Some responses on this topic explored how a specific tribe, a specific family and a specific event were used to offer insights. Other responses were more historical than analytical, without close links to the text.

During their preparation, students need to consider how construction, language and authors'/directors' choices add meaning to the text, rather than merely looking at what happened, the themes and the characters. The importance of integrating text construction and authorial choices into responses needs to be emphasised, as well as discussion of characters or themes. Language is the key. Students need to write analytically, not descriptively, and need to develop writing skills that will enable them to incorporate knowledge of the text into their analysis or exposition. Analytical writing involves critical examination of the proposition in the question, providing evidence to support the position taken in response to the question. The task for Section A was to complete a piece of analytical/expository writing. Writing that simply describes/tells what a character did rather than exploring why, how and the effect of the behaviour relevant to the set question is a limited response. Students should be encouraged to explore questions fully by unpacking topics to allow their own ideas to emerge. Thoughtful planning is needed to craft a response that directly addresses the set topic. With collections of stories, students should be encouraged to look for the links and connections between the stories. Further improvement is also needed on how to construct a response to questions that ask 'to what extent'.

Student response – Example 1

The following upper-range response to Medea explores the ‘extremes’ of human emotion in the text. It uses the text selectively and incorporates short quotes to respond to the implications of the topic. Consideration of the construction of the text and the world in which it is set also form part of this response.

‘Medea is about extremes of human emotion.’ Discuss.

'Hail has no fury like a woman scorned. Euripides’ Medea explores the way both the head and heart define a human being and human relationships and underlines the consequences when one is devalued or dominant. Medea and Jason each embodies passion and reason in excessive amounts. The foreign princess loves and hates with great strength, her once passionate love turns into furious hatred when Jason betrayed their marriage oath for his ambition. Euripides suggests men and women are both emotional and the safest way of living is in moderation, a balance of both emotion and reason.

Medea’s ‘passion is master of [her] reason, passion that causes the great suffering in the world.’ She loves and hates with extremity. To win Jason’s love, she betrayed her own family, murdered her brother and persuaded Poly’s daughters to kill their own father. She suppressed her pride to take on the submissive role of a royal wife who “seeks to please her husband in all she does.” In the first episode, her “anguish”, her extreme emotions are fully exposed and are directly contrasted with the Nurse’s principle of moderation. Euripides does not support her excessively passionate nature but warns his Athenian audience through the downfall of Jason and Creon’s royal family that the world of emotions needs to be respected.

Medea is not mere human, her “noble father is the Sun”. As the grand daughter of a god, Medea has an excessive amount of pride and fears the “mockery of [her] enemies”. This excessive pride eventually led to the death of her “beloved” children and brought her “a lifetime of sorrow”. Her extreme love that turned into extreme hate compounded with her excess pride resulted the tragedy of the play: death of innocent people and the down of Corinth. There is a degree of similarity of what Medea did to her family for the love of Jason and what Jason has done to his family to fulfil his ambition.

Euripides explores not just the capability and danger of excess passion but also the consequences of extreme reason. Jason seems love as a tool to gain success. He is willing to use Medea’s power to acquire the golden fleece and his status as a hero. Then disregard her contribution, calling it as “compelled” by the Cyprian, for a political marriage to advance his prosperity. His betrayal and rationalisation is condemned by the voices of true reason, the Nurse and the Chorus, and by the wise king of Athens.
Aegus. Euripides too condemns this cold way of living with no room or respect for empathy especially for women.

Women at Euripides' time is considered to be emotional and thus less rational and intelligent as men. The ancient Greek valued sophrosyne: self-control and reason above all things. Euripides challenges this ingrained belief; this "ill-repute" and presents the Nurse and Chorus as wise and insightful. They show sympathy for Medea and establish the audience's initial sympathy for her too. The Nurse fear Medea may hatch some "unheard of schemes" and the lives of the children, while Creon and Jason are unable to see pass Medes's "honeyed words". The Choral odes raise the moral standards in which the main characters' actions are judged against. They believe Medea's anger is excessive and Jason has been "unjust". They represent the ideal way of life Euripides admires; "moderation", the safest way to not invite "heaven's anger".

Medea is the sole victor, despite triumphing over her enemies, it is far too simplistic to say she is truly happy and passion is superior. The deus ex machina enables Medes to fly away in her dragon-drawn chariot to the safety of Athens. Euripides is not celebrating the triumph of extreme passion over reason which has been fairly represented by Jason and Creon. He suggests the gods are capricious and will not reason pure reason. His ultimate message is reflected in the last words of the chorale ode, "for the unexpected, heaven finds a way", always expect the unexpected.

Medea invites the discussion of dangers of excess reason and passion, challenges the position and status of women in the playwright's time. It is not just a play discussing who is right and wrong but a reminder to expect the unexpected. Medea explores the many aspects of human emotions: love, hate, sympathy, fear, desire, anger... Even the most logical person has emotions buried deep within them. One must live with both logic and emotion, "loves to sit by Wisdom's side" and acknowledge an alternative path.

Student response – Example 2

The following mid-range response to Brooklyn offers a more than superficial exploration of the challenges of 'new beginnings' in the text. It demonstrates adequate control of language, despite a number of errors that frequently occur in EAL writing, and the errors do not inhibit the meaning. It is organised and relevant, using the text effectively to respond to the topic.

'Many characters in the text are challenged by new beginnings.' Discuss.

Colm Toibin's 'Brooklyn' is an novel that illustrates emotional... of its characters in the period of 1950s. Many characters does face challenges from new beginning because of their attachment to the security of the old. However, the strength of each of these characters determined whether they pass the test of the new beginning victoriously or they remain stagnant fearing the change.

The most obvious new beginning is faced by Ellas Lacey, the protagonist who was sent off to the unfamiliar Brooklyn, America to make a better life in the 'land of the free and brave' and financially assist her mother and sister who remained in Enniscorthy, Ireland. Ellas felt like 'she was singled out for something she was not prepared for' and was homesick for a while in Brooklyn. Although, she was convinced that she is not prepared for the new beginning, Ellas' dream speaks something else. In her dream, she wanted to be far away from her mother. She feared her mother and avoided her. This dream implies that Ellis sub-consciously desires freedom and independence from the grip of her mother. She didn't realised it though. Ellis finally surpassed this challenge when she was told to do so by her employer at Bartocci department store and when she was enrolled into Brooklyn College.

Like Ellis, her brother Jack went to England for work. Although Jack never wrote anything personal onto his letter to home, Jack confessed to Ellis that he was 'desperate to go home' when he first came to England. He must have gone through a lot during that period but now he seem to enjoy his work and life. He tells Ellis that he 'likes his independence'. After embracing the new beginning, Jack must have lost attachment to the life he led before in Enniscorthy with his family because he said that 'there's nothing there for me' at home. This shows that every moments and people, how dear they may be, would be a memory of past that we can't even remember in detail. The new beginning is the present and welcoming.

Ellis' mother on the other hand had faced so many losses from losing her husband, sons leaving home for work in England, Ellis going to Brooklyn and the final blow of Rose's death. The prospect of living alone