# SACE Board Logo2023 English Literary Studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2023 assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

Across the assessment types for this subject, students can present their responses in oral or multimodal form, where 6 minutes is the equivalent of 1000 words. Students should not speed-up the recording of their videos excessively to condense more content into the maximum time limit.

If a video is flagged by markers/moderators as impacted by speed, schools will be requested to provide a transcript and markers/moderators will be advised to mark/moderate based on the evidence in the transcript, only considering evidence up to the maximum word limit.

If the speed of the recording makes the speech incomprehensible, it affects the accuracy of transcriptions and it also impacts the ability of markers/moderators to find evidence of student achievement against the performance standards.

School Assessment

Teachers can improve the moderation process and the online process by:

* thoroughly checking that all grades entered in schools online are correct.

Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts

Teachers can elicit more successful responses by:

* requiring a range of text forms – including essays, considered paragraphs, multimodal pieces, annotated scenes, and, if suitable, comparative writing.

The more successful responses commonly:

* showed a strong analytical approach and established the development of an argument in terms of how authors position readers to develop ideas and viewpoints. Therefore, those students who could expand their analysis beyond how devices shape an understanding of theme and character to how ideas, values and perspectives are developed achieved more highly against the performance standards
* demonstrated clear evidence in terms of connections between texts in comparative writing tasks, rather than writing paragraphs with ‘blocked’ discussion of texts
* showed a range of text forms — including essays, considered paragraphs, multimodal pieces, annotated scenes, and if suitable, comparative writing
* conveyed insight into the range of ways in which authors of different text types use such conventions and stylistic features to influence readers
* used evidence appropriately and fluently to support observations
* communicated in a register that was clear, logical, and convincing
* demonstrated an understanding of literary metalanguage and used it effectively to support their responses
* often used a clear, individual voice, demonstrating a distinct and unique writing style and a lack of reliance on group scaffolding.

The less successful responses commonly:

* created formulaic texts that only included character analyses or theme discussions which limited students’ ability to discuss their knowledge and understanding of how authors position readers to contend with issues within texts
* adopted a perceived academic style or ‘overwriting’ that served to make their work less precise and clear and often involved convoluted sentences or misused terms
* approached the critical perspective task as if the perspective in question was a device to only explore aspects of characterisation rather than a ‘lens’ through which to interrogate ideas, perspectives, and values
* attempted to answer questions that were limiting rather than challenging; for example, writing on a general theme without any requirement to analyse and develop a clear point of view
* included ‘blocked’ quotations rather than embedding ‘pithy’ quotations
* examined only one perspective or two very similar ‘lenses’ in the critical perspectives task (e.g. moral and philosophical, or feminist and gender)
* examined more than two perspectives, which generally lead to less developed insights
* created texts that often seemed ‘formulaic’ and were in essencem, only slight variations of the same response, with students following the same argument, discussion points and conclusions
* attempted comparison that was either arbitrary in nature or too ‘blocked’ and without appropriate analysis of similarities and differences
* produced texts that required additional basic editing and formatting
* created multimodal responses (e.g. a discussion of critical perspectives over a shared meal) that were either poorly executed in terms of creating a persona for the audience to suit the form and/or did not allow for close analysis but more superficial comments on readings of texts.

Assessment Type 2: Creating Texts

Teachers can elicit more successful responses by:

* requiring different text types for the two tasks to avoid repeated text types such as two persuasive texts, etc. This can limit achievement in Ap 1, KU2, and KU3
* dissuading students from choosing source texts in the transformational task that possess limited literary merit; for example, artwork such as paintings and photographs, or very popular songs, where the emphasis is more on musical effects and production values rather than lyrics with sophisticated and perceptive qualities.

The more successful responses commonly:

* demonstrated an in-depth awareness of the text type (its stylistic features and conventions), audience, and purpose
* demonstrated an understanding and analysis of devices in both texts within the transformational task
* showed breadth and creativity in the development of different text types across the assessment type
* conveyed skill in creating a persona and in identifying a target audience in oral text productions
* ensured there was the provision of evidence. Teacher grades and comments were supported, where possible, by videos, audio recordings, cue cards, transcripts, photographs, and other relevant artefacts
* conveyed an understanding of audience and purpose relevant to each text type
* showed thought to the ‘weighting’ of each section of the transformation task to enable sophisticated insights into the similarities and differences between the source text and transformation
* created transformation tasks where the text was clearly converted or reimagined from the source text but still explored a similar concept or idea
* discussed the contemporary issue investigated along with an evaluation of the group processes including group life and group roles.

