



VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

## 2020 VATE UNIT 3 ENGLISH SAMPLE EXAM

### Section C – Supplementary material prepared by Karen Graham

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**NB:** This analysis of the argument and language used in Section C is intended to provide some suggestions for a student response. It represents **one** interpretation of the material and identifies **some** possible analytical approaches. There is no intention to provide a comprehensive analysis of the material. Students are not expected to identify and analyse everything, merely to show their understanding of the argument and how it is deliberately couched in language for an intended impact on the reader. It is an attempt to show how argument and language complement each other. Student responses will need to be appropriately structured and will be much shorter given the time constraints of the examination.

Section C will be assessed against the following criteria:

Criteria	Meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>understanding of the argument(s) presented and point(s) of view expressed</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify the main contention</li> <li>• identify some of the supporting arguments</li> <li>• track the development of the argument</li> <li>• identify any major shifts in the argument</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>analysis of ways in which language and visual features are used to present an argument and to persuade</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show how argument and language complement each other</li> <li>• explain how language is used to present the argument</li> <li>• identify the tone and tone shifts that signal a change in the argument</li> <li>• explain how language is used to persuade and position the audience</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>control and effectiveness of language use, as appropriate to the task</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• accurate use of analytical language and metalanguage</li> <li>• appropriate sentence and paragraph structure</li> </ul>

Students need to show their understanding of the arguments presented, and then analyse how authors use language to support their arguments in order to persuade readers to agree with them. Analysis of both argument and language will answer the following questions:

- **What** is being argued? (contention and supporting arguments)
- **How** is it being argued? (language and persuasive techniques)
- **Why** is it being argued in this particular way? (intended impact on audience)
- What **tones** are apparent in the speaker's voice and how do they shift with particular **language choices**?
- What role do the **visual elements** play in relation to the point of view?

### Context

The opinion piece, 'The Life and Death of Kindness', written by Noah Aaronson, appeared in the Melbourne daily newspaper, *The Custodian*, on 14 November 2019. The article was published in a number of major newspapers across Australia, as well as some international publications.

The author of this piece, Noah Aaronson, is a freelance journalist, working for an international news organisation. He is an Australian, recently returned home after six years overseas, who is seeking a connection to his past in Parishville, a regional Victorian town.

### Audience

The article is directed to a broad Australian audience who have an interest in how their society functions and are concerned about current issues that contribute to social breakdown.

### Contention

Aaronson contends that the loss of kind and concerned behaviours in individuals is resulting in a form of collective selfishness and indifference that is endangering society.

### Supporting arguments

There are a number of supporting arguments including:

1. Aaronson opens his opinion piece with a personal reflection on his childhood home that is sentimental and romantic. He then juxtaposes this with the vandalised war memorial and begins his argument that thoughtless individual actions are the catalyst for social breakdown.
2. He critically examines the examples of anti-social behaviours in his hometown and argues that they develop momentum and destructive potential as more social groups adopt them.
3. Aaronson argues that the impact of this pattern of behaviour diseases the social order not only in country towns, but across wider society.
4. He concludes that the antidote to widespread loss of civility can only be found in individuals changing their behaviour and demonstrating care and concern for others.

## **Tone**

Aaronson opens his piece in a highly personal voice as he recalls with nostalgia and sentimentality the home of his childhood; however, this evolves into a disappointed and disgusted tone as he confronts the graffiti, both written and verbal, that has damaged his town. His comments take on a philosophical note as he reflects on the wider concerns of social dislocation. He comes full circle and completes his article in a strong personal voice that calls for action – and this is driven by his yearning for a reclamation of the innocence of the past.

## **Purpose**

His purpose is to highlight the loss of civility in modern life and the need to act now to reclaim a kinder, more considerate way of living.

## **The graphics**

The article is accompanied by two photographs of the town's war memorials – the Avenue of Honour that leads into the town, and the large memorial that stands at its entrance.

There is an ironical note evident in the photo of the Avenue of Honour. This avenue of trees was planted to acknowledge and revere those members of the community who had died fighting for their country, their freedom, their town and families. However, it now leads to the War Memorial which local vandals have defaced. They have desecrated the memory of those who fought, and besmirched the 'honour' of those who sacrificed their lives. Their names and sacrifices have been reduced to ugly paint tags. Is this the best that their hard fought efforts achieved? Did they die to protect freedom so that a new generation could destroy their honour?

## **Some points of analysis**

- The title, 'The Life and Death of Kindness', introduces the idea that there is something worthwhile expiring in society. The implications of the words 'life' and 'death' are echoed in the large photograph of the war memorial which honours the lives of those who have died at war. However, the irony is that there is nothing honourable in the demise of kindness.

