

**Fort Street 2022 Trials  
Section I**

**20 marks**

**Attempt Questions 1-5**

**Allow about 45 minutes for this section**

Read the texts on pages 3-6 of the Stimulus Booklet carefully and then answer the questions in the spaces provided. These spaces provide guidance for the expected length of the responses.

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In your answer you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of human experiences in texts
  - analyse, explain and assess the ways human experiences are represented in texts
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**Question 1 (3 marks)**

**Text 1 – Short Fiction**

Explain how Patrick Haas employs metaphor to evoke the experience of despair.

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**Question 2** (3 marks)

**Text 2 - Poem**

How effective is the poet's use of imagery to convey human experience?

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**Question 3** (4 marks)

**Text 3 – Non-fiction**

Analyse how Bernard Cooper uses literary devices to reflect on our shared humanity.

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**Section 1 continues**

**Question 4** (4 marks)

**Text 4 – Non-fiction**

How does Helen MacDonald represent the collective experience of awe and wonder?

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**Question 5 (6 marks)**

Compare the way that any TWO of the texts provided explore ideas about the connections between people.

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**If you need additional space to answer Question 5 use the lines below.**

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**End of Section 1**

## Section II

20 marks

### Attempt Question 6

Allow about 45 minutes for this section

Answer the question in the Writing Booklet. Extra writing booklets are available.

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In your answer you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of human experiences in texts
  - analyse, explain and assess the ways human experiences are represented in texts
  - organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and context
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### Question 6 (20 marks)

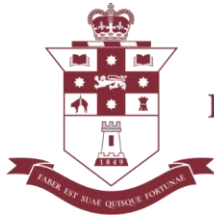
‘Literature helps people agree on the truths of the great constant, which is human nature.’

– Salman Rushdie

To what extent is Rushdie’s statement true of the **prescribed** text you have studied in the Common Module?

Answer with close reference to the language forms, features and structures.

**End of Section 2**



FORT STREET HIGH SCHOOL

2022 TRIAL HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

# English Advanced

## Paper 1 – Texts and Human Experiences

Stimulus booklet for Section I

and

List of prescribed texts for Section II

Section I	Pages
- Text 1 Short fiction.....	3
- Text 2 Poem .....	4
- Text 3 Non-Fiction/Discursive Essay .....	5
- Text 4 Non-Fiction /Discursive Essay.....	6
Section II	
- List of prescribed texts.....	8



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## Section I

### Text One – Short Fiction

Laurel finds me at the bar, again. She ignores the bartender and doesn't sit down. She takes an ice cube from my drink and sets it on the table. "Before this melts," she says, "you have to decide how it's gonna be."

I tell her that water freezes when its temperature drops below zero degrees Celsius. The molecules slow down and bond together. The density of the bonds keeps ice afloat in liquids.

"The kids are in the car, you son-of-a-bitch," she says and grabs my collar.

When things get too heated, I continue, or there's too much pressure, the molecules move faster, the bonds break, and gaps form when melting begins.

"This is your last chance."

And once that begins, I say, as water forms around the base of the ice cube until it looks like it's drowning in itself and she runs out of the door with the keys jingling in her hand -- there's not a whole hell-of-a-lot that I can do about it.

PATRICK HAAS

**End of Text One**

## Text Two – Poem

### From Liang Yue Xian<sup>1</sup>: The Letter

How it sits in his hands.

“Who’s it from?”

Her son looks away.

“Susan.”

Su-san. A girl’s name.

An Australian girl is writing to her son.

The coffeeshop patrons grow quiet.

Fat sizzles in the restaurant’s woks, upstairs.

Traffic roars round the corner.

Questions,

as if he is suddenly a stranger,

as if he has come from a far-away place,

sat down in strange clothes, demanding a coffee.

Someone strange *has* come in and sat down in their coffeeshop.

There! Her breath in the words of the letter.

A glimpse of the handwriting—

round, neat letters.

A faint outline of a person is starting to form.

His mother thinks of how words

flow out of a body and carry the ghost

of fingers, a face, a heart.

She thinks of the words that have etched themselves

on the walls of her life: *I surrender,*

*We are at war;* the words that weigh heavily

on her tongue as she stands and watches

the face of her son: *I love you, Come home.*

Come Home.

But she cannot hold him, how quickly he slips from her gaze

to those words on the page

that are taking him away,

to a place she has no name for.

MIRIAM WEI-WEI LO

### End of Text Two

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the poet’s grandmother. The poem is from a collection based on Liang Yue Xian’s life experiences.

## Text Three – Non-Fiction Essay

### The Fine Art of Sighing

You feel a gradual welling up of pleasure, or boredom, or melancholy. Whatever the emotion, it's more abundant than you ever dreamed. You can no more contain it than your hands can cup a lake. And so you surrender and suck the air. Your oesophagus opens, diaphragm expands. Poised at the crest of an exhalation, your body is about to be unburdened, second by second, cell by cell. A kettle hisses. A balloon deflates. Your shoulders fall like two ripe pears, muscles slack at last.

