**Stage 2 English Literary Studies**

**Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts**

**Critical Perspectives Task**

**Purpose**

* To consider factors that affect different readers’ interpretations of a text

**The Task**

Analyse the film *Jindabyne* through two of these perspectives:

* Feminist
* Intercultural
* Ethical

**Assessment**

Your response should be up to 1000 words or equivalent in multi-modal form. Written responses may be in essay or short answer form. Multi-modal responses may be one of the following:

* PowerPoint
* Photo Story
* Oral presentation
* Dramatisation
* Other – see teacher before proceeding

**Critical Perspectives Task: Jindabyne**

*Jindabyne*, a 2006 film by acclaimed director Ray Lawrence, is based on the short story, “So Much Water, So Close To Home,” a prominent example of Raymond Carver’s ‘dirty realism’. *Jindabyne* is itself a transformed text, and the transplanted, Australian setting invites the audience to explore substantial issues through both intercultural and moral perspectives.

The film’s protagonist is Claire and her behaviours are compelling. She presents as being understandably outraged by the indifference of her husband Stewart and his fishing friends toward the girl’s body. Their failure to take timely action is also harshly judged by the police, and many others in the small township. Local police officer Jimbo berates the fisherman saying, “We don't step over bodies in order to enjoy our leisure activities…. I'm ashamed of you. The whole town's ashamed of you.”

While the validity of Claire’s similar response is not altered by revealing that she abandoned her new born child Tom for eighteen months, it makes her moral confidence seem somewhat disingenuous. This causes the audience to ask questions. Postpartum depression is undoubtedly horrible for all, but why does she seemingly care more for a stranger than she did for her own son?

**Intercultural perspective**

Race is consciously employed in this film. While in Carver’s story the identity of the murder victim Susan is not crucial, in *Jindabyne* she is revealed as Aboriginal. Some in the community suggest that the men’s disregard, if not caused by her race, is certainly exaggerated because of this. Stewart and Carl’s businesses are subsequently vandalised, and our moral pendulum again swings. Should the fishing party’s neglect then allow for willful crimes against their property? The central couple continues to argue and Stewart proclaims, “I told you. Nothing happened. We just got stuck, that’s all. Jeez, I don’t know what all the fuss is about, I really don’t.”

With her patience and marriage collapsing Claire attends Susan’s memorial service; an Aboriginal “smoking” ceremony designed to cleanse the participants. Somewhat inexplicably Stewart, Carl and Rocco appear too, the audience is asked to presume, having accepted that their inaction by the river was wrong.

While this display of ethical and racial reconciliation is commendable it is also problematic. The local Aboriginal community exists on the periphery of the town, but is also constructed passively by the filmmakers because its only narrative role is to allow the more powerful, white, male characters to achieve absolution. Others have also noted that in this Indigenous ceremony the use of “The Way That I Love You,” albeit a song by celebrated Australian songwriter Paul Kelly, is culturally discordant, and reinforces the idea that the Aboriginal community is still only seen, but in moments of significance, not heard. Tellingly, both the film’s conclusion and soundtrack choice reinforce outdated, destructive power dynamics in which certain voices are silenced while others are privileged.

**Moral criticism**

*Jindabyne* invites moral consideration, but doesn’t automatically impose its own view. In this Claire is again at the centre, notably as the audience is made aware that Claire is pregnant when, due to morning sickness, she is seen by the children vomiting. At no point do we witness her discussing this with Stewart, but we are privy to a conversation she has with her employer, a pharmacist, about abortion. In keeping with the film’s frequently open-ended nature her decision is not revealed to us. That she is so outraged by her husband’s treatment of a dead woman, but then refuses to inform him of her pregnancy and the possible termination of his unborn child’s life adds to the film’s moral ambivalence.

Claire is profoundly concerned about Stewart’s unravelling behaviour, and questions his suitability to again become a parent. Is hers an appropriate home into which to bring a new child? We also consider the likelihood that she could abandon the new sibling, just as she did Tom. But, are disturbed domestic circumstances sufficient justification for abortion? Or is she simply being selfish in her secretive contemplation of this? The director doesn’t take sides, but suggests that modern morality is complex, and taking responsibility can be difficult.

