

Paper One

Area of Study: Discovery

Paper Two

<i>Module A</i>	<i>Module B</i>	<i>Module C</i>
Experience through Language	Close Study of Text	Texts and Society
<i>Electives</i>		<i>Electives</i>
▪ Distinctive Voices	▪ Drama	▪ Exploring Interactions
OR	OR	OR
▪ Distinctively Visual	▪ Prose Fiction	▪ Exploring Transitions
	OR	
	▪ Nonfiction, Film, Media, Multimedia	
	OR	
	▪ Poetry	

You must study the Area of Study and EACH of Modules A, B and C

There are options within EACH of these that your school will select.

TEXTS AND SOCIETY

ELECTIVE TWO: Exploring Transitions

The “Texts and Society” module, Module C, requires you to examine and analyse texts which arise from or represent a particular situation or context. The syllabus states that, “Modules...emphasise particular aspects of shaping meaning and representation, questions of textual integrity, and ways in which texts are valued.”¹

The Module’s focus, therefore, must be kept in mind and not just your elective, “Exploring Transitions”, when studying *Educating Rita*. The idea of transition or movement resulting in change should be explored in and through the text. That is, with reference to techniques and context. It can be explored thematically, in Russell’s text, with a focus on the character of Rita in particular. It can also relate to the character of Frank and be seen in Rita and Frank’s interactions and the dynamics of their relationship.

Transitions should also be explored through the textual form, in this case, Willy Russell’s choices as a playwright. In this way the Module’s mention of “Text” assumes significance and dramatic techniques assume significance. This focus on textual form and techniques holds true for your approach to, not only your prescribed text, but also your related text choices. Ask yourself how the poetic, filmic, narrative or other specific techniques linked to the textual form of your related material, contribute to representing transition within the given text.

¹ http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english-prescriptions-2015-20.pdf

“Exploring Transition”, or Change, will involve looking at the origins of, the nature of and the consequences of the transition. It will involve theme, characterisation, recognition of textual form, analysis of features and techniques of that textual form and discussion of how form and features contribute to and convey the concept of transition.

“Exploring Transition” in and through a text should also involve an examination of the impact of context and values. Through exploring the significance of time and place, or context of composition, of a text’s setting and of reception by responders, then and only then will you really engage with the requirements of Module C Texts and Society, Elective 2, and not just Elective 2. Through a focus on transitions as represented in Text and as related to and reflecting aspects of Society, you will better “explore” rather than just identify transitions in your texts.

In order to compose highly regarded responses, do not use a narrow thematic lens to explore this issue but ensure you take a wider view which focuses on the set question, incorporates discussion of textual form and related techniques as well as the significance of context and societal values. In so doing you will have really shown understanding of your text, your elective and your module.

It is her dissatisfaction with her position in life and her need for greater fulfilment which prompts Rita to question the values of her own social class. Her questioning and personal reflection prompts a transition from uneducated to educated, much as it prompted Russell’s own transition to playwright. Her frustration over the projected and expected societal role of mother is a specific example of the background to Rita’s transition which is prompted by feminism and enabled by the Open University.

Changing societal values that held education should be open to all, not just the elite, underlie, prompt and enable Rita’s change. Also, her personal desire for choice can also be equated to the liberation of female roles offered by the second wave feminist movement and developments such as the pill which impacted society from the early sixties. These aspects link to the Module title and are worth considering.

The module requires that you come to an understanding of the specific ways that texts communicate ideas, bodies of knowledge, attitudes and values which are characteristic of different areas of society. Electives in this module focus on a particular social context and texts have been selected which reflect the importance of context. You will study the values and ideas which are characteristic of this context. It will be useful for you to spend some time researching the context in which *Educating Rita* was written, to help you understand the play more thoroughly. Education and attitudes towards education and life as shaped by social class is a key contextual concern of this prescribed text.

Education for Rita, leads to self-awareness and the confidence to make her own choices. All these social aspects are represented and reflected in aspects of the text and are conveyed through dramatic techniques. For example, the symbolic setting of the room within the university and symbolic aspects of the setting such as the lawn and window, as well as speech patterns, costume, stage blocking and movement all contribute to conveying change in Rita. They are worth focussing on.

Conflict is regarded as foundational to good drama and the social and personal clashes that arise from Rita’s desire to effect personal change, render conflict a strong dramatic technique

in the play. The self-confidence Rita conveys through the words in the final scene, "I might...I might...I might... I'll make a decision, I'll chose," confirms her transition. The repetition and the syntagmatic placement of the word "I" at the start of each sentence, foregrounds its importance. Rita's choices were lost to her at the start. She asks, "What am I?" in the opening act. In the final scene she asserts she is a woman with choices.

A solid understanding of textual features is crucial to success in English in the HSC. But, you must do more than simply list features and techniques. You need to also explain how the features and techniques (such as dramatic techniques) communicate or represent transitions.

You will be expected to select supplementary material that appropriately relates to your text, elective and module. This does not mean that you have to choose a text, which was written or produced at the same time as your prescribed text, or which deals with characters from the same social class. It does mean that your text will also reflect transitions or changes which result from or respond to societal values and attitudes. These may be seen through social class divisions and be reflected in societal institutions. Rita's transition from working class hairdresser to student and from married woman to separated, is characterised by her new found and increasing ability to have choices and to be able to make decisions regarding her life's direction. Her speech, actions and opinions reflect changed perceptions and values. The proof of her transition lies in the choices she begins to make and the changes which become evident in her life. Consider the nature of the transition in the related texts you select and the textual proof of such transitions.

ELECTIVE TWO: EXPLORING TRANSITIONS

To complete this module successfully, the Board of Studies tells us that we must "explore and analyse a variety of texts that portray the ways in which individuals experience transitions into new phases of life and social contexts"². To explore a text we must critically engage with it. This will require reading the text more than once. In analysing a text well, critically examine the features of the text in order to explain it and evaluate its effectiveness.

The lens through which your prescribed and related texts are to be considered is indicated in the title of the elective: "Exploring Transitions". You will examine and critically respond to *Educating Rita* with this focus. This elective is concerned with how people negotiate transitions or grow and move into new stages of their lives and it is education which enables Rita to gain confidence, take control of her life's choices and think critically. Through studying great or canonical Literature, as opposed to small "l" literature or popular fiction, Rita begins to understand human nature and the importance of values in shaping choices as reflected in and through texts. She makes choices and journeys to self awareness in a parallel fashion to the characters she studies in texts including *Macbeth* and EM Forster's *Howards End*.

