**Stage 2 English Literary Studies**

**Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts**

**Critical Perspectives Task**

**Purpose**

To provide students with the opportunity to:

* consider factors that affect different readers’ interpretations of a text
* develop an understanding that a text may be interpreted from a range of critical perspectives and that each may emphasise different textual features.

**Description of Task**

Read Chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby*.

There are many different ways in which we can ‘read a text’. These readings are influenced by the lens through which we view the text.

In order to understand that there can be multiple readings of any text:

* Firstly, make notes on the chapter from your personal perspective to cement your own understanding of the text.

This is a ‘Reader Response’ perspective: interpretation of the text based on the reader’s particular background, and the active interactions between the reader and the author through the medium of the written word.

* Next, consider the text from the following two perspectives:
  + Historical Criticism: examines the context in which a work was written, including facts about the author’s life and the historical and social circumstances of the time.
  + Gender: examines the consequences of the social construction of gender in literary works and the role gender plays in the writing, reading and interpreting of literature

Choose one of these perspectives, and develop your critical perspectives response to this text.

**Description of Assessment**

Show how the position adopted through a critical perspective reflects that particular interpretation.

You may consider the following in developing your response.

Historical Criticism

1. How is the class divide of 1920s America represented in the chapter?
2. Show how the context in which the novel is written and/or set is reflected in this chapter.
3. How does this chapter reflect aspects of the author’s life?
4. Consider the setting and how it is used to symbolise the ideas of wealth and position which are explored in the chapter.

Gender

1. Consider the interactions between the female or male characters in the chapter. Explore the balances of power and discuss how these are shown?
2. How are female or male characters depicted? Consider the social and historical context of this work.
3. Look for gender stereotypes and explore how they are either reinforced or challenged.
4. What role does gender play in the development of this chapter?

**Assessment Conditions**

A written response of up to 1,000 words which may be either an essay or a series of short responses, or the equivalent in multimodal form – to be negotiated with the teacher.

Historical Criticism

**Consider the setting and how it is used to symbolise the ideas of wealth and position which are explored in the chapter.**

Post war America was a very different place to the still largely 19th Century inspired society which existed before the Great War. There were new opportunities for people to change their financial circumstances; new jobs for men and changing attitudes towards women in the workforce characterised this optimistic era. Though not publically defined until 1931 by James Adams, ‘the American Dream’ had been born: a social order “in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable…regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”

However as F. Scott Fitzgerald explores in his era defining novel, *The Great Gatsby*, this laudable dream for all was in fact, by the early 1920s, mutating into the pursuit of happiness through the attainment of material possessions. Of all the characters in the novel, it is the novel’s namesake, Jay Gatsby who best symbolises this pursuit.

At the beginning of Chapter 5 Nick Carraway, the narrator and the embodiment of Midwestern traditional values, describes Gatsby’s mansion with a touch of alarm when he returns home and finds ‘Gatsby’s house, lit from tower to cellar”. Fitzgerald’s description of Gatsby’s house is designed to symbolise Gatsby’s new wealth, and his blind faith in the fact that he can use his money to attain his dream. At the same time the description throws into sharp relief, this character’s new wealth and Nick’s much more modest circumstances as the latter is in fact returning to his rented, somewhat tired bungalow at the edge of Gatsby’s estate. Gatsby absentmindedly explains that he had “been glancing into some of the rooms” while Nick’s response to the house is contrastingly one of awe, ‘Your place looks like the World’s Fair.” For Gatsby however, the house is but a means to an end; a lure to attract Daisy, the embodiment of his dream. The idea that the nouveau riche, represented by Gatsby, seek wealth in the pursuit of happiness is then born out in the events which follow.

