Avila College
August 2015 Trial Exam
VCE English
Assessor's report

Analysis of results for this trial exam

Section A: Text response

Score	9/10	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Number of scripts	0	7	26	53	28	9	2	2	2	2
% of scripts (approx.)	0	5.3	20	40	21	7	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5

Section B: Writing in Context

Score	9/10	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Number of scripts	0	4	19	61	44	3				
% of scripts (approx.)	0	3	14.5	46	33	2				

Section C: Analysis of Language Use

Score	9/10	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Number of scripts	0	3	32	50	39	5	1	1		
% of scripts (approx.)	0	2	24	38	30	4	0.7	0.7		

Notes regarding the above data
- There were no scores above 8 on any section of this exam.
- The median score for each of the three sections of this exam was 6.
- The median score for the exam was 19/30. This is a promising result at this stage of the year. If we look at the Grade Distributions for the 2014 VCAA exam, 19/30 was scored as a B/B+, so Avila students are well placed as we look to the remainder of the year.
- Section C was the strongest section on the exam, with 26.7 percent of students attaining a score of 7 and above. This is an impressive result, with many students demonstrating that they have the capacity to explore the purpose of the language (written and visual) that is presented on an exam paper. Section A was also well handled, with many students demonstrating the capacity to interpret questions and use evidence judiciously.
- In contrast, Section B was less well handled, with a number of students struggling to come to terms with the demands of the task. The Context responses on *Skin* were in some cases quite narrow in focus and required more analysis of key elements of the prompt. A significant portion of this report has been devoted to Section B, given that

this was the least successful part of the exam. It was, however, heartening that every student attempted Section B with some degree of success.

Section A – Text response (Reading and responding)
Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë

i. **'Bronte's use of imagery plays a crucial role in generating the dark and violent atmosphere of *Wuthering Heights.'* Discuss**

Assessor's comments
This topic demanded an extensive knowledge of the imagery employed by Brontë. Many students alluded to the animalistic characteristics of Heathcliff as well as the descriptions of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Some students referred to natural imagery but this could have been exploited further. Direct parallels between the imagery and corresponding action should have been more apparent here as details were quite scant. There was a tendency to list imagery without a development of any argument. Ideas required more complexity overall and key terms such as "crucial role" could have been developed more fully. It was heartening to see many students endeavouring to come to grips with Brontë's intentions. This is to be encouraged.

Sample body paragraph
A place of equalisation and self-discovery, Brontë introduces the imagery of the moors as a balance between the good and the evil that is bound by the wall of the Heights and the Grange. Here, the moors can be perceived as another character in the novel, based on its influence on relationships, individuals, and the overall scope of the text. As young lovers and siblings, Catherine and Heathcliff's social situation is equalised by the powers of the moors to demonstrate the similar qualities that both possess. Through her construction of imagery, Brontë uses the moors as a barrier between the social spheres of her world. The moors are the force used by Brontë to push together the desires of Catherine to change her fate, and the permissibility of the Grange to allow her to do so. Without this force in the form of the moors, encouraging Catherine and Heathcliff to spy on the "idiots" at the Grange, Catherine's physical and moral transformation may not have occurred. In the process, this would have reconstructed the revenge, obsession and transgressive elements of the novel. As a whole, the moors are constructed as both, "a place [Catherine and Heathcliff] went to escape", and a philosophical force of attraction for Catherine to utilise to become "the greatest woman in the neighbourhood". This foreshadows the detrimental repercussions for both the characters in Brontë's novel and landscapes that must be restored by the second generation.

