English – Extension One-
Resource two - Engaging Literary Worlds part one transcript

(Duration 24 minutes 39 seconds)

(bright music)

Welcome to the HSC hub, student support session for English Extension One. Please note that this is resource two of the series. Our focus in this resource is on deepening our analysis of the underlying concepts and approaches of the Common Module for Extension one. In this first part of the resource two, we will apply the key module concepts and a module lens to a sample text. And so refine ideas about the ways in which artists respond to the world by creating literary worlds. Following the theme established in the first resource of this series, we will then examine how you might begin to respond to an unseen text by thinking about extracts and stimulus material in the ways in which an examiner might. Indeed the theme of the second part of this resource is to think like an examiner. Take a moment to re-familiarise yourself with the content of this whole Extension one session, particularly if it has been some time since you completed resource one. while the four resources are stand alone to some extent we do recommend the following, you definitely begin with resource one and that you complete the two parts within each resource in order.

The four resources are designed to build on proceeding ideas, so it does make sense if possible to follow the progression suggested in this slide. Part one of this resource, which is this video has been designed to run for approximately 25 minutes, excluding time for activities. For a teacher using this in a classroom setting, we suggest you stop the recording at key points and support students to complete the set activities. Please feel free to supplement the material presented with your own strategies. In this way the two sections of part one of this resource may work best if covered in two separate sessions. As suggested this part has been designed to run for approximately 25 minutes, excluding time for activities. We suggest students stop the recording when asked to and complete all the activities. This includes thinking routines, reflection activities, and written responses in the student resource booklet. Make sure you have all the material you need, especially the student resource booklet. If using this resource at home independently, you will need: access to some of your school classwork and assessment tasks, access to both this presentation and the student resource booklet, time to explore the activities suggested here. This resource works best if you follow all the instructions and complete the thinking routines, reflection activities, and written tasks, make sure you take adequate breaks.

Here are the two sections of this part, both intended to help you refine your thinking about the module by applying ideas to an unseen text. First, we will apply the module lens to the unseen text. Then in section two, you will pull together key ideas by considering the importance of insights and values to this course.

[Slide reads:
Learning intentions and success criteria. Engaging with a literary world – Extension 1, resource 2, part 1

For students to:

* engage with the insights developed through and values embedded in an unfamiliar text
* understand the difference between insights and values and apply this thinking to an analysis of an unseen text.

For students to be able to:

* analyse the construction and purpose of a literary world in an unseen text
* apply the module lens to an unseen text
* analyse how key module concepts can be utilised to explore the literary world of an unseen text.]

Here are the learning intentions and success criteria for this part of the resource. Pause the recording and take a moment to familiarise yourself with the aims of the activities you are bound to complete. (bright music)

The Common Module for this course demands that you have a sophisticated understanding of, one, the nature of the literary world in question, for example, what is it a response to? Two, how and why the literary world is being shaped and three, what kinds of engagement or response a reader has with such a world? Let's explore this by applying our module lens to an unseen text. Remember that this is what you will need to be ready to do in the exam. The following activities are intended to remind you of the mindset and skills necessary to do this under the pressure of the exam setting. We expect that you will get plenty of practice at doing this sort of thing.

Here's the opening scene from Cormac McCarthy's novel "The Road". "When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night, he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him. Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world. His hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath. He pushed away the plastic tarpaulin and raised himself in the stinking robes and blankets, and looked toward the east for any light but there was none."

Let's start by putting reader response theory into action. You probably know nothing about this novel and its writer. You can guess at aspects such as genre and context, but let's just concentrated on your initial uninformed personal response. In preparation for the exams, you should be familiar with making this kind of quick initial response to an unseen text and then developing your ideas from there. So is your initial response positive or negative? Does this sound like a novel you would normally be drawn to? Why? Why not? What can you guess about the genre based on which particular clues in the text? Did you notice the lexical chains associated with darkness and sight? There is certainly an effort afoot to construct a literary world that will lead to an emotional response in the reader. Pause the recording here and open the student resource booklet for engaging with literary worlds. In resource one, we've printed the whole extract we will be exploring. Read it all now and put your initial responses into the table under activity one, which follows the text.

[Slide reads:
Applying the 'module lens'. Approaching an unseen text through key module concepts – activity 2, student booklet
We analyse:

* personal, social, historical and cultural context of the text – genre, form and structure of the text
* distinctive features of the text
* our own context(s)

In order to gain understanding about:

* ideas about the complex relationship between individuals and society
* perspectives on the diversity of human experience
* alternative readings of the text
* values presented and reflected in texts.]

