

**HSC English (Advanced) Course**  
**Module B: Critical Study of Texts**

**Support Document**

This support document has been developed to provide further guidance and assistance in teaching the HSC English (Advanced) course, Module B: Critical Study of Texts.

Module B is designed to nurture enjoyment and appreciation of significant texts. The syllabus description of this module specifies that students develop a deep analytical and critical knowledge and understanding of one prescribed text, based on close study of that text. A detailed in-class analysis of the prescribed text in its entirety and how meaning is shaped in that text is central to the module. The ideas expressed in the text are explored through an analysis of construction, content and language, and an analysis of how the features of the text contribute to textual integrity. Discussing and evaluating notions of context and the perspectives of others amplifies the exploration of the ideas in the text, enabling a deeper and richer understanding.

The following documents are provided for teachers to use in their preparation of teaching and learning programs for Module B:

- the syllabus module description *English Stage 6 Syllabus* p 52  
[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_hsc/pdf\\_doc/english\\_adv\\_syl.doc](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english_adv_syl.doc)
- *English Stage 6 Prescriptions: 2006–2008* p 18–20  
[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_hsc/pdf\\_doc/eng\\_stg6\\_prescript\\_0608.pdf](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/eng_stg6_prescript_0608.pdf)
- the course outcomes *English Stage 6 Syllabus* p 42  
[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_hsc/pdf\\_doc/english\\_adv\\_syl.doc](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english_adv_syl.doc)
- *Notes from the Marking Centre*  
[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc\\_exams/hsc2006exams/index2.html#e](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/hsc2006exams/index2.html#e)
- past HSC examination papers  
[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc\\_exams/hsc2006exams/index2.html#e](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/hsc2006exams/index2.html#e)
- the Marking Guidelines for Module B: Critical Study of Texts for 2006 HSC English Advanced  
[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc\\_exams/hsc2006exams/pdf\\_doc/engl\\_stu\\_adv\\_notes\\_06.pdf](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/hsc2006exams/pdf_doc/engl_stu_adv_notes_06.pdf)

Planning begins with the selection of an appropriate prescribed text within syllabus text requirements (*see Section 10.8 English Stage 6 Syllabus*) and determining outcomes to be targeted in teaching, learning and assessment for this module.

The allocation of significant class time to analyse the ideas and the ways these ideas are expressed in the selected text is essential. During the study of Module B, students will be involved in revisiting the prescribed text through reading, viewing or listening. Through discussion and a range of other teaching and learning activities students will develop their knowledge and understanding of the text so that they can critically analyse, evaluate and comment on the text's distinctive qualities. They also draft, appraise and refine their own written and spoken texts. In this way students devote the time needed for development of personal and intellectual connections with the text. These connections are central to study and enjoyment in Module B.

Students also consider notions of context. This includes the context of the prescribed text's composer as well as the contexts of others who have responded to the text and the social or historical circumstances which influence responses. Types of context considered will vary greatly depending on the prescribed text selected for study.

Since deep knowledge and understanding of the prescribed text is the primary aim of Module B, it must also be the primary focus in the planning and delivery of the teaching and learning program. Misplaced emphasis may lead students to rely on the views of others, rather than developing their own informed view. Exploring the perspectives of others and discussion and evaluation of how the prescribed text has been received in different contexts should enhance rather than overshadow a student's personal engagement with and close analysis of the prescribed text. The view students develop must continue to be supported with detailed textual reference from the prescribed text.

Students refine their interpretation by testing their perspective against the perspectives of others. During this process students consider aspects of the text that they may not have considered previously, thereby deepening their own understanding and sharpening their personal view of the text's value and its meaning. The teacher's careful direction of students as they refer to other perspectives will enable them to develop and demonstrate their understanding of the prescribed text.

The syllabus does not require students to engage with particular critical theories in order to generate possible 'readings' of the text. Exposure to specific critical theories, such as feminist theory, postcolonial theory or New Historicism, is not a requirement of the *English Stage 6 Syllabus* in any of the compulsory English courses and modules. A focus on 'readings' of a text without a student's personal engagement with and understanding of the text does not constitute a critical study of text, as required by this module.