Sample body paragraph
Imagery also plays a crucial role for the readers in developing a deeper understanding of characters' true emotions. Catherine Earnshaw's feelings are usually well concealed, however it is not until imagery is used that her feelings are made more transparent. Catherine describes her love for Linton as being like the "foliage in the woods". This imagery suggests the transient nature of her love, that is, something that is susceptible to the change in seasons. This is admitted when she states that, "Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees." Here, Brontë uses a nature motif to suggest the fragility of love and its potential for change in line with the seasons. This strongly contrasts with the landscape imagery employed to describe the love between Catherine and Heathcliff. She describes their love as

being like the "rocks beneath the moors, little visible delight but necessary". It is evident here that their love is embedded in permanence and is not fleeting or changeable.

ii.   'One of the key messages of *Wuthering Heights* is that chaos results when people question their place in society.' Do you agree?

Assessor's comments
This topic allowed a number of diverse and interesting responses. Many students agreed with the topic and argued that disturbing the natural order of society caused internal and external chaos. Others argued that those who adhered to the social order were restricted by its rigidity, which in itself caused a different type of chaos.

There were a number of students who argued that chaos was not caused by questioning one's place in society but instead the instigator of chaos was Heathcliff who was bent on revenge. This argument did not take into account the fact that Heathcliff suffered physically and emotionally as a result of his lowly status and those who observed the social hierarchy could be seen as being responsible for Heathcliff's demise. The term "key message" needed to be defined and many students ignored this. Some students referred to Brontë's intentions but needed to explore them more extensively.

Sample introduction
Brontë's Gothic novel <u>Wuthering Heights</u> offers an exploration of what perpetuates disorder in the world. Indicative of her own time, Brontë uses the Victorian Era to often oppress and confine her characters, in the process establishing notions of acceptability and decorum within this socio-historic context. Brontë exploits this setting in order to question the importance and place of the status quo. Whilst it is true that social order does catalyse the violence, abuse and fixation of revenge that disrupts the harmony within Wuthering Heights, it is not the questioning of one's place in society that causes it. Instead, it is the blind acceptance of this scaffold of social rigidity that is at the centre of this chaos. By juxtaposing polarised examples of order and disorder, Bronte makes clear that it is indeed those who conform to society's expectations that cause havoc for both themselves and others.

Sample body paragraph
Described by Nelly Dean as a 'black haired' 'gypsy child' orphan, Heathcliff was bound to a lifetime of judgement that stemmed from the particular social class at the time. After the death of Mr Earnshaw, Heathcliff was suppressed as a member of the lower class of servants by his step brother, Hindley, who was known to turn Heathcliff's 'pale skin blue' after a beating. The preconception that an orphan was to bring 'a bad feeling in the house' arose from what characters such as Nelly and Hindley had been subjected to their whole life; societal views that were learnt from those around them. Heathcliff, unhappy with the way others saw him requests for Nelly to 'make me proper' as he 'wants to be good'. Heathcliff feels pressured to change in order to become more socially acceptable. It is the social expectations that cause characters such as Heathcliff emotional chaos, as boundaries are established that constrict characters to a lifetime of prejudice.

Sample body paragraph
Brontë highlights the utter degeneration of normality and peace that evolves from deeming societal expectation above one's deepest connections. Heathcliff and Catherine's connection is highlighted as symbiotic with nature as "eternal rocks beneath". Moreover, Heathcliff and

Catherine both seek "one breath" of the "winds… from the moors" to find clarity and resolution, while Edgar acts to "shut himself up among books". Alas, when Catherine decides to marry Edgar, a husband she "could be proud of" within social boundaries, a ferocious "storm ensues". Through the use of a nature motif here, Brontë highlights the utter detriment of not recognising one's own ability to choose true connection over one's stance in society. Catherine's failure to recognise her freedom to question and defy her place within societal norms results in her "breaking [her] own heart" and thus terminating the lives of both Heathcliff and herself.

I for Isobel by Amy Witting

Assessor's comments
Very few students attempted this text, those that did needed to familiarise themselves with the text, as responses were largely generalised. There was scant detail throughout, with characters' names often omitted or incorrect. In question one, students referred to Isobel's love of literature, but needed to identify the stories and relate them to her view of self and her perceptions of the world.

