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91472



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Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Level 3 English 2023

91472 Respond critically to specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), supported by evidence

Credits: Four

Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
Respond critically to specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), supported by evidence.	Respond critically and convincingly to specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), supported by evidence.	Respond critically and perceptively to specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), supported by evidence.

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

Write ONE essay in this booklet.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–12 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

Do not write in any cross-hatched area (). This area will be cut off when the booklet is marked.

YOU MUST HAND THIS BOOKLET TO THE SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.

Excellence

TOTAL 08

INSTRUCTIONS

Write an essay on at least ONE **written text** that you have studied, in response to ONE of the statements below.

Give the details of the text(s) in the box on page 3.

WRITTEN TEXTS

Discuss the extent to which you agree with your chosen statement. Respond critically to the statement by making a close analysis of the text(s).

STATEMENTS (Choose ONE)

1. The strengths of a character are revealed in the way they deal with their own flaws.
2. Convincing settings help us to understand the key message of a text.
3. We see our world more clearly in a text that uses effective symbols.
4. The key relationships in a text take us on a hopeful journey.
5. Changes that take place between the start and end of a text help us to understand significant ideas.
6. Powerful lessons in a text can be found in unlikely places.
7. The skilful use of language in a text reveals ideas that enlighten the reader.
8. The characters who matter most in a text are those who challenge our beliefs.

Written text type(s):*Tick (✓) your selection*

Novel

Short story

Print media

Non-fiction

Poetry/song lyric

Digital/online text

Drama script

Title(s): _____**Author(s):** _____**PLANNING**

You should aim to write a concise essay of no more than 5–6 pages in length. The quality of your writing is more important than the length of your essay.

In your essay, discuss the extent to which you agree with your chosen statement. Respond critically to the statement by making a close analysis of the text(s).

Begin your written text(s) essay here:

Statement number: _____

In dystopian literature, the typical characterisation of a protagonist is that of an inherently 'good', often male individual, liberating society from the vices of evil. Individuals adhering to these heroic archetypes, whilst admirable, lack nuance and fail to recognise the multifaceted nature of the human condition. In Margret Atwood's speculative dystopia "The Handmaids Tale", the unlikely characterisation of the protagonist Offred teaches us powerful lessons about the dangers of complicity in the formation of oppressive regimes, the flawed nature of humanity in its entirety and the importance of seeking contextualisation, thus illustrating that powerful lessons in a text can indeed be found in unlikely places.

Complicity is an integral theme in the Handmaids Tale, and something that makes Offred's characterisation as a protagonist so unlikely. Offred lives within a patriarchal totalitarian theocracy called Gilead, a heavily oppressive regime, particularly to Handmaids, fertile women who through state sanctioned rape are expected to birth children on behalf of Commanders (the men at the top of the social hierarchy) and their wives. Handmaids are the main victims of the narrative, stripped of their basic human rights and bodily autonomy and forced to comply or face certain death via radiation poisoning in the 'colonies'. As a Handmaid, Offred is at odds with her role in society, opting to spend vast portions of the narrative disassociating into memory's of her life prior to the implementation of the regime as opposed to being present in her new and horrifying reality. In spite of her unfortunate circumstances, Offred's main goal is not to incite rebellion, speak out against the regime or escape, it is instead to live, a desire she expresses throughout the book, but perhaps most convincingly during the novel's final moments in which she states; "I don't want to be a doll hung up on the wall. I don't want to be a wingless angel. I want to keep living in any form. I resign my body freely to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. I feel for the first time their true power." We see here that unlike a typical 'hero' protagonist, Offred is content to comply, as long as it continues to ensure her own survival. Whilst this characterisation may seem unlikely in the sense that it is at odds with the norm, it teaches us a plethora of powerful and important lessons, particularly in regards to how complicity, an innately human response, can be dangerous.