My mother stared out the kitchen window, ashes from her cigarette dribbling into the sink. She'd turned her back on the rest of the house, guarding her own solitude. I'd tiptoe across the linoleum<sup>1</sup> and make my lunch without making a sound. Sometimes I saw her back expand, then heard her let loose one plummeting note, a sigh so long and weary it might have been her last. Beyond our backyard, above telephone poles and apartment buildings, rose the brown horizon of the city; across it glided an occasional bird, or the blimp that advertised Goodyear tyres. She might have been drifting into the distance, or lamenting her separation from it. She might have been wishing she were somewhere else, or wishing she could be happy where she was, a middle-aged housewife dreaming at her sink.

My father's sighs were more melodic. Where my mother sighed from ineffable<sup>2</sup> sadness, my father sighed at simple things: the coldness of a drink, the softness of a pillow, or an itch that my mother, following the frantic map of his words, finally found on his back and scratched.

A friend of mine once mentioned that I was given to long and ponderous sighs. Once I became aware of this habit, I heard my father's sighs in my own and knew for a moment his small satisfactions. At other times, I felt my mother's restlessness and wished I could leave my body with my breath, or be happy in the body my breath left behind.

At any given moment, there must be thousands of people sighing. A man in Milwaukee heaves and shivers and blesses the head of the second wife who's not too shy to lick his toes. A judge in Munich groans with pleasure after tasting again the silky bratwurst she ate as a child. Every day, meaningful sighs are expelled from schoolchildren, driving instructors, forensic experts, certified public accountants, and dental hygienists, just to name a few. The sighs of widows and widowers alone must account for a significant portion of the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere. Every time a girdle is removed, a foot is submerged in a tub of warm water, or a restroom is reached on a desolate road . . . you'd think the sheer velocity of it would create mistrals, siroccos, hurricanes<sup>3</sup>; arrows should be swarming over satellite maps, weathermen talking a mile a minute, ties flapping from their necks like flags.

Before I learned that Venetian prisoners were led across it to their execution, I imagined that the Bridge of Sighs<sup>4</sup> was a feat of invisible engineering, a structure vaulting above the earth, the girders and trusses, the stay ropes and cables, the counterweights and safety rails connecting one human breath to the next.

BERNARD COOPER

### End of Text Three

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<sup>1</sup> *Linoleum*: a hard-wearing material used for kitchen floors.

<sup>2</sup> *Ineffable*: too overwhelming to be expressed in words.

<sup>3</sup> *Mistrals, siroccos, hurricanes*: names given to different strong winds.

<sup>4</sup> *Bridge of Sighs*: A famous tourist landmark in Venice, Italy.

## **Text Four – Non-Fiction Essay**

### **Eclipse**

It's reassuring to view the world on your own. You can gaze at a landscape and see it peopled by things — trees, clouds, hills and valleys — which have no voice except the ones you give them in your imagination; none can challenge who you are. So often we see solitary contemplation as simply the correct way to engage with nature.

But it is always a political act, bringing freedom from the pressures of other minds, other interpretations, other consciousnesses competing with your own. There's another way of escaping social conflict, of course, and that is to make yourself part of a crowd that sees the world the same way that you do, values the same things as you...

The millions of tourists who flocked to the total eclipse of 2017 didn't see something time had fashioned from American rock and earth, nor something wrought of American ingenuity, but a passing shadow cast across the nation from celestial bodies above. Even so, it's fitting that this total eclipse was dubbed The Great American Eclipse, for the event chimed with the country's contemporary struggles between matters of reason and unreason, individuality and crowd consciousness, belonging and difference. Of all crowds, the most troubling are those whose cohesion is built from fear of and outrage against otherness and difference; they're entities defining themselves by virtue only of what they are against. The simple fact about an eclipse crowd is that it cannot work in this way, for, confronting something like the absolute, all our differences are moot.

When you stand and watch the death of the sun and see it reborn there can be no them, only us...

When the light dimmed, the atmosphere grew electric, and the crowd became a thing of overwhelming importance, a palpable presence in my mind. I felt a fleeting, urgent concern for the safety of everyone around me as the world rolled, and the moon too, and night slammed down on us. Though I could hardly see a hand held in front of my face, far out across the sea hung clouds tinted the eerie sunset shade of faded photographs of 1950s atomic tests, and beyond them clear blue day. And then the revelation came. It wasn't what I'd expected. It wasn't focused up there in the sky, but down here with us all, as the crowds that lined the Atlantic shore raised cameras to commemorate totality, and as they flashed, a wave of particulate light crashed along the dark beach and flooded across to the other side of the bay, making the whole coast a glittering field of stars. Each fugitive point of light was a different person. I laughed out loud.

I'd wanted a solitary revelation but had been given something else instead: an overwhelming sense of community, and of what it is made — a host of individual lights shining briefly against oncoming darkness...

All that is left of the sun now is a bare, fingernail curve of light. The landscape is insistently alien: short, midday shadows in a saturated world. The land is orange. The sea is purple. Venus has appeared in the sky, quite high, up to the right. And then, with a chorus of cheers and whistles and applause, I stare at the sky as the sun slides away, and the day does too, and impossibly, impossibly, above us is a stretch of black, soft black sky and a hole in the middle of it. A round hole, darker than anything you've ever seen, fringed with an intensely soft ring of white fire. Applause crackles and ripples across the dunes. My throat is stopped. My eyes fill with tears.

