VCE English Contexts

Innovative ideas for using artworks in the NGV Collection as a resource
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Introduction

VCE Contexts:
- Exploring issues of identity and belonging
- Encountering conflict
- The imaginative landscape
- Whose reality?

The National Gallery of Victoria offers a wealth of visual resources to assist students in engaging with ideas associated with the VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) English Contexts.

There are many possible ways of approaching and exploring the ideas associated with each Context. The focus of this area of study is to think critically about the work of others in order to identify, discuss and analyse the ideas and arguments associated with the selected Context.

This resource is designed to demonstrate how you can use the NGV collection to inspire students to explore the key ideas within the Contexts through a focus on four artworks:

- **Collins St., 5pm.** John Brack 1955
- **The River Nile, Van Dieman’s Land, from Mr Glover’s farm** John Glover 1837
- **Weeping Woman** Pablo Picasso 1937
- **Migrant Woman, Nipomo, California** Dorothea Lange 1936

Each work of art can be used for all the Contexts.

Getting Started

a. Begin by looking closely at each piece.
b. Describe the subject matter, colour, style, mood and so on using as many adjectives as you can.
c. How do these aspects of the artwork suggest or construct meaning?
d. Start to make links to the Context.

This resource provides a taste of the opportunities to explore the Contexts through works of art. Engaging with original works of art in the Gallery adds another dimension to exploring the Contexts. NGV educators regularly offer programs for VCE English students and teachers and are also delighted to negotiate programs specifically tailored to an individual school’s curriculum.

For details please contact: our booking office on 8620 2340 or edu.bookings@ngv.vic.gov.au
THE ARTIST

John Glover ‘... started life as a poor country boy and finished as a successful squire.’

Born in 1767, the son of an English farmer, Glover developed an early interest in drawing from nature, which led to a highly successful career for him, both critically and financially, as a respected landscape artist in the classical tradition. Unperturbed by two club feet and a sturdy 115 kilogram frame, Glover was a great traveller who made painting expeditions to Europe.

In 1820 Glover opened his own gallery in Old Bond Street, London, and exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy nearby. His work was praised in the highest circles and he received a gold medal from King Louis XVIII for his large oil painting, The Bay of Naples, when it was shown in Paris in 1814.

It is a measure of the artist’s adventurous spirit and curious nature that at the age of sixty-three, a time associated for many with retirement, he chose to sail to Tasmania (then known as Van Diemen’s Land), to follow in the footsteps of three adult sons who had previously immigrated there.

In 1832 the artist acquired a property, known as Patterdale, about 70 kilometres south of Launceston, where he successfully farmed with assistance from convict labour.

The artist’s excitement at encountering the exotic native flora and fauna in the colony inspired the next phase of his career, in which he enthusiastically recorded his new environment in both commissioned works for landowners on the island and paintings which were sent back to England for sale in London.

Glover’s work in Van Diemen’s Land continued to reflect many of the conventions of classical landscape painting, which led to some assertions that he saw his adopted land through European eyes. However, he showed a dedication to faithfully recording the unique features of indigenous foliage and geology, and his paintings are imbued with a sense of air and dazzling light that are unmistakably Australian.

'David Hansen, curator of John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque, NGV 2004, quoted in Robin Usher, ‘Glover’s ground zero’, The Age, 18 August 2004.'
THE ARTWORK
Glover has depicted an Arcadian landscape based on the view from his farm, where Tasmanian Aboriginal people are seen enjoying an idyllic life in harmony with nature. His aim may have been to record a vanishing way of life, as the reality for Tasmanian Aboriginal people at that time was in stark contrast to the scene portrayed in the painting.

Encounters between early colonisers and the original inhabitants of Tasmania were often characterised by violent conflict.

'The colony was divided between a few influential liberals who advocated conciliation, and the “extirpationists” – the majority of colonists who considered the Aborigines dangerous pests, advocating their swift extermination.’

When Glover arrived in Tasmania in 1831 it is estimated that only a few hundred Tasmanian Aboriginal people were still living in their homelands in accord with customary tradition. By 1835, as a result of the 1831 ‘Black Line – Military Operations against the natives of Van Diemen’s Land’ many of the original inhabitants had been captured, removed from their country and dispersed to Flinders Island, others had suffered death through introduced diseases.

But, through his acquaintance with George Augustus Robinson, the Protector of Aborigines, Glover possibly met Aboriginal people from western Tasmania who are known to have camped with Robinson near Glover’s farm in 1834.

Many of the details in the painting are accurate, particularly the crystalline clarity of the River Nile and the local flora, including eucalypts, blackwoods and Tasmanian waratahs. Interestingly however, the Aboriginal figures are painted in a generic manner. This may be explained by Glover’s comments in a letter, describing a similar painting he presented to Robinson, where ‘The Figures are too small to give much likeness – my object was to give an idea of the gay happy life the Natives led before the White people came here and also to give an idea of the scenery of the Country…’

Although he probably felt some empathy for Tasmanian Aboriginal people and the maltreatment they suffered at the hands of European settlers, he ultimately accepted rather than challenged their systematic dispossession. Like many artists of his time, Glover was interested in cultures different from his own and was clearly intensely curious about Tasmanian Aboriginal people and their lives. His painting reminds us of their presence in pre-settlement Van Diemen’s Land.

3 ibid., p. 130.

Ideas for exploring the VCE English Contexts through the artwork
Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging

TEXTS
Alice Pung, Growing Up Asian in Australia, Black Inc, 2008
Skin, motion picture, director: Anthony Fabian, 2008

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS
• The complexity of identity
• Our public and private selves
• The inner self
• Alienation
• Conformity
• Identity as a construct

QUESTIONS
John Glover emigrated from England to Van Diemen’s Land at the age of sixty-three. He had had a long and successful career as a landscape painter in Europe before immigrating.

a. In what ways does the painting suggest that Glover is an immigrant?
b. Does Glover identify with the landscape? Explain why or why not.
c. How is the Tasmanian landscape portrayed?
d. How are Tasmanian Aboriginal people portrayed?
e. What mood do you think the painting conveys? What does this tell us about Glover’s attitude to his new home?
DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

The Member of the Wedding: Quest for a place in the world; acceptance and alienation; sense of self and belonging; conformity and the quest to be an individual; human expression and connectedness; social expectations of individuals; childhood innocence versus pressures of adulthood; sadness/happiness; race and gender; societal, cultural and familial expectations.

Growing up Asian in Australia: Issues of race and identity; defining ourselves and others; living as an ‘outsider’.

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll: Trying to recapture, or hold on to an old sense of self; the difficulty in accepting new situations; how much our sense of the landscape is contrasted with our own self.

