

ENGLISH

STANDARD AND ADVANCED AREA OF STUDY: CHANGE

The prescribed stimulus booklet, *Changing*

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These notes discuss the prescribed stimulus booklet, *Changing*, set for the English Standard and Advanced courses. While some of the comments provided here may also apply to the study of the booklet as required in the English ESL course, and its Area of Study, Perspective, the focus here is on the concept of Change.

The Area of Study component of the Standard or Advanced course requires students to consider the concept, Change. According to the syllabus, they will “explore the ways in which the notion of change is considered and expressed in and through texts.” Students will study a particular focus: Changing Worlds, Changing Self or Changing Perspective and at least one prescribed text for that focus.

As part of this compulsory study, every student has also been issued with a stimulus booklet, *Changing*, compiled by the Board of Studies. This booklet contains six texts, which the syllabus states offer “various points of view from which the Area of Study can be introduced.” The texts are intended to provide stimulus for responding to and composing texts relating to the Area of Study, Change, for the English Standard and Advanced courses (as well as the Area of Study, Perspective, for the English ESL course). It is expected that students will have a detailed knowledge and understanding of each of the texts presented in the booklet: its individual qualities as well as its relationship with the wider context of the Area of Study, Change (or Perspective), and their own particular focus of study and other prescribed texts.

In Paper 1 there are three sections. One of these will require an extended response to the focus study and prescribed text. In this response students will also be required to refer directly to texts in the stimulus booklet. As stated in the introduction to the stimulus booklet, “students may be asked to refer to at least one text that they have selected from the stimulus booklet” in the HSC examination. While students will not need to include references to all six texts in the stimulus booklet in their written response they should prepare all of them in order to select the most appropriate text for the set question. Students should be able to quote from the texts in support of their response and be able to refer to specific visual elements of the texts where relevant.

The texts in the stimulus booklet may also influence the students own composing on the notion of change that will be required in Paper 1. These texts should be used to develop ideas on change while also giving students insights into how these ideas and meanings may be constructed and represented.

The brief notes and questions that follow on each text are designed to stimulate the students’ thinking about the texts and develop their understanding of the notion of change while leaving them to make their own connections to the specific focus and prescribed text they have studied.

Text 1: *The Door* by Miroslav Holub

You need to consider:

- what does the image of the door represent and symbolise?
- what ideas and notions of change are presented in the poem?
- how does the poem present a point of view on the concept of change?
- how does the poem develop your own view and experiences of change?
- does the following discussion of the poem reflect your own thoughts and interpretations? What other comments could you add?

This poem tells the reader to “Go and open the door” and explores the possibilities of what may lie beyond the door that it commands us to “open”. The poem makes the reader consider a range of possibilities as to what the opened door will reveal to us while emphasising that we need to take action, to actually “open the door” in order to find what lies beyond and facilitate change. The repeated command (or imperative) creates an emphatic tone that implores the reader to take a chance, to choose to leave their “comfort zones”, their present state and to take on the world outside and possibly change as a result.

The poem presents the door as a symbol. A closed door can be a barrier, a symbol of things that keep us confined and limited as individuals. By opening the door we remove those barriers and are introduced to possibilities. Thus the door can be perceived as both an entry and an exit. By opening the door individuals choose to change, to enter a new state of being, consider new things and alter their present existence or thinking: they are exposed to change. In this way the door can also be an exit, as individuals leave their limited world through the door and embrace change and variation. The door can be seen as a dual metaphor for what restricts us (our own thinking, perceptions, physical limits etc.) as well as being a gateway to opportunity and change.

Yet the poem reminds us that there are no certainties when we open the door, just varied opportunities which are then listed and range from the common and ordinary (“a tree”, “a dog’s rummaging”) to the fantastic and abstract (“a magic city”, “the picture of a picture”). What lies beyond the door will perhaps be different for everyone and the poem offers different possibilities and results of change. The change may be subtle like “the hollow wind”, or as confronting as the stark “eye”, or unexpected like the “magic city”, or a new perspective through “the picture/ of a picture”. But all encompass the notion of change: that which may alter us, our world or give us a new perspective.