Here is the module lens that we'll use to explore this extract. Pause the recording for a moment and read over it. If it has been a while since you explored the module in the first of these English Extension 1 sessions, perhaps pause the recording again and look back over your notes and the activities in that student booklet. You will remember that it is vital to approach the texts, both your case study texts, and those you may be given as stimulus texts in the exam, with the key concepts and the module in mind.

In resource one, we examined how both writer and reader are responding to something. The writer to the world around him, the deliberate act of composing a literary world. The reader responds to the text emotionally, but also actively by being inspired to action, by being forced to write in examination extended response. To unpack the work of both writers and readers and constructing and responding to literary worlds, we will use this module lens as we explore the extract from "The Road" and prepare for the sorts of writing you can be asked to do in response.

[Slide reads: The personal, social, historical and cultural context of the text​

Late-modern, late-capitalism, post-Cold War, environmentalist discourses

With the first gray light he rose and left the boy sleeping and walked out to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasn't sure. He hadn't kept a calendar for years. They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here.]

First, let's explore a selection of paragraphs from the extract to put that module lens into practice. According to the module description, students evaluate how ideas and ways of thinking are shaped by personal, social, historical, and cultural contexts. What are the potential contexts for the creation of this text and how have they shaped it's deliberate construction? Notice that a question like this links to the cultural criticism and new historicist theoretical models we touched on in the first resource in this English Extension One session. What ideologies influence the values represented in the text? As one answer to that question, consider that one of the characteristics of late 20th century and early 21st century art is its response to the potential decline and destruction of the world. This text published in 2006 seems certainly to be influenced by Cold War and Gulf War, era politics, as well as this era’s climate concerns. Look again at just this paragraph, in the answer box under this paragraph in the student booklet, enter your analysis of how the writer has deliberately constructed this literary world to reflect those concerns. Pause the recording and consider the limited third person narrator. The variety of sentence length. Another aspect of style perhaps that you have noticed, but be sure to explain how this contributes to our understanding of the way ideas are shaped by contexts. The markers from last year's exam were very clear that they did not want to see lists of language devices divorced from an overall conceptual analysis. Pause the recording now and use the reprint of this paragraph under activity two, to write in your responses.

[Slide reads: Genre, form and structure of the text. Dystopia, speculative fiction, thriller – activity two

“When it was light enough to use the binoculars he glassed the valley below. Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of color. Any movement. Any trace of standing smoke. He lowered the glasses and pulled down the cotton mask from his face and wiped his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again.”]

Next, the module description suggests that all students will: deepen their understanding of how texts construct private, public and imaginary worlds that can explore new horizons and offer new insights. Through the deliberate construction of literary worlds, texts can do this in a number of ways, genre is one. In this paragraph, consider how both characterisation and description of setting signal genre, but also construct an imaginary world that may offer insights about the human experience of survival. Pause the recording to complete this next component of activity two.

The module description asks you to consider how language features and forms a crafted to express complex ideas and emotions, motivations, attitudes, experiences, and values. You have already been doing this with regards to characterisation, description and sentence construction. Let's explore voice and point of view further in relation to this small extract. “Then he just sat there holding the binoculars and watching the ashen daylight congeal over the land. He knew only that the child was his. He said, if he is not the word of God, God never spoke." Firstly, voice. An analysis of a deliberately constructed literary world requires us to investigate questions about voice. Whose voice is centred, whose is present, who is absent or marginalised? What is the impact of this on the literary world we've been invited into? The point of view similarly dictates the distance, temporal, spatial, and emotional between the responder and the events and ideas in the text. Point of view according to the English Textual Concepts resource, gives us a position from which to judge events. You will again find a glossary of these concepts at the end of the student booklet. Pause the recording again to consider how McCarthy has used a variety of language devices, allusion and internal monologue for example, in this short paragraph to set up a point of view that positions us as responders to the events and ideas in the text.

