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The Pearson English VCE Comparing Guides have been written to meet the new Victorian Certificate of Education English and English as an Additional Language Study Design for 2016–2020 and cover Units 2–4 Area of Study 1 Reading and comparing texts.

The Comparing guides are divided into four sections:

1: Knowing: The Namesake
2: Knowing: Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home
3: Comparing: The Namesake and Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home
4: Writing the essay.

**Knowing the texts**

These sections provide a deep insight into the texts, covering context and author, structural elements, textual elements and ideas, issues and themes. At the end of each section is a set of learning activities.

**Comparing texts**

This section outlines how to compare and contrast the two texts. The two texts are compared and contrasted in regards to: themes, cultural context and genre. This section also provides practical tips and ideas on how to compare texts as well as practice topics.

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**Comparing: The Namesake and Joyful Strains**

- **How to use**
- **Knowing the texts**
- **Comparing texts**
- **Comparing: The Namesake and Joyful Strains**

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Writing the essay

This section provides a step-by-step guide on how students can plan and write a comparing essay. Four different essay styles have been included as well as an essay sample with annotations.

eBook and online resources

Online resources support the comparing of texts and include:

- essay templates
- graphic organiser templates
- worksheets.
The Namesake tells the story of the Ganguli family, who migrated to Massachusetts, United States, from West Bengal, India. It is a story of immigrants and their experience in a new country. The novel focuses on the life of Gogol, born to Indian parents in the United States and caught between two worlds – the world of his parents who still cling to their Indian customs and rituals, and life in the United States as a teenager and young man.

CONTEXT AND AUTHOR

Context
Authors are moved to write texts for a number of reasons including: to question values held by their society, to challenge political and social movements, or to explore self-identity. Jhumpa Lahiri’s parents were born in West Bengal, India, and her family moved to Rhode Island, in the United States when she was two years old. While Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri is her birth name, she goes by her nickname of ‘Jhumpa’. Her teachers claimed it was easier to pronounce, and it has remained with her since. It is this dual identity in Lahiri’s own life, which inspired the protagonist Gogol Ganguli, and the novel The Namesake. Lahiri’s own immigrant experience, the clashing of two cultures and the development of self-identity is reflected in the Ganguli family as they are described across three decades of Indians living in the United States.

■ WEST BENGAL
West Bengal is located in north-east India and is India’s fourth most populous state. During India’s independence from the United Kingdom in 1947, the former state of Bengal was split along religious lines – West Bengal was mainly Hindu while East Bengal was predominantly Muslim. East Bengal became Bangladesh in 1971. West Bengal is noted for its political activism and for 34 years (until 1977) was ruled by a democratically elected government. The region is also known for its cultural and educational institutions – the capital, Kolkata is known at the ‘cultural capital of India’.

■ RHODE ISLAND
Rhode Island is a state located in the north east of the United States, it is part of the New England region. It is the smallest state in size in the United States. The capital of Rhode Island is Providence. Rhode Island is generally described politically as a democratic state and is one of only nineteen states in the United States to have abolished the death penalty. The main ancestries of people in Rhode Island are Italian, Irish, English and French.
Author: Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London on July 11, 1967, raised in Rhode Island, and identifies as an Indian American author. She received the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for her collection of short stories titled *Interpreter of Maladies*. *The Namesake* is her debut novel, written in 2003. It was followed by *Unaccustomed Earth* in 2008 and *The Lowland* in 2013. She currently resides in Brooklyn and is a professor of creative writing at Princeton University.
STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

Genre

The Namesake is both a drama and a coming-of-age story. The reader is introduced to the Ganguli family in 1968, at the beginning of the marriage between Ashima and Ashoke. It moves through the next thirty-two years of important familial moments including religious celebrations, graduations, marriages, deaths and divorce. Readers witness the everyday occurrences in the Ganguli family, from the preparation of Indian food, to the casual conversations between Ashima and Ashoke.

The Namesake also can be categorised as a coming-of-age novel, which follows the protagonist’s character development, from childhood to adulthood. Gogol moves through a number of developmental stages, common in coming-of-age stories, to reach adulthood.

Stage 1: He endures a loss at an early age.
Stage 2: He is thrust into the world, discontent with his environment, wanting to escape and be free.
Stage 3: He experiences repeated clashes between the values and judgments of a rigid society and his own wants and desires. This process is long and difficult.
Stage 4: In time, he eventually accepts the values and judgments of the society, which he rejected earlier.

Plot

The Namesake is divided into twelve chapters, and spans three decades. The chapters do not have chapter names and only some are given year markers. The novel spans large amounts of time in the Ganguli family. Jhumpa Lahiri introduces us first to Ashima and the difficulty she faces in a foreign country, newly married and unaccustomed to the new culture in which she has been plunged. We are allowed access to her intimate thoughts on her new home in the United States, of her homesickness and the longing to be connected to her family in India. This initial storyline overlaps with the introduction of her son Gogol Ganguli. We meet him as a newborn, and follow him through his life into his thirties. In him, we see the reversal of Ashima’s cultural concerns, for him, American culture is a normal way of life and the Bengali traditions seem out of place and uncomfortable. The intersection of these two conflicted characters and their experiences in cultures in which they feel both included and excluded, is the fundamental exploration that occurs in this text.