The less successful responses commonly:

* read notes in oral presentations without due consideration of the audience and purpose elements of a speech or presentation or the relevant text type
* repeated text types, for example, two persuasive texts, etc. This can limit achievement in Ap1, KU2 and KU3
* adopted a monotonal voice in presentations without considering register and audience
* created recounts where there was minimal evidence of thought given to the development of ‘voice’ or the skill of indirect observation
* were not clear in regard to the conventions of the text type they were creating
* resorted to a ‘retelling’ of the text types rather than comparative analysis in the transformational task
* included lengthy writers’ statements, shifting the emphasis to analysis
* wrote step-by-step statements of how they wrote their transformations, rather than analysing connections and ideas between the texts
* used source texts in the transformational task that lacked literary merit or devices; for example, artwork such as paintings and photographs, or very popular songs, where the emphasis is more on musical effects and production values rather than lyrics with sophisticated and perceptive quality
* created transformational tasks where the source text was too similar in text type and style to the transformed text
* created straightforward informational texts that contained minimal literary or aesthetic merit, thus limiting the opportunity to draw on their knowledge and experience of genre and literary devices
* wrote only brief or cursory comments in the writer’s statement.

The subject outline states on page 9 that ‘students evaluate some of the literary conventions of the original and transformed text types’ but by employing photographs, artwork, or musical compositions, this reduces the students’ ability to achieve highly against KU2, KU3, An1 and An2. If students are passionate about these art forms, then these could be explored in the second AT2 task. For example, a short story in which a painter, musician or photographer struggles to achieve their artistic vision.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

Part A: Comparative Text Study

This task involves the choice of one text that has been shared by the class paired with an independently selected text and results in an essay comparing both texts of up to 1500 words. The teacher may specify which shared text is to be used, or provide opportunity for students to select from the range of text types studied: drama, prose, poetry, or film. When students select poetry as a text for the essay it is advisable to narrow the study to the work of one poet and multiple poems and a range of stories by one author if they select short stories.

The more successful responses commonly:

* involved the selection of an independent text with literary merit that provided ample scope for detailed analysis
* involved a focus on a manageable concept that was able to be explored within the limit of 1500 words
* were the result of well-developed questions that included a comparative element, a sense of the role of the author, and an element of tension that led to a well-considered answer
* involved an argument that was clearly comparative and involved an exploration of the similarities and differences between texts
* involved a line of reasoning within and between paragraphs so that each unit of thought was logically structured and the whole essay involved a carefully organised argument
* involved an appropriate introduction that foregrounded the central thesis and argument of the essay
* involved well-considered paragraphs that started with clear topic sentences and were structured cohesively with logical transitions
* involved final paragraphs that avoided repetition and instead took a ‘big picture’ approach to the question, finalised the argument, and drew convincing conclusions that supported the overall thesis of the essay
* involved fluently incorporated references to a range of stylistic features and conventions
* involved the exploration of the features of the text types being analysed and drew attention to the contrast between stylistic features when the text types differed
* congruently connected the stylistic features identified with appropriate evidence and a valid effect (positioning the reader/viewer or presenting an idea)
* kept devices at the forefront of their analysis, supporting their overall argument or line or reasoning.
* involved evidence that was fluently embedded into the line of reasoning so that quotations, for example, were naturally incorporated into sentences
* when selecting a television series more successful response focused on an episode or a shorter arc than an entire series
* were polished responses in which students had: checked spelling, particularly of key words such as authors’ names and terms central to the metalanguage being used; appropriately used punctuation, particularly of problematic elements such as apostrophes, colons and semi-colons and the delineation of titles; applied the correct techniques of quoting from texts; had carefully checked the accuracy of word choices, particularly in ensuring the correct use of verbs; had been careful in the use of synonyms, realising that words have particular nuances and choosing an uncommon or unfamiliar word might inadvertently result in using it out of context.