**Text Four continues on the following page**

The intellect cannot grasp any of this. Not the dark, nor the sunset clouds on every horizon, nor the stars, just that extraordinary wrongness, up there, that pulls the eyes towards it. The exhilaration is barely contained terror. I'm tiny and huge all at once, as lonely and singular as I've ever felt, and as merged and part of a crowd as it is possible to be. It is a shared, intensely private experience. But there are no human words fit to express all this. Opposites? Yes! Let's conjure big binary oppositions and grand narratives, break everything and mend it at the same moment. Sun and moon. Darkness and light. Sea and land, breath and no breath, life, death. A total eclipse makes history laughable, makes you feel both precious and disposable, makes the inclinations of the world incomprehensible.

And then something else happens, a thing that still makes my heart rise in my chest and eyes blur, even in recollection. For it turns out there's something even more affecting than watching the sun disappear into a hole. Watching the sun climb out of it. Here I am, sitting on the beach in the underworld, with all of the standing dead. It is cold, and a loose wind blows through the darkness. But then, from the lower edge of the blank, black disc of the dead sun, bursts a perfect point of brilliance. It leaps and burns. It's unthinkably fierce, unbearably bright, something (I blush to say it, but here it comes) like a word.

And thus begins the world again. Instantly. Joy, relief, gratitude; an avalanche of emotion. Is all made to rights, now? Is all remade?

From a bay tree, struck into existence a moment ago, a spectacled bulbul<sup>1</sup> calls a greeting to the new dawn.

HELEN MACDONALD

**End of Text Four**

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<sup>1</sup> A type of songbird.

## Section II

The prescribed texts for Section II are:

- **Prose fiction**
  - Anthony Doerr, *All the Light We Cannot See*
  - Amanda Lohrey, *Vertigo*
  - George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
  - Favel Parrett, *Past the Shallows*
- **Poetry**
  - Rosemary Dobson, *Rosemary Dobson Collected*

The prescribed poems are:

- *Young Girl at a Window*
- *Over the Hill*
- *Summer's End*
- *The Conversation*
- *Cock Crow*
- *Amy Caroline*
- *Canberra Morning*

– Kenneth Slessor, *Selected Poems*

The prescribed poems are:

- *Wild Grapes*
- *Gulliver*
- *Out of Time*
- *Vesper-Song of the reverend and Samuel Marsden*
- *William Street*
- *Beach Burial*

- **Drama**
  - Jane Harrison, *Rainbows's End*
  - Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*
- **Shakespearean Drama**
  - William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*
- **Nonfiction**
  - Tim Winton, *The Boy Behind the Curtain*
  - Malala Yousafzai and Christine Lamb, *I am Malala*
- **Film**
  - Stephen Daldry, *Billy Elliot*
- **Media**
  - Ivan O'Mahoney, *Go Back to Where You Came From*
  - Lucy Walker, *Waste Land*

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## Section I – Short Answer Responses to Unseen Texts

### 1. Explain how Patrick Haas employs metaphor to evoke the experience of despair. (3 marks)

Criteria	Marks
Explains effectively how Haas employs metaphor to evoke despair	3
Explains how Haas evokes despair	2
Provides some relevant information about the experience of despair in the text	1

#### Marker's comments

**Most students** correctly identified the descriptions of the melting ice cube as an **extended** metaphor for the central character's collapsing relationship and/or his steady slide into apathy and despair.

**Better responses** then provided specifics to explain how the composer **developed** a **complex** analogy between a chemical 'change of state' and the dissolution of a marriage. For example, they explicitly identified:

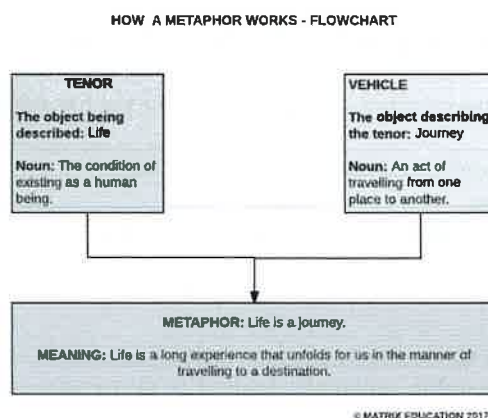
- The breaking of molecular 'bonds' as a metaphor for the loss of trust and communication between the couple;
- The melting ice's failure to stay 'afloat' as a sign that the marriage itself had become dysfunctional and doomed to failure;
- The references to 'pressure' and 'heat' within the chemical process as metaphors for the aggressive, manipulative and emotionally extreme communication patterns between the protagonist and Laurel;
- The description of the ice cube 'drowning in itself' as a symbol of despair as the end-point of a relationship breakdown. Some also effectively argued the connotative link to alcoholism established by the word 'drowning'.