The tone of the poem is optimistic and change is presented as a positive force. Even “if there’s a fog” when we open the door, an obstacle or difficulty, and things at first lack clarity, or we feel uncertain, the poem reassures the reader that “it will clear”. The poem encourages us to at least seek change, to persevere and to at least “open the door” as there is still benefit in experiencing whatever we find, no matter how insignificant or momentous. It is the attempt that matters. Regardless of what we find and how we perceive it the poem emphasises that “even if” we think “nothing/ is there. . . At least/there’ll be/a draught”; we will feel something, even if it just the movement of the door.

Texts 2a and 2b. *The Conciliation and the National Picture*

These texts need to be considered separately as well as together. To fully appreciate and understand these two texts you will need to research further the historical background to Dutterau's painting and his depiction of George Robinson with some Tasmanian Aborigines. You need to consider Parr's work as an appropriation of Dutterau's painting as well as the new techniques he employs to create his work.

Text 2a - *The Conciliation* – Benjamin Dutterau, 1840

Dutterau's painting came from a sketch he made for his planned "National Picture". It shows George Robinson interacting with a group of aborigines. George Robinson was a Methodist bricklayer who rounded up the remaining Tasmanian aborigines (after the military and local settlers had tried to eradicate them) and took them to a settlement on Flinders Island for their "domestication". Amongst the group was Truganini who became the last surviving Tasmanian aborigine. After she died in 1879 she became an icon and symbol of the period and events that occurred. She is on the left of Robinson in Dutterau's painting and the image of her as an older woman is clearly framed in Parr's work.

When examining Dutterau's painting consider the following:

- How does the title of Dutterau's painting reflect his perspective of events in Tasmania and of George Robinson? The dictionary defines conciliation as "offering parties a voluntary settlement", "gain (esteem, goodwill)"; "pacify" and "win over (to one's side)".
- The painting depicts the British colonists' attitudes and values of the time (1840). The central figure is George Robinson. How does the use of colour and positioning suggest Dutterau's admiration of him?
- What other evidence in the painting suggests its Eurocentric focus: the colonists' belief in white man's supremacy and their view of the Aborigines as a primitive people?
- What do the gestures of the individual aborigines in the painting suggest about their attitudes towards "conciliation"?
- After studying this painting what thoughts does it give you about the calls nowadays for "reconciliation" with the Aborigines? What are the connotations of this term?

Text 2b: *The National Picture* – Geoff Parr, 1985

You need to consider this work on two levels:

- as an appropriation of Dutterau's painting, *The Conciliation*
- as an example of new art forms evolving from changes and development of technology

This text highlights the changes and influence of new technology in the art making process as Parr appropriates Dutterau's work through the medium of photography, thereby using a modern medium to question past attitudes and historical representations of the treatment of the Tasmanian Aborigines. Parr used a process called digital art imaging (which blends digital photography with digitalised images from traditional art works).

By reconstructing Dutterau's original painting using modern techniques the viewer is aware of the intertextuality and transformation: the "new" resonates with the "old", causing the viewer to reflect upon the changes in our society and how our values and attitudes may have changed over the last 150 years. Make a careful list of the

similarities and differences between the two works and consider what ideas the changes suggest.

