experiment with purpose and audience. Here, students can apply skills they have noted in other texts, experimenting with the conventional forms of the text type they are creating. Although the written texts produced by students may extend or elaborate on ideas, themes, or issues encountered in the shared studies or the individual study, they should not be responses to the texts themselves. The more successful student responses in this part of the school assessment were those that demonstrated a wide range of language skills. Therefore, those students who replicated content and wrote a persuasive text and an exposition on the same topic, were not able to show a range of language skills as those students who created four different tasks that adjusted the purpose, form, context, and audience in each. Most students wrote narratives and persuasive texts; other text types included experimental writing, poems, and personal reflective writing.

The key aspect of this part of the course is again task design, and students’ success is contingent on a detailed understanding of the stylistic features of the form with which they are working. For example, students who intended to write a narrative disadvantaged themselves if what they wrote was essentially a recount, and students who intended to write a news report were similarly disadvantaged if they merely outlined their views on a topic. In some instances, work that was created for the written component was also presented as an oral; in such cases, this did not allow students to demonstrate their full potential against the performance standards. Within classes, students may have varying abilities and interests, so it may be possible for the teacher to offer a range of options to cater for their interests and needs. The key point remains, however, that students must attempt to skilfully use the conventions of the text type that they are trying to create.

Although the two written tasks in the text production folio are not permitted to be responses to shared texts, it is appropriate for the oral presentations to be generated from the shared study of texts. Students are encouraged to use language appropriately to convey meaning in a range of contexts and to use a wide range of language skills in doing so. The more successful oral text productions often had a clear purpose, context, and audience. Such text productions saw students adopting a persona and addressing an audience (imagined or not), and this seemed to provide students with opportunities to display their skills in a range of contexts. Oral text productions can be presented in class, or be filmed or recorded. The key point is that a range of language skills is evident, and the student — whatever the context — avoids simply reading out a script in a monotone manner. Where a student is giving a presentation in a context beyond the English Studies classroom, it may be entirely appropriate to grade this work for this assessment type. Such a context may be at an assembly of some kind, a competition, or a particular event, as long as appropriate evidence is available to substantiate teacher assessment.

In terms of task design, it is useful to encourage students to think of creative ways in which to produce responses to shared texts, particularly in the higher-grade bands. Simply recounting the events of an episode from a text, or reading aloud a monologue, or outlining themes will not give students the opportunity to convey meaning in a range of contexts. Some interesting responses to texts in this section included those of students who adopted a particular persona or targeted a specific audience, and such approaches gave students the opportunity to experiment with voice, context, and purpose. Some students led tutorials on a poet, an episode from a novel, a particular stylistic feature of an author’s work, or a scene annotation in a film or play.

An important consideration in submitting work for moderation is to ensure enough evidence is provided to support the student’s achievement of the relevant specific features of the performance standards. It would not be appropriate to simply submit a teacher grade without any evidence of student achievement. Cue cards, transcripts, photographic evidence, teacher notes, and recordings can all be used to corroborate the grading of student work. In this section, where multiple sources of evidence may be submitted to provide evidence of student achievement, it is especially important to label student work clearly.

Some schools are now using plagiarism software and including digital receipts to help teachers verify students’ work. Work that is to be presented for central moderation should be assembled by assessment type, and individual folios should be clearly identified with registration numbers and/or names and overall grades by type; such organisation makes the process of moderating more efficient. If there are variations to assessment, a Variations — Moderation Materials form must be submitted.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Examination

Markers commented that the 2014 examination was accessible and interesting, and provided students with a broad variety of questions that applied to the range of texts on the prescribed list. Students who approached the examination with a detailed knowledge of their texts, a willingness to adapt material in response to the questions provided, and the capacity to communicate in fluently organised arguments fared best. The features that marked successful responses included the following:

* *Planning a coherent argument*. Essay responses require an ordered line of reasoning and those students who developed clear paragraphs that were connected in a structured response produced the best answers. In an examination situation this requires mindful planning and it was obvious when students had taken the time to reflect on the nuances of the question in order to develop an appropriate and accessible argument. In establishing this argument, clear introductions are useful, as are topic sentences that signpost the focus of each paragraph and the overall flow of the essay.
* *Answering the question*. The fundamental feature that distinguished the most successful essays was a genuine focus on the question. Every marker commented on the fact that those students who presented material without engagement with the question significantly disadvantaged themselves. It is the question that provides the focus for the argument and the central concept around which the analysis can be developed. Merely stating information about a text or texts demonstrates knowledge and understanding but, in order to successfully apply that knowledge and understanding in an analytical fashion that is in keeping with the demands of communicating within the form of an essay, it is vital that the question is the ordering feature around which the response is designed.
* *Applying evidence*. Students who fared best provided ample textual evidence in support of their ideas. For written texts, this evidence took the form of pithy quotations that were fluently integrated into the line of reasoning within sentences; for visual texts, this evidence took the form of key moments that were vividly described with analytical reference to cinematographic devices.
* *Observing the role of stylistic features*. In more successful responses, students were au fait with the particular stylistic features of the text types about which they were writing. This involved the appropriate use of nomenclature, clear and relevant examples, and an explanation of the effect of the stylistic feature being discussed. Where this effect was to present or explore an idea, students were most successful in making the observation relevant to the argument.
* *Comparing texts*. Many of the questions in the examination, particularly those in the paired text and poetry sections and some in the critical reading, required students to compare. Comparison involves an observation of both similarities and differences (the balance of which will be determined by the texts being explored), and must be the driving structural feature of the response.
* *Communication.* Markers commented on the need for students to observe the various conventions applicable to good writing: appropriately delineating and referring to titles of texts; spelling correctly, especially terms most pertinent to the subject and authors’ names; and following appropriate rules of grammar and punctuation.

Section A: Shared Studies

In the following section of the report, specific comments are provided on each of the seventeen questions in the examination. Extracts from the instructions to markers are provided, as are comments made by markers about the specific ways in which students responded to the question.

Questions on Single Texts

It is valuable to note that explicit instructions were given to markers to be prepared to accept the student’s definition of a term used within a question where that interpretation was justified by the textual evidence presented. It is appropriate for students to think laterally, as long as the parameters they set are appropriate to the text on which they are writing and are explored within the argument presented.

Question 1

Show how the author of a prescribed text explores the contrast between the power of love and the love of power.

This question required that students explore the contrast between the ‘power of love and the love of power’. It was not sufficient for students to consider ‘the power of love’ or ‘the love of power’ separately. More successful responses involved an understanding of the contrast between the two elements and a clear focus on stylistic features. Some students were willing to explore the power of love beyond the obvious romantic application and explored the love of family, or the love for a particular cause, or the love of culture, or the love of self, and so on. Shakespearean texts proved popular in response to this question.

Question 2

How does the author of a prescribed text use stylistic features to explore the causes and consequences of being different?

This question required that students explicitly address the way in which the author uses stylistic features to explore both aspects of being different: its causes and its consequences. It was not sufficient for students to only describe the various examples of ‘being different’ to be found in the text, nor to consider that the ‘idea of being different’ may lead to consequences and to document these. Students were more successful in responding to this question when making explicit links between the idea and the techniques used to present it, and when exploring *both* the causes and consequences rather than one or the other. Those students were also prepared to interpret the ‘idea of being different’ in a number of ways — for example, in terms of class, gender, political stance, culture, or religion. Texts in which the central character was alienated by a prevailing system, particularly dystopian texts, were popular in response to this question.

Question 3

Show how the author of a prescribed text explores the idea that home can be a place of both refuge and restriction.

In this question, more successful responses involved an understanding of the tension between the two opposing elements of refuge and restriction. Students who wrote about either one element or the other did not address the full scope of the question. In this question, ‘home’ was able to be interpreted in various ways — a dwelling place, an institution, a location, a country, a cultural milieu — and it may have been that there were various types of ‘home’ represented in the text.

Question 4

Show how an author uses secondary characters to reinforce the central ideas in a prescribed text.

In this question, students were given liberty to establish what they regarded to be the ‘secondary characters’, whether very minor characters (for example, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Hamlet*) or quite important characters (for example, Claudius). However, their choice had to be made within reason (Hamlet himself, following the previous examples, would not have been an appropriate choice). This was a popular question in which the more successful responses involved a considered connection between the secondary characters selected and the way in which the author used these characters to reinforce the central ideas; merely describing the characters without explicit links to thematic concerns did not adequately address the question.

Question 5

‘People can become victims of their own making.’ How does the author of a prescribed text use the particular conventions of the text type to explore this idea?