**The most common weaknesses** were:

- A tendency to 'talk around' the question instead of addressing it directly and concisely;
- Most students wrote more than was needed for three marks (including some who only got one or two marks);
- Unnecessary inclusion of 'rubric-speak' (anomalies, paradoxes, etc.);
- A failure to identify the central metaphor, instead focusing on dialogue, setting, characterisation, etc.
- A failure to 'decode' the metaphorical language into literal language, e.g. by saying "*the reference to the ice-cube drowning in itself shows that the main character is 'drowning' in despair because the relationship can no longer stay 'afloat.'*"
- A failure to clearly analyse the metaphor by explaining HOW it creates meaning by comparing two unlike things.
- A tendency to conflate the author with the protagonist. The 'I' in the story is a fictional persona – it isn't necessarily a truthful account of Patrick Haas's own relationship breakdown.

**You can improve your response** in future tasks by explicitly naming the following 'working parts' of any metaphor or similar trope:

- **tenor** (the thing *being* described – here, a failing relationship)
- **vehicle** (the thing *doing the* describing – here, an ice cube)
- **ground** (the qualities that the two items *share* – in this case, coming apart)
- **tension** (the qualities that the two items *don't share* – in this case, a human being has free will, while an ice cube doesn't).



For further advice on how to analyse metaphors effectively, see this website:  
<https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-vehicles-and-tenors>

**3-mark student response:**

*Patrick Haas employs the extended metaphor of the scientific theory behind melting ice to evoke the experience of despair in a breaking relationship. The first-person narrative voice states ‘when things get too heated, I continue, or there’s too much pressure, the molecules move faster, the bonds break, and gaps form when melting begins.’ The extended metaphor invites the audience to draw parallels and read the subtext contained, which implies the narrator himself is under pressure and that pressures is straining and breaking the relationship between him and his partner, evoking the absoluteness and finality of the outcome of the situation. Thus the finality of their experience of despair is shown.*

**2. How effective is the poet’s use of imagery to convey human experience? (3 marks)**

Criteria	Marks
Effectively evaluates how imagery is used to convey human experience	<b>3</b>
Demonstrates some understanding of how imagery is used to convey human experience	<b>2</b>
Demonstrates some knowledge of imagery in the poem	<b>1</b>

**Marker’s comments**

**Most students** identified imagery effectively, especially the auditory imagery of the second stanza and the visual imagery in the fifth stanza’s metaphor describing the ‘ghost/of fingers, a face, a heart’.

**Better responses**

- Labelled imagery as ‘auditory’, ‘visual’, ‘tactile’, ‘olfactory’, ‘gustatory’.
- Explained how the imagery helps to create meanings, for example by
  - shaping the emotional atmosphere of the poem;
  - building up drama or narrative suspense;
  - developing characterisation by letting us share the protagonist’s way of seeing;
  - conveying central themes and ideas.

**The most common weaknesses** were:

- Failing to analyse imagery, instead focusing on structure or narrative point of view. Read the question before you start analysing and use this to guide your reading;
- Identifying abstract and conceptual description as ‘imagery’ – reserve this term for *concrete* language which specifically engages one or more of our five senses. Is ‘slipping from view’ imagery?
- Calling the mother in the poem the ‘persona’. (This term is best reserved for the *first*-person speaker of a lyric poem. The mother’s thoughts are described by a *third*-person narrative voice.
- Failing to *evaluate* rather than simply describing or analysing the use of imagery. (Implied appraisal was acceptable, but the question - which is modelled on a question in the 2021 HSC paper - does require you to offer some sort of judgement as to the effectiveness of the imagery.
- Mixing up the name of the character (Liang Yue Xian) with the name of the composer (Miriam Wei-Wei Lo).

This was the extract that students found hardest to understand and there were a number who made unsupportable claims because they had misunderstood the basic scenario. For example, a common misconception was that the poem describes a mother reading a letter from a son who is away at war, when the present-tense description in the first line, the dialogue in the second and fourth lines and the words 'as she stands and watches the face of her son' in the second-last stanza all make it clear that the boy is in the room with her.

**You can improve your response in future tasks by** trying to get the overall 'feel' of the text before you begin highlighting key words and techniques. The meaning of a text is always shaped according to its audience, context and purpose. Look for clues to these aspects, especially in the title, footnotes, author's name and opening and closing lines. Similarly, keep in mind that poetry often tells a story and try to clearly establish the situation, setting and characters. A mnemonic that you might find useful when gathering your thoughts about an unseen text is 'SCASI', set out below. **Note that these are questions designed to help you quickly and systematically interrogate a narrative text – they are *not* a template for a written response.**

**S: Setting**

- During what time does the story take place? Time of day and year? Time-frame: years, days, months? Time setting: historical/present-day/futuristic?
- What are the most important locations in this story? What do you notice about the way these locations are described? Is there symbolism or connotation here?
- What sort of 'world' does this story take place in? Is it our realistic, everyday, scientific world? A religious universe shaped by the struggle between good and evil? A fantasy world? An absurd surreal universe?