Remember that societal conditions and the institution of the free, Open University, both prompted and enabled Rita's transition. In this way, society and context can be linked to the beginnings of Rita's transition. The syllabus also requires you to examine transitions in terms of their nature and consequences. The syllabus states, "transitions may be challenging, confronting,

2 Board of Studies Op Cit

exciting or transformative". They can also be examined in terms of their effects, "and may result in growth, change and a range of consequences for the individual and others... new knowledge and ideas, shifts in attitudes and beliefs, and a deepened understanding of the self and others."³ It is worth exploring the origins, the nature and the consequences of Rita's change and the origin of, nature of and consequences of the transitions encountered in your related texts. In this way, the rubric can be used to scaffold an approach to studying the theme of transitions and their content in texts while focus on techniques can explore how such transitions are represented and conveyed. Effectively, Module and Elective should be seen as closely interrelated, so consider them together. Remember also that every examination question arises from the rubric and will expect that you focus on text, Module and Elective.

"Exploring Transitions" refers to how people grow and move into new phases of their life. Growth can be automatic or prompted by a trigger. Do not forget to consider titles. "Educating Rita" gives a large clue that part of Rita's transitioning will be because of education. The fact "Educating" is a verb, also suggests the importance of the Educator, Frank, to this process of transition and it is not only Rita who changes. In exploring transitions, also consider, Frank and Denny who resist transition and Rita's mother for whom, perhaps due to societal context, transition involving choice did not seem to be an option.

The elective of "Exploring Transitions", focuses on the specific situation of changing. Rita, and Frank, undergo transitional phases to find their own place in the world. You will need to differentiate how individuals experience this growth and change

3 ibid

differently. You should use this information to guide your analysis of *Educating Rita* and also your other related texts. Finally, using this information you will respond to and compose your own texts that highlight your understanding of embarking on, experiencing and evaluating transitions.

Use the terminology that the Board of Studies provides in the rubric for the module and elective in your own responses and compositions for both assessments and the HSC examination. Apply it to your texts and provide textual referencing to support your points. This lets your teacher and the examiners know that you are indeed focused, that you know and understand the requirements and your prescribed and related texts.

The following lists of synonyms and related phrases may be useful in your composing and responding.

Exploring

- Probing
- Analysing
- Investigating
- Seeking

Transitioning

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| ▪ Evolving | ▪ Maturing | ▪ Budding |
| ▪ Blossoming | ▪ Growing | ▪ Dawning |
| ▪ Expanding | ▪ Changing | ▪ Unfolding |
| ▪ Seeking to reach a new goal | ▪ Moving towards a new stage of life | ▪ Emerging |
| | | ▪ Passing |
| | | ▪ Transiting |
| ▪ Developing | ▪ Segueing | ▪ Shifting |

Educating

- Training
- Teaching
- Fostering
- Enabling

Attitudes and Beliefs

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| ▪ Values | ▪ Positions |
| ▪ Assumptions | ▪ Perspectives |
| ▪ Bias | ▪ Viewpoints |

Experiences which can be linked to Transition

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|
| ▪ Adventure | ▪ Exploit | ▪ Ordeal |
| ▪ Affair | ▪ Feat | ▪ Venture |
| ▪ Incident | ▪ Perception | ▪ Trial |
| ▪ Event | ▪ Occurrence | ▪ Profile |
| ▪ Encounter | ▪ Confrontation | ▪ Rendezvous |
| ▪ Episode | ▪ Decision | |

Textual Features

The following techniques and features may be particularly relevant to representing the idea of transition in a text -

- Narrative perspective and voice
- Confessional tone
- Contrast and juxtaposition
- Binary opposites -For example, Negative and positive tone
- Linear structure
- Bildungsroman genre
- Soliloquy
- Costuming/Description

Textual Forms

These textual forms may be relevant to representing Transition. Be sure to look at textual form, techniques and context when discussing links to meaning.

- Personal account/ Memoir
- Personal narrative
- Biography
- Film
- Polyptych (panelled Art)
- Narrative
- Poetry
- Picture book

IN SUMMARY:

This module and elective requires you to do the following with the prescribed text, *Educating Rita*, and related material:

- Engage with and explore the prescribed text *Educating Rita* and other related texts.
- Understand what the texts say about personal change or transitioning.
- Analyse how different people deal with change and transitions in these texts.
- Determine the belief systems and ideology held by society in the context of the play's setting, composition and reception.
- Understand how the belief systems and ideologies are represented using dramatic techniques.
- Respond to and compose your own texts that explore the specific situation of "Exploring Transitions" using various language features that explore transitional phases.

STUDYING A DRAMA TEXT

The medium of any text is important. If a text is drama this must not be forgotten. Today plays are not just *read* they are *performed* and *viewed*. This means you should never refer to the "reader" but the "audience" as the respondent of a drama text.

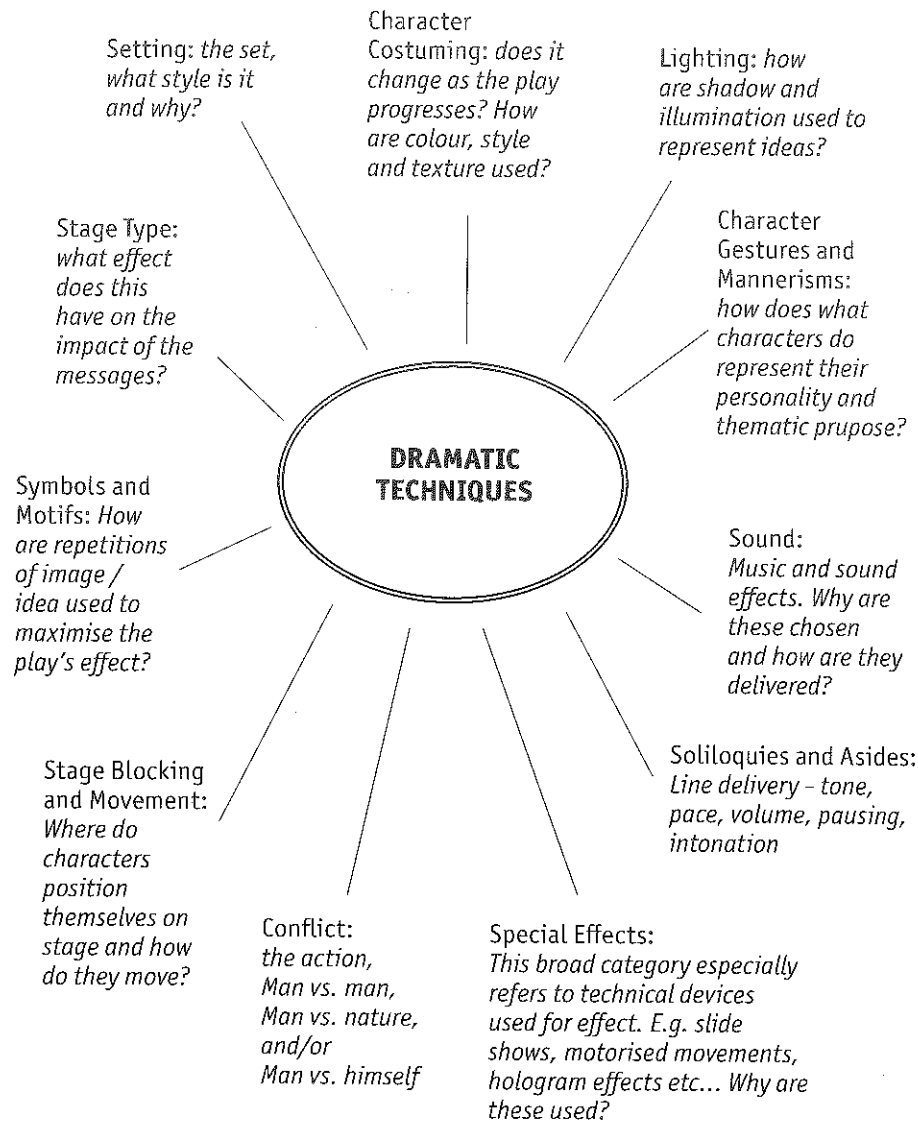
The marker will want to know you are aware of the text as a play and that you have considered its effect in performance.