Students who explored the broader idea of people creating their own harmful circumstances (developing a thematic exploration) were more successful in responding to this question than those students who documented ‘what characters did and what this led to’ (developing a description of character and events). It is important that students understand that characters are not people, but rather are authorial constructs used to present ideas. Similarly, students who understood that this question required them to focus upon the text type about which they were writing — prose text, film, or drama text — more capably addressed the question. Markers were instructed to expect students to address some of those conventions particular to the text type (in a play, for example, to include elements such as the set, props, dialogue, dramatic irony, stage directions, etc.; in a film, to include cinematographic elements, etc.); however, students are also to be aware that some features are common to a variety of text types (for example, characterisation, symbolism, perspective, relevance of the title, setting, structure) and that it is appropriate to write about these in the context of this question.

Question 6

Choose two of the following and show how the author of a prescribed text explores the idea that both elements influence people’s lives: gender; religion; status; wealth; culture; age.

As with the previous question, more successful responses involved an awareness that the word ‘people’ in the question indicates a broader idea that applies to humanity, rather than requiring a discussion of the characters (‘people’) in the text. The two elements chosen could have been (but need not have been) interrelated, but students needed to discuss how both, either separately or together, are shown to influence people’s lives. Students were not required to discuss the two elements in equal proportion, as the balance of the discussion depended upon the emphasis within the text. Markers were also instructed to be aware that there might have been some overlap of meaning in terms such as ‘religion’ and ‘culture’, or ‘wealth’ and ‘status’.

Questions on Paired Texts

In this section it was important that students refer to both texts in approximately equal proportions, making comparisons the driving structural feature of their essay. This is an essential element of specific feature Ap2: ‘Recognition of connections between texts, and an integrated approach to comparing and contrasting texts.’

Question 7

Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts use antagonists to explore similar ideas.

It was acceptable in response to this question for students to argue that an antagonist may be a character, a group of characters, or an institution that represents the opposition against which the protagonist or protagonists must contend, but it was expected that the ideas that students examine be similar in both texts. In the more successful responses, students avoided simply recounting the actions of characters and explored how the use of the antagonist related to the ideas being explored. While students occasionally misunderstood the term ‘antagonist’, the majority grasped the role of the antagonist.

Question 8

Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts explore the idea that isolation is not just about being alone.

This question required students to examine the nature of isolation within two texts. The concept is that being alone is not the only feature of isolation. Students were able to explore the tension between being isolated and being alone, or may have chosen not to focus on ‘being alone’ but rather to examine other features of isolation for this was still in keeping with the contention of the question. Students generally responded well to this question and successfully explored a range of aspects related to isolation, focusing frequently on the way in which systems or circumstances led to a character or characters being in opposition to their surrounds.

Question 9

‘Flawed or admirable?’ Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts portray female characters.

The quotation in this question was intended to be a catchy concept that might help frame the development of ideas, not a limiting concept. ‘Flawed or admirable?’ was to be regarded more as a stimulus for analysis than a prescription or template to be followed rigidly in students’ responses. The interpretation of how women are portrayed in texts therefore could vary depending upon the texts being explored. In some texts, there may have been female characters that fit both of the attributes in the quotation; in other texts, students may have examined other aspects of characterisation and the associated ideas suggested by such depiction of female characters. The more successful responses involved a carefully constructed argument that compared the portrayal of female characters and often explored a variety of ways in which those characters were portrayed. Most found the stimulus provided at the start of the question a useful way to frame their response.

Question 10

Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts use recurring symbols to explore similar ideas.

While markers were instructed to be flexible in accepting students’ interpretation of ‘symbols’, the expectation was that such symbols should represent ideas in common between the two texts and that students should choose symbols that occur more than once in each of the texts. In the more successful responses, students explored a broad range of symbolic elements (the symbolism in recurring places, objects, events, images, devices, etc.), and maintained a focus on the stylistic feature of symbolism, rather than diverting into simply exploring other techniques (such as characterisation or setting) without a clear reference to their symbolic role within the text.

Question 11

Compare the ways in which the authors of two texts use change of one kind or another to explore ideas.

Markers were instructed to expect a broad understanding of ‘change’ in students’ responses — change may be gradual or very sudden; it may be that an individual character undergoes change; or, more broadly, a group of characters or society in general might change. The key aspect is that such changes lead to an altered or modified state and that this feature of texts is used to explore broader ideas. In more successful responses, students explored the various ideas related to change itself or the way in which change signposts other ideas (that society is corrupt, that time influences the human condition, that environmental change can be destructive, that lost traditions can limit cultural awareness, etc.). Those students who avoided simply describing the change or changes tended to be more successful.