Skin: What defines our sense of self; who gets to define who we are; clash of cultures; the observing eye.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Write a reflective piece about identity and belonging from the perspective of John Glover or another immigrant from England settling in Tasmania in the early nineteenth century.

• In the passage below, Marcus Clarke (journalist and novelist, 1846–1881) describes how the bush was often viewed by early settlers to Australia. Imagine you are an immigrant settling in Tasmania in the early nineteenth century. Write a letter home to your family in England comparing the landscape of your homeland with your adopted country. Include descriptions of how aspects of an unfamiliar environment can cause a sense of alienation.

There is a poem in every form of tree or flower, but the poetry which lives in the trees and flowers of Australia differs from that of other countries. Europe is the home of the knightly song, of bright deeds and clear morning thoughts … In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird – the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness … he learns the language of the barren and the uncouth, and can read the … haggard gum trees blown into odd shapes, distorted with fierce hot winds, or cramped with cold nights when the Southern Cross freezes in a cloudless sky of icy blue.

Marcus Clarke (1874) from a text written to accompany the painting Waterpool near Coleraine by Louis Buvelot, and published by the Trustees of the Public Library and Museum of Victoria.

• Write a piece from the perspective of the Aborigines who have been painted. Continue with a section that describes them looking at the painting and describing what is accurate and inaccurate about it.

Encountering Conflict

TEXTS

Graham Greene, The Quiet American, Penguin Classics, 2004

Paradise Road, motion picture, director: Bruce Beresford, 1997


IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

• Personal/inner conflict (self)

• Interpersonal conflict (between individuals)

• Extra-personal conflict (not between individuals but with the environment or institutions)

• Causes: international; national; socio-political; cross-cultural; local community; neighbourhood; family; personal.

QUESTIONS

John Glover was aware of the devastating impact of European colonisation on the Indigenous population of Van Diemen’s Land, since its establishment as a penal colony of Britain in 1803. In this painting Glover imagines a kind of Arcadia, the domain of Tasmanian Aboriginal people before the intervention of Europeans fractured their existence.

a. In what ways might Glover convey that Tasmanian Aboriginal people were content prior to the arrival of Europeans?

b. Does Glover’s representation of his surroundings suggest an inner conflict?

c. What is Glover’s reaction to the consequences of European contact with Indigenous Australian culture? (Consider reactions to conflict – aggression, withdrawal, compromise.)

d. Compare Glover’s portrayal of the landscape to one described in The Secret River. How do they differ?

e. Compare Glover’s painting with Julie Dowling’s Federation Series, 2001, in the NGV collection: http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvschools/TraditionAndTransformation/artists/Julie-Dowling/ Compare and contrast the representation of Australian history in each work. Consider the cultural and historical context in which each painting was created.
DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

*Life Of Galileo:* Living in a place with a different sense of being or identity than your own. How to live in a new land. How to live with contradictory attitudes in your life. Truth and lives, and their relative worth.

*The Quiet American:* Characters trying to piece together the truth; conflict between individuals; cultural clashes; ideological conflict; tension between being an observer and participant.

*Paradise Road:* The aftermath of an attack from another party (i.e. war/invasion) and the effect on survivors; historical background of the clash of different groups of people with different cultural and religious practices occupying the same space/land; the impact of conflict (political and cultural); heroic idealism of conflict; justice; survival.

*The Rugmaker of Mazar-E-Sharif:* The nature and causes of conflict; destruction of families, decimation of a way of life, attacks on socio-cultural heritage of a people; exploitation; abuse; socio-cultural cost of conflict.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

- Adopt the persona of the painter John Glover. Speculate on how he might have reacted to the conflict he witnessed between Tasmanian Aboriginal people and the early settlers.
- Write about victims involved in the conflict related to invasion and settlement. How does it affect them and their relationships?
- Write a piece from the perspective of a person who is a victim of invasion/settlement.
- Write a creative piece describing Glover’s actions after he has finished the painting. Focus on how he resolves his sense of what is happening in the image.

The Imaginative Landscape

TEXTS

Alice Munro, *The View From Castle Rock,* Random House, 2007
One Night the Moon, motion picture, director: Rachel Perkins, 2006

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

- The importance of place
- Physical features of a landscape
- Making meaning through landscape
- Landscape as a metaphor
- Landscape and human imagination.
- The landscape people bring with them to any situation.

QUESTIONS

Also see the questions for *Issues of Identity and Belonging.*

John Glover was aware of the devastating impact of European colonisation on the Indigenous population of Van Diemen’s Land, since its establishment as a penal colony of Britain in 1803. In this painting Glover imagines a kind of Arcadia, the domain of Tasmanian Aboriginal people before the intervention of Europeans fractured their existence.

a. What mood do you think the painting conveys? What does this tell us about Glover’s attitude to his new home?
b. What season is portrayed? How might the mood and meaning be different if it had been painted during another season?
c. What does Glover suggest about the relationship of Tasmanian Aboriginal people with their country?
d. What does Glover suggest about his relationship to the land?
e. How might the painting be different if done from an Indigenous perspective?
f. Does Glover link the Tasmanian Aboriginal experience of and knowledge of the landscape with that of his own? Explain.
g. How does Glover ‘imagine’ the Tasmanian landscape?

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

*Peripheral Light:* The role of animals and the natural world in our understanding of ourselves; how we create the world we see in our heads; the ability to comment on the present; how we imagine landscapes that are absent of people.

*The View From Castle Rock:* personification of landscape; the idea of place being a prison; landscape and identity; loneliness; change over time.

*Tirra Lirra by the River:* Imaginary landscapes compared to the actual landscape; attitudes to landscape from different ages; memory and imagination; illusion and reality; happiness and sadness.
One Night the Moon: The idea of landscape being ancient and powerful; the impact of industrialised society; the impact of white settlement on Indigenous culture; landscape to convey abstract ideas such as grief, love, joy, horror, etc; reconciliation; different ways of relating to the land.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Write a story with a landscape setting that explores how two different world views come into opposition with each other.
• Write a narrative that includes the setting of the painting to evoke or express an emotional state of a character. Consider the effect of weather and colour to express mood.
• Produce a piece of writing in which you argue a point of view about the use of land.
• Write a dialogue between two people, each of whom holds a different viewpoint concerning attitudes to the land (scape). Make sure you include spiritual and psychological aspects.
• Write the painter’s internal monologue of his first view of the landscape, then after he has painted it.

Whose Reality?