Engagement with others' perspectives of the text is not an end in itself. Substantial and valid 'other perspectives' may include the view of a literary critic, of a fellow student, or of the student's teacher, for instance. The judicious introduction in class of others' perspectives is a matter of careful professional teacher judgement. The suitability of particular perspectives will depend on the prescribed text being studied and on the needs, interests and abilities of the students.

Module B deals with questions of textual integrity, significance and value. It is important to note that students do need to engage with the prescribed novel, film, drama or nonfiction text in its entirety to develop a deep understanding and personal view of the text and to develop their understanding of questions of textual integrity. Similarly, the study of poems or speeches in Module B requires the study of all of the prescribed poems and prescribed speeches.

The syllabus defines textual integrity as:

*The unity of a text; its coherent use of form and language to produce an integrated whole in terms of meaning and value. (p 143)*

Evaluating a text in terms of its textual integrity requires the students to consider the features and elements of a text and the extent to which it may possess an overall unity, integrated structure and unifying concept. Students' close analysis helps them to evaluate how these features and elements function in different ways, leading to the consideration of the text's overall coherence and complexity. In this way, they arrive at a sense of the text's distinctiveness and enduring, or potentially enduring, value.

The syllabus requirements for Module B suggest a possible sequence of in-class teaching and learning experiences. The suggested approach represented here is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but may assist teachers. Teachers may choose to integrate or revisit the phases in the sequence. However, what is indicated here is the balance and emphasis required for students to engage effectively with the requirements of the module.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Personal engagement</b></p>	<p>This phase engages students with the text and its ideas, captures students' interest, confronts aspects of the text, introduces students to distinctive elements of the text and presents the context of composition.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Development of knowledge and understanding of the prescribed text</b></p>	<p>This phase involves exploration of the ideas that are expressed in the text through detailed and close analysis of its construction, content and language, and examines how particular features of the text contribute to textual integrity. The phase includes reading and re-reading, viewing and re-viewing the prescribed text. Through discussion and a range of teaching and learning activities, students come to develop their knowledge and understanding of the text so that they can imagine, articulate, critically analyse and evaluate the text's distinctive qualities. They also draft, appraise and refine their own written and spoken texts.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Development of an informed response</b></p>	<p>In this phase others' perspectives of the text are explored and tested against students' own understanding, informed by notions of context. In this phase there is an investigation and evaluation of ways of understanding the text.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Articulation of an informed personal response and understanding</b></p>	<p>This phase affirms a deep individual understanding of the text through thoughtful exploration of questions of textual integrity and significance, with a heightened sense of the complex processes by which meaning is made. Students are able to argue a sustained personal response to the text, based on close textual</p>

reference.
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Throughout the teaching and learning process teachers facilitate students' development of a range of imaginative, interpretive and analytical compositions that relate to their developing view of the prescribed text. These compositions may be realised in a variety of forms and media. Wide experience of composing across all language modes will assist students in documenting and refining their developing understanding and view of the text.

In their school-based assessment of Module B, teachers set tasks that are appropriate to the texts and teaching/learning programs they have chosen and designed, and that suit the needs and interests of their students. These programs and tasks are framed in the light of the syllabus description on page 52 of the *Stage 6 English Syllabus*. Specific requirements concerning weightings of syllabus components and modes for the English (Advanced) course are set out on page 118.

Teachers prepare their students for a range of HSC examination questions as specified in the examination specifications set out on page 119 of the syllabus.

Each year the Board of Studies publishes markers' comments on student responses to the previous year's HSC examinations on the Board's website. The *Notes from the Marking Centre* for the HSC (Advanced) course from 2001–2006 have emphasised the importance of students demonstrating close knowledge and a deep and informed understanding of the prescribed text. What follows is an extract from the 2006 notes on Module B student responses.

*Better responses reflected a clear personal understanding of the prescribed text, making judicious use of appropriate references to the text as well as to other perspectives. They established and maintained a clear thesis which was grounded in the prescribed text. These responses integrated a close critical analysis of the text, with fluency and authority. Better responses displayed a confident capacity to engage with the demands of the texts and question in an integrated way, while writing in a fluent and sophisticated style. These responses demonstrated a personal and critical engagement with the text, and reference to how others' perspectives had informed and/or challenged the candidates' own understanding of the text.*

<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au>

Examples of student responses achieving high marks in English (Advanced) Module B in the 2006 HSC examination can be seen in the appendix.

