

to further prove the new perspective, using a wide knowledge of the text with a synthesis of ideas from different parts of the novel

relationship always has an air of uncertainty because Alice refuses to share her past with him. His love for Alice becomes so great that he tries to sabotage the bridge he has helped to build, knowing that many people like Alice lost their lives and became the unknown part of history. The bridge, which symbolises the future and carries with it the stories of so many who were photographed and chronicled, also symbolises the silent ones whose stories are rarely heard.

The development of certainty and the replacement of *isolation* by friendships are explored further

Alice becomes the link to Nicholas who she met when she was a nun. She fell off the bridge and was saved by Nicholas, who had arrived in Toronto from Macedonia in 1914. His love for Alice distracts him from the “terrible barriers” he feels of not speaking the language of his new land. Before he meets her, Nicholas “does not listen to most conversations around him, he assumes no one hears him”. Knowing that “if he did not learn the language he would be lost”, Nicholas goes to school with children and “dreamt of translation”. Learning language is like acting, with many of his countrymen choosing a movie star who they can imitate in speaking the new language. When he talks to the nun he has saved and calls her Alice, he speaks in “phrases from radio songs” and breaks not only his isolation but hers, as he urges her to talk. She starts to understand the different world of a “Macedonian night” and becomes conscious that “now the parrot has a language”. She breaks her silence to ask him his name.

Summing up the different parts of the response in a conclusion that confirms the introduction

Rather than being a book about isolation and uncertainty, this is a book which celebrates connection and the certainty that comes from connecting. By focusing on the stories of individual immigrants to Toronto at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ondaatje shows the importance of different people to the history of the modernisation of the city. The single stories of individuals become part of a “mural, which was a falling together of accomplices ... fragments of a human order”. Ondaatje gives voice to the workers who came to a new land where they lived precarious lives filled with uncertainty and became the unacknowledged heroes of modernity.

### Follow up

Look up the Notes from the Marking Centre and the Marking Guidelines for the 2010 Examination (on the Board of Studies website). Use these guidelines to identify what was valued and to assess the sample 2010 responses.

### 2010 Paper 2 Section II Module B: Sample response 2

*Winton's Cloudstreet continues to engage readers through its narrative treatment of hardship and optimism.'*

*In the light of your critical study, does this statement resonate with your own interpretation of Cloudstreet?*

*In your response, make detailed reference to the novel.*

## Understanding the question

### Key words/phrases:

*Engage readers* – a personal response is required by you as a reader, indicated in both the opening stimulus statement and the detailed question that follows.

*Narrative treatment* – you will need to focus on the way the novel is written and organised (techniques).

*Hardship and optimism* – your thesis must be about the creation of these two concepts in the text.

### Sample response: Prose fiction

**Prescribed text:** Cloudstreet, Tim Winton, 1991

The opening paragraph connects the book with the key words in the question: *engage readers*, *hardship*, and *optimism*

National surveys conducted over the last few years have repeatedly shown that Cloudstreet is Australia’s favourite Australian novel, and one of our favourite books overall. Winton has engaged his readership so successfully by using the techniques of prose fiction to create a compelling story of hardship that finishes with a sense of optimism and hope for the future. The context of the novel also plays an important role in engagement. Cloudstreet was first published in 1991, following a decade of national discussion and acknowledgement in the 1980s of issues of Australian identity and Aboriginal reconciliation. As such, it deals with ideas that are at the core of what it might mean to be ‘Australian’.

Conventions of the genre of the *family saga* (an aspect of *narrative treatment*) are connected to the reader’s engagement

Characters (*narrative treatment*) are introduced as typical of the genre and connected with *hardship*

Cloudstreet is a family saga, a genre that charts the fortunes and misfortunes of a family through several generations. Readers become engaged in sagas through the series of crises that befall characters, encountering difficulties and hardships that they either manage to rise above, as Oriel and Lester do, or tend to give in to, as Sam and Dolly do. All the characters in the novel experience hardship and loss, but have different ways of dealing with their problems. Winton has created characters who are essentially one-dimensional (Oriel is hard-working and unemotional, Dolly is irresponsible and over-emotional, Sam is feckless and superstitious, and so on), and it is this caricatured quality about them that helps us to feel sympathy for them. We recognise their strengths and weaknesses because these are so clearly highlighted by Winton. However, because these people are essentially likeable, we want them to overcome their failings and be successful, both personally and materially.

*We also want them* refers directly to the reader’s engagement.

Elements of plot (*narrative treatment*) engage the reader

*Optimism* is discussed

We also want them to successfully deal with the hardships that they encounter in their lives. We are shown early in the novel that both families have suffered serious losses: the Lambs have lost the lively and vital part of Fish, who could “endear teachers to him by giving them lip” before the accident, but is now very limited and dependent, and Sam Pickles has lost his hand and his livelihood. The ways both families deal with their losses shows us the very great difference between them and why they spend so much of their lives in their own separate parts of the divided house. The Lambs, and especially Oriel, cope by committing themselves to hard work, with very little time for enjoyment in their lives, while the Pickleses attribute everything to chance, the “shifty shadow”, live entirely in the moment and drift from one problem to another.

