GENERAL COMMENTS

In general, student responses to the 2012 Literature examination revealed a sound knowledge of the texts and an understanding of the task. The most successful students were able to offer a focused interpretation that was drawn from one or more of the passages provided, and articulated clearly and explored specifically through the response. These responses showed an ability to work closely with the language and to offer a detailed analysis. Many students were also able to offer a broader discussion of the wider text, and showed an obvious control of language and a sophisticated ability to use language. This ability to respond to the language of the passages is integral to this study, and students need to appreciate the ways in which language creates meaning and affects the reader/audience in a particular way. An understanding of the features of the text and the ability to see the texts as something constructed is very important. In less successful responses there was little sense of engagement. Only the best responses had a sense of the student's own voice.

Most students made some attempt to discuss the passages, but the passages were not always used as the basis of the essay. Sometimes there was evidence of a prepared response rather than an attempt to engage fully with the set passages. Many students wrote a prepared introduction that was not necessarily drawn from or supported by the passages. There was a tendency to narrate the content of the passages rather than to apply an analytical and evaluative process. Too often students offered a reductive reading based on themes – such as youth, madness, memory and marriage – and proceeded simply to work through the text, referring to the passages in little detail and drawing random examples from them to support these particular concerns. Students should realise that their interpretation should be developed from the language of the passages and not the other way around. Some students treated the passages as discrete entities and were not really able to move smoothly between them and the wider text. This was especially true of the responses to poetry and short stories.

Some students struggled to express their ideas correctly and coherently, and others showed a very limited vocabulary. The word 'encapsulates' was used ad nauseam and incorrectly. Other common errors were confusion between the words 'simple' and 'simplistic', and 'childish' and 'childlike'. Students continue to confuse the genre of texts; there was an alarming tendency to see Hamlet, Two Brothers, Stasiland and The Tall Man as novels and The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock as a play. While are perhaps liable to make errors under examination conditions, these mistakes were often accompanied by an inability to fully appreciate the way the particular genre worked, and often students showed little understanding of the plays as drama. Some students placed texts in the wrong century, showed little understanding of historical context (for example, in Stasiland) and confused the characters in a text (the most common example being George Knightley and his brother in Emma). Students who wrote responses to poetry frequently did not recognise that the poet's work was required, not three separate analyses of the selected passages/poems. The most successful responses demonstrated an ability to weave the author's views and values through the response, but the less successful students tended to append these at the conclusion of the essay.

The following excerpts are from the start of student responses that were assessed at a high or very high level. These excerpts show students working to draw an interpretation from the given passages and in many cases make an implicit reference to the views and values of the text.

*It is emblematic of the enigmatic Dane’s character that he should enter the scene ‘reading a book’. Hamlet is a philosopher whose Christian humanist moral framework is based on his ability to interpret the truth through language, once a tool to exact reality but now corrupted under the poisonous and perfidious rule of the “serpent”, Claudius.*

*Through Gertrude’s lamentation ‘one is dolch tread upon another’s heel’ Shakespeare illuminates the “rank state of affairs” that has flourished within Denmark as a consequence of Claudius’ usurpation of the throne. This “unnatural act” of fratricide gives rise to the extensive ‘woe’ and pervasion of corruption throughout the ‘whole ear of Denmark’ resultant in the cataclysmic disruption of God’s Great Chain of Being.*

*The ‘smile of astonishment’ worn by Emma in the first extract reflects the tendency of the ‘indulged’ protagonist to be ‘chiefly directed by her own judgement’. Austen employs frequent use of irony and humour to mock subtly the inability of Emma to perceive the ‘affections’ and actions of her peers, giving rise to frequent faux pas throughout the novel.*

*Throughout these three passages, Austen explores the psychological developments in her protagonist, Emma. Readers recognise a distinct change from the confident personality apparent in Extract One in the assertion ‘I assure you, you are quite mistaken’ as well as in Extract Two in her obstinate opinion if Frank Churchill! his visit had given...only good ideas’ to the uncertain character evident in the third passage through the comutations of sympathy in ‘Emma had never known how much...’*
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As Gertrude enters the stage, in full anguish over Ophelia’s drowning, the colourful and almost lyrical description of “crow-flowers, nettles, dainties and long purples” of Ophelia’s death hints at the austere nature of such an act. Rather Gertrude, whether in her love for Ophelia or to stabilize the foundations of the Royal Court, covers up her probable suicide as an accident “but long it could not be still that her garments, heavy with drink pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay to muddy death.” To Shakespeare’s contemporaries suicide was an act against God, an act with which Hamlet attempts to grapple throughout the play. However, in Gertrude’s lyricism the serious nature of the act is subverted. The real state of affairs is subsequently exposed in the down to earth and blunt language of the gravedigger.

