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How to use

The Pearson English VCE In Focus guides have been written to the new Victorian Certificate of Education English and English as an Additional Language Study Design for 2016–2020 and cover Unit 3 Area of Study 1: Reading and creating texts. In this Area of Study, you are expected to be able to develop and justify your own personal and detailed interpretations of texts.

The In Focus: The Golden Age guide is divided into four sections:

1: Introduction
2: Reading for meaning
3: Responding to text
4: Mastering the essay

The Golden Age

This section provides an introduction to the text The Golden Age, as well as an overview of the requirements of Unit 3 Area of Study 1: Reading and creating texts, including details about ‘Key skills’ and ‘Key knowledge’.

Reading for meaning

This section provides a deep insight into The Golden Age, covering context and author, story and plot, characters, key events, structural elements including style, genre and language features, narrative perspective, ideas and themes, views and values, and symbols and motifs. At the end of each section there is a set of learning activities.
Responding to the text

This section provides a step-by-step guide on how to shape and plan your response to different types of questions and prompts, and includes a list of essay topics. The section outlines how to develop and support your contention and use quotations. At the end of the section is a set of learning activities.

Mastering the essay

This section outlines the different essay types and provides an essay sample with annotations.

eBook and online resources

Online resources support the study of texts and include:

- graphic organiser templates
- worksheets
- essay templates
- weblinks.
The Golden Age

Joan London’s novel *The Golden Age* is set in a children’s polio convalescent home in Perth in the 1950s. The novel explores the themes of the refugee experience, love, memory, fear and isolation. *The Golden Age* focuses on the relationship between two polio sufferers — Frank (Ferenc) Gold, a Hungarian refugee from war-torn Europe whose family had migrated to Australia, and Elsa Briggs, a local Perth girl.

THE STUDY DESIGN

VCE Units 1 and 3 ask you to identify, discuss and analyse how certain features of texts create meaning and shape interpretation. In these units, entitled ‘reading and creating texts’, you are expected to be able to develop and justify your own personal and detailed interpretations of texts.

**Key knowledge and skills**

For this part of the course, you will need to produce both a creative response and a sustained analytical interpretation, known as a text response essay. This study guide helps you to develop a text response essay, although some creative suggestions are also included. You will need to plan, draft and edit your essay, and ensure that it includes relevant, detailed textual evidence.

You will also need to demonstrate a range of different knowledge and skills that you have developed through your reading of the set text.

**KEY KNOWLEDGE**

Your text response should demonstrate that you:

- understand the values the text conveys
- understand how readers can interpret texts in different ways
- understand the various features of a literary text, including structure, conventions, language, metalanguage and other stylistic features.

**KEY SKILLS**

On completion of this unit of work, you should be able to:

- explain and analyse the features of a text and how these influence interpretation
- identify and analyse the implied views and values of a text
- use textual evidence accurately to justify analytical responses
- read and understand different viewpoints to develop an interpretation of your own.
What the examiners are looking for

When writing your text response essay in the examination, you need to complete three fundamental components.

First and foremost, you must answer the given question. This means writing a response that is tailored and relevant to what is being asked of you. Many students fall into the trap of writing all they know about a text, ignoring what the question is actually asking of them. A better text response should demonstrate that you can analyse, understand and discuss ideas relating to the given topic.

Secondly, you must structure your response so that it reads as a properly formulated essay, composed of an introduction, body paragraphs with supporting evidence and a conclusion.

Finally, you need to concentrate your analysis on how the author has used literary devices to create meaning. This means that your analysis focuses not just on characters and plot, but rather on the way the text is written, particularly the language and style.

Checklist

- has an introduction
- develops and sustains a contention
- defines, outlines and explores the question in the introduction
- has at least three body paragraphs
- has a clear point encapsulated in a topic sentence
- uses supporting evidence
- uses a key quotation or quotations
- uses links and connectors between paragraphs
- has a conclusion
- restates and rephrases your contention in the conclusion
- answers the topic clearly, coherently and thoroughly
- uses formal language

Text response essay checklist
Reading for meaning

As you read, you need to become an active reader, seeking out and searching for meaning beyond the literal words on the page. Reading your text for a second and third time and understanding the context and the story will help you to develop the skills you need to competently analyse the literary features within the text.

BEFORE READING

Context
The protagonist of London’s novel, Frank Gold, brings together two historical experiences — the 1950s polio epidemic and the post-war migration of Europeans into Australia.

THE POLIO EPIDEMIC
The Golden Age is set in the Perth suburb of Leederville in 1954 at the height of the 1950s polio epidemic in Australia. From the 1930s through to the introduction of the vaccine against poliomyelitis in 1956, the disease affected more than 592,480 Australians and caused the deaths of 871. Poliomyelitis affected the brain and spinal cord, leading to anything from minor paralysis to almost complete paralysis and even death.

The Salvation Army conduct Sunday School at the Golden Age Children’s Polio Convalescent Home, Leederville, circa 1950s.
The polio epidemic in Australian history was a time of great fear because the disease spread from person to person but nobody really knew how; and worse, it seemed to be able to do so almost within hours.

Kerry Highley, a polio sufferer from the 1950s and author of Dancing in My Dreams: Confronting the Spectre of Polio, explains:

*Parents were really terrified for their children. Nobody could tell them how to protect their kids. And the major fear was that polio seemed to strike without warning. One day they’d have a healthy and happy child running around with their friends and the next day that same child could be lying feverish and sobbing with pain and paralysed. And no-one, neither the government or scientists or doctors could tell them how or why.*

Kerry Highley in callipers during the epidemic in Australia. Callipers are leg braces that support people who are unable to walk properly.
The Golden Age is set in the Golden Age Convalescent Home in Perth, which really existed. At the Home, children who had survived the crucial point of the virus but suffered long-term physical after-effects were sent for rehabilitation.

Sister Olive Penny, the senior nurse in London’s novel, described it as a ‘halfway house ... between the hospital and home’. What was exceptional about the Golden Age was its holistic approach to the patients who had freedom to explore, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and schooling daily so that, when they returned to the world, they were not behind their peers.

The novel references a number of interventions used to assist those who suffered from the disease, as seen right and below.

Children in iron lungs at the Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne. An iron lung helped polio sufferers to breathe because the disease paralysed the muscles in the patients’ chests and they were unable to breathe unaided. Before the invention of the iron lung, many polio sufferers died because they were unable to breathe.

Gillian Thomas at 18 months in a Thomas Splint. A Thomas Splint is a splint to correct deformities of the legs.
**1950s Australia: The Royal Visit**

The response of the ‘colonists’ to the 1954 Royal Visit to Australia by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip, the first reigning monarch to visit the country, gives an insight into the Australian context of the time. The tour took place two years after Elizabeth’s succession to the throne in 1952. The majority of Australians at this time were fervent monarchists, and it is estimated that 75 per cent of the population turned out to meet the Queen and Prince Phillip as they visited different places across the country. Australia is described in the text as ‘a tiny lost tribe on the coast of a huge island, faithfully waiting for a ship from the Motherland.’

In the text, the colonists’ fervour and excitement at the impending royal visit is tinged with the spectre of polio as there is concern that the royal visit to Perth might not take place because of the polio epidemic. The ‘possibility [of the royal visit being cancelled] made headlines, day after day’ because 96 cases had been reported in Perth in two months. Even when the tour does occur, it is adjusted to avoid contact with polio in Australia — the Queen and the Duke docked in Fremantle, but ate and slept on the royal yacht out in the water; thus, physical contact with Australians was avoided.

**Hungary in World War II**

![Map of Europe and the Middle East during World War II](image_url)