Topic two was a 'how' question which meant that students needed to be familiar with the text's construction, that is, the strategies Witting uses to show us the lasting effects of a difficult childhood. It was necessary to also explore Isobel's childhood, define the "lasting effects" as an adult, and then show how they are linked to her childhood experience.

i. **'*I for Isobel* suggests that our sense of identity is developed as much through words and stories as through experience.' Discuss.**

Sample body paragraph
While *I for Isobel* demonstrates that identity is formed by experiences with others, Witting suggests that when one is segregated from the outside world, other mediums with which one interacts, such as the written word, can become a prominent determinant of identity and sense of self. Throughout the novel, Witting's protagonist, Isobel Callaghan, is consistently shown to isolate herself as much as possible from external forces and people, preferring instead to interact with the fictional world of literature. During Isobel's childhood, Witting describes Isobel as "sliding behind a dark curtain" to escape reality, as Isobel finds refuge in bed with a book after conflict with her mother. On account of her choice to isolate herself from the world, Isobel's identity is developed predominantly by her interaction with books and stories. This is demonstrated when Witting states that Isobel "read people" the way she read stories, insinuating that her innate character and view of the world was fundamentally shaped by her ardent love of reading. Therein Witting demonstrates that when one isolates themelves from the world and limits their experiences with other people and external forces, their identity can then be shaped by an alternative force which is prominent in their lives, such as words and stories.

ii. **How does Witting show the lasting effects of a difficult childhood?**

Sample introduction
Amy Witting's novel, *I for Isobel* explores the factors which affect the development of one's identity. Witting uses the character of Isobel, the product of an abusive and difficult childhood, to imply that such an upbringing can have inexorable effects on one's ability to

function appropriately within society and to find one's identity and purpose in life. Ultimately, Witting exemplifies that we are products of our environment and it is only when we vanquish the demons of our past that we can discover who we truly are.

Section B: Writing in Context
Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging
***Skin* directed by Anthony Fabian**
***Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* by Ray Lawler**
Prompt: *Sometimes the groups we belong to prevent us from being ourselves*

<u>Assessor's comments</u>

- Some Avila students addressed the complexities of the prompt very well and drew upon the central ideas in their selected text. The 23 students who attained a score of 7 or 8 for this task performed well on what was a relatively complex prompt. This places them in the A/A+ range for this section on the final exam.

- The prompt presented concerns for some students, many of whom did not break down its key components. What does it mean to 'be oneself'? Is it ever really possible to 'be oneself' in a diverse society where a range of stimuli shapes our identity to a significant and sometimes overwhelming degree?

- Some students addressed the aspect of the prompt relating to groups but they did not examine whether such groups *prevent* us from being ourselves. Which groups prevent us from being ourselves? Why would we join such groups in this case?

- This report will focus on *Skin*, because only a few students based their writing on *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Some of the main ideas in *Skin* that were addressed were skin colour, race, religion and discrimination. Related ideas and examples that were common throughout the responses were the controversy over the booing of AFL footballer Adam Goodes, transsexuals (Caitlin Jenner), marriage equality, Rosa Parks and Malala Yousafzai. While these examples could be relevant to the prompt, they were often explained only in general terms rather than being connected back to how we can be prevented from being ourselves by joining particular groups. Students need to choose their examples very carefully to ensure that they meet the demands of specific prompts.

- While students made some good observations about identity and belonging in their pieces, there needed to be more specific references to the ideas and issues raised in *Skin*. Remember that assessors look for both the analysis of the context itself (identity and belonging) as well as links to the chosen text and prompt.

- Sample introduction and body paragraphs have been provided below to show how an example that is based on the ideas in *Skin* can be linked to this prompt. A case study of racial abuse from Melbourne has also been included. This shows how students can use contemporary media to explore identity, rather than relying only on examples such as Malala Yousafzai and Rosa Parks, which will most likely be used by thousands of

students in the VCAA exam this year. Examples such as Malala Yousafzai, Adam Goodes and Rosa Parks are likely to be used extensively by other students, so any original material, such as depicted below, is likely to be refreshing for an assessor. The Rosa Parks' case has been used below and has been incorporated into the contemporary example.