The less successful responses commonly:

* had a question that was either too general or which limited the scope of their response or did not have a comparative stem
* did not have a structured argument and were, instead, a collection of observations about texts that lacked a holistic line of reasoning
* involved a sequential, non-comparative exploration of texts
* involved only a few very lengthy paragraphs in which a logical structure was not sustained or many small paragraphs that skimmed over the texts
* sometimes wrote in a convoluted or overly wordy style that lost clarity
* paraphrased or incorporated quotations without acknowledgement into their response
* quotations involved large slabs of quotation that were not integrated into the line of reasoning
* were a recount of events, or descriptions of characters, rather than an analysis of thematic concerns and stylistic features
* focused on a descriptive discussion of author biography rather than textual analysis
* involved the labelling of stylistic features, either without analysis of the way in which these features were used to reinforce/present ideas or the provision of examples that were not clearly connected to that device or explanations about the effect of the feature that were illogical
* focused on an individual poem or short story as one of the texts that did not provide students with ample material to construct in-depth arguments
* were unbalanced, giving much more attention to one text than the other
* included images from films that did not add to their analysis, rather distracted from it, and often meant the reader was left to infer meaning.

Assessment Type 4: Examination

The texts displayed a rich range of language, stylistic features, and conventions, and both literal and figurative meanings. This allowed access for less able students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. However, the level of analysis possible in these texts also provided opportunities for more able students to demonstrate higher order thinking and sophisticated performance, particularly in relation to the level of depth they provide in their analysis and the ways they structure their responses. A differentiator was how they explored the nuances of each question and how they compared texts in question 3. Students did not have to write on all four texts, they could write on three. More successful responses drew out different aspects of the texts they discussed while less successful responses tended to repeat material across responses.

The quality of student responses was pleasing, and there were few short answers and unfinished papers. Students seemed confident and comfortable working and communicating in this medium, and teachers had clearly prepared their classes for the task. In further developing responses to the examination, it is worth noting the following:

* Students who planned and organised their responses developed more successful answers than those who may have written a lot of material but allowed responses to become unstructured and repetitive. Very long paragraphs became convoluted and lost focus. It is important that students understand that quality, not quantity, attracts better marks.
* While there is some facility to copy and paste sections of text within the electronic platform, students who integrated quotes and examples into the line of reasoning fared better than those who used the cut-and-paste function to insert material without wisely incorporating it.
* Practicing editing electronic responses to tasks during the year is highly recommended. It would be good advice to students to ‘reflect before you write’ and/or certainly to review and edit what has been written, even if the time put into this means writing fewer words in each answer.

The more successful responses commonly:

* addressed the question, ensuring that all material was relevant to the answer provided
* answered the question immediately rather than beginning with generic observations that were largely irrelevant
* avoided the repetition of material organised the responses around clear ideas that were logical and accessible or around a concept, creating a more focused response and allowing them to develop a complex and thought-provoking stance
* ensured that the stylistic feature being explored clearly connected, in a logical and demonstrated way, to an idea or ideas
* avoided didactic explanation of stylistic features that relied on discussion about an implied audience (e.g. ‘the metaphor makes the reader think about…’)
* avoided exploring the effect of stylistic features as generalised emotional/cognitive outcomes (e.g. ‘helps the reader be more interested in the text’; ‘makes the text more enjoyable’ etc.)
* used specific labels of the stylistic features that revealed an appreciation of the metalanguage appropriate to the text type
* were aware that authors are in control of the text; authors use/explore/construct etc
* used sophisticated metalanguage and appropriate examples when discussing conventions and stylistic features, and clearly connected these with an effect (in positioning the reader and emphasising ideas)
* provided detailed evidence from the texts to support points and ensured that these references supported the idea being explored
* chose succinct quotations that were integrated into the line of reasoning and avoided copying large slabs of text
* understood the conventions of the text type represented in the examination, particularly features of opinion pieces, narratives, and memoirs
* made connections and contrasts between texts when comparing, discussing texts in an integrated way
* understood that ‘How’ in each question implied what stylistic and language features have been used by the authors
* appropriately divided their time, paying heed to the recommendations of length as an indication of the relative ‘weight’ of the question
* selected key stylistic features of the texts about which to write, rather than following a formula that led to the exploration of peripheral techniques
* avoided slipping into recount by centring the answer on the question and ensuring – when appropriate – that a particular stylistic feature was at the forefront of the analysis
* wrote with accuracy, precision, and an appropriate application of terminology.