Consider the following:

- Why do you think Parr has called his work *The National Picture*? What connotations does this title have? How does it relate to Dutterau's overall concept of a national picture that his painting *The Conciliation* was a part of? How does Parr's title and work depict changed attitudes?
- For what purpose, and in what ways, does Parr's work parody Dutterau's? (Parody = a consciously exaggerated imitation of another work for the purpose of humour or satire) To what extent can Parr's work be regarded as a political statement?
- Why is the composition of Parr's work effective? The characters' positions parallel those of Dutterau's but there is a clear reversal: mostly white Anglo-Saxon characters replace the aboriginal figures in the foreground. What statement is Parr making here about our present day society? Parr retains Dutterau's aboriginal figures in the background but he literally places them on a screen, a backdrop, and gives them a "ghost-like" faded appearance. How does this represent Parr's comment on the subjugation and treatment of the Aboriginal people then and now?
- What specific images, icons or symbols does Parr use to represent changes over time in our:
 - a) socio-cultural attitudes and values
 - b) politics
 - c) environment
 - d) lifestyle

As a starting point look at:

Truginini's image on the "black" figure dressed in white (her photo is superimposed on this figure – a familiar picture that has become symbolic of the treatment of aborigines and political irresponsibility)

surveying equipment (representative of growth and building but also the mapping out, naming and laying claim to the land)

clothes and appearance, stereoplayer (jeans which have become an icon of our lifestyle; the suit that is symbolic of business/corporate and political worlds and the prolific music, entertainment industry)

esky (an Australian icon for outdoor leisure and lifestyle)

kangaroo skin (our attitudes to our environment and animal species)

aboriginal flag emblem on bag (political correctness or commercialisation?) Use of same colours on scarves?

corrugated iron sheet (replaces the natural landscape and hill of Dutterau's painting)

sense of a "set" or stage for Parr's characters – characters are inside with an artificial backdrop to suggest the natural landscape and setting in contrast to Dutterau's painting (how we "create" images now; our technological advances as well as a statement on the construction of our lifestyle and attitudes?)

- What aspects of Parr's work reflect notions of racial stereotypes?

When Dutterau and Parr's works are viewed together they highlight notions of change. It is evident that Parr's postcolonial work serves to raise awareness of changes both in our physical world as well as political and cultural attitudes. His work makes us question historical events, actions and attitudes and forces us to consider what has changed, and to what degree things have changed. We are also left

to reflect upon the forces for change and future directions. As Parr has used a new medium for his appropriation we are left to consider also how the text itself is a phenomenon of change and new techniques available to us by which we can construct our images and questions.

The texts highlight change:

- in our world due to the forces and influences of technology and modernity
- in perspective and attitudes due to our development from colonisation, Eurocentrism, imperialism, and the historical marginalisation of Aborigines and minority groups to an emerging postcolonial, more humanist approach to racial relations
- in our emerging selves with changes in national identity and sense of oneness of individuals in society and globalisation
- in the construction of texts and new types of texts

Text 3. *Sky High* by Hannah Roberts

This short story is a reflective piece as the narrator remembers her childhood experiences, using the symbol of the “washing line” to remind the reader about the changes in one’s life and the strength of memories.

The first person narrator remembers the washing line “first”, with its “silver skeletal arms”. This image is the central image of her reminiscence. She describes the garden surrounding it and the “best climbing tree”, which was “festooned with socks and knickers and shirts”. The nostalgic tone is established as we are caught up in her world of colour and nature as she notes the “almond tree”, the nectarine tree’s “hard, bird-bitten fruit” and other flora.

Yet the reader is abruptly moved on in time in with the ambiguous line, “Today, however, it is bare”. At first it seems we have returned to the present but we soon realise that her thoughts have wandered to another day in her childhood, when she climbed the washing line and sat in her “exalted position, almost sky-high”. Here we share her feelings of joy and excitement as she surveys the world she knows. The level of language and sentence structure at this point becomes almost child-like in its conversational tone, simplicity and matter-of-fact statements, “Three little boys live there; I have stood on the fence and talked to them, even been in their house once.”

The reader becomes caught in the moment with the young girl who is feeling “frilly and nearly as pink as the bathers” she was wearing. As the narrator describes, in the present tense and in the voice of the child, her climb “out along one skeletal arm” until she swings “upside-down” the reader is swept along with her euphoria and movement. We are captured in the moment as the “earth spins below” her and she is “flying”.