TEXTS

Michael Frayn, *Spies, Faber and Faber*, Allen and Unwin, 2005
The Player, motion picture, director: Robert Altman, 1992

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

• Multiple realities
• Emotional realities
• Constructed realities
• Cultural realities
• How others attempt to define you

QUESTIONS

John Glover was aware of the devastating impact of European colonisation on the Indigenous population of Van Diemen’s Land, since its establishment as a penal colony of Britain in 1803. In this painting Glover imagines a kind of Arcadia, the domain of Tasmanian Aboriginal people before the intervention of Europeans fractured their existence.

a. How does Glover perceive his surroundings? Suggest reasons for this perception.

b. How might the painting be different if it had been painted by an Indigenous Australian artist?

c. How is Glover’s cultural background evident in this painting?

d. What version of reality is constructed by Glover?

e. What beliefs about the Indigenous people does he convey?

f. Is this depiction of the landscape more or less convincing today than it would have been nearly two centuries ago? Explain.

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

*Death Of A Salesman*: Differences in social and physical power; fantasy becoming reality; hopes and dreams; relative power of the family to define a sense of self.

*The Player*: Understanding the reality of a situation; making judgements based on past experience; fabricating reality; reality as a construct.

*The Lot*: Recollection of events; place and time; assumptions made on appearance; memory; different ways of viewing the world.

*Spies*: Memory; perception of events changing over time; unreliable narrators; ways of dealing with difficult memories; inability to see things as they really are; illusion versus reality; importance of place.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Using the painting, develop a scenario that includes a series of different perspectives on what is happening or has happened.
• Write a piece where you remember an event or place from your past.
• Imagine you want to describe the painting, but you want to alter what you see. Write that piece. Consider what it is that makes you want to describe what you see differently.
Dorothea Lange

Dorothea Lange American 1895–1965 *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* 1936 (printed c. 1975) gelatin silver photograph 49.4 x 39.6 cm (image); 50.6 x 40.7 cm (sheet) National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased, 1975
THE ARTWORK

In 1932 President Roosevelt implemented an initiative, known as the Farm Security Administration (FSA), to assist farm labourers made homeless by poverty caused in rural areas by the Great Depression and drought. Dorothea Lange was one of a number of photographers commissioned by the scheme to record the harrowing conditions experienced by the workers in order to create public awareness of the dire situation and government aid efforts. The resulting photographs were published in magazines and newspapers, and displayed in exhibitions held in public buildings.

[During the project,] ‘she came across Florence Owens Thompson and her children in a lean-to tent in Nipomo, California. In 1960 she wrote of how she photographed the family:
I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet … I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food.

Lange’s portrait became one of the most memorable images produced by the FSA photographers. The woman is like a troubled modern Madonna, who, although still young, has been made prematurely old by the worries of caring for her family. It is also a fine example of the power of the documentary medium, which documentary filmmaker John Grierson defined as the ‘creative treatment of actuality’.

The documentary way of working may have appeared objective but it did not always reflect the complexities of reality. According to her own account, Thompson did not like the portraits made of her or the resulting outcry they caused when they were published in newspapers. She felt that they showed her as a passive symbol of despair when, in fact, she considered herself a strong person who worked as an organiser among the farm labourers. Regardless of the actual situation, the humanity and strength of the photograph took on a life of its own, coming to symbolise the suffering of this period.1

1 Isobel Crombie, Senior Curator of Photography, NGV, extract from Re-View, 170 Years of Photography, National Gallery of Victoria, 2009.

THE ARTIST

Dorothea Lange was one of the most influential social documentary photographers of her day, celebrated in particular for her poignant and searing studies of ordinary people battling the devastating consequences of the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Lange’s ability to communicate human suffering may have been influenced by her own experiences during a painful childhood. Born in Hoboken, a suburb of New York, in 1895, she contracted polio as a child, which resulted in a permanent, pronounced limp and led to victimisation by her peers. Her father’s sudden departure from the household when she was twelve years old caused a bitter rift in the family that was never reconciled and added further discomfort to her early life. However, such ill fate did not diminish her lifelong fascination with the excitement of the visual world surrounding her, and instead led to her commitment to becoming a photographer.

Trained initially at Columbia University, she moved to San Francisco in 1918 where she established her own portrait studio. While this allowed her to make an income, her passion lay in depicting the real human condition by documenting a range of subjects including Native Americans and their environment and the forced relocation of 110,000 Japanese and Japanese American citizens to internment camps following the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour in 1941.

Throughout her long career Lange was driven by a desire to reveal the extraordinary and the beautiful in the most humble of everyday subjects, from gnarled work-worn hands to darned stockings and deserted rural highways. Her belief in the magic of photography as a transformative power can perhaps best be expressed in her own words: ‘The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera.’
Ideas for exploring the VCE English Contexts through the artwork

Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging

TEXTS
Alice Pung, Growing Up Asian in Australia, Black Inc, 2008
Skin, motion picture, director: Anthony Fabian, 2008

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS
• The complexity of identity
• Our public and private selves
• The inner self
• Alienation
• Conformity
• Being defined by others

QUESTIONS
Dorothea Lange was one of the most influential social documentary photographers of her day. This photograph was taken during the Great Depression and the portrait became an iconic image of the time. The woman and her family were part of a pea pickers’ camp. The failure of the pea crop meant that these people were destitute and on the brink of starvation. The wider impact included influencing John Steinbeck when he wrote The Grapes of Wrath.

f. To what extent do you think the working class are brought together through common suffering? Discuss.
g. What part does gender play in the impact of the photograph? Would this image have been as potent if it portrayed a man in similar circumstances?
h. Does Lange convey empathy for the woman? Do you think Lange’s painful experiences growing up may have influenced her response to the subject?

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

The Member of the Wedding: Quest for a place in the world; acceptance and alienation; sense of self and belonging; conformity and the quest to be an individual; human expression and connectedness; social expectations of individuals; childhood innocence versus the pressures of adulthood; sadness/happiness; race and gender; societal, cultural and familial expectations.

Growing up Asian in Australia: Issues of race and identity; defining ourselves and others; living as an ‘outsider’.

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll: ‘Australianness’; cultural identity; urban versus rural; modern life versus the past.

Skin: cultural/group identity; different ways of living; clash of cultures; what it means to ‘live’; attempts to define the self; how others identify the self.

