

Sample answers

Literature in English

9695/03, 8695/09



These three sample answers are for 9695 AS/AL Literature in English Paper (also 8695 AS Language and Literature in English Paper 9). They are intended to give an idea of the range of response and the requirements at the top, middle and bottom of the mark range. They are not necessarily ideal or model answers, but are chosen as being representative answers on model texts.

Text: Songs of Ourselves

Example 1

With reference to two poems, discuss the ways the poets make universal comments out of their personal reflections and experiences.

In the two poems 'Ozymandias' by Percy Bysshe Shelley and 'Upon finding a small fly Crushed in a Book' by Charles Tennyson Turner the poets take these reflections and experiences to make a universal comment on how man's time on this earth will effect the marks we leave behind us, by taking seemingly menial observations and elevating them to contemplate deeper issues.

The title of the sonnet by Turner immediately suggests it will not be a typical ode to love however his archaic and elegiac form helps to take it from the demise of a fly to mournful poem not only for the fly. 'Upon Finding a Small Fly Crushed in a Book' does not only deal with uncommon subject matter but does not fit typical sonnet form, it is a mixture of both a Petrarchan style and Shakespearean, emphasising how Turner has used and twisted the sonnet to suit his purposes. The archaic language throughout the poem 'thou' 'thine' adds a more serious tone to the otherwise slightly comical topic matter. By creating the poem as an elegy, a mournful poem lamenting the dead the reader genuinely feels sorrow for the insects death and the continued mournful tone also creates a sense that he mourns for the short time on earth we all have and what we shall do with it.

By the use of Turner's descriptive language and imager of the fly and the extended metaphor at the end of the sonnet Turner makes a comment on the time all man has to leave a mark on this world. Turner begins by claiming 'Some had never meant to do thee harm' by saying that this death was an accident and therefore unexpected begins to create a link to humanity through their shared mortality. He then goes on to say though dead the fly has left his own 'fair monument' as his 'wings gleam out' across the page. Despite the tone of death Turner uses words such as fair and gleam to create positive connotations relating to the mark left behind.

It is at the sestet that the poem turns to humanity by use of the interjection after 'Oh' a device used to formalise poems Turner creates a sense of envy and mournfulness as he wishes that 'survive us here' on earth had as much an impact as these tiny wings have on him. By use of the word memories Turner suggests at something intangible as though what people leave may not be what they leave to be seen but how it is that people remember them. It appears that these 'Pure relics' have forced Turner to contemplate his 'doom' and impending death, as he uses the fly and book as an extended metaphor for humanity and death.

He claims the 'peril' that found this fly is also with man and as the fly did they may one day decide to 'soar/Upon the summer airs' by this he means that man may come to a moment where life is beginning in a new positive direction

and as they find their freedom and soar the 'Book of death may close'. Their death may come unexpected and no longer will their book of life continue to write its story. However upon man's death we may 'leave no lustre on our page of death' by using the plural 'our' Turner is including all of mankind in his contemplation and fears that too long of a wait before beginning to truly live may result in not leaving a mark on the world when life is cut short.

'Ozymandias' by Percy Bysshe Shelley also deals with the idea of leaving a mark on the world. However Shelley feels that no matter how large and mighty this mark may appear it is insignificant in relation to time and nature. Shelley shows this comment through relating to the reader and experience in which the narrator heard a tale from a traveller. 'The traveller from an antique land' told a tale of an ancient statue of 'Ozymandias: King of Kings' an arrogant ruler who believed his works would stand the test of time however only 'two vast and trunkless legs of stone' are left in the middle of the desert. Though Ozymandias had 'stamped' on a pedestal 'Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair' there is irony in this comment as though there may be despair it is for the 'colossal wreck' as 'Nothing beside remains' Shelley leaves this ambiguous as it could mean that there is no longer anything around or what is left is only the remains of what may have once been a mighty entrance. Not only this but it is left 'boundless and bare/As the lone and level sands stretch far away.' It is completely deserted as the alliteration creates a continuous effect emphasising the pure emptiness.

Both Shelley and Turner have experiences leaving them concerned with the marks left behind after death though Shelley feels more that those left won't last and Turner worries none will be left at all.

Grade A

Example 2

With reference to two poems, discuss the ways the poets make universal comments out of their personal reflections and experiences.

Two poems that make comments out of their personal reflections and experiences are 'Away Melancholy' by Stevie Smith and 'long distance' by Tony Harrison. Both poems are about suffering and grief. The persona of these poets are personal and this is shown throughout the poem with their personal reflections and experiences.