Did you know?

‘The reader should realise himself that it could not have happened otherwise, and that to give him any other name was quite out of the question.’
The extract at the beginning of a text is referred to as an epigraph. In The Namesake the epigraph is taken from Nikolai Gogol’s The Overcoat. It is a famous short story by Gogol, who was an influential figure in Russian literature. Even Fyodor Dostoevsky is claimed to have said, ‘We all come out of Gogol’s overcoat’.

Nikolai Gogol
Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home is a 2013 collection of memoirs in which writers from around the world explore their experiences in Australia. The collection is edited by Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer.

CONTEXT AND AUTHORS

Context
Expatriation is about leaving a place to begin a new life in another country. Joyful Strains is a collection of memoirs, by twenty-seven authors who have expatriated and come to Australia. The assortment of personal stories provides snapshots into the lives of the writers, and offers many perspectives of Australia and Australian culture. The collection includes stories of new customs clashing with old, of language barriers, of multiculturalism and diversity.

- The contributors to Joyful Strains have come from all around the world.

Did you know?

In Australia almost 30% of the resident population was born overseas. The top five countries of birth are the United Kingdom, New Zealand, China, India and the Philippines. According to the 2011 Census the top five languages spoken at home after English are Mandarin, Italian, Arabic, Cantonese and Greek.
Editors: Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer

Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer are the editors of Joyful Strains. Kent MacCarter is a writer and editor, originally from the United States, now based in Melbourne. He is the author of several poetry collections and is the managing editor of the Cordite Poetry Review. Ali Lemer was born and raised in New York City and she came to Melbourne in 2005. After studying editing at Melbourne University, she worked as an editor at Lonely Planet. Lemer is the author of three travel books.

In MacCarter and Lemer’s ‘Editors’ Note’ they write about their own experiences:

‘As expatriates ourselves, we know what it means to tear away from bonds of home and family to start over in a new country … we too turned our lives upside down to move here … We chose to move here, but many of the writers in this collection were not blessed with the same freedom.’

The editors claim that they put together the anthology because they ‘wanted to give native-born Australians an outsider’s insight into their country. A national literature needs to encompass all Australian stories to truly reflect the modern nation we have become – no matter how we got here.’

Authors

This collection contains works by twenty-seven authors. The memoirs allow the reader insight into how moving to Australia changed the writers, what they think of Australia now, and their views on multiculturalism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and country of origin</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arnold Zable New Zealand</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Zable states that ‘apart from Australia’s Indigenous peoples, we are all descendants of expatriates’. He discusses the battle we face between joy and strain in a new home. He briefly tells of his Polish-Jewish mother and the longing for her own community once she settled in Australia. He describes the collection as one that differentiates and unites us and reiterates that our stories matter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dmetri Kakmi Turkey</td>
<td>‘Night of the Living Wog’</td>
<td>Kakmi and his family emigrated from Turkey to Australia in 1971 when he was a child. He tells of his fascination for television and the unlikely allies he discovers in television personalities as he struggles to find his place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice Pung Cambodia</td>
<td>‘Stealing from Little Saigon’</td>
<td>Pung describes the microcosm that is the Little Saigon market, and the place her mother holds in it. She details the reflection of the traders, their past lives and the ways in which the market runs as a world unto itself, one misunderstood to the uninitiated, or those new to the market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Tumarkin Russia</td>
<td>‘The Beast, the Accent’</td>
<td>Tumarkin, a professional translator, recounts her own arrival in Australia twenty-two years ago, as she translates documents for new immigrants. She feels that her immigrant story is an old one, yet her unshakeable accent is the last trace of her former life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author and country of origin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Sala Netherlands</td>
<td>‘Swarte Piet’</td>
<td>Sala tells of fragmented childhood memories of Saint Nicholas in both Holland and Australia and the disparity between his homes. He traces his mother’s relationship decisions and the impact they had on him and his brother.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meg Mundell New Zealand</td>
<td>‘Confessions of a Ditch-Jumper’</td>
<td>Mundell moved from New Zealand to Australia with little effort or impact. She tells of the absorption of her New Zealand culture and the loss of her self, as Australia simply accepts her arrival with little fanfare or concern. She also fears that her homeland has forgotten her.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paola Totaro Italy</td>
<td>‘Pointing North’</td>
<td>Totaro recounts her traumatic days being in primary school in the 1970s, when she was teased for her ethnicity, and felt like an outsider. As an adult and journalist she describes her struggles with dual citizenship and the concept of ‘the other’. As a London-based journalist Totaro lives and works in neither Italy nor Australia, and she comes to realise that both places have shaped the person she is today.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chi Vu Vietnam</td>
<td>‘The Uncanny’</td>
<td>Vu arrived in Australia in 1979 when her family fled Vietnam as refugees. Settling in Australia, she recounts the sights and tastes of her new home. She tells of the confusion and miscommunication that comes with a new language, a new environment and the fragmentation of herself through this cultural shift.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malla Nunn Swaziland</td>
<td>‘An Unanswered Prayer’</td>
<td>Nunn explores her place in Australia through the lens of her ill grandmother, and the differences in heritage and skin colour in her extended family. She recalls her grandmother’s gratitude for Australia’s opportunity and safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Espeseth United States</td>
<td>‘Staying Away: A Memoir of Wisconsin’</td>
<td>Espeseth reflects on her time in Australia as her best friend is laid to rest in the United States. Their childhood and adolescence is the focus of the piece, as well as the distance between them geographically and metaphorically. She reveals that she does not want to return to the United States, and until she does, for her, her best friend will still be alive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roanna Gonsalves India</td>
<td>‘The Patron Saint of Excess Baggage’</td>
<td>Gonsalves questions her place in Australia after her arrival from India. She uses food as a tool for cultural identification, studies how she fits into the physical landscape as an Indian woman, and raises many unanswered questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle Aung Thin Myanmar (formerly Burma)</td>
<td>‘Backtracking’</td>
<td>Aung Thin explores her Burmese heritage through the words and memories of her parents, which she takes as her own. Inspiration for her comes through the possibility of losing herself. She details the concept of displacement, as she lives in Australia but feels the pull of her Burmese story.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Flynn Ireland</td>
<td>‘Gun for Hire’</td>
<td>Flynn details the frustration of desperately wanting to escape his Irish home while being reminded of his Irishness every day. This forces him into a process of reinvention. He recalls the numerous jobs and trades that allowed him to experiment with identity and thanks Australia for the opportunity to recreate himself.</td>
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Writing the essay