IDEAS FOR WRITING
• Write an imaginative piece where you are the woman in the photograph. Write a letter to a friend describing the feelings you have about your current environment and the impact it is having on your family and community.
• Write a reflective piece about identity and belonging from the perspective of a person who lives in either a rural community or a suburb or city.
• Imagine you are a journalist for the San Francisco newspaper that published Lange’s photographs. Write a story to accompany the photograph, highlighting the effect that the desperate situation is having on these people. Include ideas on the way an individual’s family and cultural background impact upon their sense of identity and belonging.
• How does the subject interpret the photo of herself?
Encountering Conflict

TEXTS
*Paradise Road*, motion picture, director: Bruce Beresford, 1997

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS
- Personal/inner conflict (self)
- Interpersonal (between individuals)
- Extra-personal (not between individuals but with the environment or institutions)
- Causes: international; national; socio-political; cross-cultural; local community; neighbourhood; family; personal
- Hope contrasted vs reality

QUESTIONS
Dorothea Lange was one of the most influential social documentary photographers of her day. This photograph was taken during the Great Depression and the portrait became an iconic image of the time. The woman and her family were part of a pea pickers’ camp. The failure of the pea crop meant that these people were destitute and on the brink of starvation. The wider impact included influencing John Steinbeck when he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*.

a. Describe the internal conflict you imagine the woman could be experiencing.

b. Discuss the ‘conflict’ that the itinerant farmers have had with the land (the failed pea crop due to a cold winter) and how this has affected their lives. Place the discussion in the context of the Great Depression – the conflict of time and place.

c. Consider the hunger and poverty and the choices that are made to survive. (This family sold the tyres from their car to buy food; another family sold their tent.) Discuss the ways in which responding to one conflict can create another.

d. When Lange’s photos were published in the press the government responded by rushing a shipment of 20,000 pounds (9 tonnes) of food to the camp. Why might photographs have provoked this response? Are there other examples where visual images, or the lack of them, have influenced public/government response to disaster areas?

e. What different aspects of encountering conflict are represented in this image? (Consider politics, class, subject/photographer, skilled/unskilled workers, inter-personal relationships, and so on)

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

*Life Of Galileo*: Characters in conflict with each other and authority; truth and lies; victimisation; betrayal; courage; fighting for one’s principles; submission under power.

*The Quiet American*: Conflict of space, place and identity; gender; location and land; violence and non-violence.

*Paradise Road*: The impact of conflict (political and cultural); heroic idealism of conflict; justice; survival.

*The Rugmaker of Mazar-E-Sharif*: The nature and causes of conflict; destruction of families, decimation of a way of life, exploitation; abuse; socio-cultural cost of conflict.

IDEAS FOR WRITING
- Imagine you are the woman in the photograph. Write a monologue exploring the harsh decisions she may be required to make in her everyday life and how they might cause her to experience an inner conflict.
- Write about victims of the Great Depression in the United States during the 1930s. How might it have affected the people and their relationships?
- Write an account from the perspective of one of the children in the photograph, giving examples of how extreme poverty can lead to domestic conflict.

The Imaginative Landscape

TEXTS
Alice Munro, *The View From Castle Rock*, Random House, 2007
*One Night the Moon*, motion picture, director: Rachel Perkins, 2006

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS
- The importance of place
- Physical features of a landscape
- Making meaning through landscape
- Landscape as a metaphor
- Landscape and human imagination
Dorothea Lange was one of the most influential social documentary photographers of her day. This photograph was taken during the Great Depression and the portrait became an iconic image of the time. The woman and her family were part of a pea pickers’ camp. The failure of the pea crop meant that these people were destitute and on the brink of starvation. The wider impact included influencing John Steinbeck when he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*.

a. How does the photograph explore people’s response to the land and their surroundings?

b. How have the geography and the climate of the place shaped and determined the lives of the people at the camp? Consider the heartbreak of these people and how the landscape could be experienced as alien, hampering human endeavour and detached from human suffering.

c. How could the setting be used to represent the interior world of the woman?

d. The title includes the word ‘migrant’. How can a landscape sometimes evoke a sense of exile from ‘one’s origins’?

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

**Peripheral Light:** Different ways of viewing the world; ideas of land as territory and property; the effect of humans on the landscape; the land as constructed and tamed.

**The View From Castle Rock:** Personification of landscape; landscape and identity; loneliness; change over time.

**Tirra Lirra by the River:** Memory and imagination; illusion and reality; happiness and sadness.

**One Night the Moon:** Impact of modern society, different ways of relating to the land.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

- Write a story with a landscape setting that explores how two different world views come into opposition with each other.
- Describe a landscape (either an artwork or a place that you know) that would reflect the atmosphere conveyed in the photograph.
- Write a dialogue between the woman in the photograph and one of her children using the metaphor of landscape to illustrate their thoughts and or feelings.
- Produce a piece of writing in which you argue a point of view about the use of land. You could take the role of the woman in the photograph.

**Whose Reality?**

**TEXTS**


Michael Frayn, *Spies, Faber and Faber*, Allen and Unwin, 2005

*The Player*, motion picture, director: Robert Altman, 1992


IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

- Multiple realities
- Emotional realities
- Constructed realities
- Cultural realities
- Personal and institutional realities

QUESTIONS

Dorothea Lange was one of the most influential social documentary photographers of her day. This photograph was taken during the Great Depression and the portrait became an iconic image of the time. The woman and her family were part of a pea pickers’ camp. The failure of the pea crop meant that these people were destitute and on the brink of starvation. The wider impact included influencing John Steinbeck when he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*.

a. Is photography a depiction or construction of reality? Discuss in relation to the photograph.

b. To what extent can a ‘creative treatment of actuality’ become a distortion of ‘reality’?

c. What version of reality is constructed by Lange?

d. How do we know that this photograph is ‘real’? Would your reaction to it be the same if you discovered it was a staged studio photograph? Would it matter if it was?

e. How does this photograph and its reception, including the response of the subject Florence Thompson who felt she was portrayed ‘as a passive symbol of despair when, in fact, she considered herself a strong person who worked as an organiser among the farm labourers’, explore the complexities of reality?

f. Why has the photograph become an icon? What universal reality might it convey?
DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

**Death Of A Salesman:** Different ways of seeing the same situation; assumptions made about dress/appearance; differences in social and physical power; fantasy becoming reality; constructing a false reality around hope and disappointment.

**The Player:** Understanding the reality of a situation; assumptions about reality shaped by the media; making judgements based on past experience; fabricating reality; reality as a construct.

**The Lot:** Recollection of events; place and time; assumptions made on appearance; memory; assumptions about reality shaped by the media and popular culture; different ways of viewing the world; the past as a place to remember and romanticise.

**Spies:** Memory; perception of events changing over time; unreliable narrators; ways of dealing with difficult memories; the inability to see things as they really are; illusion versus reality; importance of place.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

- Write a persuasive piece using the following quotation as a prompt:
  *The camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own.*

- Using the photograph, develop a scenario that includes a series of different perspectives on what is happening or has happened.