<u>Sample introduction and body paragraphs</u>
I often wonder how my life and values would be different if I were born another colour or if my parents were less cautious. I have been raised in a conservative family where everyone in my community is nice to each other. We observe the social norms that are expected of us and when trouble strikes, we generally opt for safety and don't get involved. It's a comfortable existence, because we are rarely challenged. Our identities are firmly wrapped away in cotton wool. Unchangeable. We belong in white middle class society, where niceties are the norm. Sometimes, however, events happen that force us to reflect on whether being comfortable is actually the best way to live.

I remember reading about a French woman and her friends who were racially abused on a bus that was travelling between Mordialloc and Caulfield a few years ago. The women committed the 'offence' of singing in French on the bus. Three passengers (two male and one female) were outraged by the singing. They racially abused and threatened the women. What really disturbed me was how the other passengers on the bus did nothing. Some chanted 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie' while the men shouted, "speak English or die" to the woman and her friends. This is, of course, horrific. The incident was reported around the world, especially when the video recording of the incident went viral on *YouTube*. How did we react as a nation? Yes, there was outrage but little has changed. We are in many ways a xenophobic country that feels uncomfortable around people who are different to us. Perhaps there is a certain uneasy comfort in being in the majority on occasions such as this.

I also wonder what I would have done had I been riding on that bus to Caulfield Railway Station that night. The truth is, I probably would have sat there and wanted not to be noticed. I doubt that I would have defended the women in the face of an angry mob on a Melbourne bus. Were the attackers 'my group'? I would like to think not, but the challenging thought is that if I had remained silent, is my silence a form of implicit agreement as to their conduct? Had I not said anything, I would have survived intact but my identity would have been challenged. Am I really the person who I perceive myself as being? Am I actually a coward? It is not always easy to be who we would want to be. I am a white Australian and sometimes, going against the mob, for whatever reason, is very difficult.

Perhaps this is what occurred during Apartheid in South Africa or the abuse of indigenous rights in Australia. Perhaps the onlookers who were uneasy at such behaviour were too afraid to actually say that enough is enough. Are our identities really that fragile that we need to embed them in concrete? Perhaps the groups to which we belong are so powerful that they subdue any hint of rebellion. When Rosa Parks made her brave stand against discrimination on that bus in Alabama for the offence of not giving up her seat to a white person, I wonder if any of the white people on that bus took a stand against the bus driver. Did they just sit quietly while the driver ordered Parks out of her seat in the coloured section of the bus? I would love to think that I would have taken a stand. Regrettably, I fear that my reaction would have been the same as if I were travelling on that bus to Caulfield in 2012. And that is to my shame.

The news report on this case can be found if students search *Man jailed for racist bus rant, January 17, 2014, Adam Cooper*

Section C – Analysis of language use (Using language to persuade)

Assessor's comments
- This section was handled well, with the majority of Avila students identifying Oakley's contention and her methods of persuasion.
- The intended effect on the reader was employed consistently, which is most commendable.
- However, a quite a few students neglected to analyse the visual of the female and male symbols. As this is a requirement stated in the instructions and present in the assessment criteria, marks were allocated with this in mind.

Sample analysis
The introduction of women–only carriages on public transport has sparked considerable debate and discussion in the community. While some believe the establishment of this system in Victoria is highly necessary, others assert it will be more of a hindrance to the fight against sexual assault than an aid. Olivia Oakley's opinion piece aptly titled 'Is one too many?' was published on a blog on 14 January 2015, discussing social issues. As the editor of the blog's Independent Australian magazine, Oakley presents an authoritative and informed contention in an informal yet concerned tone, that women-only carriages are a much needed addition to our public transport system. Her audience for this piece would be users of public transport and those concerned with issues of gender equality and safety.

