

Unpacking Paper 2 Essay questions



Philpot Education

Work as a group. Shuffle the cards and place them in a pile. Read each question aloud and discuss: ‘What is the question *really* asking?’ Group the questions into categories that you label. What does each category of questions have in common? Should some questions be avoided? Why? Discuss your group’s findings with your class. Turn over the cards to reveal comments on each question.

1

Authors sometimes tell their stories in a non-linear fashion. Compare how and why the authors of at least two works that you have read have told their stories in a non-linear fashion.

1

- **Question focus:** Technique, style
- **Possible exploration:** flashback, stream-of consciousness, disjointed
- **Notice:** *Why* would authors tell their stories in a non-linear fashion? *How* do narrative techniques contribute to the authors' messages?

2

The meaning of a literary work can change over time. Compare how the meanings of two literary works that you have read have changed over time.

2

- **Question focus:** Context, audience
- **Possible exploration:** multiple interpretations, literary theory, i.e. colonial vs. post-colonial readings
- **Notice:** *Avoid this question* unless your ideas are supported by secondary sources or research.

3

‘Fight or flight’ is a term used to describe human responses to adverse circumstances. Compare how the authors of two literary works that you have read have depicted such human responses to adverse circumstances.

3

- **Question focus:** Theme, character
- **Possible exploration:** suspense, characterisation, conflict, struggle
- **Notice:** This question is missing a ‘why’. *Why* would authors explore ‘fight or flight’? *What* is an ‘adverse circumstance’? What does it mean to ‘fight’ or ‘flee’?

4

Authors often write fiction as a means of social commentary. Compare how the authors of two works that you have read have written works of social commentary.

4

- **Question focus:** Context, author
- **Possible exploration:** Message, purpose, setting, conflict, symbolism
- **Notice:** This question is missing a 'how'. *How* do the authors present social criticism? What technique do they use to tell their story? How do these techniques lend themselves to the message?

1

Literary works are received differently in different places and times. Compare how two literary works that you have read have both been received differently by different audiences.

1

- **Question focus:** Context, audience
- **Possible exploration:** Literary theory, i.e. colonial vs. post-colonial readings, reader response.
- **Notice:** *Avoid this question* unless ideas can be informed by secondary sources and research. Be careful of speculation.

2

In what ways and for what reasons do two literary works that you have read appeal to their audiences' eyes and ears? Compare and contrast the ways in which they appeal to the auditory and visual senses of their audiences.

2

- **Question focus:** Technique, style
- **Possible exploration:** imagery, figurative language, poetic devices, symbolism, music, stage directions
- **Notice:** *Why* would authors use these devices? Go beyond “to capture the reader’s attention.” How do they lend themselves to the authors’ purposes?

3

Literary works often depict a struggle between genders. Compare how two of the works that you have read depict a struggle between genders.

3

- **Question focus:** Theme
- **Possible exploration:** conflict, characterisation, setting, gender constructs
- **Notice:** *Why* would authors depict these struggles? Be careful not to summarise the struggles. Instead interpret why these struggles matter.

4

Authors of literary works often write because they feel their stories need to be told. Compare the authors' reasons for writing two literary works that you have read.

4

- **Question focus:** Context, author
- **Possible exploration:** purpose, plot, narrative technique, symbolism
- **Notice:** *Avoid this question* unless there is evidence or research to suggest *why* the authors wrote their stories.

1

Pablo Picasso once said that “Art is a lie that makes us realise the truth.”

Compare how the authors of two literary works help their readers ‘realise the truth’.

1

- **Question focus:** Technique, purpose
- **Possible exploration:** plot, (magic) realism, reliable narrator, symbolism
- **Notice:** *Avoid this question*, unless the literary works address the question; ‘What’s true?’ Focus on technique and purpose. Be careful not to speculate about reader response

2

One characteristic of a literary work is that it never stops speaking to audiences. Compare how two literary works have continued to speak to their audiences over time.

2

- **Question focus:** Context, audience
- **Possible exploration:** message, purpose, narrative technique, context
- **Notice:** *Avoid this question* unless ideas can be supported by secondary sources or research.

3

Suspense is what keeps readers turning the pages of literary works. Compare and contrast the ways in which the authors of two literary works build suspense and capture the imagination of their readers.

3

- **Question focus:** Technique
- **Possible exploration:** conflict, plot, characterisation
- **Notice:** *Why* do authors create suspense besides ‘capturing the reader’s attention’? What literary techniques contribute to the suspense *and* the authors’ intentions.

4

The struggle against injustice is a theme that speaks to readers.

Compare the ways in which the authors of two literary works have depicted unjust worlds.

4

- **Question focus:** Theme, context
- **Possible exploration:** conflict, plot, characterisation, setting, dystopian, symbolism
- **Notice:** Avoid summary of unjust worlds. Draw parallels between fictional world and reader's world. Compare (fictional) worlds.

1

In what ways and for what reasons do two of the works that you have studied invite their readers to identify with certain characters and situations?

1

- **Question focus:** Technique
- **Possible exploration:** Narrative technique, characterisation, conflict
- **Notice:** The ‘invitation’ is the author’s style and use of characterisation. Be careful: ‘identify’ is a slippery slope.

2

In relation to two of the works that you have studied, discuss the ways in which atmosphere is created by the writers. What are the effects of atmosphere on the readers of these works?

2

- **Question focus:** Technique
- **Possible exploration:** Setting, mood, tone, diction, imagery, symbolism
- **Notice:** This is a 'how' question, Be careful not to forget the 'why'. *Why* do author create these atmospheres? Compare both purpose and style.

3

How have the writers' choices of character names and places contributed to the meaning of two works that you have studied?

3

- **Question focus:** Technique
- **Possible exploration:** symbolism, characterisation, setting, conflict
- **Notice:** *Avoid this question* unless character names warrant an entire essay. Names are not arbitrary.

4

In what ways and for what reasons is the notion of 'home' explored in two of the literary works that you have studied?

4

- **Question focus:** Theme
- **Possible exploration:** symbolism, characterisation, setting, atmosphere
- **Notice:** Unpack 'home' beyond the notion of 'house'. Why is 'home' explored? For whom is this 'home' significant? How is it explored?