



Trialling and amending the criteria and marking guidelines

When students have completed the task, the teacher or teachers who are doing the marking might discuss a sample of responses. They would do so mainly to check that all relevant aspects of the outcomes have been articulated in the marking guidelines so that teachers will make consistent judgements about demonstrated achievement.

Given the complexity and individuality of writing, for example, the responses could demonstrate skills that are neither specified nor implied in the criteria, though they are relevant to the outcomes being assessed. It is important that these skills are included in the guidelines so that marking is both consistent and fair.

At the same time it is essential that looking at a sample of responses does not draw the markers back to a norm-referenced approach in which the best and worst responses set the standard.

Finally, it is wise to group mark or double mark either a sample of responses or all responses. This is good practice at all stages of implementation.

Once again, collegiality is crucial. As teachers articulate reasons for allocating a particular mark, and as they listen to their colleagues, markers can:

- develop a consistent approach to the marking by checking that everyone is interpreting the guidelines in the same way
- become familiar with and internalise the guidelines
- identify any problems in the marking process, and
- prepare the substance of feedback to students about the criteria used to differentiate responses.

As part of an ongoing reflection and refinement process, it would be useful for a copy of the task, the criteria, the marking guidelines and samples of students' responses for each level to be filed for future reference after this assessment has been completed.

THE PRELIMINARY ENGLISH (EXTENSION) COURSE

Progress report from Sydney Boys High School

In this article, Su Langker and Mary-Anne Wood, who teach English at Sydney Boys High School, describe how they coordinated the programming of the Preliminary Extension course. They also detail some of their faculty's approaches to implementing the course.

Su and Mary-Anne teach in a selective boys school and so their approaches will differ administratively from those of teachers in other types of schools. However, the type of work is applicable everywhere.

We would like to publish articles from other schools about implementing the Stage 6 English syllabus. If you would like to contribute, please contact Paul Hardage, CEO English, by fax on (02) 9886 7654 or by phone on (02) 9886 7624.

At the moment there are five Preliminary English (Extension) classes at Sydney Boys High. We expect that the numbers will drop, with fewer doing the HSC Extension course next year.

The Preliminary English (Extension) course consists of a compulsory module entitled "Texts, culture and value". There are three identified outcomes in the syllabus:

1. A student understands how and why texts are valued in and appropriated into a range of contexts.
2. A student develops skills in independent investigation involving particular texts and their manifestations in various forms, and within particular cultural contexts.
3. A student develops skills in sustained composition in a range of modes and media for different audiences and purposes.

When our faculty was planning the course program, we took the following key phrases from the module description in the syllabus:

- "texts from the past have been appropriated into popular culture", and
- "how and why cultural values are maintained and changed".

(English Stage 6 Syllabus, page 87)



The easy part seemed to be the idea of “texts from the past”, until we realised that the English (Extension) Overview (page 17) suggests that these texts should be “highly valued cultural texts”. We worked on this and decided that “texts from the past” meant any text which belongs to a world which has passed and is substantially different from the society of which the students have first-hand experience. This meant that most of the pre-twentieth century texts that we had in the bookroom were suitable for consideration.

Planning

In the module, students study a text or group of texts from the past, in conjunction with an exploration of the concept of popular cultures, and they explore the manifestations in popular culture of the ideas and values in that text or group of texts.

Each of the course teachers identified a text from the past with cultural values manifested in popular cultures. What we came up with was:

Class	Text
1	The myth of identity transformation: Shaw, <i>Pygmalion</i>
2	The myth of identity transformation: Shaw, <i>Pygmalion</i>
3	Political and social satire: Swift, <i>Gulliver's travels</i>
4	Pastoral values: Hardy, <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>
5	Pastoral values: Theocritus, Virgil, Spenser and Marlowe, <i>The pastoral mode</i> .

In our planning sessions we recognised that students would have a lot to offer when exploring definitions of “popular cultures”. It also became obvious that there will always be shifts through time as to whether texts are regarded as belonging to high culture or to popular culture, and that it is common for texts to emerge from popular culture and later to be valued as high culture. Examples of this are Shakespeare and Dickens.

One of us decided to use Shakespearean comedy as an example of what was contemporaneously part of popular culture, and has emerged again recently into popular culture in feature films, for example, *Shakespeare in love* and dramatised extracts in the recent BBC production, *Shakespeare*.

However, others of us took the view that the products of contemporary popular culture can draw a clear

correlation for students between the world of the text's past and their own world. We found support for this argument in the setting of some contemporary popular culture texts set for the 2001 HSC, such as *Clueless*, *SeaChange* and web sites.

We agreed to begin the module with an exploration of what constitutes popular culture, supported by reference to various web sites and teacher research; this exploration would be integrated with close study of a text.

Following are descriptions of some of the approaches that we took with our classes.

Pastoral values

Pastoral values, for example, the idealised moral superiority of the country over the court or the city, and the shepherd as lover, poet and philosopher, are seen in the poets chosen for this module. They can also be found today in films like *Mansfield Park*, novels like *The Mosquito Coast*, song lyrics, television programs like *Nature boy* and advertisements, and in the popular culture of Elizabethan England, a society far removed from that of Virgil, Theocritus and even Spenser.



Arcadian shepherd, Cameron, and reader, Lachlan, exploring in words and music the beauties of pastoral life at Sydney Boys High School.

Clearly, students needed considerable help with the poetry of Theocritus, Virgil and Spenser. We began with a simple example of the pastoral, Marlowe's “Come live with me and be my love”. This was chosen because it expresses the values of the ideal life in the country. Students were given a brief taste of adaptation by being asked to write a modern version



of the poem which encompassed the idea of escape from reality. This activity complied with the requirement that they should compose texts which “explore the relationships between key texts from the past and texts in popular culture”.