Once again the reader is abruptly moved on to an image of an “older, more age-warped washing line” that depicts the passage of time since she once soared in the childhood memory previously described. The image of her hands that have accumulated “the line-etched story in scars and wrinkles” reinforces the sense of ageing and nostalgic tone. While the washing line has stood constant in the yard, changes have occurred and the carefree imagination of the child and will of the child

are tempered by the reality: “The inclination is still there . . .but it is unlikely the washing line could support me this time.” The adult world intrudes on her reflection as she realises how her life and world have changed. She must accept the responsibilities of adulthood as she is no longer the “curious onlooker” but creates her own “semaphore secrets” with her washing. She doesn’t feel “the sagging wires” and “spotted metallic arms” could support her and acknowledges it would be a struggle as “there are too many things tying [her] to the ground.” She has matured and accepts her changed circumstances but still pines for those moments of freedom she experienced as a child and remembers, symbolised by the washing machine and the memories it evokes.

This story highlights the passage of time and stages of our life that bring change and development yet it also evokes the adult nostalgia for the fun, innocence and freedom of childhood. The title reflects the childhood’s whimsical notion of being “sky-high” on the washing line while the conclusion reflects the realistic image of an adult being tied to the ground. The young child is fearless, inquisitive and imaginative, acting on impulse. Her descriptions of her world and people in it are non-judgemental. The narrator reminds us that as an adult she still feels “a small pilot light burning” but she rationalises it, preventing herself from responding to a moment of inspiration and perhaps, even briefly, entering another world – one of her youth or alternatively a new one. The author encourages the reader to consider their own circumstances and reminisce about changes that have occurred, and reflect on those that could still occur.

Text 4. Sturt’s Dreaming by Bruce Lundgren

For this poem you should investigate further the explorer, Charles Sturt, and the aboriginal creation story, the Dreaming. Briefly,

- Charles Sturt was an early explorer who set out in 1828 to follow the course of the Macquarie River to its mouth. Journeying west he discovered the Bogan River and in 1829 found a much larger river which he named the Darling River. He believed that this river was the key to unlocking the mystery of the distant interior and western river system. His next expedition was to try and solve the mystery of the mouths of the Murrumbidgee and Darling Rivers. Leaving behind some men at a depot Sturt set off, with seven men in a whaleboat towing a small dinghy with supplies, to explore by river. After much hardship they found their way to the Murray River, encountering native aborigines along the way, and forged towards a lake, naming it Alexandrina. Across the mudflats was the ocean: they had discovered the destination of the inland rivers and the mystery that had perplexed many explorers had been solved. Sturt had fulfilled his dream.
- The Dreaming is the Aboriginal creation story. The Dreaming represents a mythic period in which ancestral spirits travelled across the land shaping the landscape and creating new life as they went.

The title of this poem at first seems to focus on Sturt and his visions to conquer a new land but the familiar connotations of “Dreaming” link it to the Aborigines’ history and culture. Sturt, the explorer, had a dream to unlock the mystery of the land and interior and find the “legendary ocean”. The Aborigines’ Dreaming provides us with the story of creation and the stories of each geographical feature in Australia. The irony is that Sturt’s dream took him across a land that he believed was unexplored and new, yet the Aborigines’ Dreaming, which tells the stories of this same land, had existed for thousands of years.

The poem begins by presenting us with the image of Sturt as both a private individual, whom Charlotte called “Charlie dear”, and a “Captain”, an “efficient explorer” and leader as he marshalled “his officers and steadfast men”. Sturt’s vision, or dream, is clear – he searches for an “inland sea” and it is this dream that drives him on, that continually laps “in Sturt’s mind”. He toils to cross a “mysterious and unknown land” as he seeks to fulfil his dream – dragging with him provisions and transport (“sheep”, “drays” and a “painted boat”) which represent the world from which he comes, rather than the world he is entering. Like the Aborigines’ Dreaming his journey takes on religious and spiritual significance for Sturt.