Remembering a drama text is a play also means, when you are exploring *how* the composer represents his/her ideas, you **MUST** discuss dramatic techniques. This applies to any response to a drama text, irrespective of the form of the required response. For example, irrespective of whether you write a report or essay or review, you should include reference to dramatic techniques in your answer.

Dramatic techniques are all the devices the playwright uses to represent his or her ideas. They are the elements of a drama that are manipulated by playwrights and directors to make any drama effective on stage! You might also see them referred to as dramatic devices or theatrical techniques.

Every play uses dramatic techniques differently. Some playwrights are very specific about how they want their play performed on stage. Others, like Shakespeare, give virtually no directions. They might give detailed comments at the beginning of the play and/or during the script. These are usually in italics and are called *stage directions*. They are never spoken but provide a guide to the director and actors about how the play is to appear and sound when performed.

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES



THE PLAYWRIGHT – WILLY RUSSELL

Willy Russell was born in Whiston, just outside Liverpool, England, in 1947. He grew up and was educated in Liverpool. He did not enjoy school although he formed a desire to be a writer whilst there. He wrote, "I knew it was the only thing for me. Terrible because how could I, a kid from the D stream, a piece of factory fodder, ever change the course that my life was already set on?...It was a shocking and ludicrous thought, one that I held deep in myself for years, but one that would not go away." In *Educating Rita*, we see Rita also feeling that the class into which she has been born is opposed to the desires of her heart. Like Russell, she must suppress them before accomplishing them.

As an alternative to the unappealing prospect of working in a factory, Russell became a hairdresser. At this time he was also writing songs and trying to write poetry and sketches, even a novel. He realised that he needed to get into an environment which was conducive to writing, "the sort of world that allowed for, even encouraged, such aspiration." The realisation that this was an academic world led him to college, a radical move away from his working class origins.

After graduating, Russell became a teacher in Toxteth, and began to be interested in writing drama. His first play was *Keep your Eyes Down* and it was produced in 1971. A musical he wrote about the Beatles, entitled *John, Paul, George, Ringo ...and Bert*, moved to the West End in London and won an award as the best musical of 1974.

Willy Russell has written several plays, the best known of which are *Educating Rita* (1985) and *Shirley Valentine*. Both of these have

SETTING

The action of the play takes place entirely within one room – Frank’s room in “a Victorian-built university in the north of England”. This is Frank’s familiar environment but a foreign one for Rita. She moves around this room a lot in the early scenes as a way of dealing with her discomfort. This also reveals how socially naïve Rita is, as she has no idea how to behave in this situation. In the first act, Frank’s room becomes something of a haven for Rita, where she receives the sustenance she is lacking elsewhere. When she breaks up with Denny, she still comes to Frank’s room and insists on getting down to work. In the second act, we see that the room and Frank do not play such a large part in Rita’s world. Sometimes, she does not come to the room at all. She skips class, or she is late and by this time, she has found her own niche in the world outside the room.

Early in the play, the room is a symbol of all that Rita aspires to. She sees the good taste of the room as evidence of the sophisticated and superior values she believes educated people have.

Two other powerful symbols in the play are the window and the lawn. Rita gazes through the window at the students sitting on the lawn. She wants to be like them but in the beginning of the play, the window symbolises the invisible barrier between her world and theirs. In Act Two, Scene One, Rita attempts to convince Frank to have their tutorial on the lawn. Her confidence has been greatly augmented by the experience of the summer school and she is not in awe of the ‘real’ students as she once was. Frank refuses, being unable to change his accustomed routines and environment. So, as a compromise, she suggests opening the window. It will not budge, not having been opened for years. This

is an effective symbol of Frank’s life. Although disillusioned and frustrated by his world, he is incapable of moving out of it until events force a change.

In the next scene, Rita has achieved her ambition of sitting on the lawn. She is able to talk to the students and finds that, “They don’t half come out with some rubbish...” The barrier she once perceived between the ‘real’ students and herself has come down. She is no longer awestruck or intimidated by them but can interact with them on an equal level. She even wins an argument with one of them.

Other settings referred to but not seen are Trish’s flat, the hairdressing salon, the pub, the summer school, the bistro and Frank’s house.

When Rita moves into Trish’s flat she feels the same kind of admiration that she expressed for Frank’s room. It is “dead unpretentious” and “full of books and plants”. Now, she describes Trish as having taste as she once described Frank. Other people are replacing Frank in Rita’s world.

The hairdressing salon features in the early scenes as Rita communicates some very funny experiences with customers. We also hear of it as the place where she has to do her course work because Denny’s attitude makes it difficult for her to work at home. We can only admire her persistence as she attempts to read and write essays in between attending to customers. Later, Rita leaves the salon and the fact that she has not mentioned this to Frank is upsetting to him, symbolising the widening gap between them.

For Rita, the pub represents working class culture (or the absence of it as she claims). She scathingly describes Denny's idea that choice is finding a pub with eight different kinds of lager. This narrow view represents to her the limited horizons of the world to which she belongs. The pub also symbolises the restrictions her family and friends impose on her. Denny wants her to come to the pub (stay as she is) rather than go to her tutorials (change). In Act One, Scene Eight, the pub is the scene of Rita's conscious decision to continue with her course. Up until this point she flirted with the idea of giving up. Earlier in the evening, she lost her courage outside Frank's house, because she felt inadequate to the task of fitting into his milieu. At the pub, she realises that she does not fit into her old familiar world either. The sight of her mother's tears and desire for "better songs" to sing, is a catalyst for Rita. She cannot return to her old self, so she must forge on with the creation of a new one.