The following excerpts are from students who are attempting to comment on the language and aspects of the text but lack the analytical ability to explore and substantiate their ideas.

In Gail Jones’s novel ‘Sixty Lights’ Jones uses imagery and descriptive language to help the audience to feel as though the occurring events are actually happening. Jones uses recurring images and themes in the text to help point out characterization and character development.

Passage Three ‘The Spelling Prize’ has a completely different feel to it and also comes from a different place in Harwood’s life.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

**Essay 1**

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------|
| %     | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 11 | 10 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 13.2 |

**Essay 2**

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------|
| %     | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 12.6 |

**Novels**

The most popular text in this section was **Frankenstein**. Responses were often of a high standard and students were able to move comfortably from one passage to the next. Few students attempted to explore the third passage which, with its Gothic language and macabre setting, offered a lot of possibilities. **Mrs Dalloway** was attempted by fewer students but was invariably well handled, with students showing a sophisticated and often complex understanding of the text’s construction and ideas. **Emma** was again a popular choice and the passages afforded students the opportunity to consider Emma’s moral development but also a chance to consider the many blunders that Emma has made. Some students discussed the world of the text and its values. Unfortunately, some students thought that the Mr Knightley speaking in the first passage was not John but George. **Sixty Lights** was quite popular, but few students looked at the rich imagery offered by the novel. Many of the less successful students tended to concentrate on storytelling. **Atonement** was popular and responses were of a varying standard. Some students did well when selecting particular words or images to explore. The importance of writing, and in particular letter writing, was stressed. Students could well have explored the idea that the novel itself is a coded piece of writing. Some students picked up on the words ‘wedged herself in’ to show how Briony had effectively wedged herself into an impossible situation in the novel. **The French Lieutenant’s Woman** was attempted by few students but was generally well handled. Very few students attempted the other novels. There were some good responses on **The Death of Napoleon** and **Love in the Time of Cholera**.

**Plays**

Many students wrote on plays and showed a pleasing engagement with the text. However, too often they ignored the texts as drama, referring to ‘the reader’ rather than to ‘the audience’. Students could well have commented on aspects of stagecraft, such as setting and lighting, and how events such as those in **The Freedom of the City** and **Two Brothers** are presented in chronological order. **Hamlet** was by far the most popular choice. Some students offered a complex and sophisticated reading, especially when they worked closely with the passages. Others, however, gave a prepared answer and tried to make their response fit the selected passages or, in some cases, simply ignored the passages altogether. These students wanted to discuss themes like madness, acting and the nature of the Revenge Tragedy, or to give a summary of the play. There were some excellent responses to **The Freedom of the City**. The Bacchae was quite popular and generally the responses to this text were quite good. **Two Brothers** was another popular text and the passages offered a variety of possibilities but there were few outstanding responses. **No Sugar** was also popular but responses
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the inest man's vain attempt to find a form to voice his purpose. However, lacking the cocky reassurance of the symbolist, Prokofiev's desire to obtain enlightenment in the form of 'telling the bull' in some overwhelming question, once again is reduced to his awareness of vivid popular culture -- 'I shall wear my trousers rolled. His sexual anxieties reach their pinnacle as he playfully refers to 'the mermaids singing, each to each.' The break-up in line serving as a break-up in rhythmic cadence, before the revelatory 'I do not think that they will sing to me' is undeniably representative of the disconnection of emotional bonds in modern society. Prokofiev like the false 'yellow fog' remain on the outskirts of the room, 'where the women come and go talking of Michelangelo', is unable to infiltrate the exclusive upper class. Prokofiev is inert and proceeds to commit a fit of self loathing,descending into the spiritual abyss where 'human voices wake us, and we drown'.