As he ventures forward Sturt is changing the world as he knows it, both literally and figuratively. The landscape he crosses is marked by his “iron shod wheels” which “plough deep in red hot sand” and “rattle and jar over . . . plains”. In the poem Sturt is making a physical imprint on the land, one that metaphorically would never be erased and led to the growth and development of white settlement in Australia. He is spurred on by his dream to find the “legendary ocean”, the “topographical dream” he projected onto the land from the start. His expedition to follow the flow of the western rivers would inevitably lead to the naming of geographical landmarks and features and the creation of a map for this “new” territory. Exploration, the naming of rivers and places, symbolise the changes that occurred with British occupation and colonisation and their perceived “ownership” of the land.

This is reinforced by the language and images presented. The terminology used to suggest mapping and exploration, charting and navigation (“topographical dream”, “set to launch”, “charted”, “trigonometry”) portends the drastic changes about to take place as a result of Sturt’s successful expedition and the British colonists’ need to conquer, control and own the land. This is juxtaposed with images that remind us of the natural environment, the land of the Aborigines Dreaming: “red hot sand”, “gibber plains”, “sliding sides of dunes”, “spinifex” and “birds”.

There is irony in the image of the Aborigines watching Sturt’s toil as they already know the land and the answers to its mysteries that Sturt seeks. They watch, “immersed in their own dreaming” which readers recognise as symbolising their affinity with the land. This image also heralds the changes to come for the Aboriginal people and the land as explorers pursued their own dreams of new worlds, new settlements and prosperity.

The poem, while seeming to have a nostalgic tone, is ironic in that Sturt, representative of the white colonists, dreams of searching, marking and mapping the physical landscape whereas the Aborigines look upon the land in terms of “dreaming” and understand the intrinsic nature of the earth and view it spiritually and symbolically. White men seek to find explanations, keys to the mysteries of nature, yet we are reminded that they will always be misled “by the false trigonometry of birds”, unable to understand them as the Aborigines do as they have remained constant in their ties to nature and their own Dreaming myths.

While the poem’s subject is of an 1829 expedition it has a greater universality. Consider:

- what is the poem saying about an individual's pursuit of a dream? How may it change us? How may "Charlie" have been altered by his experience? How can individuals make their marks on the world and how may this affect them?
- what is the power of dreaming? What does the poem reveal about our own desires and dreams?
- what perspectives on history does the poem give? How does the poem revere the ancient mythology of Dreaming while questioning the white man's beliefs?
- what changes occur when one culture's beliefs are usurped or subjugated by another's?
- what exploration occurs in our own time? How does exploration define and change the world as we know it now?
- is space the only really "new" territory left for us to explore? Why do we have such a fascination with it? How may knowing what is "out there" change us, our world and our thinking?

Text 5. Fractal – Microsoft Encarta 96 Encyclopedia

This text needs to be considered for both form and content. Text 5 is from a multimedia text; it presents a screenshot from a CD Rom, Microsoft's Encarta 96 Encyclopedia. The text in itself represents the changes that have occurred in information technology and how the CD Rom has become a common method of presenting both entertainment and information to the mass population. The example of the Fractal screenshot in the stimulus booklet shows us the different search options and the interactive approach offered by multimedia texts as we identify the various functions it contains. We also recognise the use of familiar icons and symbols commonly used in computers to highlight possible options for the reader/viewer. This text encapsulates the world's developing and changing technology with its multiple uses and purposes, and the changing access to, and presentation of, information via the computer and other electronic mediums.

The subject matter of the text, fractals, also presents notions on the concept of change. The fractal is a mathematical concept whereby shapes are repeated regardless of the magnification of the particles. Fractals constantly change but they consist of self-repeating units: each magnification is a new image but it essentially is a repeated pattern. Hence the use of the term "self-similarity" to describe their key characteristic.

Their quality of "infinite complexity" suggests perhaps a natural resistance to change, whereby the very nature of the fractal appears complex and varied but is in essence repetitious. A fractal reminds us of the notion of the unchanging nature of things – each transformation gives an illusion of change which is superficial as essentially nothing is really changing, merely a pattern is being formed and replicated.