The language of death and dying is used consistently throughout the piece. Aaronson writes about the 'sacrifice' of the soldiers, the newspapers full of 'assaulting and killing', the 'tentacles' of the beast 'strangling' the kindness out of the community. The metaphor of disease and suffering is used to reinforce the death of kindness and consideration.

- The piece opens with the personal story of Noah Aaronson who has returned to Australia after six years and is looking for some connection to 'home'. He heads to his birthplace, Parishville, and the tone is nostalgic as he recalls 'clean country air' and the 'clear blue light' of 'my true home'. The town of his past is represented to the reader as a place of light and freedom, and there is a note of yearning as he drives down the Avenue of Honour. He yearns 'to feel', 'to breathe' and 'to bathe' in the openness and freedom of his childhood memory, and the reader is invited to share the innocence and joy of this experience.
- The mood changes abruptly with the single line 'But changed, it had'. There is a sense of foreboding in the short sentence. Significant is its deliberate placement under the photograph of the defaced war memorial. Here, in all its visual ugliness, is the evidence of this change.

The names of local soldiers and heroes are plastered over with ugly paint tags. Memory has been defaced. Honour has been desecrated. The ugliness of senseless vandalism has sullied the romantic mood of the past. The reader is positioned to feel disgust at the implied disrespect of history and memory.

- The language and tone adjusts to emphasise this shocking change. The nostalgia of feeling, gives way to the disgust of the visual assault. The language of light and space becomes the gritty language of violence and crime – ‘defaced’, ‘garish, fatuous scribble’, ‘underbelly of urban life’ and the tricolon ‘Meaningless, senseless, careless’ all carry connotations of darkness, destruction and chaos.

Aaronson has sharply juxtaposed the warmth of the childhood memory with the ugliness of the grim reality of Parishville.

- As he reflects on the significance of the memorial, Aaronson uses the simile of it standing ‘like a sentinel’ – a protector or a watchman – standing guard over a more innocent time where people cared about each other. He puts emphasis on examples of human behaviour of caring and concern. The reader is encouraged to empathise with those who visit their sick neighbours and help the elderly across the street. There is a simplicity in these examples that reinforces the innocence and humanity of an earlier time.
- However, when he writes about the vandal, the perpetrator of the graffiti, Aaronson represents him as non-human, ‘the creature’ with a ‘mediocre mind’, and in so doing diminishes his importance in the mind of the reader. He describes his action of defacement as a ‘grubby smudge’ and ‘selfish scribbles’ which demeans the behaviour to that of a child. He plays on the words of the idiom ‘leave your mark on the world’ to reinforce the immature and delinquent nature of the graffiti marks written over the names of men who made **their mark** by sacrificing their lives for others.
- The writer demonstrates the escalation of anti-social behaviour that has developed in Parishville. The list includes rudeness in the supermarket, deliberate littering of the streets and disrespectful public behaviour. His personal encounter with a group of teenagers using offensive language and engaging in anti-social behaviour is the stimulus for the argument to move beyond local problems in Parishville. The anonymity of the painted tags now becomes the public verbalisation of insult, mockery, and personal attack. The term ‘verbal graffiti’ captures the speed of the escalation of carelessness, rudeness and offensiveness.
- Aaronson extrapolates from his experiences in Parishville – the ‘carelessness’ of the townsfolk takes on more sinister and threatening overtones when he refers to the ‘mean-spirited nastiness’ of wider society. He identifies people ‘manipulating, coercing, bullying, assaulting and killing’. This list of words reinforces and magnifies the individual behaviours he has witnessed in his home town. Identifying social media as a ‘breeding ground’, he presents the metaphor of the ‘insidious beast’ whose ‘tentacles’ stretch into everyday life ‘strangling’ the kindness from the community. This heightened language of sub-human behaviour, reinforces the images of death and destruction seen earlier in the article, and seeks to shock the reader into action. He represents the anti-social behaviour as developing an uncontrollable momentum that will drastically transform their quality of life.

- The imagery of disease is maintained as he identifies world-wide societies ‘suffering from social and moral dislocation’. The writer represents the loss of civility as an international illness. But he does not finish his article with uncertainty or threat. The juxtaposition of the ‘corrosive effects of indifference’ with the ‘restorative effects of kindness’ (the rust and the repair, so to speak) offers a note of hope to the readers. The personal ‘I’ which has dominated the article gives way to the inclusive ‘we’ as he offers the certainty of the modal auxiliary verb ‘will’ – what *will* help is people taking a stand.
- The writer again plays on words – instead of ‘random acts of violence’ that we regularly read about in the media, Aaronson calls for ‘random acts of kindness’. It is a call to the reader for individual action with the long-term hope of achieving collective redemption.