

UNIT 5: Prose Essay Questions: tackling the essay questions; choosing appropriate references, commenting on narrative features, structuring an essay.

Recommended Prior Knowledge: A reasonable standard of written English and familiarity with reading prose gained at O Level or IGCSE.

Context: This Unit is designed to help students acquire the skills to answer the open essay questions on Paper 3. It can be undertaken at any time during the course.

Outline: This Unit addresses the understanding and appreciation of prose, its characteristic features and techniques.

Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching/Learning Activities	Resources
<p>1. <u>Getting Accustomed to the Text</u></p> <p>Students need to develop a working knowledge of their prose set text. This will introduce them to the text and to the skills of analysing and interpreting it.</p>	<p>Because of their length, novels are frequently quite challenging to teach. Short stories are usually more manageable. Teachers should expect students to do the bulk of the reading themselves, to devote class time to teaching. One useful approach is to encourage students to read the text rapidly, almost a skim read when they first encounter the text. The teacher can then focus lessons on a chronological sequence of key passages. Students can follow the development of plot, characters and ideas through the passages, which can also be used as material for Unit 4.</p>	<p>Prose text to be studied for the Paper.</p>

2. Narrative Structure

Once students have a working knowledge of their text, they need to develop their understanding of its construction. This will increase their appreciation of the text and prepare them for the questions they will face in the examination.

Students, working in pairs, should compile a log or chart of the main events in the text. Comparisons between the pairs will show whether all agree on the most significant episodes and can lead to useful discussion justifying the choices made.

The chart should also demonstrate other aspects of the text's structure:

- Is the narrative linear, with each event occurring sequentially?
- Does the narrative make shifts between, for example, different times, locations or groups of characters?
- Is the Narrative Position consistent, or does it change?
- What are the effects of the structure on the development of ideas in the text?

Prose text to be studied for the Paper.

Though limited in the range of authors and texts, www.learn.co.uk/default.asp?WC=Home is useful for those areas which are covered.

3. The Context of the Writing

Though not an essential feature of examination answers, a knowledge of the context of a text's writing can be helpful in increasing appreciation, particularly if that text is from a culture or period different from the reader's. This section looks at research and the application of knowledge gained through research.

The internet is an invaluable resource, its world-wide nature giving world-wide views of literary texts. There is also an enormous number of cultural, geographical and historical sites which can give useful background material to texts. Students should be encouraged to carry out their own researches, but such is the bewildering wealth of information, they may find it difficult to select the most relevant information.

It can therefore be helpful for the teacher to do some of the initial research, and direct students toward particular sites which they know to be of use and ask them to select specific information. This can be written as a word-processing document, including the relevant hyperlinks to sites. A short written task at the end of the document will give the teacher a chance to assess the quality of the students' research and their ability to apply their learning.

It is very important for students to remember that they should use the contextual knowledge gained to assist their interpretation and appreciation of the text, as they will not gain marks for contextual knowledge on its own.

Sample Web Paths can be found at:
[http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/projects/jtap/\(WW1 Poetry\)](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/projects/jtap/(WW1%20Poetry))
<http://englishstudies.users.btopenworld.com> (>GCSE>Shakespeare and >AS/A2> Friel, Brian: *Translations*> *Translations* WebPath).

For a number of texts on the syllabus, the Post Colonial Web is an invaluable and very well organised internet resource, with sections on authors, history, politics and literary movements. It is at:
<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/>

The Empire Writes Back by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (ISBN 0-415-28020-6) is a central work on Post Colonial literature.

The Victorian Web is very useful for nineteenth century fiction. It is at: <http://www.victorianweb.org/>

<p><u>4. References and Quotations</u></p> <p>In a closed book exam, students have to be very familiar with their text in order to be able to support the points they make in their essays with appropriate references and quotations.</p>	<p>The teacher should reinforce what the students know from O level/IGCSE about references and quotations. References are precise citations of episodes or events within the text, quotations are direct citations of words used in the text. References work best when accompanied by quotation, and quotation is essential for any point made about language or imagery.</p> <p>The chart of key episodes completed in (2) will serve as a key for important references in the text. Students should be encouraged to keep a logbook of key quotations which establish character, setting, narrative perspective etc. The best quotations are short — they are more easily remembered and more easily incorporated into discussion.</p> <p>The teacher can make up a worksheet containing key points about the text, and ask students to provide a reference and quotation which would support the points. By comparing suggestions, students can evaluate their ideas.</p>	<p>Prose text to be studied for the Paper.</p>
<p><u>5. Preparing to Write Essays</u></p> <p>On a foundation of knowledge and experience of the text, students can build towards writing essays on the Prose text to be studied for the Paper.</p>	<p>As an initial writing exercise before tackling examination-type questions, students should develop the work they have done in (4). They should develop some of the key points in that exercise into paragraphs, aiming to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish clearly what point is being made in the paragraph • incorporate appropriate reference • support the point with appropriate quotation, incorporated into the student's sentences • add some comment on the effectiveness of the author's language or technique exemplified in the quotation 	<p>Prose text to be studied for the Paper.</p>

6. Writing Exam-Style Essays

This prepares students for the type of question they will face for the open essay in the examination (the *a* question).

The open questions (always the *a* option) frequently use the word 'Discuss' Students should note that it is 'the ways' or 'the presentation' which they are asked to discuss, so these questions focus on the author's technique. An alternative form is to present a view of the text and ask the candidate 'How far do you agree?' In this case, candidates should reach a conclusion in their essay. The teacher should discuss the implications of these types of questions with the students.

Earlier discussion should have prepared the students to discuss the language and structure of a text and how these affect the communication of its meaning. Research into context has deepened their understanding and appreciation.

They are now prepared to attempt their first examination style essay question, remembering that answers which rely on narrative or description will receive low marks.

Past papers (available from CIE).