Eliot focuses his disdain towards the insipid nature of modern living through the loss of sexual depravity in the 'Wasteland'. Though in passage one, Prokofiev foregrounds a rather innocuous form of sexual impotence as he refuses to 'eat the peach' -- the chinese symbol of seminal sexuality'-- this depravity reaches its nadir in 'A Game of Chess'. Where Prokofiev's poetic voice was jazzy and buoyant, Eliot puts on an extremely patronizing voice of contempt towards the sexually fertile but morally vacuous lower class. The repetition of 'What should I do?' commencing the passage serves to underline the lack of spiritual direction which has both haunted and confused the poetic voices of his earlier poetry. However, quite perturbingly for his readers, the answer to the question 'what should I do?' is placed solely on sexual gratification to fill the vacuum of time -- he wants a good time.(And if you don't give it to him, there's others will!). The blankness of such prose smears all sense of hope that lies beyond materialism or sexual gratification. The anaphora of 'I said' is another technique employed by Eliot to underscore the sheer schizophrenia which has encapsulated modern man -- he no longer can recognize the 'sign' of God as alluded to in Gerontion, but merely 'fake it for money'.

As the abhorred image of Liluki taking 'them pills' filters through the audience's mind, we become aware of our spiritual desolation. Emotions closely associated with sex or other forms of human connection have been transposed into another vehicle to drive our excessive hedonism. The continual ringing of the bell 'Harry up it's time', of the pub scene is micromotic of the extent to which we have descended 'the stairs' into a moral and spiritual abyss. Not only is it time for the drinkards to leave the pub, but Eliot here foreshadows the 'good night' of all spiritual consolation. The histrionic tone in which Eliot finishes this second part of his showpiece -- 'The Wasteland' -- is revelatory in explicating Eliot's own despair at our apathy. Whilst this extract of the 'Wasteland' is undeniably gloomy and ostensibly lacks hope, by the end of the poem, he hints towards 'shantih, shantih', and salvation through culture and religion.

Indeed as the Christian poet didactically explicates in his latter poetry, it is not until we sublimate our material self consciousness can we truly obtain Enlightenment. The condescension evoked through the cacophony of unserved voices in the second passage and the palpable angst... in Prokofiev dissipates into a melancholic cadence of 'what sees what shore' what grey rocks and what islands'. Here a clear sense of progression is achieved in Mating, where instead of the circumspection experienced in Prokofiev as he builds himself up, 'to have...to have' the liturgical voice in Marina, embark on a journey to 'What images return?/O my daughter'. These images already alluded to in 'The Wasteland' as Eliot attempts to salvage meaning through these fragments I have stood up against my ruins 'reappear in the form of platonic love. The seven deadly sins embodied by the 'tooth of the dog', 'the story of the hummingbird', the 'cry of contentment' and the 'ecstasy of animals', respectively glutony, pride, sloth and lust are indeed renowned, 'become unsustantial' as we return to the kingdom of heaven. However as our moral turpitude of industrial society would not allow us, this journey is neither simple nor clear; in fact it is rather painstaking as this metaphorical ship has 'bowprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat'. The half line 'I made this, I have forgotten' concludes with a caesura, a pause which allows the audience to ponder on the intimate connection with God -- inviting us to 'remember' what we have 'forgotten'. As 'this form, this face, this life' uses the forced consonants of 'this' in repetition, the poetic voice certainly embodies a palpable liturgical presence as it prolysetises the community to rekindle our love with God — to 'reign my life for this life'. The sexual profligacy of the earlier poems as we renounce our sins quickly forms into the lyrical image of 'my daughter', a pure and true form of love that is elusive to modern man. For Eliot, it is only as we set cut 'the new ships' can we truly find moral and spiritual salvation in this urban morass.

Oscillating between object despair and a doubtful consolation Eliot's pre-war poetry reflects his own desire to transcend the banal but is subsequently unable to. The frightening metropolis of this 'unreal city' reflects a spiritual desolation which has engulfed the modern man. Whilst he proves quite cynical towards the human condition, in the midst of the shallow rituals of 'a game of chess' lies esoteric messages which eventually become explicative in his Christian poetry. Whilst we 'have forgotten' it is not too late to repent as Eliot suggests the sooner we can recalibrate our moral compasses, the sooner we can, together, move towards 'the hope' or that 'ininitely suffering, infinitely gentle thing' alluded to in Preludes.