Literary critic Allan Weiss speaks on the potential dangers of Offred's complicity in a critical analysis he wrote on the book, asserting that Atwood's purpose through Offred was to warn readers of the dangers of being complicit in the formation of totalitarian regimes. He asserts that Offred is in part at fault for Gilead's regime due to her complicity, and that totalitarian regimes can only be upheld by the adherence of their citizens. In application to the real world, this holds true to some extent, with the likes of Hitler's Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union illustrating that the complicity of ordinary citizens is required to enable dictatorships to retain power. Thus it can be seen that Atwood uses Offred's unlikely characterisation as a complicit individual to caution readers about the innate shortcoming of humanity and how these have the potential to corrupt the societies in which we live.

The Juxtaposition of Moira and Offred further exposes Offreds' shortcomings and teaches us important lessons about the human condition. Moira is Offred's closest friend, and epitomises what we would typically expect from a dystopian protagonist. Moira is rebellious, actively defying rules, failing to conform to societies expectations of her and even escaping from the 'red centre' intended to indoctrinate women into following Gilead's ideals. Initially we like Moira for being all that Offred is not, brave and unafraid to speak out against what we as readers recognise to be an unjust system. Towards the end of the book, Offred meets Moira at Jezebel's, Gilead's equivalent of a strip club. Moira is not the woman she once was, now adhering to Gilead's rules and working in the club to avoid having to do labour in the colonies. Offred is disappointed with this 'new Moira', stating "I don't want her to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin." Moira states that she is "Not a martyr", and exposes to readers that often human resistance is futile and no one is exempt from their own humanity. Even if we like to perceive ourselves as infallible moral creatures, there are inherent fallacies to the human condition which none of us can escape. Perhaps it is true that Offred's complicity is not admirable, but Atwood illustrates through Offred's relationship with Moira that we are all just as flawed. This powerful lesson is a poignant one, albeit perhaps one we don't want to learn.

A final way in which Offred's character defies what we would consider "likely" is her gender. Atwood wrote at a time in which protagonists in the Science fiction and Speculative fiction genres were typically men, a reflection of the male writers who crafted them. Offred is a woman, which gives her a unique female voice and allows a feminist message to be integrated into the novel. One such way this is done is through the use of biblical justification to deny women the rights to their body. Gilead presents a society in which "The bible is kept locked up" and religious doctrine is twisted to 'justify' the oppression of women. We see this particularly in the fact that abortion has been outlawed in Gilead, even if the fetus is incompatible with life or presents a serious risk to the mother. Offred states in regards to fetuses, "They cannot be taken out. Whatever it is must be carried to full term." Gilead justifies this removal of bodily autonomy with numerous biblical passages. This concept of subjugating people in accordance to uncontextualised religious doctrine feels dystopian, but actually serves as a powerful reminder that without context and holistic understanding, people can easily become victims of oppression. We can see this happening in the USA, where legislation protecting women's rights like Roe Vs Wade are being overturned at a rapid pace. Through this focus on viewing a dystopian world through a female protagonist, Atwood is able to show us how easy it is for society to regress and for individuals to become the subjects of inhumane laws. We learn through Offred that we must always seek wider context and not allow society to be shaped by viewpoints that lack this.

In conclusion the Handmaids Tale, a work of speculative dystopian fiction by Margret Atwood uses the unlikely characterisation of its protagonist Offred as a non-heroic female character to teach readers powerful lessons about the dangers of complicity

in the formation of oppressive regimes, the flawed nature of humanity and the importance of contextualisation in preventing oppression.

Excellence

Subject: English

Standard: 91472

Total score: 08

Q	Grade score	Marker commentary
6	E8	<p>Statement: 6</p> <p>Written text: <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> (Margaret Atwood)</p> <p>The candidate perceptively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• uses the non-typical 'hero' of Offred from Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> as an example of an unlikely place where lessons about the shortcomings of humanity and the dangers of complicity can be found• provides a sophisticated argument supported by well-chosen and clearly unpacked evidence• gives attention to all aspects of the chosen statement.