The written text also highlights that mathematician Benoit B. Mandelbrot gave a new perspective on fractals with the discovery of fractal geometry. This also highlights that while the essential facts and substance of something may not change a new, fresh and different perspective can transform the perception of the original.

People explore the world of fractals as part of their need to find patterns and logical sequences. A mathematical concept such as fractals reminds us that even in nature there are patterns that can be explained; new or unfamiliar things can be rationalised and understood, and thereby conquered and controlled. Fractals support the notion

that while the world may appear random and unpredictable on a microscopic level it is ordered and systematic: there is reason and logic behind everything.

Our perspective on life can be changed by considering fractals. While we may think a particular experience or decision has drastically altered our life it may be more like a continuum where the change reflects past actions, events and decisions – a pattern of behaviour we may be unaware of until we placed our lives under the microscope. The old cliché of “History repeating itself” applies to both fractals and the sequence of our lives.

Text 6. Humans in their environment. Flacco, *Burnt Offerings*

Many of you will know Flacco, his satirical humour and his comedy “offerings” on television – just think of the bald man with the question mark hairdo!

This satirical piece presents a common scenario – a zealous environmentalist trying to change policy and prevent the destruction of a rainforest. Flacco begins by stating his belief, “that you can take environment consciousness just a little too far” and so the reader’s own perspective on the issue is immediately challenged – do we agree with him or not? Is he going to change our minds or give us new insights?

Flacco raises a number of points in this ongoing public debate while presenting a number of ideas on the notion of change:

- Can an individual bring about change? Can the lonely protestor in his “regulation jungle-green overalls” actually prevent the deforestation, destruction and permanent change in our landscape? Is an individual powerless to halt change and development? Is the protest against destruction a minority voice?
- Change is conveyed as the huge mechanism of destruction, which fails to hear individual “screams . . . above the chainsaws.” Are our protests not heard because technology, symbolised by the “chainsaws”, and those that wield it, drown out our voices and cut us down?
- Has the corporate and commercial world proved too powerful for individuals to battle and change their policies? Are too many people happy with the technological changes and capital growth to question the ethics of the development? The use of economic terms and jargon (“market capitalization” and “Dow Jones Slump”) reinforces how pervasive the market forces are in our society: we may not understand the terms fully but there is a sense of recognition of them.
- Do we feel sympathy for the activist who “camouflaged” himself so successfully that he could not be seen in the environment he was trying to protect? Does this suggest that even those who protest against change are inevitably caught up in it? How futile are their protests? Does the hyperbolic example of the protestor being “turned into paper pulp” suggest that we are all destined to be transformed into the world of change no matter how strongly we try to stand against it? If change is inevitable to what extent should we be embracing it or questioning it?
- The irony in the image of the protestor ending up “as a minor article on speculative market capitalization on the Dow Jones Slump” is clear. The cliché, “To add insult to injury” is used to satirise his fate – not only is he fatally injured but his protest against deforestation led him to become the very thing he was protesting against. He ends up as an article on the economy – and a “minor” one at

that. The Dow Jones reference further reinforces the irony and concept of change as it is an economic index and identifies market forces and changes.

- Does Flacco agree or disagree with environmental activism? He uses an exaggerated and satirical example to highlight different points of view in the debate – but which one does he agree with? Which do you agree with?
- Is Flacco suggesting that such environmental activism is a new phenomenon due to the desperation of people witnessing and experiencing the destruction? Does he hope that his satirical look at the issue will encourage people to change their perspective and recognise the need to make their voices heard? Does he identify and emphasise the danger of such widespread destruction in order to change people's complacency and point of view?
- Is the piece highlighting the danger of such individual extremism but supporting the need to do something "in the face of the continuing destruction"?
- Can change be a compromise, achieved through a rational approach, negotiation and the consideration of each side's point of view?