The summer school is the setting for Rita's increasingly confident journey into the new world. It is here that she is able to talk to other students, to stand up, in front of 2000 people, and ask questions.

Frank's house is in Formby, obviously a better suburb than the one in which Rita lives. It is the scene of Rita's loss of confidence because she does not yet know how to talk, dress or buy the right wine.

The bistro is only mentioned occasionally. Rita and Trish both work in the bistro and this period of time is one in which Trish has great influence over Rita.

Questions

- Do you think that at the end of the play, Rita still wants a room like Frank's?
- Imagine that you are Rita after you have sat on the lawn with the students. Write a paragraph expressing your thoughts.
- Using the stage directions from Scene One and other relevant information from the play, draw a plan of the stage set.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Rita Susan White

Rita, the lively and irrepressible main character of the play, makes her dramatic entrance in the first scene of the play. The door is stuck as she tries to enter Frank's office. When it finally gives way, she is projected rapidly and with a great deal of swearing, into the room.

Rita is nervous in this initial meeting with Frank. She smokes, accepts a drink from Frank and prowls around the office, commenting on everything. Her social naivety is apparent, as she has no idea what is appropriate behaviour in this situation.

Rita wants to change her life and hopes to do it through an Open University course. She feels out of sympathy with her working class family and friends because she wants more out of life. She has changed her name from Susan as a symbol of the change she wishes to make. Ironically, Rita believes that she has taken the name of a respected novelist, when in fact; Rita Mae Brown is the author of a highly sexually explicit novel, regarded as scandalous when it appeared.

Rita is a twenty-six year old hairdresser who is married to Denny. She confesses to feeling out of step with her working class peers and says that she should have had a baby by this point in her marriage. But Rita wants more out of her life than her family and friends expect from theirs. Becoming educated will give her "choice" about the direction her life takes.

Rita struggles in the early stages of her course. She has no solid school background on which to draw and responds to her first assigned novel by describing it as "crap". She looks through the window wistfully at the other students sitting on the lawn and feels an immeasurable gap between her world and theirs. In the early part of the play, Rita is flippant and unfocused, and although she says she wants "to see" and "to know", she sometimes talks about giving up the course. A pivotal event for Rita is Frank's dinner party and its aftermath. It is on this evening, when she feels disconnected with both her working class world and Frank's middle class world, that she resolves to persevere with the course.

Following upon her resolve to continue, Rita's positive experience at the summer school imbues her with confidence. Soon, she has crossed the divide between herself and the 'real' students and has moved into their world. It is during this period, that she begins to outgrow Frank's influence and to take on, uncritically, the ideas and values of her new friends. She begins to talk in an affected voice because Trish has told her to do so. Her essays are more academically acceptable, but have lost the "originality" which Frank values.

Throughout Act One, Rita encounters constant opposition from her husband, Denny. Their relationship becomes increasingly stormy as the play progresses, culminating in Act Two with the ultimatum that Rita tries for a baby and remains in the marriage or continues with the course and they separate. Rita chooses to leave. Moving into a new world has involved sacrifice for Rita.

Throughout Act Two, Rita moves away from Frank, as well. Where once she admired him and was grateful for all he gave her, now she prefers to spend time with Trish, Tyson and the other students. She misses tutorials or is late for them. Frank is upset and resentful, as he has become fond of her. Their sessions have been a bright spot in his otherwise unrewarding life. A discussion about Frank's poetry escalates into an acrimonious quarrel. Rita believes he is angry because she has achieved a great deal and so is on a more equal footing with him, which he resents. At this point she feels very satisfied with the progress she has made, claiming that now she knows "what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what books and papers to read". Frank dismisses her claims, describing her achievement as "so very little".

Later, after Trish's attempted suicide and reflection, Rita realises Frank's criticisms were justified. She has uncritically accepted "a load of quotes and empty phrases," all the second-hand opinions of other people because she wanted a transformation of her life so passionately. "I was so hungry. I wanted it all so much that I didn't want it to be questioned," she tells Frank, in justification, finally commenting ironically, "I told y' I was stupid." It is precisely because she is not stupid that she can understand her own motivations.

This realisation is seen in Rita readopting her birth name of Susan, rather than her assumed name of Rita. She states, "I dropped that pretentious crap as soon as I saw it for what it was..." (Act 2, Sc 6). Rita learns to discern.

At the end of the play, Susan/Rita has come to realise that her journey with Frank has given her the gift of choice. She can now direct her life in the way she wants. She has successfully achieved the transition she desired.

Quotes

"I've been realizin' for ages that I was, y' know, slightly out of step. I'm twenty-six. I should have had a baby by now; everyone expects it... See, I don't wanna baby yet. See, I wanna discover meself first."

"Is this the absolute maximum I can expect from this livin' lark? An' that's the big moment that one, that's the point when y' have to decide whether it's gonna be another change of dress or a change in yourself."

"My mind's full of junk, isn't it? It needs a good clearin' out."

"I don't want to be funny. I wanna talk seriously with the rest of you..."

"...I'm a freak. I can't talk to the people I live with anymore. An' I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday, or them out there, because I can't learn the language."

"But don't you realise, I want to change!"

"I feel young, you know like them down there."

"Don't sound so surprised. I can talk now y' know, Frank."

"I can have a mind of my own can't I?"

"...don't keep treating me the same as when I first walked in here."

"I'm educated, I've got what you have an' y' don't like it because you'd rather see me the peasant I once was."

"I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what papers and books to read. I can do without you."

"You think I just ended up with a load of quotes an' empty phrases; an' I did. But that wasn't your doin'. I was so hungry. I wanted it all so much that I didn't want it to be questioned. I told y' I was stupid."

"I chose me. Because of what you'd given me I had a choice."

Tyson (Tiger)

Tyson is one of the students with whom Rita begins to talk, on the lawn in front of Frank's office. She makes an immediate impact on him and he invites her to come to France with him and some other students. (No doubt, like Frank, he has never met anyone quite like her before.) When Rita shares this information with Frank, he has a jealous reaction and attempts to tell her that she cannot go. As time goes on, she continues to talk to Tyson and his friends because she finds that they are "passionate about things that matter". However, by the end of the play, Rita has regained some perspective and regards him as "a bit of a wanker". The offer to go to France still stands, but Rita is undecided and will choose to do what suits her.

Quotes

"There was this really mad one with them; I've only been talkin' to them for five minutes and he's inviting me to go abroad with them."