Questions on Poetry Texts

Note: There is no prescription that the poets about whom students chose to write must be on the prescribed list; they may have selected from the range of poets chosen by the teacher. The phrase ‘compare the ways’ invited students to explore the poetic techniques used by poets, but also more broadly allowed students to explore the ‘way’ a poet approaches the thematic concept in the question (where applicable). Students were expected to have discussed at least two poets and at least two poems, as this constitutes a ‘range’. Comparison also needed to be drawn between poets.

Question 12

Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year use brief moments of human experience to explore ideas.

The concept in this question is that poets use snapshots to explore broad ideas. Those snapshots should involve human experience of some kind. The question required students to compare the ways in which these experiences are used to explore ideas; simply describing the experiences themselves was not a sufficient response. Markers were instructed to be guided by the students’ definitions of ‘brief moments’, but it was expected that students would contend with this notion throughout the essay and not cursorily dismiss it in the introduction. This was a very popular question. Responses were less successful when students wrote about ‘human experience’ more generally and did not address the concept of ‘brief moments’ or consider the ways in which poets *use* these moments to explore broader ideas. The most successful responses involved the student exploring the ways in which those brief moments were used and structuring the essay around a comparison of the approaches poets adopted in doing so.

Question 13

Show how comparing the works of a range of poets reveals that the world can be a place of poverty and plenty.

The idea in this question is that undertaking a comparative study of poets enables students to see the variety of ways in which ideas can be explored; in this case, that the world can be a place of poverty and plenty. It is not therefore necessary that any individual poet presents such an idea, but rather that the exploration of the work of a range of poets does so. Students were required to examine both ‘poverty’ and ‘plenty’, but the balance of these two elements was to be determined by the student. Markers were instructed to be guided by the student’s definitions of ‘poverty’ and ‘plenty’ (for example, a poverty of spirit, financial poverty, etc.). Very few students responded to this question.

Question 14

‘Poetry is an argument — dynamic and unsettling.’ Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year present their arguments to the reader.

As with Question 9, the terms ‘dynamic’ and ‘unsettling’ in this question were intended to be concepts that might help frame the development of ideas, therefore providing a stimulus rather than limiting what students might have explored. The question does, however, assume that poets present arguments and so the focus of the answer was expected to be on comparing the ways in which they do that. In the more successful responses, students were aware that the question was asking them to consider the ways in which poets structure their arguments and use stylistic features to do this. Those who only examined the arguments themselves — that is, recounted *what* poets argued rather than *how* they argued — did not fare as well.

Question 15

Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year explore the nature of hope.

In this question, students were free to develop a variety of interpretations of the ‘nature of hope’: hope may disappoint; hope may be illusory; hope may sustain; hope may help people survive; etc. These broader parameters meant that students responding to this question could construct a range of different arguments and generally did so well. More successful responses were ones where students fluently embedded references to the stylistic features used by the poets to explore the nature of hope, and created an argument with a cohesive line of reasoning in which the approach of poets to the subject was compared throughout.

Question 16

Compare the ways in which the poets you studied this year use contrast to explore ideas.

The focus of this question is upon the technique of contrast and the way in which it is used to present ideas. Those ideas may vary between poets and poems. Students produced more successful responses to this question when they were conscious that they were expected to explore the ways in which poets *use* contrast to explore ideas; those students who explored contrasting ideas did not fare as well.

Section C: Critical Reading

Both texts proved accessible to most students, with clear understanding demonstrated regarding the content and ideas explored in both passages; only a few students were unaware that Daisy was a dog. While an obituary may not have been a familiar text type, most students displayed a grasp of the purpose and intended audience of the texts, and most understood what the questions required. As to be expected, the more successful responses involved a clear focus on ensuring that all material was relevant to the question, involved a range of close textual references, and were structured around comparison when it was required. In providing material about the stylistic features used by an author, students fared better when they used the correct metalanguage, provided a range of clear examples, and explored how the device emphasised ideas without resorting to didacticism.

Question 17 (a) allowed students to explore the content of the texts. While it was expected that students would write more about Wroe’s text, since it involved two distinct subjects, many only provided cursory material about White’s text in response to this question and so did not provide the breadth required. Part (b) provided some discrimination between students; in the more successful responses, students observed a broader range of life lessons and were aware of some of the nuances in Wroe’s obituary. Most students explored the idea that people are remembered for their character rather than how much wealth they possess; most also commented on the way in which money does not bring happiness. In more successful responses, students provided detailed textual references to support their points. In part (c), better responses involved a considered comparison of the stylistic features employed by the two authors. Students who wrote about the devices in one text, and then wrote about the other text, did not address the requirement to *compare*. As the notes provided to markers indicate, there are a wide range of alternative features to explore, but these were observed by only the most successful students who moved beyond the confines of the earlier questions.