Further into the chapter, Fitzgerald again uses aspects of setting to explore the contrasting circumstances of these two male characters. Preparing for the clandestine meeting with the love of his life, Gatsby wants everything perfect. Nick only notices through Gatsby’s gaze that there is a clear divide between where his ‘ragged lawn ended and the darker, well-kept expanse of his began”. The ragged lawn again represents Nick and more widely the middle class, while the darkness of Gatsby’s lawn suggests his secretive desires hidden beneath the well-kept façade of a rich man.

While the social divide between Nick and Gatsby is reflected in their homes and surrounds, the divide between those from ‘old money’ and the nouveau riche is symbolised through aspects of the interior of Nick’s home when Gatsby and Daisy finally meet there. Fitzgerald highlights the division between the two through Gatsby’s awkward stance. ‘…his hands still in his pockets…reclining against the mantelpiece in a strained counterfeit of perfect ease (he) leaned back so far” that his head rested ‘on the face of a defunct mantelpiece clock”. In contrast, Daisy is seated ‘frightened but graceful, on the edge of a stiff chair”. Associating Gatsby with the broken clock and positioning him in such an informal pose, Fitzgerald emphasises how out of place this character is in the world of the woman he desires. While she maintains an air of grace and composure despite the discomfort she feels, Gatsby fumbles and struggles to maintain an appropriate demeanour. Therefore the setting of this intimate encounter reinforces the idea already established by the author that these characters are from different worlds and will never be equals.

Finally, when the setting changes to Gatsby’s home, the characters, are described as wandering through the opulent rooms. Once again the contrast between the social classes is obvious. Gatsby hopes to impress his love with his almost vulgar show of wealth while her response is understated as she remarks only “with enchanting murmurs”. His ostentatious show of his newly found wealth is contrasted with Daisy’s much more measured reactions to the display, and this foreshadows the ultimate failure of Gatsby’s dream to be one with Daisy in the world he has created to attract her.

**Word count 708**

*The Great Gatsby* – Gender Criticism

**How are female stereotypes either reinforced or challenged in Chapter 5 of *The Great Gatsby?***

During the 1920s when the novel *The Great Gatsby* was both written and set, traditional female roles were being challenged. This was in response to a number of factors; during WW1 women had undertaken roles which were traditionally the domain of men and they were keen to remain in the workforce; in 1920 women were granted the right to vote and with that their social freedoms expanded. Inevitably women who adopted a more modern approach to life were given a name which defined them. ‘Flappers’ were criticised by the more traditional elements of American society as facile and promiscuous but they were often intelligent and well educated women seeking to free themselves from the restraints a society where the woman’s place had been defined as home and hearth.

It is during this period of social change which challenged female stereotypes, that F. Scott Fitzgerald set his novel *The Great Gatsby*. While secondary characters such as Jordan Baker exude a Flapper persona, the central female character, Daisy Buchanan, is much more stereotypical. In Chapter 5 Daisy is initially introduced as coquettish yet calculating. This conflicting nature is in evidence during the clandestine meeting of Daisy and Jay Gatsby at go-between Nick Carraway’s home. Indeed right from the beginning of the chapter Daisy appears to deliberately embrace the definition she coins earlier in reference to her daughter; the role of “a beautiful fool…the best thing a girl can be”. When Nick agrees to contact her to arrange afternoon tea with Gatsby at his home, Fitzgerald uses the phone call between Nick and Daisy to highlight an aspect of her character which we see throughout the early stages of the novel. In response to Nick’s invitation to tea and his repeated insistence, “Don’t bring Tom”, Daisy coyly replies with, “Who is Tom?” While described by Fitzgerald as an ‘innocent’ reply, the reader senses this is in fact the response of one who enjoys games and secrets, one who enjoys the idea of playing the ‘fool’ while manipulating the men around her. In contrast to the ‘new woman’ of the era, Daisy is portrayed as someone who has learned to survive in the old world and she is so adept at this persona, she is not willing to relinquish it.