Billy and Elissa are used by the screenwriter in juxtaposition to the other couples. Stewart only discloses the incident after being caught out by Claire whereas Billy and Elissa “stay up all night” talking about what happened. As such theirs seems to be the healthiest relationship, or is this merely an indicator of their age? What ethical learning can we take from their decision, a few days later, to leave Jindabyne? Why do they flee? Are they merely young and furnished with the freedom that comes from having no authentic investment in the town? Or do the community’s racial tensions mobilise them, given Billy’s guilt by association? With his relative powerlessness could we have expected him to make independent decisions in necessary conflict with the older, socially superior men during the fishing trip?

Perhaps, for the audience, the film’s setting is instructive. As part of the Snowy Mountains scheme the town was relocated in the 1960’s, but with only a handful of the buildings moved. It would have been simple for the original town to have ceased to exist: submerged as old, forgotten architecture. But it didn’t merely sink below the water, and with tremendous communal energy is today thriving in the clear mountain air. Could this geographical and public redemption be metonymic for its contemporary citizens? Courtesy of this key creative decision, Lawrence is suggesting that we should continue to talk, don’t stay trapped by our past, and strive to remain hopeful. The flimsy truce noted between Stewart and Claire at the smoking ceremony reflects this, and when Stewart says, “I want you to come home Claire,” the audience sees a shift in their relationship, and is left with a sense of delicate hope.

**This critical perspectives task is assessed as B**

Performance Standards for Stage 2 English Literary Studies

|  | Knowledge and Understanding | Analysis | Application |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | Detailed knowledge and understanding of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts.  Thorough knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Detailed knowledge and understanding of a range of stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Perceptive analysis of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.  Perceptive analysis and evaluation of the complex ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the interpretation of texts.  Perceptive analysis of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Perceptive analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Sophisticated use of a wide range of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.  Detailed and appropriate use of evidence from texts develop, support, and justify responses, with textual references incorporated fluently in discussion.  Use of precise and fluent expression, which is appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| B | Knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in most texts.  Knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Knowledge and understanding of a range of stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Clear analysis of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.  Clear analysis and evaluation of the complex ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.  Clear analysis of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Clear analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Use of a range of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create coherent texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.  Appropriate use of evidence from texts to develop, support, and justify responses, with textual references incorporated in discussion.  Mostly accurate and fluent expression, which is appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| C | Knowledge and understanding of some ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts.  Knowledge and understanding of some ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Knowledge and understanding of some of the stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Some analysis of ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values.  Description, with some analysis and evaluation, of ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.  Description, with some analysis, of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Some analysis of ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Competent use of conventions, and/or stylistic features to create texts that address the meaning and intention of the task.  Competent use of evidence from texts to develop, support, and justify responses, with some use of textual references in discussion.  Generally fluent and clear expression, which is mostly appropriate for audience and purpose. |
| D | Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a narrow range of ways in which ideas and values are represented in texts.  Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a narrow range of ways in which authors use stylistic features to communicate ideas.  Some knowledge and restricted understanding of a few of the stylistic features and conventions of different text types. | Description of the ideas and values represented in texts.  Description of some ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the reading of texts.  Some description of similarities and differences between texts in comparative tasks.  Recognition of some ways in which different critical perspectives inform critical interpretation. | Use of some language features to create texts that address the meaning and intention of the task in a limited way.  Some use of evidence from texts to develop, support, and attempt to justify responses, with use of a narrow range of textual references.  Occasionally clear expression, which is appropriate for some audiences and purposes. |
| E | Simplistic knowledge and very restricted understanding of the way in which an idea or a value is represented in a text.  Limited knowledge and restricted understanding of a restricted range of stylistic features used by authors.  Limited knowledge and restricted understanding of different text types and conventions. | Reference to an idea or value represented in a text.  Limited description of a way in which a stylistic feature is used to influence the reading of a text.  Simplistic description of a connection between texts in a comparative task.  Reference to a critical perspective. | Attempted use of some language features to create texts that attempt to address the meaning and intention of the task in a limited way.  Restricted use of evidence from texts to develop and support a simple response, with minimal textual references.  Emerging development of control of expression. |