Selections from the works of the set poets were then read, accompanied by teacher-produced introductory notes and glossary. The ideas and values inherent in each text were discussed in detail, complemented by student research on either biographical or critical reference material. This process resulted in students’ bringing to light many new ideas and values, including unrequited love and the debate between youth and age.

The myth of identity transformation

We developed the idea that the myth of identity transformation has been found in many cultures throughout time, involving a central character whose identity is literally transformed by an act of will or an outside force, such as accident, fate or the actions of others. The transformation may be an absolute truth or a subjective truth. The changing values intrinsic to this story can be traced by comparing Ovid’s version of the Galatea story with Shaw’s version, and noting how each text fulfils the needs of its own society.

Popular manifestations of the story, such as *Pretty woman*, follow this original myth very closely. The myth, however, can also be interpreted more broadly to allow for the study of texts such as *Unforgiven* and *Superhero* comics and television programs. Many forms of advertising rely on the promise of transformation.

So, students began their study of *Pygmalion* with versions of Ovid’s tale taken from children’s books from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Students highlighted the cultural values implicit in these tellings by composing an adaptation entitled “The Feminist’s Pygmalion”, in which they embedded contemporary views by changing the focus and point of view from which the story is told.

A discussion of what students expected when told that they were to be reading a text of the romantic comedy genre showed that they were familiar with that genre. A biography of Shaw also helped them to identify the likely concerns of the play. A class reading of the play then followed. The reading led to discussion of how far their expectations arising from their knowledge of the genre and the writer were met.

Next, the class read and discussed the value of items of literary criticism in reaching an understanding of a text. We began with short extracts from literary criticism, so that students could familiarise themselves with the vocabulary and register of literary criticism. We then looked at complete articles from the school library. With these models at their disposal, students completed a traditional analysis of *Pygmalion*. The main purpose was to familiarise themselves with the vocabulary and register expected in an examination question.

Conventional literary analysis was included in the treatment of the texts in each class. The treatment covered form, structure, language and dramatic or poetic features. We were able to obtain many useful resources from *In Focus*, the State Library of NSW resource service. School libraries have access to this service at a reasonable cost. We also down-loaded from the Internet a copy of Virgil’s “Eclogues” and the film script of *Unforgiven*.

Popular cultures

By now we had also made a beginning on the popular culture component. Our recalcitrant pastoralist began with a viewing of *Shakespeare in love*, just to prove her point about Shakespeare as popular culture. This was followed by a viewing of the television program *Shakespeare*, which uses clips from a new production of *Titus Andronicus*. This play was seen as Shakespeare catering to the popular taste for violence. Students were set an essay on the extent to which Shakespeare can be considered popular culture.

A film study of *As you like it* will follow, rather than a close literary study of the written text. Similarly, students viewed the recently released film version of *Mansfield Park*. We also encouraged them to read the novel for their own interest. Discussion of the film version will follow, as will contemporary manifestations, such as television programs, country and western songs and beer advertisements.

The class doing the myth of identity transformation began with a discussion of the features of the Western genre as preparation for viewing the 1992 Academy Award-winning film, *Unforgiven*. Through this film we will further explore genre and genre subversion, which emerged as a pertinent feature of *Pygmalion*. The film provides contrast, not only in terms of the possible meanings of the transformation myth, but also as a genre which focuses on the masculine. The class has discussed the wide range of popular culture products which can be explored for manifestations of the transformation myth, such as



children’s picture-story books, folk-tales and comics. We are also looking at reading Franz Kafka’s short story, *Metamorphosis*, to view the issue from a non-English speaking cultural perspective.

Assessment

Assessment consists of two examination questions, a research assignment and an oral presentation.

We planned for two examination questions, one at half-year and one at the end of the course. In the first exam, students attempted a question on the ideas and values in their text from the past. The final exam will require them to answer a question on the manifestations of these ideas and values, both in the text from the past and in texts from popular cultures.

To broaden students’ experience of “highly valued cultural texts” and to fulfil the requirement for “investigation and independent learning and interpretive and analytical composition”, we set a research assignment.

Students selected a text from an extensive, teacher-devised list of valued texts. The texts were chosen to include titles from the past as well as the present, including a variety of forms and cultural origins. They were to select a title in a different genre from their class set text; for example, those studying *Pygmalion* were not to select a play, those studying pastoral poetry were not to select a poem. The assignment, which was to be accompanied by a bibliography, required students to present clearly differentiated responses, personal analysis and post-research. The final product was approximately 1,000 words.

In hindsight, we should have collected their initial analyses and then given them time to complete the research and the second half of the assignment before putting it all together for assessment, because there were a few instances which caused concern over the originality of the initial response.

To fulfil the requirement for “imaginative composition”, we set a free choice writing assignment. Students are to select a genre and form and complete a piece of writing of no fewer than 1,000 words. In order to avoid any problems with originality, this assignment will be sighted in progress. Perhaps next year we will make this a little more relevant to the rest of the course and ensure originality by requiring the composition to be an adaptation of the ideas and values found in any of the texts experienced in the course.

- To reinforce the idea that “cultural values are maintained and changed through time”, students are to find a text of their own choosing from popular culture which is a manifestation of the ideas and values studied in class. They are to make a spoken presentation, in which they discuss:
 - the ways in which language shapes and reflects cultural values
 - the ways in which and the reasons why the original and later manifestations are valued.

We had not included this in our original assessment schedule, as we originally planned to have the research assignment findings presented orally to the class. However, we decided that two periods a week did not allow enough time for such lengthy presentations before the half-yearly assessment period.



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