"...I do find Tiger fascinatin', like I find a lot of the people I mix with fascinating; they're young, and they're passionate about things that matter."

"He's a bit of a wanker, really."

THEMES

Change

Rita wants to move into a different world from the one in which she grew up. This journey changes her in many ways. At the beginning of the play, we learn that she has changed her name from Susan to Rita. It is an indication that she wishes to transform herself, leaving her background behind. Later, she dismisses the action as "pretentious crap".

Rita experiences both internal and external changes as she transitions into the world she has chosen. She is intelligent, but has had a minimal education. She wants "to know everything", but Frank tells her that "possessing a hungry mind is not, in itself, a guarantee of success", and that she will need to become more disciplined in her thinking if she is to pass exams.

However, it is Frank who becomes uncomfortable with the idea of being the instrument of Rita's change. He has come to value her "uniqueness". Rita insists that she wants to change, and that he must "be dead firm" with her in order to bring her work up to the necessary standard.

Throughout the second act of the play, Rita not only changes but draws away from Frank. The summer school and contact with other students boosts her confidence to the point where she can disagree with Frank's point of view on a Blake poem. She absorbs ideas and opinions from other students, and as Frank feared, loses her unique voice. Frank and Rita have a fierce argument, with Frank telling her, ironically, that he has done "a fine job" on her. But, after reflection, Rita is able to understand herself and

her motivations. She has wanted so desperately to change that she has been unable to question the value of the changes.

Rita has a significant change thrust upon her when her husband, Denny, instigates her leaving their home, thus, ending their marriage. He gave her the choice of the course or the relationship and she took the course.

Rita makes external changes to her life, as well. She moves into a flat with Trish and she leaves the hairdressing salon to work in a bistro. When she is in London, she buys 'new' second-clothes and changes her appearance. Under Trish's tutelage, she attempts to change the way she speaks to one that is more acceptable to her flatmate.

In contrast to Rita, who is the agent of much of her own change, Frank cannot change. He is trapped in a world which is unsatisfying, but cannot make any conscious move out of it. Instead, he drinks to escape. His drinking escalates until the university authorities can no longer ignore it and advise him to take time in Australia or be sacked. At the end of the play, he is being forced into a transition.

Social Class

Rita is keenly dissatisfied with the limited horizons of her working class life. She feels "out of step" with her peers in her working class neighbourhood, acknowledging that most of them would have had a baby by the time they had reached her age. Longing for "a better way of livin' me life", she has attempted to explain her restlessness to her husband, Denny, but he interprets her discontent in material terms and suggests they save and move to a better neighbourhood. Rita feels constrained by the values of her class. When she talks about having a baby, she says that "everyone expects it". By implication, everyone expects that she should settle down to a life of marriage, children and possibly an undemanding job, with the only change on the horizon being possibly a slightly better house to live in.

Rita's desire for a better way of living leads her into a different world and a consequence of this is her leaving her husband, Denny, behind. As she progresses through her Open University course, Rita comes to a point where she feels that she is "a half-caste", belonging in neither class. She can no longer relate to her working class peers, but neither can she speak the language of the middle class she aspires to. It is the recognition that she is caught between two classes or two worlds that spurs her to continue with her course.

Rita looks very critically at the working class, denying that they have any culture. She claims that she sees "everyone pissed, or on the Valium, tryin' to get from one day to the next", because their lives have "no meanin' ". At this point, she has a very rosy view of educated, middle class people. She looks out of Frank's window during her first tutorial and says, "God, what's it like to be free?" The question is ironic because Frank is by no means

free, restricted as he is by an unsatisfactory job and a lukewarm relationship and drinking his way through each day. Rita believes that education will liberate her.

Rita embraces her new middle class student friends in the second act. She accepts their opinions and ideas unquestioningly. Once she might have dismissed these as “crap”. She accepts their dictates on dress and speech. However, by the time she takes her exam, she has regained some perspective and can see that because she was “so hungry”, she didn’t want to question anything in her new world. We see, from her comments on Trish and Tyson, that she is no longer so uncritical and that she has begun to have a more realistic view of her new friends. It is also implied by her comment about possibly going to her mother’s for Christmas that she is no longer feeling so alienated from her family and friends. The action of giving Frank a haircut could be interpreted as Rita beginning to be more comfortable with her background.

Choices and consequences

Choice is a very important theme in *Educating Rita*. Rita’s motivation impelling her transition is to achieve some sort of choice about the direction her life will follow. She doesn’t wish to blindly follow the path determined by her working class background and environment; she wants an education so that she will make more informed choices.

Rita’s choice to enrol in the Open University course is only the first in a whole series of choices she has to make on her journey. Even after she has embarked on her course, she says she might “pack the course in” and she comes very close to doing that in Act One, Scene Seven. But, the sight of her mother’s unhappiness

with her life, coupled with her realisation that she was existing in a kind of limbo, neither in the working class nor the middle class world, stimulates her to make the conscious choice to continue with the course.

Rita’s choice to study has repercussions in her personal life. It causes friction with her husband, finally leading to the breakdown of the relationship. Rita grows increasingly alienated from her family and friends as they cannot understand her wish to study.

In the last scene, Rita talks about choosing to do her exam, even though “it might be worthless in the end”. She seems to be revelling in having achieved what she set out to do when she talks about possible ways to spend the Christmas period and says, “I dunno. I’ll make a decision, I’ll choose.” She has achieved the luxury of having a choice.

Frank has to make choices, too. In the first scene, although he is delighted with Rita’s outspokenness and finds her “marvellous”, he chooses not to tutor her because he feels that he is an “appalling” teacher and she deserves to have someone better. However, Rita will not accept this, and tells him she will return the next week. Initially, Frank enjoys the interaction each week with Rita, but as she changes, he regrets giving in and beginning to teach her. He feels that he has created a monster and that she has lost touch with parts of herself which were unique and precious.

Frank’s life is unsatisfying for him, but unlike Rita, he does not choose to make any changes. The choice he does make is to drink, and to drink to an increasing degree. It is this choice which results in his being sent to Australia. Frank is forced to make a change, leaving his familiar environment and relationships behind.

Relationships

The key relationship in the play is the unlikely one between the world-weary academic, Frank, and the feisty hairdresser Rita. Frank is delighted by Rita at their first meeting, telling her, "I think you're marvellous. Do you know, I think you're the first breath of air that's been in this room for years". Rita is equally taken with Frank, insisting that he remain her tutor and calling him, "a crazy mad piss artist".

Throughout Act One, Frank and Rita begin to form a close relationship. Rita feels that her tutorials with Frank provide her "with life itself". Frank, for his part, allows himself to be talked into going to the theatre with her and asks her to a dinner party at his home, thus taking their relationship to a more personal level.

