

SECTION I

COMPREHENDING (100 MARKS)

2007 Paper 1

TEXT 1

FILMS TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Read the following sample answer to text 1. Then, discuss the strong points of each answer and afterwards consider areas where some improvement might be made.

QUESTION A

- (i) In what way, according to the author of this text, do films change the way we think and/or feel about life? Support your answer by reference to the text. (15m)

In this text, the author makes a number of interesting points to illustrate the influence of film on how we think and feel about life.

In the second paragraph, the author refers to the film “Bicycle Thieves”, in which the protagonist, Antonio Ricci, attempts to locate the thief who has stolen his treasured bicycle. In Ricci’s enraged search through the streets of post-war Italy, clear frustration and outrage shows on every close-up of his face. Such emotive images, in the author’s opinion, are certain to evoke a sense of empathy among the audience with Ricci’s sad plight and in turn make that audience imagine how things might have been so different for Ricci and his family in a better society.

In the third paragraph, the author explores the impact which documentary films can have on an audience’s thoughts and feelings. He gives the example of the film-maker Michael Moore and cites several of his documentaries which have prompted people to question major issues in American society. Hard-hitting documentaries such as Moore’s 9/11 would cause the audience to reflect upon the political and indeed moral issues that are raised in the course of the narrative. The author goes on to suggest that documentaries succeed in changing people’s views by providing a manageable amount of information, but more specially, by presenting that information in a dramatic, gripping and memorable way.

The author, however, seems convinced that while film can encourage people

to consider wide significant social and political issues, the cinema-goer can also enjoy lighter moments filled with laughter. The film ‘Zoolander’ for example, can both inform and entertain the audience simultaneously. Its powerful use of satire and its comic approach to the ‘vanities and corruption’ within the fashion industry are both entertaining and informative. Classic films such as ‘The Sound of Music’ may raise our spirits and remind us that life can have its better, inspiring moments.

In conclusion, the author seems convinced that film is a powerful medium that can affect our thoughts, our emotions, even our relationships with one another.

(ii) As a teenager the writer found reading books more rewarding and appealing than watching films. Has this been your experience? Explain your answer. (15m)

Unlike the author, whose teenage experience of story and storytelling came from books and the theatre, I have found that both reading and cinema have appealed to me for a number of reasons.

On several occasions I have walked out of a cinema and directly into a bookshop to read the story I had just seen on screen. For example, I found the film Angela’s Ashes, an adaptation of Frank McCourt’s novel, a compelling and dramatic account of a child’s trials and triumphs in Limerick. When I read the novel, it proved even more rewarding and more-layered than the film version. While the book’s effect was less instantaneous, it was, on reflection, more enduring. For weeks after I finished this book, I harboured mental images of the gripping and impoverished world of the McCourt family, a world that the book had immersed me in completely.

My encounter with both the film and book versions of My Left Foot, however, provided a different experience for me. While I enjoyed reading the autobiography during the summer, I really found the film to be more thought-provoking. The setting came alive for me in the film version and I think it revealed more effectively that in the midst of poverty and hardship, there was love and laughter in the hearts of the Brown family. The film proved more rewarding in this case, probably in large part owing to the outstanding performance of the actor Daniel Day-Lewis, whose portrayal of Christy Brown was both compelling and convincing.

Film and books have their relative merits, no doubt. Overall, I have found film to be very immediate, making an instant impact with the help of striking visuals and emotive music. In addition, film is very atmospheric, making good use of evocative sets, interesting properties and stunning special effects. Books, on the other hand are unique in their ability to delve deeply into a character’s life. They invite the reader into numerous twists and turns of the plot. They

open up layers of engagement with characters that might not be possible in the relatively short time-frame of a movie where numerous scenes must be relegated to the cutting floor.

(iii) What features of the writer's style help to make this an interesting piece to read? Support your answer by reference to the text. (20m)

There are several features of the writer's style that make this text interesting and informative to read. One of the first things I noticed was the personal nature of the extract. The author engages our interest instantly with the use of the personal pronoun, 'I'. This is his story. He is willing to share it with us; we can learn of his thoughts and his feelings. Who would not be curious to read behind the 'blood-and-sweat physicality of theatre' and the 'tangled passions that raged' in his teenage heart? This willingness to reveal his feelings creates a sense of intimacy, a sense of rapport with us, the reader. Such a writing style is essential to any good storyteller.

A second feature of the writer's style that makes this text interesting and persuasive is the inclusion of specific references to films such as 'Zoolander' and 'The Wizard of Oz'. These references suggest that the author has enjoyed viewing numerous films which in turn adds weight to his argument on the powerful impact that a film can have on its audience. By including examples of films that have influenced people, the writer succeeds in making the piece more convincing. He decides not to quote from surveys nor to quote authority figures in an attempt to strengthen his argument. On the contrary, it would appear that his opinions are largely borne of personal engagement with that medium. This feature of his style adds to the persuasiveness of the piece.

Finally, I enjoyed reading the text because of the author's skilled use of language. There are several examples of well-crafted descriptive language that create a nostalgic mood without becoming sentimental. The pathetic depiction of Antonio Ricci, for example, a 'proud but unemployed father' who 'wanders up and down the city, often with his young son in tow', is in itself an emotive piece of descriptive writing. That such word-pictures can be so moving would seem to support the author's assertion that film can be a powerfully affective and provocative medium for an audience.

[End sample answers]