Critical Reading Notes

The following notes are provided on the critical reading. However, it is essential to realise that these are only a guide. Students were not expected to observe all the elements listed, and some students made observations not included in these notes.

(a) This question asks students to demonstrate their comprehension of the way the subjects are presented in the texts; in effect it is an exploration of ‘characterisation’. Students’ interpretations of what makes the subjects ‘stand out’ should be accepted as long as the ideas are justified by the text. It is not a requirement of the question that students compare the approaches of the two authors, although some students may choose to refer to similarities and differences. The question also does not require students to explore stylistic features, although some students may choose to incorporate analysis of some of these features.

Daisy ‘stands out’ because of her place in the owner's life and the joy she brought him rather than her particular achievements, as she had a life ‘full of incident but not of accomplishment’. The ‘smallest’, ‘oddest’ dog in her litter, she was ‘an opinionated little bitch’ who chased horses, visited hospital, and was even arrested once. Daisy also represents a ‘carpe diem’ view of life that is celebrated in the text. She had a ‘stoical nature’ in spite of the injury to her right hind leg, and an ‘objectionable cheerfulness’ that meant even her own death ‘would have amused her’. The author seems to take delight in Daisy’s ‘quirkish temper’ which led to her inexplicable ‘moods’ and even prompted her to hold ‘people firmly by the ankle’ which she did in order to manage her ‘chronic perplexity’. Daisy was a dog that never grew up, remained perpetually curious, and ‘died sniffing life and enjoying it’. Similarly Brooke Astor and Leona Helmsley could be described as living life to the full: both were wealthy New York philanthropists who died within days of each other after long lives in the public sphere. In the writer’s view, what made them stand out was not just their philanthropy but the contrast between them in style and demeanour sustained across their lifetimes. Though ‘New York gained hugely from both women’, the obituary focuses on the contrast between them, with the ‘arrogance of big money’ and ‘vulgar showiness’ being hallmarks of Leona Helmsley’s public presence, contrasted with Brooke Astor’s gentle, polite ways. The latter is a woman described as being ‘small, delicate and as fine as a Meissen cup’, possessing ‘good manners’, ‘unobtrusive [jewellery]’, and a ‘well-behaved’ approach to both money and people that earns her the epithet of ‘a gentle soul’; the former is a brash woman who wore ‘loud’ clothing, had a ‘big and cruel’ mouth, and possessed vulgar manners that resulted in her being labelled ‘abrasive and rich’. One was a ‘saint’; the other a ‘sinner’.

(b) This question requires students to consider what is implied in Wroe’s text and how her reflections on Astor and Helmsley provide broader life lessons. There are a number of different ideas that students may extrapolate from the passage, the merits of which should be based upon the understanding and application of the passage as a defence of that idea.

While Astor and Helmsley gave much to New York, both ‘ended sadly, left alone with their dogs and the ghosts of their husbands…’ For all of Brooke Astor’s delicacy and good manners, she died much like Leona Helmsley: alone with her money. Helmsley’s brash arrogance did not buy affection, regardless of her philanthropy. By extension, Astor’s genteel behaviour and generosity with money could not shore her up against a lonely, isolated old age. Wroe therefore suggests that money cannot buy happiness and that, ultimately, death is a universal leveller.

Clearly, both women followed the rules of ‘*richesse oblige*’ (the concept that if you have great wealth, you are obliged to be philanthropic with it) and, having ‘oodles of money’, they gave ‘some of it back’. Society was quite happy to accept the money of both ‘saint’ and ‘sinner’. However, the characters of each affected the attitudes of general society towards them. Astor’s civility, kind remarks, and good manners meant that she was regarded affirmingly; Helmsley’s brash arrogance and vulgar showiness meant that she was regarded critically. Wroe suggests that it is character, not philanthropic actions, that determines the way in which people are remembered. Extending this idea, it is clear that society is willing to support the punishment of those who display arrogant confidence in their wealth: Leona Helmsley ended up spending eighteen months in Camp Fed for tax evasion, as much for her greedy and abrasive ways as for the crimes themselves. Even acts of philanthropy are not enough to earn the forgiveness of a condemning public.