<p>Final outcomes (an aspect of <i>narrative treatment</i>) are explained as they illustrate <i>optimism</i></p>	<p>The novel takes the reader through the ups and downs of the two families, to finally reach a point of hope and optimism, where all characters seem more personally complete, able to accept themselves and others more readily, and able to better cope with the external hardships of life. In the union of Rose and Quick we see that the strengths of each family “complete” the other and that their children will combine the best of both parents. Even Fish is made whole again at the end, his two separated selves “healed” in the water, creating a sense of rightness from what would normally be considered a tragedy.</p>
<p>The way language (an aspect of <i>narrative treatment</i>) is used to <i>engage the reader</i> is now discussed with specific examples</p>	<p>The language of the novel engages the reader. Winton is a master of imagery, creating vivid mental pictures in very few words. He describes a country town as having “a rarefied air of boredom, almost a tangible purity of boredom that blows in through the windows”. “Rarefied” and “purity” suggest that the town has refined the art of being boring and attained the highest standards of boredom, while “tangible” and “blows” suggest that boredom has a solid, physical presence in the town. Even the repetition of “boredom” adds to the sense of tedium. In the burning man incident, Fish’s distress is succinctly conveyed through “Fish mouth all black with hurt”, a phrase that eloquently portrays his protracted howl of anguish, even though no sounds are mentioned. We are engaged by these types of descriptions because we know these emotions ourselves and can relate to the feelings of the characters. The intensity of the images helps us to understand Winton and his characters.</p>
<p>Note how the quotations become part of the sentence</p>	<p>Winton also uses humour to engage us, often in scenes that are distressing and confronting, such as Fish’s resuscitation. Oriel’s frantic attempts to revive Fish appear to Lon as though his brother is being punished for his cheekiness and Lon laughs delightedly when Fish coughs up water all over his mother. There is also humour in the determinedly Australian vernacular of the novel, with its understated irony. This black, ironic humour reminds us that even in the face of hardship, there is a lighter side to be found and it is an Australian trait to find humour in adversity.</p>
<p>Humour (an aspect of <i>narrative treatment</i>) and the reader</p>	<p>The uniquely Australian context and ‘feel’ are important ways of engaging the reader. International readers often comment that they do not understand the language of the characters or the landscape, but the novel has a different effect on many Australians. Speaking on ‘The First Tuesday Book Club’ on ABC TV, 2 March 2010, Marieke Hardy commented that, “It is Australian ... But reading it felt like coming home. It feels like looking through the plane window when you’re flying back into the country”. <i>Cloudstreet</i> was published just a few years after the bicentenary of white settlement in Australia and looks at issues that are still relevant, such as Aboriginal reconciliation and Australian identity. The growth of characters in the novel parallels the growth of Australia, the post-war struggles leading to a broader outlook, greater prosperity, a stronger sense of identity and optimism for the Lambs, the Pickleses and the nation. The setting is also quintessentially Australian, in an almost mythical sense, pitting Aussie battlers against the landscape, fate and themselves. Australian readers recognise this stereotypical character who battles hardship and refuses to give in and admit defeat.</p>
<p>The book is placed into a historical and national context, which is related to the audience</p>	
<p>Other people’s views are used to support the thesis</p>	

The conclusion summarises the topics of the preceding paragraphs each on an aspect of narrative treatment

The genre, style, characters, language, setting and plot of *Cloudstreet* all engage readers in their own particular ways. The struggle to cope with hardship and perhaps to achieve something better is at the core of the action of the novel and embedded in the notion of saga. The movement from crisis to crisis engages the reader through suspense. The gradual growth of characters towards acceptance and optimism also engages us, as we sympathise with the characters and want them to succeed and be happy. This finally seems achievable when the ghosts of the past (the Aboriginal man, the girl and the old woman) are exorcised by love and a better future beckons for the united families, suggesting the possibilities of reconciliation on a wider scale.

### Follow up

Look up the Notes from the Marking Centre and the Marking Guidelines for the 2010 Examination (on the Board of Studies website). Use these guidelines to identify what was valued and to assess the sample 2010 responses.

## Module C: Representation and Text

### From the Syllabus

This module requires students to explore various representations of events, personalities or situations. They evaluate how medium of production, textual form, perspective and choice of language influence meaning. The study develops students' understanding of the relationships between representation and meaning.

Each elective in this module requires the study of one prescribed text offering a representation of an event, personality or situation. Students are also required to supplement this study with texts of their own choosing which provide a variety of representations of that event, personality or situation. These texts are to be drawn from a variety of sources, in a range of genres and media.

Students explore the ways in which different media present information and ideas to understand how various textual forms and their media of production offer different versions and perspectives for a range of audiences and purposes.

Students develop a range of imaginative, interpretive and analytical compositions that relate to different forms and media of representation. These compositions may be realised in a variety of forms and media.

*(English Stage 6 Syllabus, p. 48)*

### From the Prescriptions document

#### Elective 1: Conflicting Perspectives

In their responding and composing, students consider the ways in which conflicting perspectives on events, personalities or situations are represented in their prescribed text and other related texts of their own choosing. Students analyse and evaluate how acts of representation, such as the choice of textual forms, features and language, shape meaning and influence responses.