Student example 2
Nominated text: Collected Poems 1943-1995, Gwen Harwood

In confessing her desire that 'I want to understand the continuity of human experience', Gwen Harwood could be seen to express the core of her works as she examines the ostensibly linear progression of life through the cyclical patterns of memory and experience. The strong metaphysical theme that may stem from a strong biographical influence reveals the core of Harwood's poetry as the patterns of life, through childhood, adolescence and motherhood lead to a confrontation of death as the 'unceasing darkness' that threatens the transient beauty of the natural world. Yet her Wordworthian ability to inspect human experience through 'patches of memory' demonstrates the power of memory to illustrate not only the past but the future as well.
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Passage 1 depicts Pentheus upholding all the strict restrictions and control that is expressed through civilization, also known as nomos. As being the ruler of Thebes, Pentheus in his youth lets anger take control of him and demonstrates the leadership of a tyrant who will not listen to his people and will act in an extreme manner in order to impose order once again to the city of Thebes. This is demonstrated through his angry and passionate reaction to his grand-father and the blindseer Teiresias who have shed their respected clothes in order to take up the Bacchantic worship. Pentheus’ claims to ‘tie him up’ and for Dionysus be ‘stowed to death’ express an extreme side to nomos, where control and rationality has been replaced by an irrational text in an inversion that demonstrated civilisation at its worst. Pentheus’ strong outburst towards the two men that he should most respect is the foreclosure of a busy and nasty end to befoul the unexperienced Pentheus who creates the most atrocious sins of all by angering the gods by calling Dionysus an ‘instructor in banity’. The tragic fate that is already established through Pentheus’ wild errors is furthered by Cadmus who shows less than pure reasons for submitting to Dionysus. Cadmus’ words of ‘lie royally’ and ‘credit come to us and all our family’ demonstrate that he has only political rewards in mind that will be given with his family’s support for this popular cult. By acting in such a way Pentheus and Cadmus both set targets on their backs for being the characters who will experience the wrath and revenge of the gods which is befalling in a Greek tragedy. With their foolish words, the Greek audience now expect the punishment of these two whooly men who put their self before the gods. This punishment is confirmed when Cadmus is brought the head of Pentheus by his delusional daughter after the blood dismemberment of the Sparagmos.

Passage 2 demonstrates the power of nature and Dionysus as even the angry Pentheus is seduced by the idea of ‘frenzied Bacchantic Woman’. Dionysus demonstrates his power of seduction as the now ‘entirely subservient’ Pentheus fuses about his woman’s clothes that depict everything that he had heard in passage 1. The sexual notion of Dionysus dressing Pentheus and tucking in a ‘curl’ that has slipped out of place bring up sexual images. By using the sexual notions of the ‘thyrsus’ that represents the Phallic and Xonic symbols, further shows the enticement of the Bacchant worship as the sexually repressed people in Thebes find liberation through the cult that frees them from the restraint and corrects at nomos presents. Dionysus not only shows his power of seduction, what he also shows his power in the forms of illusions and theatre as he changed Pentheus’ mind from one that is ‘sickly’ with the confines of nomos to one that has become docile towards Dionysus and his control. The notion of illusions is enhanced by Pentheus’ comment that ‘I seem to see two sons’ encouraging the idea that Pentheus is no longer in a rational mind but in a dreamy stupor where he is seeing multiples of the same thing. This trance is similar to the one expressed during Bacchant rituals where people let go of their sanity in order to enjoy the bliss of ecstasy. Dionysus’ power of illusions is also confirmed in passage 1 as he makes fools out of the supposedly wise old men. Teiresias speaks like a true sophist who has only words with no rational wisdom behind them, as he shows that he is blind to the future and the ridiculous state he is in is as he states that ‘It would be scandalous for two old men to fall when they have indeed fallen to an all new law of dressing as Bacchant worships that would look nothing less of ridiculous.

Pentheus, Teiresias and Cadmus’ delusional states expressed in passage 1 and 2 show the true power and threat that Dionysus and nature can be to civilization as respectable men who made tools by the god. Passage 3 confirms the dangers of nature by depicting the aftermath of the horrific Sparagmos where Pentheus is torn apart by his mother and aunt who are closest to him. This horrifying and bloody ending depicts a scene that even shocks the faithful Bacchant worships from the East who make up the chorus. With Agave in her deluded state stroking her child’s hand with her ‘defiled hand’ depicting nothing but a gruesome and unnecessary punishment that Dionysus has created. The notions of the ‘saint’ become strong in passage 3 as words such as ‘kill’, ‘blood’ and ‘slaughtering’ depict what should have been a sacred ritual. In this way Euripides demonstrates the worst of natures where everything has fallen into chaos (oistros) due to the seduction of Dionysus’ cult. In this way Dionysus depicts how people can be turned into ‘frenzied’ animals that have lost all humanity due to the lack of control and order applied by nomos.