## Appendix

### HSC English (Advanced) Module B: Critical Study of Text

The following is the 2006 HSC English (Advanced) Module B: Critical Study of Texts rubric, HSC examination question and a sample answer.

The sample answers provide possible approaches to examination responses.

#### Examination Rubric

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

- demonstrate understanding of the ideas expressed in the text
- evaluate the text's reception in a range of contexts
- organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form.

#### 2006 HSC question (4c):

To what extent has your personal response to *Cloudstreet* been shaped by the enduring power of Winton's characterisation of Quick?

Support your evaluation with a close analysis of two key episodes from *Cloudstreet*.

#### Student Response

Winton's enduring characterisation of Quick shapes personal responses to the text, however the reason for this is the way that Winton's characterisation is incorporated and successfully integrated with his other textual concerns. Therefore, the characterisation of Quick is powerful in shaping the reader's response, but only when considered in context. Analysis from the perspective of integration of the spiritual, the way Winton responds to gender concerns and the concept of "enduring" characterisation reflect how Winton's characterisation maintains integrity with his key concerns.

It is Winton's purpose for the novel that it not only provide an historical perspective, but offer a way forward for humans in their dealings with the spiritual. Winton has stated that he believes that a good book should "entertain and teach", and *Cloudstreet* does this in the way Winton suggests a combination of western and Aboriginal spiritual values as the way forward. The device he uses to achieve this is characterisation, combined with the language and forms of storytelling. Quick is presented as the character who – like the rest of the Lamb family – has to fundamentally come to deal with the presence of the spiritual in everyday life and to value that integrated form of spirituality above organised religion in which he and the Lambs have lost faith.

The incident in which Quick and Fish row the boat back from Fremantle is evidence for this. For Fish, the acceptance of the spiritual in everyday life comes naturally because of his duality and "other worldliness" from which he narrates the novel with the omniscient insight of the initiate into the world of the spirit. Quick, on the other hand, has difficulty believing in his experience, and likens their experience in the

water to a dream. The implication of what is occurring – that the boat has left the river, which is “full of sky” and entered a world in which – as Winton would support – heaven and earth are not separate.

It is significant that Quick is the means by which Winton tests this – his body is the “litmus test of wakefulness”. When Quick realises that he is awake, Winton is using his characterisation to convey that we, like Quick, should come to accept the spiritual life as we would do if it were a dream. To complement this characterisation, Winton uses the quasi-religious language in the extract, and returns to the image of “the stars” of which the water becomes full. Thus, this episode is powerful because Winton uses Quick to introduce his own perspective on the role of the spiritual. The power of this characterisation however, comes from the unity it has with Winton’s thematic concerns and narrative devices.

From a different perspective, Quick’s characterisation is powerful and enduring for the statement Winton makes about gender roles, actively challenges stereotypes. Whereas women, such as Polly, are depicted as tied to the realm of the material and earthy, the characterisation of the men (including Quick) is made powerful because Winton grants them insights into the world of the spiritual, as well as into emotions and relationships. Here, Quick is often characterised as a foil to his mother – she with her “parade ground bark” running the shop with qualities which might normally be considered masculine and he with a deeper sense of intuition. Quick is described as picking up sadness “like he’s got a radar for it” and this is made more powerful when applied to other men, such as Sam who values “family above all”. By giving characters such as these the redeeming qualities of insight, Winton’s style of non-judgemental valuing of every perspective is demonstrated.

Through the characterisation of Quick he inverts these gender roles and creates a powerful statement about the value of the human perspective. An example of an episode in which this is exemplified is the opening and closing of the novel, in which the context and reality of Fish’s situation is explained and then concluded, reaching a new equilibrium. In this context, Winton integrates the spiritual and the earthy seamlessly, describing how “even the missing are here, among the shade pools of the peppermints”. It is in this context that Fish can finally make the transition back to wholeness, as shown through the unifying change in pronouns, when “you’ll be a man” becomes “when I feel my manhood”. For Quick, this is a moment of great significance, as he has to actively hold himself back, stopping himself “rescuing” Fish once again. He is described as having tears streaming down his face, and therefore the extract is given significance, especially when put in the context of Fish and Quick’s relationship.

