

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 1

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this course assessment component.

The candidate was awarded **22 marks**.

Topic

How does 'The Color Purple' reveal the themes of oppression and empowerment?

Task

This is an appropriate topic with a clear focus on the contrasting themes of oppression and empowerment. The chosen (single) text offers an appropriate level of challenge.

Knowledge and understanding

The dissertation begins with an opening paragraph which has a short plot synopsis, definitions of 'oppression' and 'empowerment', and statements explaining that Celie lies at the heart of both themes in the novel.

The candidate then goes on to establish the fact that Celie's circumstances at the start of the novel place her in an oppressed state as she has been raped by her stepfather, is married off to 'Mr...' and plays a very passive role in the marriage as a 'survival technique'.

The candidate then explains, with the support of some textual evidence, that a woman's role in the household being described would be one of being subservient to male desire and focussed on child-rearing and keeping a house clean, and being somewhat accepting of physical abuse as a part of the marital experience, all of which outline the oppression of Celie in the novel.

The candidate then asserts that Shug Avery 'empowers Celie by becoming Celie's friend and influencing Celie to break away from the traditional views of society and gain independence by herself.' The candidate develops Celie's oppression and liberation as they explain that it is her discovery of letters from Nettie, her sister, hidden by her husband, which push her to challenge the patriarchy, something which empowers her despite her husband's attempt to further oppress her when he retaliates with: 'You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman.' Shug's influence and inspiration becomes more evident in her interactions with Celie which empower her and teach her to love herself, have a renewed relationship with God, to be 'valued and creative' and to become self-sufficient (emotionally and financially) in the world.

The candidate also makes a point concerning Sofia being a role model for Celie, and Celie encouraging Squeak to gain her own voice, therefore cementing ideas of oppression and empowerment in the dissertation.

Fundamentally, the dissertation shows a broad knowledge and understanding of the text, with a relevant approach to the task, which demonstrates a broad consideration of the implications of the task. The line of argument is supported by relevant textual evidence to support the demands of the task, which demonstrates selection from across the breadth of the text.

Analysis

The dissertation has a relevant analysis of a range of literary techniques and/or features of language, as appropriate, which support the line of argument.

The candidate looks explicitly at the epistolary form which offers Celie 'a means of self-expression and is her only outlet'; the symbolism of financial freedom which symbolises 'liberation from patriarchy'; the symbolism of Shug's 'tight red dress' which is symbolic of 'empowerment and control'; the symbolism of Shug calling Celie a 'virgin' being symbolic of 'new beginnings'; the symbolism of the colour purple itself symbolising 'independence and freedom' but also bruises 'highlighting the oppression of black women'; the characterisation of Celie and Shug, with the minor characters Sofia and Squeak illustrating various aspects of oppression and empowerment; the use of non-standard English showing Celie's 'lack of education'; and the use of tone highlighting Celie's 'angrier tone, showing how Celie will no longer believe that she is worthless'.

Throughout the dissertation the candidate refers to 'narrative voice' in a very broad sense, and as such, tends to lose some analytical power at times when analysing the idea of character 'voice'.

Evaluation

The candidate has a relevant evaluative stance with respect to the text and task and based on evidence presented within the dissertation.

In the introductory paragraph the candidate makes the evaluative statement that 'Celie discovers the power of narrative and her personal transformation frees her from her past, reuniting her with the one she loves', and thereafter the evaluative comment is relevant, consistent and broad in its sweep, with comments such as the 'theme of oppression is highlighted through Celie's narrative of abuse but she transforms herself [through] empowerment'.

Expression

There is a consistently accurate use of structure, style and language, including appropriate critical/ analytical terminology, to develop an argument focused on the task. The candidate structures the dissertation logically, and primarily deals with Celie and Shug's relationship as the core vehicle for dealing with the central concerns.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 2

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this course assessment component.

The candidate was awarded **29 marks**.

Topic

Reflecting the Single Story: a literary examination of how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie develops the characters Ugwu and Olanna through their experiences of the Biafran War in her novel *Half a Yellow Sun*.

Task

This is an appropriate topic with a clear focus on the character development of two characters in the novel. The chosen (single) text offers an appropriate level of challenge.

Knowledge and understanding

This dissertation shows a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the text as a whole and demonstrates sustained insight into the issues explored with a full and relevant exploration which demonstrates sustained consideration of the implications of the task.

