
Student responses with examiner commentary

A-level English Language and Literature

Paper 2: Exploring Conflict 7707/2 Section A

For teaching from September 2015

For assessment from June 2017

Introduction

This collection of resources gives examples of student responses to questions from our A-level English Language and Literature specimen materials, with accompanying examiner commentaries. The student responses are extracts from full answers that exemplify the kinds of approaches students ought to take and the analytical frameworks with which they should be familiar.

The responses in this resource relate to A-level Paper 2: Exploring Conflict, Section A (Writing about Society). Please see the separate resources for examples of student responses, with accompanying examiner commentaries for A-level Paper 2 (Section B) and A-level Paper 1.

Paper 1: Exploring Conflict (7707/1)

As detailed in the specification (4.2), the area of study examined in this paper focuses on how language choices help construct ideas of conflict between people and between people and their societies. Students learn about how the language choices writers make are used to express relationships, drive narrative and construct views about the nature of different societies. Students are required to apply their knowledge to the study of texts about individuals in situations in conflict.

Section A: Writing about Society

In Section A, students answer two questions from a choice of eight (two questions for each set text). The first question requires students to produce a re-creative work that seeks to find an absent or underplayed perspective in the original text they have studied. The second question asks students to evaluate their writing; to explain their own language choices and analyse their intentions in reshaping the writer's original material.

Question 1: *Into the Wild* – Jon Krakauer

Read the opening of Chapter One from ‘Jim Gallien had driven four miles out of Fairbanks’ to ‘he couldn’t wait to head out there and get started’.

Here the writer describes the meeting between Gallien, a working man travelling to Anchorage, and Alex, who is hitchhiking.

Recast this description into an account that Gallien might give to his wife later that evening.

You should write about 300 words.

In your transformation you should consider:

- Gallien’s perspective of the meeting, his views on Alex and attitudes towards travellers
- Gallien’s relationship with his wife in the way he conveys his recent experience

Assessment objective(s) covered:
AO5 (25 marks)

Total marks available: 25

Student response

‘You’re late’ was all she said.

Gallien sighed, brushing his large hand over her mousey head as he passed her chair. He pretended not to notice her flinch.

‘I took a detour on my way down there’, he called from the kitchen. ‘Picked up some crazy kid on his way to Denali.’ He paused for a moment. A few years ago she would have scolded him, worried at him for picking up strangers, despite him telling her that everyone carried a rifle.

But she said nothing. He pressed on.

‘This kid didn’t have the proper gear, nothing. A bag of rice and a gun for shootin’ squirrels, that was it. I gave him my old boots just so he could make it up to McKinley.’

Mary shrugged. ‘You’re always getting those city-folk trying to get back to nature. You say it yourself – wantin’ to live out Jack London fantasies.’

‘Maybe, but this kid was different. His map was from the fifties, scrounged off some trucker – I bet half the roads on it don’t exist no more. He had no idea what he could eat without puking up his guts, or what to do if he came across a grizzly...but he was so excited.’ Gallien paused. There had been another reason he had stopped for Alex.

‘Gave him my phone number, told him to give me a ring. At least he knows there’s someone waiting for him.’

Mary just nodded in response, her eyes fixed on the television screen. Gallien continued.

‘It was the way he pretended to be older than he was. Told me he wanted to fuck the government and their stupid rules. He reminded me of...’

Mary turned to him, her face for the first time in years was soft. She knew what he had reminded him of.

‘Oh, Jim’, she said. ‘Say it, say his name.’

‘Chris.’ It was the first time he’d mentioned his son in years. His wife’s eyes shone.

‘The kid’ll be alright Jim,’ she said. ‘He’ll go home when he’s ready.’ She paused, looking at her twisting hands. ‘I thought you’d forgotten him.’

Jim smiled and touched his wife’s shoulder.

‘Never,’ he said, turning to look out of the window. He hoped Alex would do better than his son out there.