Rita's time in London at the summer school signals the beginning of a rift in their relationship. As she becomes more confident, less in awe of the regular students and able to form friendships with them, she has less need of Frank. This is revealed by her late appearance at tutorials or her failure to attend at all. Frank feels this keenly, sounding, at times, like a jilted lover. He complains "...that there was a time when you told me everything".

At the same time, Frank is disenchanted with Rita's transformation under the influence of Trish, Tyson and the other students. Rita, for her part, has lost her initial respect for Frank whom she now sees as simply wasting his talents and opportunities.

Rita and Frank resolve their differences in the last scene. Frank asks Rita to accompany him to Australia. It can be seen as either a hope to regain the once close relationship or as an indication of his apprehensions about the impending change in his life.

Rita and Denny's relationship is a casualty of Rita's movement into the world. His inability to understand or support Rita's need for something more in her life leads to conflict and the eventual disintegration of the marriage.

Rita's relationship with Trish, Tyson and the other students is an important stage in her transition. Through them she gains confidence and a sense of being comfortable in her new milieu. By the end of the play, she has lost her rosy view of them and is able to view them more realistically.

OTHER ASPECTS/TECHNIQUES

Conflict

Educating Rita is a realistic play of two acts and fifteen scenes which depict profound changes in the lives of Rita and Frank. It is what is known as a 'two-hander' because only two characters are seen on stage. In Act One, we see Rita's difficulties and epiphanies as she struggles to enter the new world of an Open University course. Her mentor for the journey is Frank, a cynical academic, who, to his own surprise, becomes captivated by her. Her endeavours are hampered by the opposition of her husband and, the end of the act, sees the end of their marriage. In Act Two, Rita moves with increasing confidence into her new world, but at the same time she moves away from Frank, needing his help less and less. This creates conflict which builds throughout the act, to explode into a violent argument in Scene Five. This conflict is resolved in the last scene, with both Rita and Frank moving on, Rita to a life of her own choosing, and Frank to 'exile' in Australia. Conflict is seen as a significant dramatic technique.

Intertextuality

We can find intertextual allusions to both the Pygmalion myth and to *Frankenstein* in the play. The former, which is the basis for both George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and for the later musical, *My Fair Lady*, describes the transformation of a woman by her mentor. She outgrows him and wishes to go her own way and try to determine her own fate. This has obvious parallels with *Educating Rita*, where Rita leaves Frank behind as she moves into the world. Frank makes reference to the more sinister *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley, where a monster is created by Dr Frankenstein. He

feels that not only does Rita wish to move away from him but he does not much like the new personality he has helped to form. Other works of literature are also alluded to and have symbolic significance. For example, Macbeth is a character who undergoes great transformation and comes to self realisation.

Language

Social class is established in the play by the way Rita and Frank speak. In the first scene, Rita bursts in, talking quickly. She uses a fair sprinkling of expletives in her conversation. Her lack of education is obvious in the way she says, "wanna" and drops the final 'g' of words, as in "shoutin' " and "smokin' ". Words are shortened as when she says, "Don't y' " instead of "Don't you" and "cos" instead of "because". Her speech is very imprecise as when she says, "With the inflation an' that" and ungrammatical as in "on me own". She swears frequently and unselfconsciously, saying "fuckin' ", "bleedin' " and "crap". She uses slang frequently. *Macbeth* is "dead good" and Trish is "dead classy". But as Rita's education proceeds, her speech becomes less idiosyncratic. Although she still drops the final 'g' and uses expressions such as "gonna" and "dunno", she uses less slang and fewer expletives. She uses affected language for a period but realises it as such as she becomes able to discern things for herself.

By contrast, Frank's speech is that of a typical academic. It is measured, considered and grammatically correct. He uses "erm" a great deal, suggesting that he is thinking before speaking, in contrast to Rita. His choice of elevated diction and sophisticated vocabulary attest to the fact that he is an educated person: The words, "patina", "masochism", "partisan" and "sobriety" stand as examples. We only hear Frank swear when he is very drunk and

has been reported by his students. "Sod them — no, fuck them!" he fumes.

Tone

Frank can be quite witty at times. He inverts the idiom and tells Rita that "there's less to me than meets the eye" and he makes a ridiculous case for feeling comfortable in Australia, because "the Australians named their favourite drink after a literary figure" and notes they got the spelling wrong.

Humour is created in the play by Rita and Frank failing to understand each other because of confusion and a clear dichotomy over the way language is used. In the first scene, Frank, attempting to discover who Rita is, asks, "You are?" She thinks it is a statement rather than a question and asks, "What am I?" It is not just an amusing exchange which foregrounds the key theme of identity and self-knowledge; it illuminates the gap between their social classes and backgrounds. As such, Rita's transition can be mapped through a change in language and her use of humour. Rita used humour to cover her inadequacy. This is seen when an academic asked her whether she was fond of Ferlinghetti and she almost replied, "Only when it's served with Parmesan cheese". Rita's transition involved a growing awareness of appropriateness and the knowledge needed to provide a sensible answer. She actually replied, "...I'm not too familiar with the American poets." (Act Two Sc One).

Symbolism

There are a number of important symbols in the play. The window is one of them. It represents a barrier between Rita and the 'real' students who sit on the lawn and talk. When her confidence has been enhanced by the experience of summer school, Rita tries to open it but it will not move. Frank's comment that "it hasn't been opened for generations", suggests his willingness to leave matters as they are rather than attempt to change them as Rita does. While Rita embraces transition, Frank resists it.

The door to Frank's office is an important metaphor. The first time she visits him, she has difficulty opening it. This symbolises the difficulty of someone like Rita entering the academic world. Later, Rita oils the lock so that the door opens more easily. This can be seen as Rita overcoming the first (physical) barrier to her aspirations as she later overcomes other (emotional, social and mental) barriers.