The candidate begins by establishing a useful historical context to the novel within the opening paragraph and then moves on to the main protagonists as they explain that Ugwu is 'poor, uneducated [...] isolated [...] naïve and inquisitive' and this 'makes him extremely impressionable during the war.' On the other hand, Olanna is described as 'wealthy [...] educated abroad and now mingles with socialites and chieftains.' Her life has been protected albeit she 'thinks she knows the realities of life' but will struggle to cope when she becomes aware of the 'horror and injustice of war'.

Ugwu's naivety is dealt with early in the dissertation when he is a houseboy for Professor Odenigbo and comes into contact with a diverse range of people so different from his insular life in his own village, and this leaves him 'disorientated from culture shock' and an easy target 'for Biafran propaganda'. The candidate also looks at Ugwu's determination to be educated, albeit his education is disrupted by war, and his desire to provide for his family, yet his life away makes him very judgemental towards his family and subsequently 'estranges his family'. Ugwu transfers his loyalty to those he serves, and 'by the outbreak of war, they have supplanted his own family.' Ugwu is 'very impressionable to the war propaganda' and has an admiration for the soldiers in the war, yet he soon becomes aware that 'becoming a soldier ruins you', something that is supported by changes in the poet, Okeoma. Ugwu will learn from his own experiences that it

is merely the fear of the soldiers that instils any respect in the populace, and it is at this point that Ugwu 'finally loses his naïve outlook on life.' Ugwu struggles with life after the army, and on returning home, he sees that all has changed with family and friends because of the effects of the war, and he sees himself as contributing to the destruction of this community, but he retains his determination and 'still achieves his goals' by the end of the novel.

Olanna is introduced as a character who is privileged, yet 'she is unhappy' as although she is 'compassionate', 'her parents are arrogant and her twin sister [...] her polar opposite.' Like Ugwu, Olanna becomes somewhat isolated 'from her family and class' and also like Ugwu, Olanna can be seen as 'naïve', but the war will push Olanna to question her idealistic view of the world and develop Olanna's integrity and self-knowledge as she will have to choose between 'moral values or self-preservation'. Olanna is originally sceptical about the war and its impact, but the reality is driven home when 'her extended family is killed in a massacre', and her naivety is taken from her, as is her scepticism, as this new world teaches her vigilance, but also gives her 'a crippling fear that negatively impacts her life.' Olanna has to challenge her own morality as she uses deception and her social status to free Ugwu, and this she struggles with, with Adichie coming to the conclusion that no one can uphold the most stringent moral standards, and that it is 'an unrealistic goal, especially in wartime.' It is Olanna's visit to the refugee camp which is a key moment in her own development and the readers' understanding of the suffering generated by war: as she has never seen 'how the other half lives' and her reaction is all the more powerful, and it ultimately 'strengthens her moral compass' and allows her to come to the realisation that choosing 'self-preservation over morality [...] does not necessarily make her a bad person – only human.' Finally, Olanna 'has failed to see that the situation could be worse' and by observing Mama Oji's self-sufficiency and strength, Olanna sees that she can also 'develop her own resilience outside men.'

Extensive textual evidence is employed to support the candidate's line of argument throughout the dissertation and it is clearly focused on the demands of the task through the broad but judicious selection of references.

Analysis

This dissertation offers relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques and/or features of language which skilfully strengthen the line of argument of the candidate. These include narrative structure (looking at the efficacy of different narrative points of view, and the narrator's own perceptions, which make 'Adichie's characters broader and more complete'); characterisation (of the two main protagonists but also an understanding of how the interactions with minor characters helps develop the central thematic concerns); setting; contrast; foreshadowing; crucial moments; and the symbolism of owls and wigs, all of which are relevant, accurate, and skilfully support the line of argument.

Evaluation

The dissertation reveals a committed, clear stance with respect to the text(s) and the task and this is skilfully based on precise evidence presented within the

dissertation. There are many explicit evaluative comments evident, each one linked to the textual evidence which has immediately preceded it. For example, the candidate evaluates in a concise manner that ‘the different angles [of narrative structure presents] us with clearer understanding of the motives behind them. The result is a coherent, realistic narrative that successfully maps out character development throughout the war’; and ‘the war tests Olanna’s idealism as her experiences force her to acknowledge humanity’s flaws and how unsuitable an idealistic approach to life is.’