The less successful responses commonly:

* struggled with structuring their answers; they wrote topic sentences that simply repeated the question and did not provide a thesis statement in answer to the prompt
* used a list-like approach to organise the response (‘also… additionally…furthermore…also…’) and slipped into recount by not maintaining a focus upon the central idea at the start of points
* struggled with sentence structure where the sentences ran-on, or in which the subject/verb agreement was inaccurate, or in which word choices made the meaning obscure
* poor verb choices also affected these responses, particularly when describing the actions of the author/s (‘the author transcribes the characters’; ‘the author elucidates the plot’ etc.)
* colloquial or non-conceptual adjectives inhibited the sophistication of the writing (describing ‘strong imagery’ or ‘heavy metaphors’ etc.)
* often relied on quotations without explaining or unpacking them or did not provide evidence to support their claims
* discussed characters as if they were real people, not constructs of the authors
* listed techniques and did not provide examples or when they did, they did not show how this information helped to address the question; paragraph/s often became observations about stylistic elements without a logical connection to a concept
* used metalanguage incorrectly, mislabelling devices and leading to incorrect evaluations and analysis
* tended to repeat the ideas/devices that had been explored in previous questions
* separated the two texts in the comparative question into individual paragraphs and therefore did not address the comparative requirement of the question
* may not have proofread their work as they often had grammar and spelling errors such as author’s names being misspelled, no capital letters, wrong there/their etc.

Suggestions about possible answers to the questions

The texts are accessible but also display a range of language and stylistic features and conventions and both literal and figurative meanings. This allows access for less able students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. However, the level of analysis possible also provides opportunities for more able students to demonstrate higher order thinking and sophisticated performance, particularly in relation to the level of depth they provide in their analysis and the ways in which they structure their responses. Some examples of differentiators may be how they explore the nuances of each question, how they organise their responses, and how they compare texts in Question 3.

The choices students had to make, in Question 2 and 3, means a degree of mental gymnastics is required, and students may have divided their time more between thinking and writing.

\***Note**: It is *not* required that students address everything in the suggestions below. These are a guide to *possible* responses students may provide. Equally, students may write about concepts or devices *not* covered in these notes.

Notes on the questions

Question 1

In the article, how does Andrew Miller attempt to persuade the reader of the importance of characterisation? (Approximately 250-350 words)

This question asks students to consider how Miller uses a range of language and stylistic features to support his argument about the importance of characterisation. The student may focus exclusively on what they perceive as persuasive devices, or they may broaden their discussion of devices. While it appears a simple question, Miller uses a wide range of devices and approaches to appeal to and persuade the reader.

Students might consider the following:

* Andrew Miller suggests characterisation is ‘at the heart of all great literature’, using this metaphor to persuade the reader to share his point of view and suggesting the centrality of characterisation.
* He begins with the thesis ‘Strong characters are crucial to fiction.’ Then, after offering a counterargument about fiction itself being almost impossible to parse or that there is something unnatural or artificial about dividing it up into parts like ‘characterisation’, he makes another big claim about character being superior to plot.
* He downplays the importance of plot, claiming that it is ‘is a very secondary matter’, the emphasis on ‘very’ suggesting plot's unimportance in relation to character.
* Miller addresses the reader directly, arguing that ‘You do not need to know how to spell’ and ‘You do not need to know much about grammar’, the modals of prohibition suggesting the unnecessary nature of what are usually considered essential elements of good writing.
* Through figurative language and visual imagery, Miller reveals the creation of characters does not necessarily, need to be fabricated, readers can create them from the ‘mental aquarium’ in which they keep those they meet.
* Using assertion and a hint of hyperbole, he supports this by saying that ‘strong characters are at the heart of all great literature and always will be.’
* He reinforces this argument by presenting another bold claim that accentuates the negative: ‘A writer who does not create convincing characters will fail.’
* Quickly switching to the positive and using a series of anaphora, ‘You do not need to know...’ he suggests that by mastering character, you master all you need to know about writing. Having asserted characterisation's importance through such declarations, he uses self-deprecation to counteract the effects of overstatement, characterising his own strategy as ‘insist[ing] so immoderately" and employing the histrionic rhetorical question: ‘how in God's name is it done?’
* This takes him onto the safer ground of providing writing tips, the central purpose of the article, providing a metaphor for the writer as a self-reflective ‘umpire’, constantly observing his thoughts before moving onto the careful observation ‘of those around him.’
* The shift in tone from assertive and definitive at the start to the more tentative, personal, reader-focussed tone at the end is persuasive because, in this shift, Miller emphasises respect for the reader as a fellow traveller in the writing endeavour
* Miller's closing argument, already stated in the article's lead, makes a convincing point about the importance of characterisation bringing us closer to ‘a deeper human understanding’ of ourselves.
* Moving from a rational argument to an emotional one, from confident, even extreme assertions to what he calls a ‘radical uncertainty’, he posits the true importance of characterisation is to pose ‘honest questions about our nature and the nature of those about us.’
* Miller's superlative use in the first sentence of his final paragraph highlights why the reader should see characterisation as important: ‘At its simplest, its barest, characterisation is about a writer's grasp of what a human being is.’  Expressing the essential quality of good characterisation, Miller attempts to persuade the reader of the fundamental purpose of the author's craft, a purpose founded in an understanding of humanity and at which, according to Miller, characterisation lies at the very heart, as suggested by his initial metaphor.