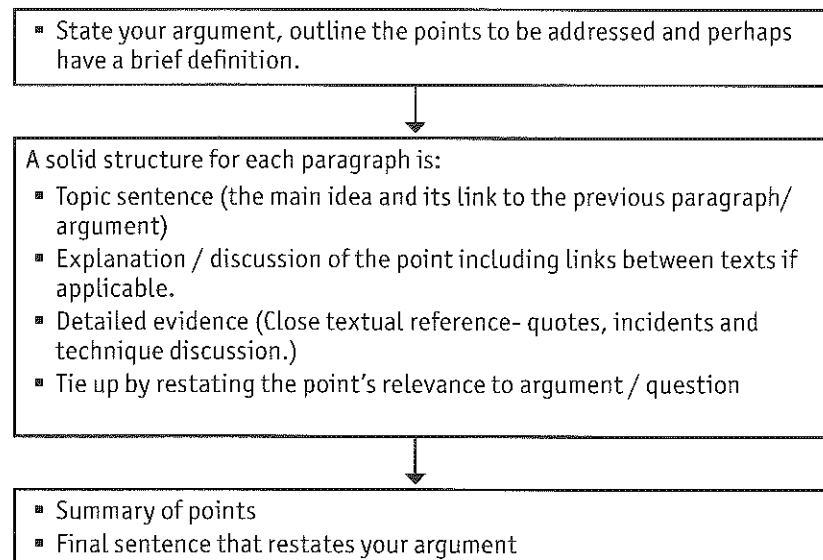
References to new clothes also act as symbols of transition. After being at Summer school Rita is dressed in "new second hand clothes" and "She twirls on the spot to show off her new clothes". At the end of the play Frank gives her a new dress, as befits an "educated woman". Thus, clothes, as in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, can be seen to symbolise social class and identity.

THE ESSAY

The essay has been the subject of numerous texts and you should have the basic form well in hand. As teachers, the point we would emphasise would be to link the paragraphs both to each other and back to your argument (which should directly respond to the question). Of course, ensure your argument is logical and sustained.

Make sure you use specific examples and that your quotes are accurate. To ensure that you respond to the question make sure you plan carefully and are sure what relevant point each paragraph is making. It is solid technique to actually 'tie up' each point by explicitly coming back to the question.

When composing an essay the basic conventions of the form are:



As well as this basic structure you will need to focus on:

Audience – For the essay the audience must be considered formal unless specifically stated otherwise. Therefore your language must reflect the audience. This gives you the opportunity to use the jargon and vocabulary that you have learnt in English. For the audience ensure your introduction is clear and has impact. Avoid slang or colloquial language including contractions (like doesn't, e.g., etc.).

Purpose – The purpose of the essay is to answer the question given. The examiner evaluates how well you can make an argument and understand the module's issues and its text(s). An essay is solidly structured so its composer can analyse ideas. This is where you earn marks. It does not retell the story or state the obvious.

Communication – Take a few minutes to plan the essay. If you rush into your answer it is almost certain you will not make the most of the brief 40 minutes to show all you know about the question. More likely you will include irrelevant details that do not gain you marks but waste your precious time. Remember an essay is formal so do not do the following: story-tell, list and number points, misquote, use slang or colloquial language, be vague, use non-sentences or fail to address the question.

ESSAY QUESTION

Read the question and essay outline. Use the outline to help guide your writing. Practise the essay questions listed after the sample essay, attempting to write under exam conditions – a definite forty minute time limit and with no outside distractions.

You must also practise other types of responses. A number of these are suggested after the sample essay.

QUESTION

*“Experiencing transition involves difficulty as well as triumph.”
Discuss this question, making reference to your set text, as well as to related texts of your own choice.*

A few notes about the question:

- Remember that the actual question is asking you what you have learned about the representation of how individuals experience and learn from transitions.
- The question is to point you in the right direction but you must define the terms carefully.
- Take care to examine the prescribed text in sufficient detail and always with reference to the concept of “Exploring Transitions”.
- You must have quotes and textual references to display a good knowledge of your prescribed text and related material.
- The recommended breakdown is to spend approximately sixty percent of your time on your prescribed text and forty percent on your related.

ESSAY RESPONSE

*“Experiencing transition involves difficulty as well as triumph.”
Discuss this question, making reference to your set text, as well as to related texts of your own choice.*

The word ‘transition’ implies change, and change rarely comes without pain and stress. The movement into a new world may be physical, emotional or mental and will involve facing challenges and overcoming difficulties. Rita, the exuberant main character of Willy Russell’s play, *Educating Rita*, achieves a successful move into a different world but finds that she must surmount many difficulties and that her transition comes at personal cost. The immigrants depicted in Shaun Tan’s picture book, *The Arrival*, struggle with difficulties when they experience the transition of moving to a new country and suffer as a consequence, before creating a successful new life. In *Dead Poet’s Society*, the film directed by Peter Weir, the boys are encouraged by their charismatic teacher to move fearlessly into a world beyond the familiar one they know but find that such a move can have great costs as well as great rewards.

Rita, the street-wise, fast-talking, main character of *Educating Rita*, embarks on an Open University course because she wants more out of her life. She is discontented – “out of step” with her husband, family and friends – and wants to learn “everything”, hoping that an education will allow her to move into a different world, one where she has some “choice” about the direction of her life.

The difficulties of Rita’s transition are immediately obvious to the audience in the first scene of Act One. The stuck door is a metaphor for the effort required to make a change. Rita’s quest

for education begins with a physical difficulty to overcome and continues with her being challenged by emotional difficulties. Rita is uncomfortable in the first scene because she is in an unfamiliar situation. Her discomfort is revealed by her talking fast, swearing and moving about the room commenting on its contents, rather than sitting down and allowing Frank to interview her. It is clearly not easy for her to begin to change her life as she desires.

As Rita begins to progress through her course, she encounters emotional difficulties. Act One Scene Seven reveals that Rita has moved away from her working class world, but does not feel ready to enter the middle class world. The catalyst is a dinner party at Frank's house to which she has been invited. Suffering a loss of self-confidence, she joins her husband and family in the pub. It is here that she realises that she does not feel adequate to attend the dinner party and converse on an equal basis with Frank and Julia's friends, but equally, neither is she comfortable with her peers in the pub. "I'm a freak," she declares bitterly, "I'm a half-caste." She suffers acute emotional distress at this realisation.

Rita's pursuit of an education comes at the cost of her marriage to Denny. Denny neither understands nor supports her choice and the conflict between them escalates throughout Act One, with his savage action of burning her books in Scene Five and his ultimatum in Scene Eight which leads to her moving out. Although clearly suffering, Rita shows some insight into Denny's behaviour. She describes his "wonderin' where the girl he married has gone to" and later she comments that "he said I'd betrayed him. I suppose I had." However, despite her emotional pain, Rita will not be swayed from her path and she forges on.

Rita's transition is not only a series of challenges and difficulties. It is also a path which brings her discovery, excitement, triumph and self-discovery. Rita has an epiphany in Act One, Scene Four, when Frank leads her into the realisation that literature mirrors real life and offers her insights into her own experience. Later, Rita goes to a performance of *Macbeth*, expecting it to be "dead borin'" but finds it is actually "dead good...like a thriller". Her excitement is such that she rushes off to tell Frank during her lunch break. She makes a dramatic entrance as she did in Scene One, but this time it is excitement which propels her into Frank's office.

