

Responding to extracts

No, really, what is this?

This is the type of response you will be making for two texts in your Y12 Literature exam. You will be given three passages from a text and develop your own response based on these.

Section A: Novels

7 Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*



Use one or more of the passages selected as the basis for a discussion of *Frankenstein*.

1.

The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time. I knew my silence disquieted them; and I well remembered the words of my father: 'I know that while you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected.'

I knew well therefore what would be my father's feelings; but I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination. I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed.

I then thought that my father would be unjust if he ascribed my neglect to vice, or faultiness on my part, but I am now convinced that he was justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from blame. A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity. I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception

2.

'My mode of life in my hovel was uniform. During the morning I attended the motions of the cottagers; and when they were dispersed in various occupations, I slept: the remainder of the day was spent in observing my friends. When they had retired to rest, if there was any moon or the night was star-light, I went into the woods and collected my own food and fuel for the cottage. When I returned, as often as it was necessary, I cleared their path from the snow and performed those offices that I had seen done by Felix. I afterwards found that these labours, performed by an invisible hand, greatly astonished them; and once or twice I heard them, on these occasions, utter the words "good spirit", "wonderful"; but I did not then understand the signification of these terms.

'My thoughts now became more active, and I longed to discover the motives and feelings of these lovely creatures; I was inquisitive to know why Felix appeared so miserable and Agatha so sad. I thought (foolish wretch!) that it might be in my power to restore happiness to these deserving people. When I slept or was absent, the forms of the venerable blind father, the gentle Agatha, and the excellent Felix, flitted before me. I looked upon them as superior beings, who would be the arbiters of my future destiny. I formed in my imagination a thousand pictures of presenting myself to them, and their reception of me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanour and conciliating words, I should first win their favour, and afterwards their love.

This is an example of what an extract might look like, you can find more on the VCAA study design

So what exactly do I do with this?

In the exam you will not be given a prompt, just the three selected passages from the text to base your response on.

From there you will need to choose the direction of your discussion. You should note that there is no requirement to draw on all of the prompts. Your discussion can focus on all three equally, all three with particular focus on one, or even only use one or two of the prompts to develop your response.

The best responses take the given info and use analysis techniques to discuss the prompt in the following ways.

- How it is situated in the text
- The specific effect of the language/techniques within the extract.
- How it exposes something about a character
- How the extract adds to or detracts from a point that the author is trying to make through the text.

- Then take the information you are given and develop a discussion about how it supports an idea/theme/concern which the text questions or puts forward. This is with relation to the social, historical or cultural values related to the text.

A vague process that you can follow when developing an extract response

Step 1:

Who is involved? What is happening? Where is it? When is this?

Step 2:

Offer your interpretation of this extract. Why is it important?

Does this foreshadow anything?

Does it tell us anything about the character/s?

What does it reveal about the author's intent?

How is it commenting/reflecting on social values/historical context?

How does it tell us these things?

Step 3:

In what ways is this linked to other key events?

How is this extract linked to the rest of the text?

Be specific, use evidence.

Step 4:

What are the techniques being used?

What are the collective effect of these techniques?

What are the features of the language being used?

The truth

In truth the only thing that is important to remember is that you are being asked to develop a discussion based on the three extracts you are provided with. You are in essence being asked to put forward your own literary criticism/interpretation of a text. You are assessed on your use/knowledge of;

- How the texts comments on its historical/cultural context
- How the texts comments on social values
- How the text develops central themes/ideas or concerns
- Your use of evidence
- Your interpretation of the techniques/features/language from the extract
- The quality of your response and how well it ties all of this stuff together to deliver a quality interpretation/critique of the text
- The quality of your use of vocabulary.

So it's about putting all the skills I have learned together to put forward my own thoughts on the text in an informed way?

Yes, it is. But be sure to build your response around at least one of the extracts you are given, otherwise you are not fulfilling the requirements of the task.