- Write a piece with the title ‘The camera never lies’.

- Write a piece where you remember an event or place from your past.

- Imagine you are the woman or one of her children in the image. Write a piece from your perspective twenty years later. How do you view things differently?

- Write what the woman in the photo sees and her perception of Dorothea Lange.
Pablo Picasso

Spanish 1881–1973, worked in France 1904–73

Weeping woman 1937 oil on canvas 55.0 x 46.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased by donors of The Art Foundation of Victoria, with the assistance of the Jack and Genia Liberman Family, Founder Benefactor, 1986

© Pablo Picasso, 1937/Succession Pablo Picasso, Paris. Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia
THE ARTIST

Pablo Picasso, born in Málaga, Spain in 1881, is acknowledged as the greatest and most influential figure in twentieth-century Western art. The son of an art teacher, he showed prodigious artistic talent as a child and in his early teenage years was painting virtuoso portraits and scenes in a highly realistic style. In 1907, when he was twenty-six, he shocked the world with his first landmark work, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, a brutal and disturbing depiction of prostitutes. The painting, with an absence of spatial depth and a picture surface fractured with angular, deconstructed figures supporting stylised, mask-like faces, was revolutionary for its time. The radical new style was a precursor to Cubism, which Picasso invented in collaboration with the artist Georges Braque between 1908 and 1911, an equally groundbreaking style.

Throughout his long life, his non-conformist and innovative spirit guided his practice, which was marked by a continuous series of different styles, each characterised by astonishing originality and technical virtuosity. His prolific output amounted to 22,000 works in a range of mediums spanning sculpture, ceramics, mosaics, drawing, printmaking, collage and stage design.

The artist’s magnetic persona and turbulent personal life, peppered with muses and lovers who fuelled his impassioned creative drive, ensured that he was the first Western artist to become an international celebrity whose work commanded a mass audience in his own lifetime.

Picasso’s visionary oeuvre can be paralleled with the radical ideas championed by his counterpart, the giant of scientific thinking, Albert Einstein. Both men shattered conventional ideas of reality, dramatically changing forever the way we perceive the world.

Ideas for exploring the VCE English Contexts through the artwork

Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging

TEXTS

Alice Pung, Growing Up Asian in Australia, Black Inc, 2008

Skin, motion picture, director: Anthony Fabian, 2008

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

- The complexity of identity
- Our public and private selves
- The inner self
- Alienation
- Conformity
- Who gets to define people

QUESTIONS

Pablo Picasso was born in Spain in 1881 and is acknowledged as the greatest and most influential figure in twentieth-century Western art.

THE ARTWORK

"In January 1937 Picasso was asked by representatives of the Spanish Republican government to paint an enormous mural for the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition that coming summer. On 26 April 1937, while Picasso was at work on the commission, German planes – acting in concert with General Franco – bombed the Basque city of Guernica for three hours, levelling it to the ground. Picasso's shock at the massacre of Spanish civilians contributed to his creation of the great Guernica mural.

The Weeping woman compositions of late 1937 belong to what have been termed the ‘postscripts’ of Guernica. The common stark motif in these disturbing images, that of a woman’s grief laid bare for public scrutiny, derived from the figure at the far left of Guernica – a woman who screams uncontrollably and vainly attempts to escape the bombing, grasping her dead child to her chest.

Aspects of Picasso’s turbulent love life have also been read into Weeping Woman – a complex web of relationships involving his first wife Olga Koklova and concurrent new lovers Marie Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar.

Weeping Woman stands as a strong, iconic denouncement of the atrocities and inhumanity of modern warfare. The painting’s strident palette of acid greens and hot purples allows no rest or forgiveness for the eye – only protest and accusation."

Dr Ted Gott, Senior Curator of International Art, NGV.
a. Develop a ‘character inventory’ of the woman.
   Consider her age, occupation, family background,
   socio-economic standing, habits/tastes,
   education, occupation, fears, dreams and so on.
b. Why is she crying? What does this tell us about
   her inner self?
c. Why is her face mostly green? Discuss Picasso’s
   choice of colours overall. How does they
   contribute to the mood of the painting?
d. What might the painting reveal about Picasso’s
   inner self?
e. How can you tell that Picasso was passionate
   about his Spanish identity?
f. How might reactions to this painting unite or
   divide people?
g. In what ways was Picasso prepared to take risks
   that could have led to criticism and alienation?
h. Why has Picasso’s art received such popular acclaim?

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE
TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

The Member of the Wedding: Quest for a place in
the world; acceptance and alienation; sense of self
and belonging; conformity and the quest to be an
individual; human expression and connectedness;
social expectations of individuals; childhood
innocence versus the pressures of adulthood;
sadness/happiness; race and gender; societal, cultural
and familial expectations.

Growing up Asian in Australia: Issues of race and
identity; defining ourselves and others; living as an
‘outsider’.

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll: Issues of identity;
defining ourselves and others; living as an ‘outsider’;
how we deal with frozen or passed realities; the power
of violence.

Skin: Individuals in conflict with their environment;
cultural/group identity; conception of the self by
others; what it means to ‘live’.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Imagine you are Picasso. Create a monologue
   exploring his inner feelings at the time he painted
   Weeping Woman. Consider his complicated love
   life and the anguish he may have felt as he read
   accounts of the Spanish Civil War from exile
   in France. Explore how these factors may have
   affected his sense of identity and belonging.

• Imagine you are a journalist reporting on the
   bombing of Guernica. Write an account of what
   you have witnessed. Reflect on the effect that the
   tragedy might have had on the fiercely nationalistic
   Basque people. It may be interesting to read an
   actual newspaper report of the event from The

Times in 1937. See www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/
news/world/europe/article709301.ece

• Write a profile interview with the woman from
   Picasso’s painting about a significant factor that has
   impacted on her sense of self and belonging. Focus
   on a particular factor, such as a socio-political or
   socio-economic situation, cultural background,
   family/relationship situation, or other issue.