In the poem 'Away Melancholy' by Stevie Smith, the poet portrays to the readers the suffering of her pain and the desperation of getting rid of it. The repetition of 'Away melancholy' shows her desperation of letting the melancholy go 'let it go,' it is also just like a ritual chant when singing to God. Smith uses animal instincts and how human relates to animals 'man, too hurries, eat, couples, buries' this shows the cycle of life and how humans are the same as animals except for that humans have more feeling – stress, joy, happiness. Smith almost envies the animals for their simplicity and not having

to deal with problems. Smith expresses through the poem her doubt of God 'the trees are green?' the question mark shows uncertainty and this relates how she doubts God's belief. By capturing the readers to the poem Smith uses 'Tyranny, pox, wars' rule of three to capture the readers and the effect it gives to the poem. Smith reveals her doubt for God but in the last stanza 'Away melancholy, let it go' shows that when we are at our worst we cry for help and that we cry for help from God even though she is uncertain of God's belief when she is at her worst she will cry out for God and find faith and comfort from him. 'But man's called God' shows that people may not believe in him but we still will cry out for him as God gives a sense of faith and hope to people. Stevie Smith shows through her poem that she is dealing with suffering and finally turns to God for help, this is shown by her personal reflections and experiences and that man is not perfect but has good intentions.

Tony Harrison reveals in his poem 'long distance' his suffering and grief and how people deal with death differently. In the poem Harrison shares the comment that death is common and you need deal with death or it will interfere with your lifestyle 'Dad kept her slippers, made the bed and always renewed her transport pass' this shows his love affection to his wife and how he is dealing with death and he is too scared to let her go. This created distance from father and son 'You couldn't just call in, You had to ring' the emphasis of You shows that his own son was like a stranger he couldn't enter his own house without calling reveals the distance from father and son. 'give dad an hour to hide her things' they were so far apart that his father was embarrassed of how he was dealing with death that he was scared of his own son judging him. The persona of the poem is the poet so Harrison reveals to use his own personal experiences, 'he thought she just popped out to get some tea' his father's wish for his wife's return was so great that he believed she just went out to get tea. 'They both didn't go shopping; Just the same' caesura in the line gives a pause for the audience to take in that his father is also dead. Now the son is left to deal with two deaths 'new black leather phone book, disconnected number I still call.' even though he bought a new book he still put their names in it and still called them 'disconnected' reinforces that their dead, this shows that he is not ready to let her go. The simplicity of the diction reveals it is easy for the readers to see how death is a horrible thing, but yet still a way of life that we need to understand and try to deal with. Smith shows the suffering of his own pain through his personal experience and reveals to us how people can grieve differently of their loved ones.

In both poems 'Away Melancholy' by Stevie Smith and 'long distance' by Tony Harrison reveals suffering and pain through different experiences and reflections. These ideas have been shown through these poems and how different they deal with their own suffering and pain.

Grade C

Example 3

Discuss the following poem in detail, exploring its concerns with identity and place. ('Where I Come From', Elizabeth Brewster)

The poem 'Where I come from' by Elizabeth Brewster is about how places have an impact and affect our identities, in that we will always be identified with them. This is summarised simply in the first sentence of the poem, 'People are made of places'.

Brewster in the first stanza begins with an introduction to her theme, thoughts and her personal view or perspective of the different places people may 'come from' and this affects and moulds their 'identity'.

Brewster hints that where we come from always leaves a mark or dent in our lives and that we will always carry it with us no matter where we go, 'they carry with them hints of jungles and mountains'. That people can tell where we come from just from our identities and the way we behave.

She also intends the reader to feel like it is something we can not get rid of which gives it a slightly sinister effect.

In the first stanza the poet also touches on the different places people live in and this helps the reader relate to her poem and this situation in their own lives, 'Atmosphere of cities/how different drops from them, like the smell of smog/or almost-not-smell of tulips in the spring.'

In that whether your background is the 'glue factories maybe' or 'chromium-plated offices' it will still have an effect on your identity.

In the second stanza of the poem she begins it with the line that is the title and main theme of the poem, 'Where I come from' in order to remind her readers of what she has been introducing and trying to explain. She then goes on to expand on where she comes from and her new identity.

Brewster further explains that places mould people or individuals and thus creates their identities and that a place and the individual are inseparable. It is shown and also reflects in our personalities.

In lines 12-19 the poet informs or tells of where she 'comes from' in greater detail and how this has affected their identities, especially hers, 'people carry woods in their minds.' We see how this has affected her life and 'identity' in the last of the two lines of the poem, 'A door in the mind blows open, and there blows/a frosty wind from fields of snow.' Although she is not actually experiencing 'winter', it is the 'mind's chief season, ice and the breaking of ice' thus it is still vivid in her mind.

Brewster appreciates where she comes from in that although it may not always be beautiful she has taken time out to see the positive and the negative aspects of it, 'battered school houses/behind which violets grow.'

The poem, 'Where I come from' may also be compared to Norman MacCaig's Summer Farm in that the poet also sees himself in connection to the place and also how it affected generations before him and 'in the centre me' also enhances the theme of place and identity.

Grade E