**C: Character**

- How many characters are there in this story? Few, many, none... hang on, can there be none?
- Who is the main character? What are their general qualities? What emotions are they feeling? What do they want? What obstacles are in their way? What do their actions reveal about them?
- What words and phrases are used to characterise the main character?
- Which other characters are important to our understanding of the story? What roles do they fill?

**A: Action**

- How much happens in this story? Are there a lot of important events?
- What is happening *beneath the surface* of events?
- What happens in this story? What events or changes 'kick off' the narrative? What are the most important turning points? To what extent is a resolution achieved at the end of the story?
- What sort of verbs and verb phrases are employed?

**S: Style**

- Are the descriptions ornately detailed or minimalistic? What are the features of the narrative voice? From which point of view is the story narrated? How reliable is the narrator and how involved are they in the action?
- What sort of diction (patterns of word choice) does the author use to tell their story? Are there any changes in the diction?
- What figures of speech are employed? Are there few or many? Do any figures of speech recur?
- What sort of syntax is employed? Are the sentences short and simple or long and convoluted?

**I: Ideas**

- What is this story 'really' about, deep down? (Its 'theme')
- What are the big ideas or values that it explores?
- Does it mostly raise questions or provide answers? Is there a message or a 'moral of the story'?

**3-Mark Student Response**

*The poet very effectively uses imager to convey the human experience of curiosity. The poem describes how 'the coffeeshop patrons grow quiet./Fat sizzles in the restaurant's woks, upstairs./ Traffic roars round the corner.' The use of, and focus upon, auditory imagery conveys the silence and ambience of only those in the immediate surroundings and communicates the reaction of anticipation as the coffeeshop patrons wait to hear more. This conveyed anticipation communicates to us the collective curiosity of the patrons about the foreign Australian girl. Thus the collective experience of curiosity is conveyed effectively within the poem.*

**Note: the marker didn't find this argument particularly persuasive, but it is valid enough to work and argued clearly enough to get the marks.**

**3. Analyse how Bernard Cooper uses literary devices to reflect on our shared humanity. (4 marks)**

Criteria	Marks
Demonstrates a thorough understanding of how Bernard Cooper uses literary devices to reflect on our shared humanity	4
Demonstrates an understanding of how Bernard Cooper uses literary devices to reflect on our shared humanity	3
Demonstrates some understanding of how Bernard Cooper uses literary devices to reflect on our shared humanity	2
Describes some ways the text deals with our shared humanity	1

**Most students** recognised that Cooper’s essay focuses on a biological reflex that seems to be universal to our species and describes it using vivid (or ‘visceral’) imagery of human body parts – oesophagus, diaphragm, shoulder muscles and cells, thus establishing it as a fundamentally shared experience. Many also mentioned the way he encourages us to recognise our own involvement by his use of second-person address to the reader at the start, thus making us realise that we ‘share’ in this experience.

**Better responses** identified the way that Cooper showed how this common human experience unifies our diversity by

- contrasting the different sigh-styles of his parents, as archetypes of ‘contentment’ and ‘dissatisfaction’ and showing how he identifies with both;
- describing the different places, occupations, moods and fetishes of people who might unwittingly sigh in unison;
- exaggerating the impact of this synchronised sighing to a meteorological and global scale;
- imagining a fanciful ‘Bridge of Sighs’ to symbolise the connections we share because of our common emotional experience.

**The most common weaknesses** were:

- Beginning with an analysis of the *structure* of the text, which tended to add a layer of unnecessary complexity to the response;
- Picking out ‘literary devices’ because they seemed easy to analyse (e.g. the auditory imagery of the parents sighs) only to get bogged down trying to explain how these *unique and distinctive* sounds were evidence of ‘shared humanity’;
- Mutilating quotes so they didn’t make any sense in your analysis (“*A man in Milwaukee... lick his toes.*”);
- Mis-identifying ‘personification’ and ‘synecdoche’. (If there is any doubt, call it metaphor and you’ll usually be on safer ground.)
- Mixing up sighing with yawning. (Sorry, we’ll choose more exciting texts next time.)

**You can improve your response in future tasks** by reading the *whole* text *before* you start writing so you can pick out the *best* techniques for the question, as opposed to simply those techniques that stand out as most obvious to you. Too many students are making inflated claims for the effects of anaphora, asyndeton and alliteration. These are usually devices of ornament or emphasis – they don’t dictate a meaning in their own right, they simply draw our attention to certain words and phrases, which *do* contain that meaning. Similarly, students are way too quick to invoke ‘high modality’ language. This has a specific meaning. It is not a synonym for concrete diction or vivid imagery.

**4-Mark Student Response**

*Cooper uses a range of literary devices to reflect on our shared humanity of sighing and the richness sighing provides humans. The metaphor that we ‘surrender and suck the air’ reveals how sighing is an inevitable action, an action where human consciousness succumbs to the force of nature. This is universalised through the second person ‘you’, showcasing how all readers have a shared experience of sighing. The comparison between the auditory imagery of the mother’s sigh that is ‘so long and weary’ and the father’s sighs that ‘ricochet like an echo’ reveals how, despite being a shared part of humanity, sighing is diverse and comes differently to different people – a metaphor for our shared humanity despite the intrinsic differences that set us apart from each other.*



**4. How does Helen MacDonald represent the collective experience of awe and wonder? (4 marks)**

Criteria	Marks
Demonstrates a thorough understanding of how Helen MacDonald represents the collective experience of awe and wonder	4
Demonstrates an understanding of how Helen MacDonald represents the collective experience of awe and wonder	3
Demonstrates some understanding of how Helen MacDonald represents the collective experience of awe and wonder	2
Describes the representation of awe and wonder in the text	1

**Most students** recognised that McDonald is describing an awe-inspiring cosmic occurrence and that it was rendered all the more powerful because she saw it alongside a crowd of strangers.