Nick’s later description of her face ‘dipping sideways beneath a three cornered lavender hat,(looking) out …with a bright ecstatic smile”, further strengthens the argument that Fitzgerald is presenting a stereotype of a woman who smells and looks good but whose gaze is calculated to quietly disarm those with whom she makes contact. However she then suggests that Nick may be in love with her and that is why he has asked her to come alone, so the reader is again confronted by the idea that in this world women are objects to be desired.

For much of the rest of the chapter, Daisy is portrayed in very traditional terms. When he enters the room after leaving the couple alone, Nick finds her crying, “her face smeared with tears”. While Gatsby glowed with the confidence of a man once again in charge of the situation, Daisy tries to wipe away her tears and checks her appearance in the mirror. Similarly when Gatsby boasts about his house Daisy’s response is a passive one of “enchanting murmurs” and she is again brought to tears by the beauty of the shirts he displays before her as a symbol of his wealth and his worthiness as a suitor.

Fitzgerald then chooses to reprise her coquettish role in the closing scenes of the chapter when Daisy exclaims that she would “like to just get one of those pink clouds and put (Gatsby) in it and push (him) around”. The obvious reference to pink as a symbol of all things girlish and the fanciful nature of the comment in general, seals the character of Daisy within the stereotypical role of a woman who has few options. To survive in her traditional world, she must present herself as woman without the capacity for deep thought, one who is influenced by superficial things rather than having the ability to offer intelligent, informed conversation.

As the chapter concludes, Fitzgerald uses the reflections of his narrator on that afternoon to present the idea that even Gatsby must have been able to see that Daisy was just a flawed human being the same as the rest of them, that she “tumbled short of (Gatsby’s) dreams. But then the final description of her is offered. “…that voice held him, with its fluctuating and feverish warmth”. Once again Fitzgerald suggests that the central female character is bound to her feminine role and even in her most treacherous moments, she still relies on the gaze of a man to define her.

**Word Count: 792**

**Total: 1500**

**This critical perspectives task is assessed at B+**

**Knowledge and understanding**

**Ku1** Detailed knowledge and understanding of ways in which ideas, perspectives, and values are represented in texts. They confidently address two critical perspectives - historical and gender - showing a definite understanding of the context of the novel and time period particularly regarding the social change that was occurring.

**Analysis**

**An1** Clear analysis of the ways in which texts represent ideas, perspectives, and values; they connect the world of the text to the historical and social context and explore the influence this has on the authors construction of the characters in regards to their behaviour, values, status and the roles of women.

**AN 2** Clear analysis and evaluation of the complex ways in which stylistic features are used to influence the interpretation of texts. A wide range of stylistic features are incorporated into their analysis supporting their claims and adding weight to them. For example social class is explored when “Nick only notices through Gatsby’s gaze that there is a clear divide between where his ‘ragged lawn ended and the darker, well-kept expanse of his began”. The ragged lawn again represents Nick and more widely the middle class…” or a point raised earlier is expanded in “Nick’s later description of her face ‘dipping sideways beneath a three cornered lavender hat,(looking) out …with a bright ecstatic smile”, further strengthens the argument that Fitzgerald is presenting a stereotype of a woman who…”

**AN 4** Two varying critical perspectives are explored: historical criticism and gender criticism. Concepts associated with gender in the second section are embedded in the exploration: the way in which women are defined; the social challenge to gender stereotypes; women as objects to be desired; women presenting themselves as ignorant in order to be socially acceptable; women made valuable by the gaze of male attention. These ideas are implicit within the section. Concepts about historical criticism are less clear: the writer tends to explore events that occur in the novel and the role of setting, rather than using those features to demonstrate a historicist reading.

**Application**

**An1** They clearly address the meaning and intention of the task. The piece is clearly structured, directing the reader throughout their analysis; they establish the context of the text and perspective in the opening paragraph for each critical perspective before working through their evidence in a considered manner.

**App 2** A range of applicable examples are used, which are detailed and appropriate. In most cases these are incorporated fluently into the discussion, with only a few examples not as well integrated. These references to the text ably support the individual points being made.

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. |