

Feature article on belonging with unseen text

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English Paper One: The Extended Response When you ask people what they hate the most about English the majority will say writing extended responses. Essays, lectures, feature articles they all cause great grief to the poor HSC students who have to write them. I believe this attitude is mostly due to the fact that a great deal of students simply don't know how to construct a response. They don't know how to construct a thesis statement, or write arguments that can be backed up by textual support. All these students need is a little assistance, information on how to write something that serves its purpose.

So here is that help, that little bit of assistance that will help you to get the highest marks possible in your extended response for Belonging. Breaking the response up into its primary elements makes the whole process a lot easier and allows you to focus on what is really important. To illustrate this let's take a look at Arthur Miller's 1953 play *The Crucible*, and Jean Rhys' 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. First up, the thesis statement: The most important part of any essay is establishing a solid thesis statement that sets up the tone and structure for your essay.

It is an argument about a specific aspect of belonging / not belonging which you can apply to multiple texts. Your texts are the evidence with which you reinforce your thesis. It's best to prepare three thesis ideas and on the day form two thesis statements which best the question you are given. For example, you could prepare ideas about the nexus between place, power, madness and women. On the day, if the question is about how belonging is influenced by connections to places, you can develop your prepared ideas into a thesis that fits this question.

For example: Connection to place evokes an emotional attachment through shared experience and shared values. Many teachers like you to use two sentences in your thesis; and address the first half of it in the first part of your essay and the second in the second half. So, you could expand your thesis to be: Connection to place evokes an emotional attachment through shared experience and shared values. Moreover, to feel alienated or disconnected from a place often means an individual is estranged from the social and cultural values of this place. This first part of your essay should address the first part of the thesis, using a key scene from the core text. Miller uses the form of the political fable to comment critically on the American McCarthy era, and the fear of communism. His criticism highlights how a positive connection to a group in society founded through shared values and experience can cause people to abuse the power they have in order to retain it. Your thesis statement must include the question, but also your own beliefs about belonging.

You have to argue it so it is better if you believe in what you are arguing. After you have addressed the first part of the thesis you could go on to say. For example, Danforth forges a positive connection to Salem as he recognises that he can exercise the full extent of his power over the people. When Danforth's integrity is questioned, Miller's use of rhetorical questions highlights his need to maintain power within the community, " And do you know that near to four hundred are in the jails upon my signature? And seventy-two condemned to hang by that signature? In this scene, it would probably be wise to also comment on the setting of Miller's play, the courtroom and how powerless individuals can improve their position in

society and forge a sense of belonging by joining the majority. For this you could use the example of Cheever, a man who has gained much power through the court, " I am an official of the court, I cannot keep it". Constructing supporting arguments: As the thesis is the point you are arguing it is wise to back it up similarly to what has been done above.

You need to support you argument no matter what, it is essential, otherwise there is no point to the response. This starts with a topic sentence, switching over to our related text (Jean Rhys' novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*) for some variety. For example: Antoinette has forged a positive connection to her home at Granbois because she knows through experience that only there is she free from the derision of society. This topic sentence is straight from the first part of the thesis statement.

The key terms are taken out and moulded to fit into an idea that can back up what your thesis statement is saying. Your supporting argument would be made complete with analysis to back it up. Antoinette's feeling of belonging to her home is foregrounded in the hyperbole, when she declares to Rochester: " This is my place and everything is on our side. " Rhys uses this to evoke an immovable confidence within Antoinette. Bringing this confidence in place into the foreground heightens the audience's awareness of her demise as Rochester breaks down this connection.

How to integrate textual support: The paragraphs above have arguments, based on the thesis statement that have been backed up with textual support. Textual support is one of the most important aspects of any extended response as it backs up you arguments. You are essentially drawing examples from your text and analysing them to prove your point.

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This process of analysis is called TEE, technique, example, effect. This method combined with your topic sentence makes up a paragraph, which in turn, make up your entire response. For example:

Abigail is disconnected from Salem through her subversive behaviour as she doesn't observe the social and cultural values of this place regarding the expectations of women being passive and obedient. There is the argument, based on the second part of the thesis statement. Take, for example, the dialogue in act one between John Proctor and Abigail, when he comes to investigate the accusations of witchcraft in Salem. Many of the play's key ideas are introduced here, including Proctor and Abigail's affair, " John I am waitin' for you every night. Her motivation for her future behaviour is foreshadowed when she retorts: " A wild thing may say wild things. " This highlights her reluctance to conform to the social and cultural values of Salem. This includes contextualisation of the scene, for the marker, as well as a technique, and example and the effect of it all. In your analysis you are not restricted to using direct quotes as evidence for your argument. Consider Miller's effective use of place. His chosen domestic setting of the bedroom emphasises the inappropriate nature of their relationship.

Furthermore, you could combine this with discussing Miller's use of stage direction to heighten the dramatic tension, for example Abigail behaves " Tauntingly" towards Proctor, " grasping his and before he can release her". Writing an essay for the HSC doesn't have to be hard. 800-1000 words in 40 minutes may seem like a lot, but if you understand how to compose your extended response, everything becomes much easier. It is important that

after you have finished studying the module you keep writing responses about belonging, to keep your arguments alive and your technique strong.