**Better responses** identified that McDonald's piece is, indirectly, a hopeful response to American politics under Donald Trump, where 'fear of, and outrage against otherness and difference' were prominent in national discourse. In response to this awe-inspiring cosmic event, minor differences dissolved into 'an overwhelming sense of community... no them, only us.'

**The most common weaknesses** were:

- Failing to explicitly mention the basic situation being described: the author joining a large crowd to view a solar eclipse;
- Citing the imagery and metaphor of 'a wave of particulate light... a glittering field of stars' without explaining that what it describes is a *crowd* of smartphone cameras flashing in unison;
- Under-emphasising the word 'collective' in the question and focusing too much on McDonald's description of her own, personal and subjective experience of the eclipse, as opposed to her descriptions of the response of the crowd at large, or her awareness of herself as part of the crowd;
- Beginning with an analysis of the *structure* of the text, which tended to add a layer of unnecessary complexity to the response;
- Use of the term 'juxtaposition' (which, strictly, doesn't require the contrast of opposites) where 'antithesis' might have worked better – e.g. 'reason and unreason, individuality and crowd consciousness, belonging and difference' or 'Darkness and light. Sea and land'.
- Use of the term 'truncated sentences' when 'short sentences' would have been more accurate. (A jockey is short; a double amputee is truncated.)

**You can improve your response in future tasks by asking the following questions:**

- *What repeats?*
  - Highlight exact repetitions of words and details and write down how many times they repeat. (Here, for example, the imagery of light against darkness repeats – once to describe the eclipse itself, once to describe the light from the human crowd.)
- *What goes with what?*
  - List similar details or near repetitions and name the 'common denominator' that connects them up as a 'strand' in the text.
- *What is opposed to what?*
  - Look for details and strands that are in contrast or tension with each other, e.g. rude/polite; light/dark; inside/outside. Look also for implied oppositions: e.g. a rock (stability) and water (change and flow).
- *What doesn't fit?*
  - Look for details that are anomalous, that don't seem to fit the patterns you have identified so far. Are these parts of a pattern that you hadn't previously noticed? Or are they meant to stand out for some reason?
- *And, for any of these, so what?*
  - Think about how these details, strands and oppositions convey meaning.

**5. Compare the way that any TWO of the texts provided explore ideas about the connections between people. (6 marks)**

Criteria	Marks
Insightfully compares the way two texts explore ideas about the connections between people	6
Effectively compares the way two texts explore ideas about the connections between people	5
Competently compares the way two texts explore ideas about the connections between people	4
Shows some understanding of how two texts explore ideas about the connections between people	3
Shows some understanding of how ONE text explores ideas about the connections between people	1-2
OR	
Includes some relevant information regarding ideas about connections between people in one or two texts	

**6-mark Student Response**

*Texts 4 and 3 examine the varying ways individuals are connected. Text 3 portrays differing human responses to a shared experience, while Text 4 demonstrates the homogenising properties a collective experience holds.*

*Text 3 demonstrates how individuality arises from our shared humanity. Using repetition and cumulative listing in ‘Every day, meaningful sighs are expelled from school children, driving instructors, forensic experts... a tension between our shared experience and our individuality is created, where varying responses are evoked by a single connection: sighing. Such connections are emphasised through the use of second person in ‘You feel a gradual welling up of pleasure, or boredom, or melancholy’, establishing the differing behaviours evoked by a single experience. Thus, text 3 explores how connections between people reveal the individuality within the collective experience.*

*Conversely, Text 4 demonstrates the way a collective experience of awe and wonder creates a sense of unity homogenising individuals to create a single entity. This is demonstrated through the case study of the ‘Great American Eclipse’, where hyperbole of ‘all our differences are moot’ demonstrates how the collective awe and wonder of the eclipse ultimately brought individuals together. The shared emotion is extended through sensory imagery, where the collective ‘applause crackles and ripples over the dunes’.*

*Thus, while Text 3 demonstrates the individuality within our shared humanity, Text 4 reveals how our shared humanity unifies individuals.*

**Formulas for Clarity and Concision under Time Pressure**

You don’t need to be an original thinker or a brilliant prose stylist to get full marks in Paper 1, section 1. What you do need to be is *relentless* in ‘joining the dots’ between technique, effect and meaning. Don’t simply name a technique and assume that the analysis speaks for itself. You need to get into a mental habit of explicitly naming the technique, explaining its effect within the text, explaining the meaning that is then conveyed to the audience and THEN linking this to the set question.