Euripides’ depiction of Pentheus and his family’s grim down fall demonstrates that when nomos and phyiscs strive to conflict they end up destroying everything in its path. In this way Euripides does not praise Dionysus for his cruel punishment but suggests that a balance must be found between nature and civilisation.

Student example 4
Nominated text: Collected Stories, Peter Carey

Through his Collected Stories, Peter Carey exposes the harsh yet unrelenting truth behind the modern tragedy. Carey provides us with an angular lens through which we can observe the tragedies of fictional characters who are subject to disorientation, and thus enable us to question our own sources of orientation in life. When we lack a fundamental basis of existential purpose due to the corrupt modern world manifested into institutions such as ‘The Company’, we are disoriented, and thus succumb to similar tragedies to Carey’s characters as a result of our inherent frustration. Furthermore, Carey proposes that the mutability of a corrupt society explored through the concept of ‘revolution’, and our inability to change the past we ‘had thought long gone’, further disorientates us and condemns us to tragedy.

Carey suggests that an understanding of existential purpose is crucial in life, and it is when we are denied such knowledge that we are isolated and disoriented. The narrator in ‘Life & Death in the South-Side Pavillion’ is assigned as a ‘Shepherd 3rd class’ to watch over the horses for ‘The company’, which Carey presents as paradoxical because his subservience to ‘The company’ undermines his status as a ‘shepherd’. He is denied even the opportunity to know the name of the ‘The Company’ who keeps him in the pavilion, as well as his ‘responsibility’ towards ‘the horses’, which isolates and disorientates him. The etymological definition of a ‘pavilion’ is that it lacks walls, but the narrator is confined to it as he has ‘no wish to be responsible for so many horses’, but cannot ‘leave the pavilion’ until he determines whether he is to drive them into the pool and satisfy their
The exact opposite is reflected in passage two through the monster’s narrative. Essentially a ‘new-born child’, the monster represents the most innocent and primitive thought of human, untainted by social conventions and culture. He ‘performed... Offices that [he] had seen done by Felix’ not for the sake of recognition, elucidated by how he ‘did not then understand the signification of the words ‘good spirit’, ‘wonderful’). The child-like inability of language evokes the readers’ admiration to the inherent good-will and compassion of the human kind—all of which Frankenstein himself lacks. The ‘fresh air’ harboured by the monster to ‘acquire the art of language’ despite his ‘harsh’ voice is reflected in pathetic fallacy as ‘the pleasant showers and genial warmth of spring greatly altered the aspect of the earth’. The sublimation of Mother Nature in accordance to the ‘effort lends at Shelley’s support of the monster’s humane pursuit of knowledge that is indeed worthy of ‘favour’ and ‘love’ as the monster imagined. The monster describes his current situation as ‘tranquil’, having ‘been hid in caves’ but now ‘employed in various sorts of cultivation parallel to the men’ he speaks of. All these compound to draw parallels to that which Frankenstein lacks—’a calm and peaceful mind’ and ‘tranquillity’. Interpreting this parallel though the notion of doppelgangers, readers are invited to view the monster as embodying the inherent and celebratory humane spirit that Frankenstein in fact lacks. This raises a further question of the possibility of doppelgangers in readers own lives and if they, too, behold that which we ourselves do not have, and on a subconscious level, want.

Frankenstein’s story begins with the lust for self-discovery and the power to create life, but ends in the pursuit of power over what he had created, that is, revenge. This is particularly pervasive in passage three, filled with overlying syntax of the dark, supernatural powers as Frankenstein, fuelled with ‘deep grief’, turned into ‘rage and despair’, calls on the ‘night and the spirits that preside over thee’ in order for more ‘power’ to ‘pursue the demon’. This draws intersubtextual links to Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play Macbeth, sending chills down readers’ spine in the dabling with the dark spirits. Besides evoking fear and terror through Frankenstein’s dark language of the summoning of the ‘wandering ministers of vengeance’ to destroy ‘the cursed and hellish monster’, the monosyllabic pursuit of revenge already starts to take its toll as Frankenstein is ‘possessed’ and ‘checked’ by his mad ways. This foreboding omen allows readers to rightly imagine the tragic ending of Frankenstein which portrays that of Lady Macbeth—the intersubtextual link epitomising the universal condemnation for the pursuit of such powers, testament to Romantic qualities characteristic of Shelley and Shakespeare. The monster’s pursuit of revenge towards Frankenstein is also mildly evident at the end of passage three, especially in his ominous threat, ‘I am satisfied: miserable wretch! You have determined to live, and I am satisfied’. These menacing words can be seen as the glue of his further opportunity to torture and plot further revenge against Frankenstein, but also holds a duality in allusion again to the doppelganger effect: if Frankenstein and the monster are in fact the same being, Frankenstein’s death would be equivalent to the monster’s death, which readers eventually discover at the end of the novel. Shelley thus questions the lust for the power over one’s other half. In fear of what the other can—or cannot do, as Frankenstein fears the monster’s murderous deeds and the monster fears the creative control of Frankenstein to deny him a female companion. Hence, readers are positioned to consider their own doppelganger and their possible reactions to them, as Shelley discourages the fight for power and revenge against each other, and essentially, in one self. This elucidates again the initial issue—Enlightenment versus Romanticism. Frankenstein and the monster represent these movements respectively, and also the doppelgangers in a single being. Shelley therefore prompts readers to contemplate our very own human nature and the values most important to us—is it that of Enlightenment and/or Romanticism? The story of the protagonist to originate from the opposite notion as mentioned in the introduction which they represent enhances the issue that everyone is in fact capable of the two, and it is a choice not a factual decision from the beginning.