Quick exhibits a uniquely maternal nature towards Fish, perhaps born of his survivor guilt. He certainly feels that being given his own room at Cloudstreet is a “banishment” and he loses himself in the stories of other peoples – such as Holocaust victims’ – sufferings. Yet he tends to Fish, and nurtures him even as a grown man unable to perform simple tasks, such as when Quick attends to Fish’s toilet needs on the camping trip.

When Quick is searching for meaning and has a “prodigal-son-like” experience in the wheatfields, Quick and Fish’s relationship is described in Winton’s poetic prose,

which uses the continuous tense and repetition to imbue the words “can’t you hear the boy in the box-boat calling? I’m calling brother-boy, and you won’t come” with a sense of power and timelessness, valuing emotional connection as part of a relationship – even between males. Thus the characterisation of Quick is powerful because of the way Winton integrates his nature with his other concerns, and consciously constructs him as a device by which insight can be conveyed to readers.

Winton’s novel is also often valued for the historical perspective it gives, providing a look back at a time when values about family and work were the antithesis of today. Winton consciously presents “this great continent of a house” at number one, Cloudstreet as a microcosm of Australian society, albeit it one with a distinctly working class vernacular and idiomatic expressions, including putting expletives in the middle of sentences, such as “Egyptian flamin’ plagues”). Within this house Winton uses Quick to deal with a significant issue facing Australians – that of reconciliation and apology for the wrongs inflicted in the past, as happened to the girl spirit by the old woman of the house. Winton proposes healing and reconciliation, and does so by presenting Quick and Rose’s union in the library and later the birth of Cloudstreet’s son Wax Harry as healing and cathartic. During the birth, Winton uses alliteration and the soft sound to convey the fluidity of the healing process, in which the spirits are “fading, fading”, and using his sensory words to describe the “good, clean, sweet” place this leaves. This is inherently due to Quick’s involvement. The fact that Quick values the perspective of the Aboriginal man (the “black angel” or “novel’s conscience”) also shows Winton’s desire for this perspective to be given weight – it is after all, at the behest of the black man that Quick returns to Cloudstreet and the healing begins.

Therefore, Quick’s characterisation is resonant and powerful for the insight it gives into Winton’s key concerns. Yet this is so mainly because of the unity with which these concerns, the language and other characters are integrated to convey Winton’s ultimate purpose for the novel.

### **Comment**

This answer addresses all elements of the question skilfully, and is impressive in its display of a deep understanding and detailed knowledge of the prescribed novel. A sustained, perceptive evaluation is evident through the strong personal thesis that Winton’s characterisation of Quick has enduring power mainly because it maintains integrity with his key concerns. This thesis is presented through a skilful analysis of the textual features of judiciously selected extracts from the novel. The personal voice in the response is clear, providing evidence of a strong, personal engagement with the prescribed text, and the response is delivered in an articulate and concise manner.

## Examination Rubric

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

- demonstrate understanding of the ideas expressed in the text
- evaluate the text's reception in a range of contexts
- organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form.

### 2006 HSC question (8):

To what extent has your personal response to the speeches been shaped by the enduring power of their intellectual and artistic qualities?

Support your evaluation with a close analysis of two speeches.

## Student Response

Aristotle once wrote that “it is simplicity that makes the uneducated more effective than the educated when addressing popular audiences”. Aristotle, like many others, knew that the “spoken word” was the most powerful form of communication because the simple, yet effective use of rhetorical language ensured that speaker’s themes & ideas were easily translated to a large audience. This is evident in both Margaret Atwood’s “Spotty-handed Villianesses” & Emma Goldman’s “The political criminal of today must needs be the saint of a new age”, as their intellectual & artistic qualities have been shaped in such a way, due to the effective use of rhetorical technique, that they can simply be translated to the audience, ensuring their speeches were memorable & would resonate with a contemporary audience due to their universal themes & values.

Atwood’s “Spotty-handed Villianesses” is a casual & entertaining speech that combines a celebration of literature with the topical issues of Feminism & the notion of literature reflecting reality, & it is through her unorthodox approach, a contemporary audiences personal response can be easily formed due to her effective use of rhetorical technique.