You can do this across three separate sentences, but you can also save time and space by learning to make explanatory connections within a single sentence. Two sets of verbs are key here: the verbs describing how the composer crafts the work and then the verbs conveying how the text impacts upon the reader.

Learning to use the ‘explain sentence’ formula, set out in the table below might be helpful.

Table 2. Group patterns to express ideas in 'explain' sentences

Composer/text	'Working' verbs	Technique	Representing verb	Effect
Baz Luhrman	utilises	diegetic folk pipe music	to reflect	the traditional context [of Shakespeare's text].
Shakespeare's original play	relies on	powerful dialogue	to reveal	the passion [between the two characters].
<i>Noun group (specific)</i>	<i>Verb group</i>	<i>Noun group with classifiers</i>	<i>Verb group</i>	<i>Extended noun group with [qualifying phrase]</i>

Table 3. Further examples of complex 'explain' sentences

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diegetic folk pipe music is utilised in the scene to reflect the traditional context of Shakespeare's text.</li> <li>2. The romantic tone is established through the diegetic folk pipe music.</li> <li>3. Luhrman is able to link the modern and traditional eras through depicting the scene as a costume party.</li> <li>4. One particularly effective visual technique is through crosscutting close ups of the couple.</li> </ol>
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Another, very helpful and even easier, strategy is the 'This does that, doing this and doing that' sentence structure outlined in the videos on this page:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/teaching-and-learning-resources/literacy/secondary-literacy>

## Section II: 'Texts and Human Experiences' Essay

Most students showed solid knowledge of their prescribed text and its context.

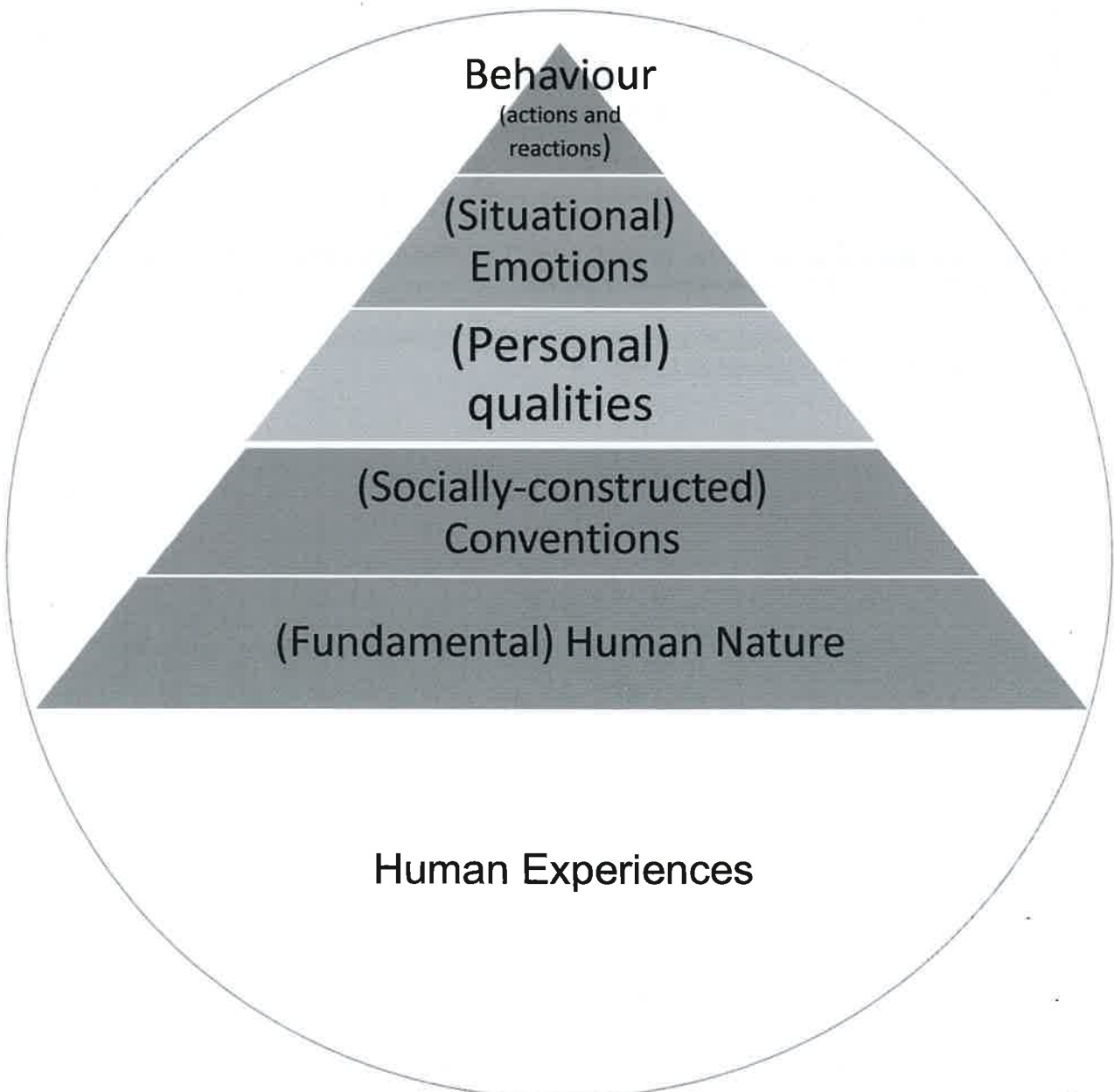
There were three main areas for improvement identified by the marker.