Encountering Conflict

TEXTS

Graham Greene, The Quiet American, Penguin
Classics, 2004

Paradise Road, motion picture, director: Bruce
Beresford, 1997

Bertolt Brecht, Life Of Galileo, Penguin Classics,
2008

R. Hillman and N. Mazari, The Rugmaker of Mazar-
E-Sharif, Insight, 2008

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

• Personal/inner conflict (self)
• Interpersonal (between individuals)
• Extra-personal (not between individuals but with
  the environment or institutions)
• Causes: international; national; socio-political;
cross-cultural; local community; neighbourhood;
family; personal

QUESTIONS

Pablo Picasso was born in Spain in 1881 and is
acknowledged as the greatest and most influential
figure in twentieth-century Western art.

a. How does the painting express the pain of
   conflict?
b. The woman’s response is to ‘weep’. What other
   response to conflict can occur? How might that
   be depicted? How can it be resolved?
c. The painting can be read as a ‘strong denunciation
   of the atrocities ad inhumanity of modern warfare’,
   as well as reflecting aspects of Picasso’s turbulent
   love life, which has been described as ‘a complex
   web of relationships involving his former wife
   Olga Koklova, and concurrent new lover Marie-
   Therese Walter and Dora Maar’. Choose one of
   these ‘readings’ and discuss what and how it is
   being conveyed.
d. How might anti-war statements such as Weeping
   Woman or Guernica contribute towards the
   prevention of further conflict?
e. Picasso’s work has caused strong reactions over
   the decades. In what ways might a painting such as
   Weeping Woman cause conflict? What types
   of conflict could it cause? Is it all negative? If not,
   explain why not.
f. Compare the painting with The Times newspaper report of 1937 on the bombing of Guernica. See www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article709301.ece. Which of the two texts is more successful in conveying the experience of war? What aspects of conflict are represented in this image? (Consider politics, inter-personal relationships, and so on).

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

Life Of Galileo: Characters in conflict with each other and authority; truth and lies; victimisation; betrayal; courage; fighting for one's principles; power.

The Quiet American: Conflict of space, place and identity; conflict between different cultures; gender; location and land; violence and non-violence; effect of violence on the individual and attempts to deal with it; inability to articulate what people are feeling.

Paradise Road: The aftermath of an attack from another party (i.e. war/invasion) and the effect on survivors; historical background of the clash of different groups of people with different cultural and religious practices occupying the same space/land; the impact of conflict (political and cultural); heroic idealism of conflict; justice; survival.

The Rugmaker of Mazar-E-Sharif: The nature and causes of conflict; destruction of families, decimation of a way of life, attacks on socio-cultural heritage of a people; exploitation; abuse; socio-cultural cost of conflict.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Imagine you are the Weeping Woman. Write a letter to relatives in another part of Spain describing the bombing of Guernica and the effect it has had on you personally and the community. It may be interesting to read an actual newspaper report of the event from The Times in 1937. See www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article709301.ece

• Write about victims involved in the conflict of war. How does it affect them and their relationships?

• Write a piece from the perspective of a victim of war, whose country has been invaded by the 'enemy'.

• Write a piece that explores Australia's involvement in a particular conflict.

• Adopt the persona of Picasso at the time he painted Weeping Woman. Speculate on some alternate paths he could have taken in response to the Spanish Civil War.

• Write from the perspective of a child observing Weeping Woman. What does the painting reveal about human emotions experienced during conflict? How might their ideas in this respect differ from those of their parents?

The Imaginative Landscape

TEXTS

Alice Munro, The View From Castle Rock, Random House, 2007
Jessica Anderson, Tirra Lirra by the River, Picador, Macmillan, 2006
One Night the Moon, motion picture, director: Rachel Perkins, 2006

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

• The importance of place
• Physical features of a landscape
• Making meaning through landscape
• Landscape as a metaphor
• Landscape and human imagination
• Manifestation of the interior life

QUESTIONS

Pablo Picasso was born in Spain in 1881 and is acknowledged as the greatest and most influential figure in twentieth-century Western art.

a. How is the landscape of Picasso's imagination influenced by the memory of actual experiences?
b. How is the painting a metaphoric representation of a time and place?
c. How does the landscape of the painting convey feeling? What and whose feelings are conveyed?
d. What type of geographical landscape could the painting represent? Describe it. Would it change over time? How/why? Relate this description to an extract from one of the texts you are studying. It can be a physical, emotional or metaphorical example.
e. Describe the landscape in terms of your senses – sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste.

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

Peripheral Light: Different ways of viewing the world; ideas of land as territory and property; the effect of humans on the landscape; sadness associated with change.

The View From Castle Rock: Personification of landscape; landscape and identity; loneliness; change over time.
**Tirra Lirra by the River**: Imaginary landscapes compared to the actual landscape; attitudes to landscape from different ages; memory and imagination; illusion and reality; happiness and sadness.

**One Night the Moon**: Landscape to convey abstract ideas such as grief, love, joy, horror, etc.

**IDEAS FOR WRITING**

- Write a story with a landscape setting that explores how two different world views come into opposition with each other.
- How has the artist conveyed the landscape of his mind? Consider how he has used colour, shape and line to express his mood.
- Describe the features of an image which you would create to represent the landscape of your mind.
- Write a dialogue between two different people who have contrasting opinions regarding *Weeping Woman*, as a ‘landscape of war’.

**Whose Reality?**

**TEXTS**


Michael Frayn, *Spies, Faber and Faber*, Allen and Unwin, 2005

*The Player*, motion picture, director: Robert Altman, 1992


**IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS**

- Multiple and coexisting realities
- Emotional realities
- Constructed realities
- Cultural realities

**QUESTIONS**

Pablo Picasso was born in Spain in 1881 and is acknowledged as the greatest and most influential figure in twentieth-century Western art.

a. Can this brutally distorted face be considered real? Explain.

b. How would you react if someone said, ‘I love this painting. It is so full of happiness and joy. It just makes me smile’? Why would you react the way you do? Is a response that differs to yours wrong? Explain why/why not. Consider why two people can see things differently.

c. Why do you think Picasso used a woman in this painting? Could this painting be seen as a self-portrait? Discuss. Whose reality is being explored in this painting?

d. To what extent is the painting an expression of the universal reality of suffering?

e. You could consider comparing this painting to another painting in the NGV collection, for example, *A Sergeant of the Light Horse in Palestine*, 1920, by George Lambert.

f. What did Picasso mean when he said: ‘We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise truth.’ Dore Ashton, *Picasso on Art*, 1972. Discuss this idea in relation to *Weeping Woman*.

g. Compare the painting with *The Times* newspaper report of 1937 on the bombing of Guernica. See [www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article709301.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article709301.ece)

h. How does each of these texts convey different realities associated with war?

**DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK**

*Death Of A Salesman*: Different ways of seeing the same situation; assumptions made about dress/appearance; differences in social and physical power; perceptions of gender roles; fantasy becoming reality; failing at constructing a believable and successful reality.

*The Player*: Understanding the reality of a situation; assumptions about reality shaped by the media; making judgements based on past experience; fabricating reality; reality as a construct.

*The Lot*: Recollection of events; place and time; assumptions made on appearance; memory; assumptions about reality shaped by the media and popular culture; different ways of viewing the world; resistance to conflict and the resultant effect on outlook.