 Question 2

Answer any **one** of the questions. (Approximately 150-250 words)

Select the option that you are responding to from the following list:

* In the short story, what does Isabel Allende suggest is special about Bella Crepusculario?
* In the novel, what is interesting about Italo Calvino’s choice of narrative perspective?
* In the memoir, what connects the author Roberta Esbitt and Jack, despite their differences?

Question 2 asks the student to choose one question/text to respond to. Each is a 'what' question that focuses on understanding the texts and allows students to show that they have engaged with the chosen text. The questions do not ask for analysis of devices, though students may choose to bring evidence of devices to support their response. While option 2 mentions narrative perspective, they are not required to analyse its effect but may do so.

 Option 1 - students might consider:

* Isabel Allende suggests there are many things special about Belisa Crepusculario. The first suggestion of this specialness is in the opening sentence, where we learn she had named herself after she had ‘searched until she found the poetry of 'beauty' and 'twilight' and cloaked herself in it.’
* No ordinary person, ‘baptised or ‘given’ a name ‘by their mother,’ Belisa chooses her name because of its poetry, which fits her occupation, another element suggesting she is special; she ‘made her living selling words.’
* The importance of her occupation and recognition she has a special gift with words is seen when Allende writes, ‘Some people waited for her from one year to the next, and when she appeared in the village with her bundle beneath her arm, they would form a line in front of her stall.’
* Belisa is remarkable in the eyes of many as, from sharing stories, she can unite people by connecting towns separated by distance where she shares the ‘true stories’ of the lives of individuals and events.
* Allende shares there is a sense of the religious in what Belisa does, especially considering she can 'minister' to the people. She is also extraordinary because she is an eloquent orator who can either engage the masses with 'verses' or help those in need by becoming a confidante of dreams and desires in the 'penning of love letters'.
* Her ability with words contains a mysterious quality, as she could give "the gift of a secret word to drive away melancholy" and that, importantly, "Each person received his or her own word". Her way with words is, therefore, something quite special, beyond that of a mere storyteller.

Option 2 - students might consider:

* Italo Calvino’s choice of narrative perspective is interesting because it is metafictional in quality, drawing attention to the reader’s reading of fiction and directly addressing the reader.
* It is ‘interesting’, i.e. not conventional, that Calvino addresses ‘the reader’ in the second person and directly references the text they are reading: ‘You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, If on a winter’s night a traveller. Relax. Concentrate...’
* What is not clear is whether the ‘you’ addressed throughout is the fictional character implied, or the actual reader of the actual text on the page…or both.
* The rest of the extract encourages the reader to make themselves comfortable and away from distractions, ensuring full engagement with the text without interruption.
* The casual tone of the narrative perspective creates a sense of playfulness and a feeling of the author being right there with the reader.
* When asked, ‘Well, what are you waiting for?’ the narrative perspective suggests the author can see the reader’s action (or inaction). This tone builds to suggest that the text is so worthwhile, that the reader will not want to move from their spot once engrossed in the novel, using an imperative of ‘Do it now, because once you’re absorbed in reading there will be no budging you.’