### 1. Many responses did not argue a clear and sustained thesis in response to the set question

Students seemed to struggle with Rushdie's words "the great constant – which is human nature." It might help to understand that he is using 'constant' as a noun not an adjective.

The equations of physics assume that there are certain 'constants' in nature, that is, unvarying and fundamental truths - the speed of light, for example. Rushdie is here suggesting that human nature is a similar sort of 'constant', a transhistorical, unchanging and universal essence that underpins all of the variations we see in individual psychology and social behaviour.

The diagram below is a rough model of the way we might think about the logical relationship between human experiences and human nature. Broadly speaking, Rushdie is suggesting that literary representations, by showing the typical range of human behaviour, emotions, qualities, etc. in response to human experiences help to reveal the constants underlying human diversity.





Problems arose because some students tried to use the phrase 'human nature' as a synonym for 'human experience'. This produced odd statements like 'Miller's play *The Crucible* powerfully represents the human nature of love.' We speak about 'the nature of' things in this adjectival way all the time, but this isn't a standard way that the phrase 'human nature' is used. Human nature is an abstract noun.

A related problem was students tending to write at length about the *distinctive* qualities of certain characters in their set texts or about the *unique* context that shaped the composers' perspectives – without linking these to human nature more generally. It is, of course, important to discuss context in any critical essay. But in the Common Module, you usually want to talk about how the experience depicted in a particular text is a case study of a wider 'human' experience. Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* shows us historical facts about Salem in the 1690s and allegorical truths about America in the 1950s. But more important for this module is what it reveals about moral panics, scapegoating, ideological rigidity and moral hypocrisy in *all* times and places. William Shakespeare, in *The Merchant of Venice*, helps us to understand the anti-Semitic attitudes of his time and the marginalised status of the Jewish people within Renaissance Christendom. But, again, a better Common Module essay will aim to argue the broader relevance of the play's key themes and ideas, showing how the questions it raises remain relevant because they are questions of human nature.

## **2. Many responses tended to 'recount' or 'paraphrase' the narrative rather than analyse it.**

Some plot synopsis is always necessary in an essay, in order to properly introduce and contextualise the analysis you are offering.

However, your essay should never give the impression that you are simply 're-telling with quotes'. Try to make your summary more analytical. Instead of describing plot events and character actions, describe the composer's choices and their impact on the audience. Put the composer, not the character in the subject position of your sentences.

No: John Proctor, driven almost to insanity by the cruel and irrational paradox of corrupt law, screams out 'God is Dead!'

Yes: Miller employs blasphemy to confront complacent his complacent 1950s audiences with the way that piety can mask corruption, having Proctor condemn himself to a tragic end in his climactic dialogue 'God is Dead!'

Likewise, instead of using the chronology of the narrative to structure your essay as a series of plot happenings (*first...*, *next...*, *and then...*, *after that...*, *finally...*), try to step back from the text and recognise the larger patterns within it (*throughout the text...*, *contrary to our first impressions...*, *similarly...*, *by contrast...*, *perhaps anomalously...*, *overall...*).

## **3. Many responses read like pre-prepared responses to a different question**

It is important that you have written some practice essays and memorised some textual analysis before you go into an exam. However, markers will be on the lookout for anything that seems like a pre-memorised response. For this reason, it is *crucial* that your introduction directly and explicitly uses the key words of the question. It is also very risky to use key words from previous HSC questions, which will usually be recognised. Smart students will try to 'tweak' their memorised material to make sure it (at the very least) pays 'lip service' to the question – not just in the introduction and conclusion but throughout.

This is another area for students to focus upon: ensure every body paragraph ends with a 'linking sentence' that explicitly ties back the analysis just presented to the set question.

**Exercise:**

Read through the introduction to this student essay. It is far from perfect, but it was well-received by the marker.

- What 'moves' does it make that help it to show *both* contextual knowledge *and* a good understanding of the Common Module's focus on human universals?
- How does it 'tweak' a pre-prepared response to ensure it addresses this particular question?

*Composers often convey the truths of human nature, helping people agree on how society and individuals shape these truths. Arthur Miller's tragic play, The Crucible (1953), depicts the human experiences of fear, conformity and individuals upholding their reputation at the expense of others, exploring how these experiences are formed. Miller allegorises these experiences in the Salem Witch Trials, responding to the McCarthyist movement of the 1950s. This movement involved the unjustified vilification of suspected communists, leading to social degradation of the great constant. The Crucible parallels the detriment of this vilification through a mass hysteria campaign, providing insights into the quest for truth in McCarthy's paradigm. Ultimately, Miller creates universal political commentary on the truths of human nature, allowing audiences to agree with how individuals and society shape these truths to form the shared human experience.*