The changes Rita experiences involves her moving with increasing confidence into the middle class world of educated people. By the time she takes her exam, she has come to a point where she realises that her journey so far has given her the ability to choose. She says, "I had a choice. I chose, me." Although her path into the world has been beset with challenges and difficulties, she ultimately feels triumph at what she has achieved and that is, a degree of control regarding her future..

Rita has a less rosy view of the educated, middle-class world to which she has aspired by the end of the play. She sees her new friends as fallible – Tyson is "a bit of a wanker" – and understands her own motivations better. In the final scene, she tells Frank, "I was so hungry...I didn't want it to be questioned." Her view of her new world has become more realistic. Rita has successfully achieved her transition and is a more confident and self-aware woman.

In Shaun Tan's atmospheric wordless picture book, *The Arrival*, immigrants are depicted meeting and coping with difficulties

in a new country. The strangeness and unfamiliarity of the new environment is suggested in a number of ways. The picture of the ship's arrival in a major city shows the immigrants gazing at bizarre statues in the harbour. They do not match anything in the responder's experience and thus, convey effectively how confronting they must be to the new arrivals.

Another difficulty is language. The writing the main character sees on labels and signs is incomprehensible. He cannot understand or use the language, much as Rita neither understand nor use the right educated language in the early part of her journey towards a better education.

However, as in Rita's case, the immigrants have times of triumph. The main character forms friendships and his world becomes brighter. This is effectively suggested by the progression from dark to light in the drawings. The composition also changes as within frames the immigrant is increasingly framed with another person, rather than being alone. Clasped hands and shared experiences are depicted to reveal a transition from alienation and confusion to acceptance.

Finally, as in Rita's case, the main character achieves a successful transition into his new environment, bringing his family to join him. The final pages of the book depict his daughter, totally at home in her new country, extending help to a newcomer. It is a symbol of how well the family has coped with this transition.

In *Dead Poet's Society*, the film directed by Peter Weir, the boys at an elite boarding school are encouraged to embrace the world by their teacher, John Keating. Inspired by their mentor, they resolve to "seize the day". This comes at great cost for Neil who

changes under Keating's influence and defies his father. The consequences of this are tragic. Todd, his roommate, suffers from paralysing shyness and to change and achieve his potential, needs to overcome this. A key scene shows Keating masking Todd's face so that he is able to speak out and release his creative abilities. The scene contains many close-up shots of the masked Todd and Keating, who is holding Todd and encouraging him to keep speaking. The audience is aware of the extreme difficulty Todd is facing in overcoming his shyness and shares his triumph when the mask is removed and he receives the affirmation of his peers. This scene is the beginning of Todd's successful transition, one which was formerly closed to him because of his shyness. Todd is worlds away from the ebullient Rita but in both cases, negotiating a transition involves painful change before they can move confidently forward.

In all of these texts, experiencing a transition involves difficulties and challenges with which to grapple before the desired outcome is achieved. Russell conveys this struggle and triumph through characterisation and dramatic techniques, Tan conveys it visually using visual techniques and filmic techniques are used to depict the struggle and triumph of transition in the film, *The Dead Poet's Society*. Rita achieves the outcome for which she has hoped from her education – the ability to choose the future direction of her life and move forward confidently – after surmounting many emotional difficulties. This is her triumph. The immigrants in *The Arrival* achieve a new life in a new country after coping with problems of unfamiliarity and communication. In *Dead Poet's Society*, Todd, at least, appears ready to 'seize the day', having overcome the difficulties of shyness. In all of these texts, we see that to achieve a significant transition may be fraught with difficulties, but it may also bring the desired reward.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Attempt these in a forty minute time allocation, to help prepare you for examination conditions.

1. "Those who set out to experience transitions often discover themselves." How true is this of *Educating Rita*? Include reference to related texts.
2. How has your study of *Educating Rita* and related texts broadened your understanding of the concept, "Exploring Transitions"?
3. "Experiencing a period of transition usually comes at a cost." Discuss this statement with reference to your text, *Educating Rita*, and related texts.
4. Has the context of your prescribed text and one related text totally shaped representation of the issue of "Exploring Transitions" within the two texts? (Hint – argue against this one and present a thesis which also argues for the importance of text, text type and relevant techniques as per your module title.)

nb. If your essay question does not mention society or context and values, text types or forms and techniques or transitions specifically, mention them in your response and incorporate them into your approach to the set question. They are part of the rubric and will have relevance. They must, however, be incorporated into a focus on the actual question.

OTHER TYPES OF RESPONSES

It is crucial students realise that their responses in the examination, class and assessment tasks will **NOT** always be **essays**. This page is designed to give guidance with the different types of responses which are now required.

The response types covered in the exam may include some of the following:

- Writing in a role
- Journal/Diary Entry
- Brochure
- Point of view
- Radio interview
- Television interview
- Letter
- Feature article
- Speech
- Report
- Essay

Students should familiarise themselves with these types of responses and be able to write effectively in them. You should practise each one at some stage of your HSC year.

Sample Questions

Willy Russell is participating in a television panel entitled *New Worlds*. Russell will discuss his play, *Educating Rita*, and share his view of how experiencing transitions affects people. You must make reference to related texts as well as to your set text.

Write a speech to be given to an audience of Year Eleven students who are embarking on their study of the play, *Educating Rita*. Discuss how the study of *Educating Rita*, as well as related texts helped you to understand the concept of "Exploring Transitions"

You are invited to create a web page for students who will study *Educating Rita* next year. Write a plan for the site which will help students to understand the text and alert them to aspects they may find challenging when studying the text. Your site must include close reference to related texts.

Create a feature article with the title, "New Worlds to Conquer". Include reference to *Educating Rita* as well as to your related texts.

Willy Russell is being interviewed on the local radio station, about his motivations for creating his play, *Educating Rita*. Write a transcript of the interview. You must include reference to other texts as well.

Create a brochure for mature-age students with the title, "Exploring Transitions". Explore the concept, making reference to your prescribed text as well as to related material.

ANNOTATED RELATED MATERIAL

Text One: Novel

Looking for Alibrandi Melina Marchetta

Penguin
1992
ISBN 0 14 036046 8

Josephine Alibrandi is a girl of Italian Australian background in her last year of school. She is a scholarship girl at an exclusive school and feels out of step with most of the other students whom she sees as having perfect lives due to their money and position.

Josephine feels constrained by her Italian family and longs for her 'emancipation' from them. Over the course of the year, she has experiences which shape her. She meets her father and develops a relationship with him, she has a relationship with a boy from the local high school and she loses a friend to suicide. All of these experiences help her to forge a stronger identity. She realises that money and position are no guarantee of a perfect life and that she is in charge of her own destiny.