

overcome the challenges they face and to accept their situation. Eventually Tom Brennan feels healed enough to fall in

Conclusion: Both texts are fictional and the other may be real life but in both cases, moving into a new world can challenge attitudes and beliefs. Both texts show the power of family love and a positive attitude in overcoming challenges to the individual.

Sample response 4: Educating Rita

The experience of venturing into new worlds and social contexts is transformative and has consequences for the individual. Discuss with reference to *Educating Rita* and ONE other related text of your own choosing.

Note: this elective is new to 2015 HSC so a previous HSC question has been reworked to fit in with the module and elective descriptions.

Prescribed text: *Educating Rita*, Willy Russell, 1980 (play)

Related text: *Father and Son*, Cat Stevens, 1970 (song)

Response by: Mel Dixon

Ties the question and thesis into an understanding of the elective
There are critical moments in a person's life when the choice to move away from the known world into an unknown world arises. These moments can be a normal part of growing up or can come later in life with the realisation that something is missing. The move into a new social context is not, however, an easy one and, paradoxically, in order to achieve this individual freedom, there comes an understanding and acceptance that there will still be consequences to face. Two texts, the play *Educating Rita* and the song *Father and Son*, reflect the difficulties of transition into a new world and the struggle to assert individual needs while constantly feeling the pull of the old way of life.

Places both texts into their contexts while relating this to the ideas in each
Educating Rita was first performed in 1980; it reflects a previous decade of great change in Western thinking about the boundaries imposed by established institutions. Accepted practices were being challenged and exposed as controlling. Patriotism, marital roles, social divisions, assumptions about race, gender and sexuality all came under attack and led to new ways of being in the world. The song *Father and Son* first appeared in 1970, ten years before *Educating Rita* but like the play was about dissatisfaction with the expectations of society and a desire to be an individual and break the restrictions of family. Cat Stevens uses a conversation to show the growing generation gap while Willy Russell uses a two-hander play and his own personal experiences to show a woman breaking work, gender, cultural and social boundaries.

Setting and the characters
The setting for the play is a university college room, the office of Frank, an alcoholic failed poet who has taken on teaching an Open

Rita shares her dream

University student for financial reasons. His cynicism is in sharp contrast to the excitement of the garrulous woman who enters his room and his life, aware that she is 'slightly out of step' and seeking to 'see' and 'discover' herself. She is aware of the limitations of life and understands the desire of the women who come to her hairdressers 'cos they wanna be changed'. Unlike them, however, she realises that 'if you want to change y'have to do it from the inside'. The analogy with hairdressing comes from the personal context of the author who, like Rita, struggled against being a hairdresser and studied to become a writer so he captures the longing for change and the vernacular of the working class woman effectively.

The pressure of the expectations of society

The song *Father and Son* similarly comes from the same social background with the expectations being to 'Find a girl, settle down, /If you want you can marry'. Both texts show people trying to break the expected pattern of life of their social contexts. Rita, like the son, is fighting against those around her and trying to find a new way forward while her husband 'thinks we got choice because we can go into a pub that sells eight different kinds of lager'. She is fighting against peer pressure that controlled her at school and then in her adult life with people who 'hate it when one of them tries to break away'.

The pressure of the father and his attitude is compared to the son's attitude

The same pressure is applied in a different way in the song *Father and Son* starting with the calm reasoned voice of the Father, asking his son to 'Calm down', 'think of everything you've got' and to look for what is proven in the past and certain rather than what might be possible: 'For you will still be here tomorrow, but your dreams may not'. The son, however, seeks to carve out his own pathway and feels his relationship with his father has been oppressive and that 'from the moment I could talk I was ordered to listen'.

The musical techniques need to be considered in song discussions

The father offers himself as an example of happiness ('look at me, I am old but I'm happy') in the first stanza, which is accompanied by a soft and gentle melody of the chorus, showing contentment. In sharp contrast, the music and the singer's voice rises in the next stanza capturing the voice of angry and rebellious youth but also unhappiness at 'keeping all the things I know inside'. In an interesting play on the third person pronoun, the boy positions his father as part of a separate group asserting a point of view without understanding any other points of view. When he says, 'If they were right, I'd agree, but it's them they know not me', he is demonstrating an inner struggle and an awareness that there are different ways of seeing the world that are unknown to many. In the acceptance of the group he sees a loss of individuality but, as his father says, he is taking a risk pursuing a dream.