Atwood explores the changing role of women in society through a study of significant female literary characters. In particular, Atwood plays close attention to the character of Lady Macbeth, whom the very title of the speech refers to. Atwood continually refers back to Lady Macbeth & the notion of “spots” which are synonymous with Lady Macbeth to entertain her audience & emphasise the crux of her argument, that it is wrong to deny female characters the right to be evil as it is not an accurate reflection of society, for in society there exists both “good” & “evil” women. “The murderers, the seducers, the espionage agents, the cheats, the bad mother...” By visiting easily recognisable stereotypes, Atwood’s audience is able to acknowledge her argument & appreciate its intellectual & artistic qualities due to the execution of rhetorical technique.

Atwood further argues that the portrayal of female characters due to the feminist movement is false & inaccurate through two simple words: “good” & “evil”. By simplifying the female character into two extremes Atwood’s audience is easily able

to grasp her audience, and she is also able to criticise the feminist movement. The repetition of “good” & “evil” allows Atwood to criticise the feminist movement for creating such a divide in literature but also, simplifies Atwood’s argument making it accessible for her audience & thus, more persuasive. Atwood refers to the notion of “good” & “evil” right up to the final lines of her speech where she quotes Rebecca West “we have not enough evil in us” which also suggests, Atwood admires the role of evil women in literature.

Atwood further entertains & emphasises her argument through a plethora of colloquialisms such as “flogging a few dead horses”, “bumped off”, “juicy parts” to both entertain & persuade. Atwood also uses a series of humorous metaphors where she likens her job as an author to that of God’s, followed by religious allusions to challenge her audience which gives her speech enduring power. “God” who is “among other things an author”.

Atwood’s speech is still valid to a contemporary audience as the role of women in society is still a very topical issue, and so it has not lost its enduring power to persuade people & there invoke an emotional response due to its intellectual & artistic qualities. This is only emphasised through her unorthodox approach to addressing apparent themes as her use of simple rhetorical technique has allowed her to engage her audience, ensuring her speech is of timeless relevance.

Emma Goldman, like Atwood, uses effective rhetorical technique to emphasise the validity of the study of speeches to convey universal ideas & themes, (freedom, patriotism, progress) ensuring those who study them shape their own personal response due to its artistic & intellectual qualities.

Goldman’s speech was delivered at the time of the Great War, a time where the nation was bound by patriotism & so, Goldman uses this theme to identify with her audience & justify her actions. Goldman was on trial for her controversial anarchist views which were seen as a threat to patriotism. However, Goldman suggests that it is her love of America, which is patriotism, that fuels her anarchist views, with the belief that it will lead to a better future, the notion of progress. Goldman contrasts the two sides of patriotism through the metaphor of the love between a man & a woman. “...that of a man who loves a woman with open eyes; enchanted by her beauty yet sees her faults”. The use of this metaphor has ensured that Goldman was easily able to convey the universal value of patriotism to her audience because of the effective artistic use of rhetorical technique.

Goldman uses the theme of progress to develop her argument & present herself as a hero by saying all those who worked towards progressions were never “within the law”. The repetition of “within the law” emphasises the notion of progression for a better outcome. Goldman then makes comparisons between herself, the true patriots & religious pioneers, drawing parallels between herself, the founders of America and Christ saying these people were anarchists of their time which arouses anger amongst her audience. By invoking an emotional response, we can see that the execution of rhetorical technique is essential in creating a successful speech as it is what gives the speech its enduring power of its artistic & intellectual qualities, showing that a study of speeches is of timeless importance.

Finally, Goldman draws on the shared value of freedom, a concept on which America was founded. Goldman presents herself as a victim being punished for exercising her fundamental right. The repetition of “democracy” only emphasises the need of freedom which adds to the persuasive nature of her speech.

Historically, her speech failed as she insisted on pushing conventions at a turbulent time however that only strengthens its power today. With a wider knowledge of political ideologies, a contemporary audience can respect the speech for its controversial nature & its brilliant use of oratory technique to its enduring power.

Both speeches shape one’s personal response to the study of the speeches collectively due to the perfect execution of the art & intellect of rhetoric as well as the enduring themes they resonate.

### **Comment**

In this answer, all elements of the question are skilfully addressed. The answer presents an informed and clear thesis, revealing a detailed understanding and perceptive evaluation of the qualities of the prescribed speeches. The arts of speech writing and oratory, as well as the intellectual ideas expressed in the speeches, are explored. The answer contains a convincing argument that these ideas transcend different contexts and audiences, thus proving their enduring power. This view is supported by judiciously chosen textual references. This response is fluent and articulate, with a strong personal voice.