On many occasions throughout her piece, Oakley attempts to unify her male readership with the female audience who are presumably already allied to her cause. By directing her opening rhetorical question specifically at 'men', she challenges them to consider and therefore sympathise with the constant vigilance and 'assessment' of 'threats' that women must experience on public transport. By acknowledging that 'the vast majority of men are gentle, kind… law abiding people', she seeks to allow male readers to distinguish themselves from those exhibiting 'predatory behaviour', further uniting them with her plight to ensuring they are not alienated by perceiving it as a 'man-hating' agenda. Here, she is also appealing to readers to regard her as being objective, which is designed to present her as someone who is fair and balanced on this issue. For those female readers who may be on the fence regarding the issue, Oakley employs inclusive language to reiterate that 'we women' should be advocating for change, as 'we all want to feel safe'; a dogmatic and irrefutable statement that attempts to disallow female readers to detach themselves from the matter at hand. Oakley is also seeking to present herself as a champion of women's rights and someone whose passion shows her credentials as a leader on this issue.

Oakley works to instil fear in her readership in order to stress the urgency of the issue in debate. By referring to 'leering, grabbing and catcalling' as a 'familiar experience' for women, she offers women-only carriages as a 'safe-haven' and viable alternative to enduring the aforementioned occurrences. With an appeal to objective evidence, she goes on to list countries where women-only carriages exist, such as 'India' and 'Thailand' regarded perhaps as relatively perilous places by the readership. Oakley brings the matter closer to home by noting the lack of these facilities in the UK and Australia, evoking concern in the readership

of our government's inability to match the efforts of developing countries. The figure that accompanies the article provides what Oakley hopes will be undeniable statistical evidence that more are 'assaulted' on public transport than have their car broken into. This appeal to logic is designed to highlight the dangers facing commuters and appeal to the fear of women that they may become a victim. The accompanying question of 'who hasn't had their car broken into..?' emphasizes the likelihood of the female readership being put in the 'firing line' of 'misogyny missiles', a hyperbole that solidifies the severity of assault.

To show her command of the issue, Oakley attacks multiple opposing arguments. She asks the 'vocal objectors' how many assaults must occur before they too advocate for change, implying they condone the 'harassment and violence' experienced by women on public transport. Her language here is emotive and suggests that anyone who opposes her views is unconcerned about the rights of women. She assumes that this is a response that no reader would wish to be associated with. Continuing on to repetitively ensure '[she] knows' of all the 'good, logical valid arguments' that refute her stance, she stresses that none 'combat' the fact that one women-only carriage per train can 'easily fix this anxiety'. By highlighting the simplicity of the strategy, she challenges the reader to question why it has not already been enforced.

In contrast, Dan from Croydon states in his comment "Safety in Numbers' that Oakley's proposition will only 'magnify fear and mistrust.' In a matter-of-fact and subtly facetious tone, he turns Oakley's words on her own argument, consistently. Dan asserts that Oakley's description of allied men as 'gentle, kind and considerate' is one of the very people women should want 'in their carriage to make it safe'; attempting to convince readers that the presence of men is more beneficial then detrimental to warding off sexual assault. Here, he adopts a broader view of the issue in an attempt to diminish the credibility of Oakley as someone who does not observe the reality of travelling on public transport. Dan continues by claiming that actions of men criticised by Oakley, such as the overuse of leg-room on public transport are not 'declarations of gender war', implying she has exaggerated the severity of the issue and has presented her as unreasonable and irrational.

Both Oakley and Dan utilize a range of techniques to persuade the reader. While Oakley works to instil fear and unite the readership, both authors are heavily critical – in Dan's case, sarcastically so- of the opposition. Nevertheless, both pieces represent views in the debate that is ongoing within the Australian public.

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