The differing approach to money suggests the various ways in which it might be accumulated. The Astor fortune was ‘old money’ acquired from ‘New York land and the fur trade’, and Brooke Astor merely allowed the ‘markets’ to ‘increase her pile’ while she relished ‘spending the capital’. The Helmsley wealth was acquired through property speculation and Leona Helmsley ‘worked like a dragon’ to build up her husband’s hotel empire. Regardless of the different ways money can be first earned, or the ways in which it can be then treated, Wroe makes it clear how both these women came to be so rich: ‘late third marriages to cunning husbands’.

(c) The most successful responses will involve an integration of the comparison of the stylistic features used in both texts to position the reader and influence their response. Students may have covered a number of stylistic features in their previous answers and consideration should be given to this.

Some elements that students may consider include:

* The authors of the obituaries position the readers differently: White positions readers to respond with affection to Daisy; Wroe shapes a more critical response towards Astor and Helmsley.
* White’s piece displays a more personal, intimate tone. Daisy is the family pet and as such we are positioned to approve of her and find warmth and humour in White’s description of her. We connect on a personal level with small details about her, like being born ‘in a clothes closet’ and her ‘curious habit of holding people tightly by the ankle’, compared to the more distanced tone of Wroe’s piece, written about subjects she does not personally know. This text opens with the idea of ‘the concept of *richesse oblige*’, and relies more on hearsay and public opinion rather than first-hand knowledge. The fact that this text was published in *The Economist* also suggests that the reader might expect a more detached perspective.
* The structure of White’s piece positions the reader to respond to the fact that Daisy is a dog, which is revealed throughout the piece. It is a small twist in the tale, which is revealed through clues early on, such as ‘smelling the front of a florist’s shop’ and becoming more obvious as the piece progresses, for example, Daisy is described as the ‘smallest of the litter’. In contrast, it is clear who the subjects are in Wroe’s piece from the very beginning, positioning the reader to view them through the lens of celebrity.
* The structure of both texts builds and develops the picture of the subjects — White’s text building a loving picture of a funny, family pet throughout the piece, and Wroe developing critical portraits of the two women, with both being contrasted within every paragraph (i.e. not a discussion of one woman and then the other). Wroe creates a tension between the two women throughout, and expands on the idea of both ‘saint’ and ‘sinner’.
* Anecdotes are used in both texts. We are given examples of Daisy’s exploits and her energy and enthusiasm — ‘once she slipped her leash and chased a horse for three blocks through heavy traffic’ — which we respond to with humour, whereas we have anecdotes of Astor’s distance from the everyday people in ‘a start-up furniture service for the poor had to include tea-cups and saucers’. The anecdotes used to build up pictures of the two women are used to further reinforce the author’s view that one was a ‘saint’ and the other a ‘sinner’.
* Imagery is used extensively in Wroe’s piece, both simile and metaphor — ‘Mrs Astor was as small, delicate and fine as a Meissen cup’ and a ‘gentle soul’ who ‘magically’ treated money ‘like fairy dust’, compared to Helmsley being described as ‘rhymes with rich’, ‘with her mouth made big and cruel by scarlet lipstick’, and with ‘scarlet pecking fingernails and the icy tiara smile’ who ‘worked like a dragon’. In contrast, the image of Daisy is sentimental and affectionate, with humorous images of her as having a ‘quirkish temper’ and ‘objectionable cheerfulness’.
* Contrast of the subjects within Wroe’s text builds the picture of the women and positions us to respond with both criticism and pity as we move back and forth between the women. Their appearance, demeanour, dogs, backgrounds, treatment of others, and displays of wealth are all compared. This is in contrast to Daisy who is developed as an individual character throughout the piece.
* The endings of the texts are significant to positioning the reader to respond to the subjects of the texts. We see Daisy as always being curious, a creature who ‘never grew up’ and who approached everything with wonder and energy. In the definite last line, ‘She died sniffing life, and enjoying it,’ White positions us to view her *joie de vivre* positively. In contrast, the reader is positioned to view Astor and Helmsley as increasingly sad figures. Astor is developed as being a lonely woman, distance from the world outside her wealth, and Helmsley is demonised in part for being ‘abrasive and rich’, for being a philanthropist but not genteel. The concluding image, ‘Both ended sadly, left alone with their dogs and the ghosts of their husbands in dust-draped apartments or empty summer homes,’ suggests that death levels all of us in the end.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers' assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

English Studies  
Chief Assessor