



NSW Education Standards Authority

2024 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

English Standard

Paper 1 — Texts and Human Experiences

Stimulus Booklet

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Text 1 — Poem

of glass and wood and water

I am trying to tell you about Venice,
how I felt
waking in a crisp white room
to rain falling softly
in the courtyard
outside my window.

I want to tell you about the light in that room,
about the houseplants and the glass
and the books
in languages I couldn't read
and the bath that didn't work,
how happy I was.

I want to tell you about the colour of Venetian water
and the way the sky and sea
makes everything soft and old,
how the wood groans—
the way nothing is spoken
and everything is sung.

In Venice I walked on wet stone
through a floating cloud.
You weren't there,
so the mist kissed the back of my neck
where you would have.

EMMA BRAZIL

Text 2 — Prose fiction extract

The flight back to Australia departed late at night, and Jess had left [the house] with hours to spare; partly because she was catching the train [to the airport] and you never know what might happen, but also because, having packed and readied the house for her absence, she'd started to feel like a guest who'd overstayed her welcome and was now being tolerated by a well-mannered host. The train ride had been smooth, and she'd arrived well ahead of time, setting herself up in [a café] near security so she could have a bite to eat before going through the rigmarole^[1]. She preferred it on this side, where travellers and their families were still together. She liked to guess at their relationships and the purpose of travel, the destinations, and the length of time they'd be away.

She had been observing a group of three at a table beside her own and continued to watch them now as they made their way towards the security area. The young woman carrying a backpack was clearly the one leaving, walking faster than the older couple, with an eagerness and energy to her gait^[2]. A few metres out from the door she stopped and they all embraced; some further words were exchanged, the backpack was referenced, and a laugh was shared. Another round of hugs and the girl continued to the door alone. She gave her parents (presumably) a quick wave, flashed them a bright smile, and didn't look back again.

Jess had been that young girl once, twenty years before. She knew about the excitement on the other side of the gate: the first taste of real freedom, the thrilling sense of being, at last, in control of one's own destiny.

KATE MORTON
Homecoming

^[1] rigmarole *complicated process*

^[2] gait *walking style*

Text 3 — Nonfiction extract

SMELL IS ONE OF THE LAST REALMS where virtual reality still feels deeply virtual. Recently, I found myself at a theme park riding a VR roller coaster that felt breath-stealingly real. It wasn't just that falling felt like falling and turning felt like turning; I even felt the mist on my face as I flew through ocean spray.

But that water did not *smell* like the ocean. It smelled like this room deodorizer I'd used in high school called "Spring Rain." "Spring Rain" didn't actually smell like spring rain any more than it smelled like the ocean, but the scent did somehow communicate moisture, so I can understand why it had been repurposed as ocean-y. Still, nobody who has ever smelled the salty din of a cresting wave could possibly mistake it for the scent being pumped into that VR experience, and the smell of "Spring Rain" wrenched my mind from its state of joyfully suspended disbelief. Suddenly, I was not on a flying tour of a heaving ocean but instead stuck inside a dark room with a bunch of strangers ...

But I think there's something else at play with smells that try to mimic nature, which is that nothing in the real world ever smells quite like we imagine it should. Actual spring rain, for instance, seems like it ought to smell at once moist and crisp, like the artificial scent does. But in fact, springtime rain smells earthy and acidic.

Humans, meanwhile, smell like the exhalations of the bacteria that colonize us, a fact we go to extraordinary lengths to conceal, not only via soap and perfume, but also in how we collectively imagine the human scent. If you had an artificial intelligence read every novel ever written and then, based on those stories, guess the human odor, the AI would be spectacularly wrong. In our stories, people smell like vanilla, lavender, and sandalwood. The AI would presume we all smell not like the slowly decaying organic matter we are, but instead like newly mown grass and orange blossoms.

JOHN GREEN
The Anthropocene Reviewed

Text 4 — Nonfiction extract

The very first measurement, like the first word or first melody, is lost to time: impossible to localise and difficult even to imagine. Yet it was a hugely significant act: another addition to that nest of primeval^[1] consciousness that grew in the brains of our ancestors hundreds of thousands of years ago, and that would eventually set us apart from the other animals of the plain. For measurement, like speech and play, is the cornerstone of cognition^[2]. It encourages us to pay attention to the boundaries of the world, to notice where the line ends and the scales tip. It requires that we compare one portion of reality to another and describe the differences, creating a scaffold for knowledge ... If we could not measure, then we could not observe the world around us; could not experiment and learn. Measurement allows us to record the past and by doing so uncover patterns that help predict the future. And finally, it is a tool of social cohesion and control, letting us coordinate individual effort into something greater than the sum of its parts. Measurement has not only made the world we live in, it has made us too.

I first began to realise the importance of measurement when writing about the redefinition of the kilogram as a journalist in 2018. I had travelled to Paris for the assignment, and there interviewed scientists who had been working on the project for decades as part of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, the organisation that oversees the metric system. They explained how, since the eighteenth century, the kilogram had been defined as the weight of a particular lump of metal: an actual physical artefact, kept under lock and key in an underground vault in France. Every weight in the world (even the non-metric ones) could be traced back to this single standard, to *the* kilogram ...

The existence of this hidden world was a revelation. I felt like I had opened the door of my flat one morning only to step out on to the surface of an alien planet, surrounded suddenly by strange trees and the cries of unfamiliar animals. The idea that something as fundamental and commonplace as a unit of measurement was even capable of change was thrilling, and the more I learned, the more questions I had. Why is a kilogram a kilogram, anyway? Why an inch an inch? Who first decided these values and who maintains them now?

As I followed these breadcrumbs, I began to understand what an intellectual feast measurement truly is, what a banquet of historical, scientific, and sociological wonder.

JAMES VINCENT
Beyond Measure

^[1] primeval *ancient*

^[2] cognition *the mental processing of information*

Text 5 — Prose fiction extract

At times these days I think of the way the sun would set on the farmland around our small house in the autumn. A view of the horizon, the whole entire circle of it, if you turned, the sun setting behind you, the sky in front becoming pink and soft, then slightly blue again, as though it could not stop going on in its beauty, then the land closest to the setting sun would get dark, almost black against the orange line of horizon, but if you turn around, the land is still available to the eye with such softness, the few trees, the quiet field of cover crops already turned, and the sky lingering, lingering, then finally dark. As though the soul can be quiet for those moments.

All life amazes me.

ELIZABETH STROUT
My Name is Lucy Barton

Text 6 — Photograph