There are many different ways to write compare and contrast essays. Selecting an essay framework for comparative writing can be challenging because essays need to be more than lists of ideas. Rather they should aim to be thoughtful, in-depth analyses of the two texts, *The Namesake* and *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home*. Compare and contrast essays encourage critical thinking, and the more complex comparative models provide more scope to demonstrate these skills.

**SHAPING INFORMATION AND PLANNING**

Once you have read your texts, deconstructed for meaning and prepared your notes, it is time to start to write essays.

This section will model how to:

- work through a topic
- brainstorm a topic
- develop a contention
- create an essay plan
- write different types of essays.

**The topic**

The very first step you should take when approaching the topic is to highlight and identify the key words. It is very important to recognise what the topic is asking you to do. Highlighting and identifying the key words assists you in understanding the specifics of what the topic is asking of you.

Consider the following example:

In what ways, or by what means

The question focuses on one structural element: narrative voice. You will need to explore this in detail, and it will be the tool by which you compare the texts.

How is narrative voice used in *The Namesake* and *Joyful Strains* by the authors to explore differing cultural experiences?

You must analyse how the choice of narrative voice impacts the cultural experience.

**High-scoring responses**

High scoring responses should include the following:

- consistent engagement with the topic throughout
- a well-sustained contention, supported by strong supporting arguments and excellent use of evidence
- complex but well-controlled sentences that use punctuation accurately and purposefully
- formal language of critical analysis used effectively
- accurate and specific details supported by judiciously-used quotes and examples
• weaving of the two texts throughout the analysis
• complex links, which recognise similarities and differences but also go further to establish subtle distinctions.

Before you start

BRAINSTORMING THE TOPIC

Begin by brainstorming the topic. Consider any sub-questions that are raised by the topic, and think about what evidence you have from each text to support these ideas. By brainstorming questions about the topic you will be able to set the boundaries for your response.

Writer’s toolbox


Are the cultural experiences portrayed in the texts positive or negative? Does narrative voice impact this?

Why does Lahiri show three alternate perspectives? Why does she use those three characters?

What is left untold, due to the choice of narrative voice in each text?

What narrative voice is used in The Namesake and Joyful Strains by the authors to explore differing cultural experiences?

Does the narrative voice change throughout Joyful Strains? Why?

What narrative voice is used in The Namesake?

What narrative voice is used in Joyful Strains?

Mindmap: Brainstorming

Creating the essay plan

After you have brainstormed the topic and created a list of useful quotations as evidence, you should begin planning your essay. Your essay plan can be developed using a simple table, and it is a valuable way to consider the most important points that will make up your body paragraphs. A detailed analysis of an essay question should include at least three main arguments or body paragraphs.

Writer’s toolbox

Make sure you are developing an argument and not falling into the habit of storytelling. If you find yourself writing about what happens for the majority of your paragraph, then you are probably storytelling. Try arguing a case by asking Why? and How? in each paragraph.