Examiner Commentary

AO5

This is a complete and cohesive text, which is wholly convincing. The student makes use of a third person narrative filtered largely through the consciousness of Gallien, but shifting towards the end for effect to that of his wife. The representation of speech and thought is convincing and original, and is used to good effect to develop the characters and explore their relationship. The style is maintained throughout the piece, with very few if any lapses. The base text is used convincingly to create the account that Gallien gives to his wife about his meeting with Alex and to explore their relationship, their history, and the suggestion that Alex is a reminder of their own son.

Question 2:

Write a commentary explaining the decisions you have made in transforming the base text for this new account and the effects of reshaping Krakauer’s original description.

You should write about 400 words.

In your commentary you should:

- consider how you have used language to shape your intended meaning
- demonstrate the connections between the base text and your transformed text
- structure your writing clearly to express your ideas.

Assessment objective(s) covered:

AO2 (15 marks)

AO4 (10 marks)

AO5 (5 marks)

Total marks available: 30

Student response

I intended to present the meeting between Gallien and Alex within the broader context of Gallien's relationship with his wife. Gallien's 'story' opens the novel and is intended to provide an initial – and important – view of Alex. However, some of Gallien's true feelings about travellers like Alex are not explicitly stated.

To do this I presented the conversation with his wife using a heterodiegetic narrator but filtered through Gallien's perspective, often mixing speech with thought to show a more complex side to Gallien. To demonstrate the physicality of his nature (described in the base text as 'an accomplished hunter and woodsman'), I focused on his physical actions to represent his emotions, rather than his mental processes: 'Gallien sighed, brushing his large hand..'. I made Mary deliberately uninterested until it's clear that Gallien wants to talk about their son. The change to Mary's perspective gives a glimpse of her character, shown in her more pleading speech at this point: 'Say it, say his name'.

I wanted to show Gallien and his wife's attitude towards travellers generally, drawing both from the base text 'Jack London fantasies', and using pre-modifiers that emphasise Gallien's feelings on him: 'some crazy kid'. However, whereas in the base text Krauker presents Gallien as being a bit more relaxed about what would happen to Alex, I wanted to show how the encounter might have a more profound and long-lasting effect on him. I thought carefully about terms of address used: Mary doesn't use her husband's name until he brings up their son, again demonstrating the change in emotion and the impact of meeting Alex on them. Likewise, the narrating voice begins to use 'his wife' towards the end, showing the renewed connection between them when they start to talk about their son (I chose the name Chris, Alex's real name which Gallien didn't know, to show the irony of the similarities between the two young men). Both Mary and Jim refer to Alex as 'the kid', a term Gallien uses in the base text. This emphasises his youthfulness and naivety, suggesting their attitude towards his lack of preparation. It also dehumanises him by taking away his individuality – by using this term repeatedly, I wanted to suggest that Gallien saw him mostly as a stand-in for his own son, his own lost 'kid'.

My use of temporal deixis creates a shared frame of reference between the couple and allowed me to spread my narrative across time. Moving back in time in Gallien's thoughts allowed me to suggest that Gallien has a history with hitchhikers: 'A few years ago she would have scolded him...', '..that was the first time he'd mentioned his son in years.' This provides a motivation for Gallien's reaction to Alex's journey both in the base text and in my narrative suggesting he wasn't the first, nor would he be the last to take the journey 'into the wild'.

Examiner Commentary

AO2

The student selects examples carefully from her own writing and explores reasons for decisions that she has made precisely and with insight. Her comments are evaluative and exploratory at all times. The use of linguistic terminology is impressive (heterodiegetic narrator, temporal deixis, pre-modification) and allows the student to explicitly comment on key decisions she has made in her own writing. She has clearly drawn from a range of learning across the specification to inform and shape her own writing.

AO4

The student makes explicit links to the base text, drawing extensively on the encounter that Gallien has with Alex and using it to shape her own narrative of events from Gallien's perspective. She makes explicit reference to aspects of Krakauer's style and narrative choices and compares them to her own. She highlights how she has used particular elements of the base text (speech patterns of characters, echoes of specific phrases, events and objects from the story that Gallien tells in the novel) to give credibility to her work.

AO5

The commentary is reflective and controlled. It is well structured (narrating voice, characterisation, terms of address, attitudes, deixis) and ideas are clearly signposted.

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