



IB English HL Paper 1 Question Bank



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English Paper 1 HL
2 hours 15 minutes

Instructions to candidates:

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Write a guided analysis of text 1.
- Write a guided analysis of text 2.
- Use the guiding question or propose an alternative technical or formal aspect of the text to focus your analysis.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[40 marks]**.



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Text A: An excerpt from "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald (published in 1925)
Text B: A poem titled "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot (published in 1922)

Question:

Compare and contrast the ways in which Text A and Text B depict the disillusionment and decay of the American Dream in the early 20th century. Analyze the literary techniques used by the authors in each text to convey their views on this theme. Support your analysis with relevant evidence from both texts.

Sample Band 7 Response:

Text A, an excerpt from "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Text B, the poem "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot, both explore the disillusionment and decay of the American Dream during the early 20th century. While Fitzgerald portrays the disillusionment through vivid descriptions of decadence and materialism, Eliot employs fragmented language and symbolism to convey a sense of desolation and despair. Both authors utilize a range of literary techniques to effectively convey their views on this theme.

In "The Great Gatsby," Fitzgerald employs rich imagery and descriptive language to depict the extravagant lifestyle of the characters, highlighting their excesses and moral decay. For example, he describes Gatsby's mansion as a "factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden." This description conveys the excessive opulence and artificiality of the American Dream, suggesting that it is built on materialism and lacks true substance.

Furthermore, Fitzgerald uses symbolism to depict the disillusionment of the American Dream. The character of Gatsby himself represents the hollowness of the American Dream, as he is a self-made man who has accumulated immense wealth but is unable to find fulfillment and happiness. The green light at the end of Daisy's dock, which Gatsby obsesses over, symbolizes the unattainability and emptiness of the American Dream, as it is always just out of reach for Gatsby despite his efforts.

On the other hand, in "The Waste Land," Eliot employs fragmented language and symbolism to create a sense of disillusionment and decay. The poem is composed of various disjointed voices and narratives, representing the fragmented and broken nature of the modern world. For example, the repeated line "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" conveys the sense of despair and emptiness that pervades the American Dream, as the once-promised land of opportunity has turned into a wasteland of disillusionment.

Eliot also uses symbolism to convey his views on the disillusionment of the American Dream. The river Thames, which appears throughout the poem, symbolizes the decay of society and the loss of traditional values. Additionally, the use of mythological and historical references, such as the story of the Sirens and the Tower of Babel, adds depth and complexity to Eliot's portrayal of the disillusionment of the American Dream, suggesting that it is a universal and timeless theme.

In conclusion, both Text A and Text B effectively depict the disillusionment and decay of the American Dream in the early 20th century through their use of literary techniques. Fitzgerald uses vivid imagery, descriptive language, and symbolism in "The Great Gatsby" to portray the excesses and moral decay of the American Dream, while Eliot employs fragmented language, symbolism, and mythological references in "The Waste Land" to convey a sense of desolation and despair in the modern world. Both authors provide a critique of the American Dream, showing how it has lost its promise and has become hollow and unattainable.

Furthermore, both texts highlight the challenges and struggles faced by individuals in the pursuit of the American Dream. In "The Great Gatsby," characters such as Gatsby and Myrtle are shown to be willing to do whatever it takes, including illegal and immoral actions, to achieve their dreams of wealth and success. However, their efforts ultimately lead to their downfall, revealing the dark side of the American Dream and the consequences of unchecked ambition.

Similarly, in "The Waste Land," Eliot presents a bleak and fragmented world where individuals are lost and disconnected from each other, struggling to find meaning and purpose. The lack of communication and meaningful connections among the characters in the poem reflects the breakdown of societal values and the disillusionment of the American Dream.

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