*Spies*: Memory; perception of events changing over time; unreliable narrators; ways of dealing with difficult memories; an inability to see things as they really are; illusion versus reality; the importance of place.

**IDEAS FOR WRITING**

- Write a persuasive piece using Picasso’s statement as the prompt: ‘We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise truth’. Dore Ashton, *Picasso on Art*, 1972.

- Using the painting, develop a scenario that includes a series of different perspectives on what is happening or has happened.

- Write a piece where you remember an event or place from your past.

- Imagine you are the woman in the painting. Write a piece imagining it is twenty years later in 1957. How might you view things differently? How has your perception on the cause of your sadness changed?

- Write a piece in which you describe the painting but suggest alterations you would like to see. Consider what it is that makes you want to describe suffering differently from the artist.
John Brack

1920–1999 Collins St., 5 p.m. 1955 oil on canvas 114.8 x 162.8 cm National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased, 1956 © National Gallery of Victoria

**Unreal City,**
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.


**THE ARTIST**

John Brack was one of Australia’s leading modern artists. He was born in Melbourne in 1920 and lived most of his life in or near the city. Having studied art at the National Gallery School in the late 1940s he went on to become an art reviewer and respected teacher. His work was influenced by artists and writers, including Georges Seurat and T. S. Eliot.

Unlike some of his famous contemporaries, including the painters Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale, who alluded to Australian identity through depictions of the outback, Brack found urban and suburban themes more authentic, particularly because by the 1950s Australia was one of the most urbanised countries in the world.

The suburbs also inspired poets. In November 1962 John Brack’s suburban drawings were published alongside the poetry of Chris Wallace-Crabbe entitled *Eight Metropolitan Poems*, which appeared in *Australian Letters*, a journal of writing and criticism.

**Suburb**

Streets where I pause, boughs I have walked beneath,
Pass your implicit comment as you will;
I crave no path, demand no twisted wreath
But your configuration shapes me still.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe, *Eight Metropolitan Poems*.

Brack was interested in describing facets of modern life and society, and his paintings, often sombre in tone, are characterised by ironic humour and revealing insights into the human condition. He died in Melbourne on 11 February 1999.
THE ARTWORK

Collins St, 5p.m. is considered to be both an iconic painting of peak-hour Melbourne and a social commentary on daily life in the 1950s. It describes office workers in the city trudging home at the end of the day, and is composed of three horizontal bands – the angular, chiselled faces of the people in the foreground, a stripe of faceless, uniform figures in the middleground and the flat, geometric shapes of the architecture behind them.

The robotic figures suggest people emotionally closed down by the ritualistic routine of nine-to-five office work. They are unaware of each other, despite their close proximity, and as Brack noted: 'As a matter of fact it used to strike me as most eerie, to be sketching within three feet of so many people, none of whom took the slightest notice.'

John Brack on Brack, CAE art notes, 1956.

In 1955 Melbourne’s first skyscraper, ICI House, was approved. Modern architecture, such as the Melbourne Olympic Pool and Olympic Park, were constructed and a civic clean-up included the demolition of Victorian cast-iron verandas from Melbourne shopfronts. The first television licences were granted in time to broadcast the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Those without new television sets often watched the ‘friendly games’ in department store windows.

Melbourne’s population in the 1950s was primarily Anglo-Celtic in origin and Brack has painted them monochromatically, visually expressing this sameness.

One of the reasons for the lack of cultural diversity in the city population was the White Australia Policy, which was in place from 1901 to 1973. This policy restricted non-white people on racial grounds; it was based on fears that there would be problems with their assimilation and the threat of cheap labour. Policies were in place to maintain a way of life based on the British heritage of Australia as a former colony.

In the 1950s immigration transformed Australia; however, immigrants mainly came from continental Europe and Britain.

The painting may also be read as a loss of individuality and a lack of social cohesion among the masses. This idea may have wider political implications to do with class and power relationships.

Like many people whose youthful ideas are reconsidered in later life, John Brack, who painted Collins Street, 5p.m. at the age of thirty-five, reflected several years later:

I’d sketch the crowd walking towards Spencer Street Station, as I waited for a friend in a doorway near the corner of Elizabeth Street. I was thinking ... I used to be a clerk in an insurance company 200 metres up this street, and it was a deadly, cowardly, too-secure life. Now I’m an artist, with the courage to take risks, and superior to these feeble people who cannot control their own boring lives. A few years later, I felt pretty ashamed of that painting. It was too one-dimensional. I realised those people were as worthy as me, and their lives as complex as mine. Unless my work contained humility, it would fail. I could use irony but not superiority. I began to put many levels of meaning into each painting.


Skin, motion picture, director: Anthony Fabian, 2008

Ideas for exploring the VCE English Contexts through the artwork

Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging

TEXTS

Alice Pung, Growing Up Asian in Australia, Black Inc, 2008

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

- The complexity of identity
- Our public and private selves
- The inner self
- Alienation
- Conformity and security
- Self-identification
QUESTIONS

John Brack was born in Melbourne in 1920 and lived most of his life in or near the city. In the 1950s Melbourne was one of the most urbanised countries in the world contrary to the pastoral and pioneering image so often projected.

a. How are the people portrayed?
b. How are the buildings portrayed?
c. What mood is evoked?
d. What might the image suggest about modern life?
e. What might the image suggest about group identity?
f. Why might people feel more comfortable when they conform to a ‘type’ or particular group?
g. To what extent are Melburnians today just as conformist as illustrated in the painting?
h. Compare and contrast the way men and women are portrayed in the painting. What does this reveal about the role of gender in 1950s Melbourne?

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

The Member of the Wedding: Quest for a place in the world; acceptance and alienation; sense of self and belonging; conformity and the quest to be an individual; human expression and connectedness; social expectations of individuals; the childhood innocence versus pressures of adulthood; sadness/happiness; race and gender; societal, cultural and familial expectations.

Growing up Asian in Australia: Issues of race, class and identity; defining ourselves and others; living as an ‘outsider’.

Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll: Cultural identity; modern life versus the past; masculinity and its many facets; the role of femininity in Australian society.

Skin: Cultural/group identity; conformity; the difficulty of individualism; absence of difference.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Write an imaginative piece where you are one of the characters in the painting. Write a letter to a friend about the feelings you have about your environment and the impact it has on your sense of identity and belonging.
• Compare the portrayal of Melbourne in this painting with the city today. Write a reflective piece about how things have changed (for example, the make-up of the population, the roles of women, architecture, and so on). How might these factors have influenced a new sense of Australian identity?
• Write a piece from the perspective of an ‘outsider’ in a major city. Describe how they may feel alienated by their environment and those around them.
• Write a poem which evokes the demeanour of the people depicted in the painting.
• Describe two of the characters after they leave Collins St.