In the concluding paragraph, the candidate summarises that Adichie ‘rejects the single story [and] lets us see her characters’ development from different viewpoints. She does not become unfocussed because of this – instead Adichie crafts each chapter around a key moment in her characters’ arcs [as she] takes us on a journey with compelling, realistic characters that grow to become people who are defined by more than their social and cultural backgrounds.’

Expression

The dissertation demonstrates the skilful and considered use of structure, style and language, including appropriate critical/ analytical terminology, to develop an argument with a sustained and precise focus on the task.

The main body paragraphs are consistently structured in that they are always relevant and concise. However, the penultimate paragraph on Olanna and gender identity is not as cleanly integrated into the overall line of argument as it could be.

There is appropriate referencing of primary and secondary sources and a bibliography is appended.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 3

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this course assessment component.

The candidate was awarded **26 marks**.

Topic

A study of Margaret Atwood's exploration of identity in *The Edible Woman* (1969).

Task

This is an appropriate topic with a clear focus on a particular aspect of this text. The chosen (single) text offers an appropriate level of challenge.

Knowledge and understanding

This dissertation displays a secure knowledge and understanding of the chosen text as a whole and demonstrates some insight into the issue of identity.

The candidate offers a relevant exploration of Atwood's novel and demonstrates a secure consideration of the implications of the task in relation to the central character, Marian. In the introductory section, the candidate refers to Atwood's view of the novel as 'proto-feminist' and touches succinctly on the theme of identity and how the narrative structure of the novel 'is used to show the loss and regeneration of Marian's sense of self'.

The candidate then discusses the 'social pressures' on Marian's identity, including 'the lady down below' which leads to recognising Marian as 'a subdued and passive female protagonist whose identity is moulded by her social surroundings'. This is followed by consideration of Marian's struggle with 'normality' and the motif of eating which is central to the text. The candidate links Atwood's novel to the work of Virginia Woolf to support their assertion that 'a woman is an individual and must find out who she is as such'.

Knowledge and understanding of key relationships in the novel are shown in the detailed discussions of Marian and Peter; Marian and Duncan and Marian and Ainsley.

The candidate also deals with parenthood and how it 'contributes towards Marian's rejection of identity' and the difficulties Marian faces in 'the transition between identifying as a girl to identifying as a mature woman'. Further on in the dissertation the candidate examines how 'the idea of maintaining her girl-like innocence seems to be pressed on Marian throughout the novel' and then discusses the change in narrative as 'Marian's identity reaches a crisis'.

The dissertation ends by identifying the 'powerful message' of the novel; that 'toxic societal traits must end if women are to be able to grow and develop their own identity and shape their own lives'. Extensive textual evidence supports the demands of the task.

Analysis

This dissertation offers relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques and features of language which help to strengthen the line of argument taken by the candidate. These include: characterisation; narrative structure; setting (there is an awareness of Atwood's deliberate placing of the characters in a setting where they are impacted by 'stereotypical gender roles'); the key role the depiction of relationships has in the text; the use of Peter and Duncan as 'devices to symbolise a conservative and liberal lifestyle respectively', and the changes from first to third person narrative.

Evaluation

The dissertation demonstrates a clearly identifiable evaluative stance with respect to the text and this is securely based on evidence presented within the dissertation. There are many explicit evaluative comments evident, each one usually linked to the textual evidence which has immediately preceded it. For example: 'Atwood may be trying to raise the point that a woman cannot be determined by the pressures around her. . .'; '. . . Atwood could be suggesting that a liberal lifestyle is the way forward.'; 'Atwood could be inferring that . . .' and 'This could be read as illustrating the lack of acceptance . . .'.

The concluding paragraph neatly sums up the evaluative stance taken by the candidate.

Expression

The dissertation demonstrates a skilful use of structure, style and language including appropriate critical and analytical terminology. This helps to develop the candidate's argument with a sustained focus on the task. Several sections are structured in a similar fashion, with the discussion of textual evidence culminating in a summative or evaluative comment.

A suitably academic tone is present in the writing apart from the odd, minor lapse ('. . . married women are viewed as being higher up the food chain').

There is appropriate referencing of primary and secondary sources and a bibliography is appended.