Tie in to the question

Tracing the growth of Rita while showing the limits of the new world she enters

Entry into a new world needs a lot of fortitude and demands focus. Apart from social and family expectations Rita has to overcome her own low self-esteem and negativity, feeling excluded from 'the proper students'. The outcome may be individual growth but it also means losing everything she knows and embarking on the unknown. She has to remake herself completely, leave her husband, her friends, her family and even her locality. We see that immediately in the way she changes her name from Susan to Rita. It is in the end when she realises that her dream is approaching and she feels the strength of her self-identity that she returns to her own name. In the first scene she asks rhetorically with longing 'what's it like to be free?' but by the end we see that the freedom she yearns for is as limited as her past life and requires her to submit to a new set of rules. 'An examination,' Frank tells her, 'is a sort of accepted ritual, it's a game with rules. And you must observe those rules.' He reminds her that to pass an examination she has to 'suppress, perhaps even abandon your uniqueness'.

Some close discussion on techniques to support the argument

The change to the new rules is evident in the way she changes the language she uses, the books she reads, the clothes she wears and the company she keeps. Willy Russell captures the vernacular of the working class hairdresser with her expressions of 'dead ...', and then shows her transition to an educated person with her discussion of Frank's poetry as 'More resonant than – purely contemporary poetry.' She has learnt to analyse but in so doing she has lost the quick wit and raw natural intelligence that produced original metaphors such 'pebble-dashed' to describe healthy bread, and the response 'Do it on the radio' to the difficulties of staging Peer Gynt. These comments and her refusal to accept Forster's attitude when he says, 'We are not concerned with the poor', are all original and challenging ideas, which she has to discard to change.

Final summary tying discussion to the question

In both texts we see that individuals may not be satisfied with the world they live in but that the transition to new worlds is a struggle. That transition requires a loss of something – be it family or a part of the self. The dream of freedom is therefore not always about achieving limitless dreams but about accepting a new lot of boundaries.

Sample response 5: Unpolished Gem

Question

Explain how moving into the world opens up new phases of life and influences the way people interact with one another.

In your response, refer to your prescribed text and ONE other related text of your own choosing.

Note: this elective is new to 2015 HSC so a previous HSC question has been reworked to fit in with the module and elective descriptions.

Prescribed text: Unpolished Gem, Alice Pung, 2006 (non-fiction)

Related text: 'Telephone Conversation', Wole Soyinka (poetry)

Response by: Mel Dixon

Direct and immediate response to the question, linking this with the two texts

Moving into a new country is a difficult task for most people. This requires entry into a new phase of life with different language skills, cultural attitudes and interactions. Alice Pung's autobiography Unpolished Gem and Wole Soyinka's poem 'Telephone Conversation' both centre on experiences of immigrants to a new country. In both texts we see that movement into the world may be filled with hope but it becomes a battleground for many as they negotiate to re-establish themselves far away from what is familiar.

Starts with the opening of the prescribed text and offers overview

Pung's family arrived from war-torn Cambodia as refugees. Conscious of the anti-boat-people sentiments of Australians, Pung starts with a deliberate negation: 'this story does not begin on a boat'. Instead, she starts in a multi-cultural suburb of Melbourne, full of liveliness as different nationalities communicate to sell and buy. Communication is difficult 'where words like 'and', 'at' and 'of are redundant', but the busy interactions of the people are filled with life and hope. That hope is not always realised and we follow the struggles of the Pung family as they establish themselves in Australia. Despite the wealth that comes from their persistent work ethic, we see a family divided from the outside world because of language barriers. Pung's mother loses the will to go on because she cannot speak English and she feels tremendous isolation. Alice Pung herself suffers with depression in her final year of school, but by the end she becomes more confident and strong.

Related text's context is given

The poem 'Telephone Conversation' only captures the beginning of the process of assimilation. Set in England in the 1960s, it is about a Nigerian migrant to England, ringing to see a rental property. The dialogue that makes up most of the poem conveys effectively the difficulties of trying to enter a world where prejudice is prevalent. We hear the voice of the caller who is communicating with a possible landlady. The poem starts near the end of the conversation with lines in enjambment, 'Nothing remained / But self confession',

Close reading of the language related to the question