 Option 3 - students might consider:

* Esbitt identifies different and similar experiences of family and the past that connect her to her husband, Jack. She refers to ‘disparate trajectories’ and ‘backstories’ that ‘are not dissimilar’ as she considers what brought them together.
* She acknowledges Jack’s parents, as refugees to Australia post WW2, had a much tougher migration experience than her parents. She suggests these shared cultural and migrant backgrounds were the basis of their connection, partly made clear in the simple statement ‘we share a cuisine’ followed by the enthusiastic list of foods they discovered in common.
* Esbitt speculates about Jack’s indifference to the past and family he has never met, even as she declares her enthusiasm for the honeymoon they are about to share. Jack has close ties within his small family, whilst Esbitt ‘left my own family behind in a puff of dust half a lifetime ago’ to embrace her European cultural roots.
* Whilst the honeymoon sees them ‘both paying homage to the past’ for her, it is an enthusiastic re-engagement with a world she knows and loves; for Jack, it is a first experience of a world he has no experience of, undertaken reluctantly, in obligation to a dying father’s wish that Jack ‘seek out their ancestral home’.
* The extract concludes with Esbitt affirming the importance of nurturing and valuing the cultural connections they have in common, with a nod to the wedding tradition in many cultures – ‘I share with him my valuable dowry of family folklore, my Middle European ghosts, in an attempt to make up for what his parents excised.’

 Question 3

Choose any **two** of the three texts. Compare the ways in which the two authors explore aspects of human nature. (Approximately 350-550 words)

Select the option that you are comparing from the following list:

* short story by Isabel Allende and Novel by Italo Calvino
* short story by Isabel Allende and Memoir by Roberta Esbitt
* novel by Italo Calvino and Memoir by Roberta Esbitt.

There must be a comparative element to this response. It is not expected each paragraph will involve a continual movement back and forth between texts/authors, but there must be some discussion of the similarities and differences in how the authors use devices to ‘explore aspects of human nature’. While students are required to look at both similarities and differences it is not expected they do so equally. Integration of the response may be a discriminating factor of stronger responses.

Example comments for *two* of the three possible pairings covering all three texts. Students will come up with other ‘aspects of human nature’ not mentioned here.

Pairing 1 example ‑ the human need for belonging and also uniqueness - Esbitt and Allende. Students might consider:

* Esbitt reflects on the 'different trajectories' but similar 'backstories' that led to the relationship between herself and Jack and suggests whilst there is a human need for close family ties, seen in Jack's story, there is an equally important need for a sense of belonging to culture and history and a larger story through generations
* Esbitt indicates no close nuclear family ties, 'I left my own family behind…' but reveals a rich and varied connection with her historical roots and the language and culture of places in her family background
* Her marriage to Jack is presented as bringing together the various threads of the human need to belong
* The last line emphasises connection: 'I am a lone addition to Jack's family….but I share with him my valuable dowry of family folklore, my Middle European ghosts, in an attempt to make up for what his parents excised'. This gives weight to Jack's father's dying request that he should 'seek out the ancestral home' and reconnect to the culture and past of the parents' post-war migration as refugees.
* Emphasis on the importance of language and story to a sense of belonging and identity ties Esbitt's text to Allende's. In her description of Belisa's impact on those she meets from village to village, Allende conveys the importance of language and story in creating and preserving a sense of belonging across time and place – 'everyone knew who she was' – she performed 'stories' for a fee, she embellished stories with details that connected villages and villagers: 'people learned about each other's doings, about distant relatives, about what was going on in the civil war'… 'people paid her to add a line or two: our son was born, so and so died…'.
* Both explore the need for and complexities of human connection. Allende discusses how Belisa Crepusculario 'sold stories' and that ‘this is how she carried news from one town to another.' The townspeople's eagerness to learn of news from elsewhere is shown in Allende's anaphora as she writes, 'and that was how they learned about each other's doings, about distant relatives, about what was going on in the civil war', emphasising a need for human connection despite the tyranny of distance.
* Esbitt's understanding of the need for human connection is similarly explored through her recognition of the connections within families, despite membership at times being 'cryptic and peripheral', the imagery comparable to Allende's distant townships.
* Esbitt, however, sees that family trees fail to express the emotion of being part of a family, stating metaphorically they present 'only dry lineage, not the hot pressure of relations.' Esbitt suggests, "Better to map circles of influence, radiating colours and casting shadows, with bold connections that pulsate with anger and laughter, and spidery traces that hint at longing and regret carried across generations.'
* Metaphorical circles', 'shadows', and 'spidery traces' emphasise the ups and downs of human connections and are echoed by Allende in the list of Belisa's wares as she 'delivered verses from memory', 'improved the quality of dreams', 'wrote love letters' and 'invented insults for irreconcilable enemies', similarly suggesting human connection is complicated and, at times, difficult to navigate.
* In her understanding of the power of words and stories, Belisa draws her clients together because they hear the same words and same stories, though they are physically apart. Crepusculario, because of her storytelling skills, is invested by her patrons with magic powers of healing– 'she gave a secret word to drive out melancholy'.
* Allende, through her almost magical character, alludes to the power of storytelling Esbitt suggests creates and sustains a sense of connection to worlds/traditions beyond family ties, a connection Jack has missed out on.
* Allende shows people are drawn to the spiritual – the desire for the magic word in this case – and the need to know the bigger story beyond the individual experience of the world. Esbitt's version of the relationship between herself and Jack, and what she sees the relationship as representing – is a bringing together of the two kinds of belonging - the close relations of the individual family group and the wider experience of culture and history that fleshes out each family's story.
* Esbitt seems to believe such connectedness will make itself known without any need for a conduit, suggesting Jack's fingers might be revealed to be 'common currency', the alliterative metaphor implying the prevalence of his seemingly unique features.
* Esbitt feels the need to aid Jack in achieving some connectedness to his European past and, not unlike Belisa, takes on the role of storyteller in creating such connections: 'I share with him my valuable dowry of family folklore, my Middle European ghosts, in an attempt to make up for what his parents excised. Her metaphor in dowry and 'ghosts', combined with the personal possessive pronoun, strongly highlights her perceived importance of retaining a connection to the past.
* Both explore the human need for connection to people and worlds beyond their immediate time and place and the power of language and culture to make and sustain these connections. In each extract, language and story convey information about the real world and connect people to and create the spiritual world.
* Despite a strong desire for human connectedness, a person's need for uniqueness is recognised by both uthors as an important aspect of human nature.
* Allende's descriptions of Belisa Crepusculario signify her specialness. 'She did not need to peddle her merchandise because from having wandered far and near, everyone knew who she was.' Yet, as readers, we note what she sells are words and stories, and so we must reconcile in our minds the willingness of her patrons to pay for something we tend to regard as free, further highlighting the unique gift she must have.
* Esbitt sees uniqueness less as the gift of a special person and more as a desire to be different from others, a potential reason for Jack's sense of 'supreme indifference' towards his as-yet-unknown family in Europe. She writes, 'Perhaps it is his sense of uniqueness, so dear to his heart, that he is reluctant to relinquish'. She metaphorically speculates such an attitude is borne of necessity through a desire to assimilate in a foreign land, suggesting once more the importance of belonging: 'It is not uncommon to turn one's back on the mother country, as the fastest way to assimilate is to have no other option.' She suggests this has left Jack 'a distant and disinterested stranger, content in the freedom of not belonging'.
* Such contentment connects Jack to the character Belisa, as she is a singular individual with little connection to others; even her name does not connect her to a family. However, while Esbitt appears unconvinced by the need to feel unique, Allende stresses its importance at the end of her extract by emphasising the uniqueness of the 'secret word to drive away melancholy' received by those willing to pay 'fifty centavos.' Belisa herself recognises the need for such uniqueness, as 'Each person received his or her own word, with the assurance that no one else would use it that way in this universe or the Beyond.' The significance of this 'assurance' stresses to the reader the desire of individuals to feel special and unique.
* Both authors present different views on the human needs to belong and to remain singularly unique, Allende suggesting the special gifts of one can assist us in feeling both belonging and individually fulfilled, and Esbitt suggesting something fundamental and inescapable about belonging that perhaps tests the desire to be unique.

Pairing 2 example ‑ human curiosity and how we look for meaning in/give power to words - Calvino and Allende. Students might consider:

* Calvino's second-person perspective is immediate and compelling, arousing reader curiosity. From the beginning, he breaks convention by directly addressing the reader as 'you' and positions them to question the text and their possible role in it; 'You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel…. Relax. Concentrate.'
* Differing from Calvino's second-person, present-tense perspective, Allende writes from a third-person perspective, in the past tense, 'she went by... she journeyed...', which mythologises her character, Belisa.
* Many elements of Allende's story extract are mysterious. The vivid descriptions and images spark reader curiosity. Right from the start, we are introduced to the main protagonist cryptically. The main character's real name is never mentioned, beginning the story with an air of mystery; 'She went by the name of Belisa Crepusculario, not because she had been baptised with that name or given it by her mother, but because she herself had searched until she found the poetry of 'beauty' and 'twilight' and cloaked herself in it.'
* From the first sentence, Allende shows her reader the power of words. Belisa gives herself a new identity centred around the beauty and power of language; she creates her own identity and, in some ways, her destiny as well. She sells words that bring wonder, happiness, and information to people.
* The casual tone of Calvino's narrative perspective, highlighted through rhetorical questions, incomplete sentences, listing and tangential statements, creates a sense of playfulness and a feeling of the author being right there with the reader, arousing curiosity, drawing them in and conveying the power of words to manipulate the reader.
* In his short, imperative commands, Calvino demands focus is given to being in the moment, holding his book, the supposed book being read, immersing the reader in the act of reading and discovering.
* Calvino focuses on the reader arousing their curiosity and suggesting the power words have over them when reading. Allende focuses on Belisa, suggesting she has built her reputation in such a way people are drawn towards her and compelled by her words as if her words have magic.
* As mentioned in Pairing 1 Belisa, in her understanding of the power of words and story, draws her clients together because they are hearing the same words and the same stories, though they are physically apart from each other. Allende suggests that because of her storytelling skills, her patrons invest her with magic healing powers– 'she gave a secret word to drive out melancholy'. Allende, through this almost magical character, alludes to the power of storytelling that binds people/cultures together.
* Calvino speaks to the reader with a litany of actions (filled with imperatives) so 'that[light] will not strain your eyes…' to ensure the act of reading can be treasured and savoured, thereby making the actual art of reading transcendental and evoking the power of words.
* Allende employs lists and adds value to words – both emotional and momentary as people also use her words to write love letters and gain advice; for five centavos 'she delivered verses from memory, for seven she improved the quality of dreams, for nine she wrote love letters, for twelve she invented insults for irreconcilable enemies,' emphasising her and language's mystical powers.
* Calvino employs elaborations, still with imperatives, but increasingly in fragmented sentences. For example: 'Find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat...On top of the bed, of course, or in the bed.' The language imitates the cadences of speech and postures and there is an increasingly urgent tone even as the instructions/suggestions become more absurd, one absurd idea leading to another and appealing to reader curiosity.
* Allende often employs long descriptive sentences and vivid imagery; 'She journeyed through the country from the high cold mountains to the burning coasts, stopping at fairs and in markets where she set up four poles covered by a canvas awning under which she took refuge from the sun and rain to minister to her customers' the power of words driving Belisa across the country to wherever she is needed.
* The reader is teased with Calvino's opening sequence. Whilst there seems to be an internal logic to the grammar in each sentence – the content borders on absurd; Calvino disrupts the reader's expectations of the form of the 'novel' playing on human curiosity. There is something about the absurdity that is engaging, 'Well, what are you waiting for…now don't stand there with your shoes in one hand and the book in another….' and the reader wonders where they are being taken.
* Calvino sustains the over-familiar tone to the end of the passage. There seems to be a logic to the sequence of ideas, and the reader wants to resist the silliness but is held captive and curiosity piqued by the direct address.
* Allende employs elements of magic realism, suggesting that Belisa can help people improve people's dreams, meaning her words are powerful enough to access a person's subconscious. Allende uses this literary style to convey the 'magic' words have; they have a certain power that can get hold of people and influence how they feel.
* Allende uses strategic repetitions; 'words' is repeated several times, reinforcing the power words convey in the extract. The concept that language and literacy are equated with power is clear; her ability with language is a necessity and valued commodity to the villages she visits.
* Calvino employs imagery, simile, and evocative language to giver words a sense of movement and life - ‘Make sure the page isn't in shadow, a clotting of black letters on a grey background, uniform as a pack of mice… the cruel white of the paper, gnawing at the shadows of the letters as in a southern noonday.’
* Both paragraphs/sections end in a way that leaves the reader wondering 'where to next' and with a sense of the prophetic (a choice also made by the editing team). 'Try to foresee now everything that might make you interrupt your reading' - the final word and the form of the extract suggest a disruption of the conventions of the novel form – something challenging that evokes curiosity and adds power to Calvino's seemingly simple words. Allende's section also ends with a sense of prophecy and magic: 'Each person received his or her own word, with the assurance that no one else would use it that way in this universe or the Beyond.'

 Criteria for assessment

* Knowledge and understanding — KU1, KU2, and KU3
* Analysis — An1, An2, and An3 (not An4)
* Application — Ap2 and Ap3 (not Ap1)