Mary Shelley’s fictional novel, Frankenstein, offers many complex matters for reader consideration, including the possible existence of doppelgangers and also the ever-present tension between Enlightenment and Romantic values. Through the symbolism of her protagonists, Shelley suggests that the latter in fact should prevail, in line with the natural world. Readers are subsequently prompted to think about their doppelganger and their own struggle between Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Student example 6
Nominated text: Hamlet, William Shakespeare

‘One woe doth tread upon another’s heel’

Hamlet’s paralyzing intellect and stagnation of action has detrimental effects on those around him and the collaboration of his misdemeanours where he stains his hands with innocent blood through spurting action along with the ‘unweeded garden’ of Denmark culminate in the death of his beloved Ophelia—conveyed in the third passage.

Hamlet’s intellectuality, the working of his mind, is largely at the service of attitudes of rejection and disgust which are indiscriminate in their working. His exclamation to Polonius in the first passage, condemning him a ‘fish monger’ denotes his superior intellect as Polonius is ignorant to the insult, replying ‘not I my lord’. Hamlet is intellectual, but he does little enough effective thinking on the moral and metaphysical issues that bestrait him: his god-like reason is clogged and impeded with emotions of disgust, revulsion and self-contempt that bring him back, again and again, to the titillation of his obsession.

Central to the thematic concerns of all three passages, is the notions of the mystery of death and impossibility of certainty. The depressive and contemplative tones throughout Hamlet denote the vehement anguish and paralyzing mindset the man himself endures.
There is also an interesting relationship between Mr Neal and Billy—yet on a very different level to the female ‘blacks’ of the camp—which is important to note. Even though Billy is in fact ‘black’, Neal holds some respect for Billy—or possibly just the strength and respect that Billy can represent to the other ‘natives’ in the camp—and sets Billy to do his dirty work for him. The closing of passage two also demonstrates this, calling Billy to resolve the matter of ‘one too many’ dogs ‘per family’ by violent means. Billy is seen as a disciplining character forcing families in the camp to attend particular events or act in a certain manner, such as attending ‘Chunday school’.

At the Moore River Settlement, Christianity is forced upon the ‘natives’ in an attempt to assimilate them into white society, culture and beliefs. This becomes evident in the third passage where the playwright shows the audience Sister Eileen’s choice of stories—King Herod orders soldiers to ‘kill every first-born baby boy’—and hymns—‘There is a Happy Land’. Whites attempt to make ‘natives’ believe that they will become part of ‘white society’ if they believe in God, behave in particular ways, and sing hymns that this will lead them to a life where they are not stereotyped, or discriminated against; a life the Millimurra family dreams of.

The Munday and Millimurra family endorse Davis’ key theme of the play—family. The final passage shows Cassie’s anger toward the mistreatment of her older brother, with directed hatred toward a particular ‘rotten stinkin’ mongrel’ named Billy. Throughout the play, this is a family that sticks together, provides for each other as well as fighting for each other. A particularly violent member of the Munday family is Jimmy Munday, always known for standing up for his family, and his not very subtle insults toward white authority figures, such as Neal or Sergeant.

In all, Davis reveals to the audience the way Aboriginals were mistreated and stereotyped during the 1930’s, as well as the struggles they faced. The Munday and Millimurra family battles all of these problems, and does show that with family by their side, they can get through anything.