Encountering Conflict

TEXTS

Graham Greene, The Quiet American, Penguin Classics, 2004
Paradise Road, motion picture, director: Bruce Beresford, 1997

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

• Personal/inner conflict (self)
• Interpersonal (between individuals)
• Extra-personal (not between individuals but with the environment or institutions)
• Causes: international; national; socio-political; cross-cultural; local community; neighbourhood; family; personal
• Modernity in conflict with humanity.

QUESTIONS

John Brack was born in Melbourne in 1920 and lived most of his life in or near the city. In the 1950s Melbourne was one of the most urbanised countries in the world contrary to the pastoral and pioneering image so often projected.

a. To what extent does Brack suggest that the people are in conflict with their environment? Consider ideas of alienation and boredom.
b. Commentators have described the people in the painting as passive and withdrawn. Do you agree? Does the painting suggest that they are experiencing internal conflict?
c. What response do you have to Brack’s depiction of Melbourne and its people? Why do you respond this way?
d. What judgements do you think Brack has made about these people? Consider the views and values he conveys. How could these attitudes cause conflict within the community?
e. How would different elements of the community, from the past and in the present, respond to this painting?
f. What sections of society are not depicted in this painting? What meaning could you read into this?
DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

Life Of Galileo: Characters in conflict with each other and authority; truth and lies; fighting for one’s principles; submission in the face of power; the beauty and constriction of conformity.

The Quiet American: Conflict of space, place and identity; conflict between different classes and cultures; gender; the place of the outsider.

Paradise Road: The impact of conflict (political and cultural); justice; survival.

The Rugmaker of Mazar-E-Sharif: The nature and causes of conflict.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Consider the conflicts the people in the painting may be struggling with. Write a piece from the perspective of one of the people portrayed, which explores the personal aspects of a conflict they might be experiencing.

• Describe the inner conflict the artist may have been experiencing when he painted the artwork.

• Create a dialogue between two characters in the painting who hold different views on how the city of Melbourne in 1955 should be developed. Discuss how they might resolve their conflicting ideas to create a shared vision for the future.

• Write the story of a man wearing bright clothes on Collins St and his attempts to hide it.

The Imaginative Landscape

TEXTS


Alice Munro, The View From Castle Rock, Random House, 2007

Jessica Anderson, Tirra Lirra by the River, Picador, Macmillan, 2006

One Night the Moon, motion picture, director: Rachel Perkins, 2006

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

• The importance of place

• Physical features of a landscape

• Making meaning through landscape

• Landscape as a metaphor

• Landscape and human imagination

• The patterns in the built landscape

QUESTIONS

John Brack was born in Melbourne in 1920 and lived most of his life in or near the city. In the 1950s Melbourne was one of the most urbanised countries in the world contrary to the pastoral and pioneering image so often projected.

Also see the Questions for Issues of Identity and Belonging.

a. What does the setting suggest about the inner world of the people depicted?

b. What mood is evoked by the streetscape?

c. What does the painting suggest about the climate and the environment? How might this add meaning to the painting?

d. Why do you think Brack has chosen to paint the scene in winter? How would the scene be different if it were depicted in summer?

e. Does the painting make a negative or positive comment? How is this achieved?

f. How might the scene depicted be similar and different if it were painted today?

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

Peripheral Light: Different ways of viewing the world; the effect of people on the landscape; the effect of urbanisation on people.

The View From Castle Rock: Personification of landscape; landscape and identity; loneliness; change over time.

Tirra Lirra by the River: Imaginary landscapes compared to the actual landscape; attitudes to landscape from different ages; memory and imagination; illusion and reality; happiness and sadness.

One Night the Moon: Landscape to convey abstract ideas such as grief, love, joy, horror, etc.

IDEAS FOR WRITING

• Write a story with a landscape setting that explores how two different world views come into opposition with each other.

• Inspired by the painting, write a narrative that includes the setting to evoke or express an emotional state of a character. Consider the effect of weather and colour to express mood.

• Write a letter, or dialogue between two characters from the painting using the metaphor of the landscape to illustrate how they might be thinking or feeling. How could the landscape represent a turning point in their journey?

• Write a dialogue between two people in the painting who each have different attitudes to the land (scape). Make sure you include spiritual and psychological aspects.
Whose Reality?

TEXTS
Arthur Miller, Death Of A Salesman, Penguin Classics, 2000
Michael Frayn, Spies, Faber and Faber, Allen and Unwin, 2005
The Player, motion picture, director: Robert Altman, 1992

IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS
- Multiple realities
- Emotional realities
- Constructed realities
- Cultural realities

QUESTIONS
John Brack was born in Melbourne in 1920 and lived most of his life in or near the city. In the 1950s Melbourne was one of the most urbanised countries in the world contrary to the pastoral and pioneering image so often projected.

a. Why might art be described as depicting multiple realities?
b. How do you think Brack perceives his surroundings?
c. How might one of the persons depicted in the painting differ from Brack's representation?
d. How do you respond to Brack's painting? Explain your response. Do others feel the same? Suggest reasons for similar or different responses.
e. How far removed is the world represented here from the world that you live in? Are there any similarities?

DISCUSS AND COMPARE THE THEMES IN THE TEXT WITH THOSE IN THE ARTWORK

Death Of A Salesman: Different ways of seeing the same situation; assumptions made about dress/appearance; differences in social and physical power; attempts to define the self through occupation; the allure of ready made identities.

The Player: Understanding the reality of a situation; fabricating reality; reality as a construct.

The Lot: Recollection of events; place and time; assumptions based on appearance; memory; specific and definitive ways of viewing the world.

Spies: Memory; perception of events changing over time; unreliable narrators; ways of dealing with difficult memories; the inability to see things as they really are; illusion versus reality; the importance of place.

IDEAS FOR WRITING
- Write a persuasive piece using Picasso’s statement as the prompt: ‘We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise truth.’ Dore Ashton, Picasso on Art (1972)
- Inspired by the painting, develop a scenario that includes a series of different perspectives on what is happening or has happened.
- Write a piece where you remember an event or place from your past.
- Imagine you are a character in the painting in 1955. Write a piece imagining it is twenty years later. How might you view things differently?
- Describe in a few paragraphs how each of the following people might respond to Collins Street, 5p.m., 1955:
  - An immigrant newly arrived in Australia.
  - A contemporary young woman.
  - An older man or woman who used to live in Melbourne in 1955.
  - The artist, John Brack, as an older man.
  - What do these people see, and which reality is stronger?