Here's some ideas you may have considered so far through your responses in the student booklet. For each one, let’s briefly consider the way it contributes to the literary world being built, remembering how the markers have urged you to develop a thesis in response to the purpose of the literary world, rather than simply listing literary devices. Add these ideas if you desire to your answers for activity two, they are also listed under appendix five in the student booklet. One, the tension between beauty and horror drawn through the lyrical quality of certain sentences, juxtaposed to the staccato of others. If the purpose here is the conventional one for speculative fiction, a warning about humanity's future, it is still vital to consider the ways in which the language is used to deepen and layer the complexity of that insight. What is it within the gloom that will give us cause to continue and survive? Two, the claustrophobic point of view, through the limited third person narration. Here is a literary world that we discover and experience through the eyes of the character. There is very little in the way of the comfort that can come from an omniscient narrative voice. Notice that this authorial choice not only brings us closer to the character, but also enmeshes us in his moral and emotional struggles and so complicates our experience of the world. Which responses are ours in which are his? What if this voice becomes untrustworthy or repugnant to us? Three, the biblical cadence and illusions that evoke an existential threat to humanity. The crafting of the imagery throughout this extract certainly contributes to the development of complex ideas and insights. For example, the struggle between the love of one parent for their child. that most intimate of situations. sits in stark contrast to the broader philosophical tension established by the references to religious experiences.

[Slide reads: The responder’s context(s) Contexts that frame responses to this text – activity two continued, student booklet

“He spread the small tarp they used for a table on the ground and laid everything out and he took the pistol from his belt and laid it on the cloth then he just sat watching the boy sleep. He’d pulled away his mask in the night and it was buried somewhere in the blankets.”]

Now let's continue with the module lens. The literary worlds module encourages you to explore how your personal response to the text is informed by an awareness of context, either yours or the composers. How did this enhance your appreciation of the diversity of literary worlds? Did you develop a greater understanding of how texts challenge our assumptions and generate new understanding? What are the potential contexts that frame the responses to this text? The post nuclear age, the plethora of dystopic genre text in recent years, nine eleven, the Lindt café and Boston bombings, COVID-19? In the student booklet use the space beneath this paragraph to consider how McCarthy's deliberate accumulation of detail in these sentences maybe brought into a sharper relief by remembering the contextual frames through which we cannot avoid, but see this literary world. Pause the recording now to consider this next component of activity two.

[Slide reads: Ideas about complex relationships and the diversity of human experience. Illuminating complexity and diversity through a literary world – activity two

He watched the boy and he looked out through the trees toward the road. This was not a safe place. They could be seen from the road now it was day. The boy turned in the blankets. Then he opened his eyes. Hi, Papa, he said.
I’m right here.
I know.
An hour later they were on the road. He pushed the cart and both he and the boy carried knapsacks. In the knapsacks were essential things. In case they had to abandon the cart and make a run for it. Clamped to the handle of the cart was a chrome motorcycle mirror that he used to watch the road behind them]

The module demands that we explore, investigate, experiment with and evaluate, the ways texts represent, and illuminate the complexity of individual and collective lives in literary worlds. Students are also engaged to extend their understanding of the ways that texts contribute to their awareness of the diversity of ideas, attitudes, and perspectives evident in texts. On the surface of it this segment of the unseen extract appears to represent a simple situation between a father and a son. But the dialogue and the symbolism of the road, hint at something more complex. In a moment, you will be asked to pause the recording again and consider this extract in the student booklet. As you do, keep in mind the following questions. One, does the representation investigate our notions identity? For example, what it means to be a father. Two, how did the composer create the voice and point of view of different characters? Three, did your journey into this literary world encourage you to explore new horizons? Did it often new insights about the diversity of human experience? Pause the recording now and work on the extract again in the student booklet under this paragraph.

[Slide reads: Alternative readings of the text. A return to theory – activity two

He shifted the pack higher on his shoulders and looked out over the wasted country. The road was empty. Below the little valley the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds. Are you okay? He said. The boy nodded. Then they set out along the blacktop in the gun-metal light, shuffling through the ash, each the other’s world entire.]

This text has provoked much discussion about the presence or absence of hope. What details from the segment contribute to the possibility of alternative readings of the literary world being created here? Why would the composer be deliberately ambiguous about something like hope? Or is the writer's intent not so relevant? Reader response theory would have much to say here as would psychoanalysis, given how important the parent-child relationship is in that lens. A feminist reading of the whole text, considering the absence of female characters and their voices, would also read this literary world with a particular interest in how certain values are presented and reflected in the text. Strangely, the absence of the mother is a very strong presence in this extract, but you would have to be reading the text in a very particular way to see that. If you are interested in this approach, explore the concepts of dominant and resistant readings, but keep in mind our warnings about the way you should critically assess any reading. We don't rigidly respond to readings, but rather strive to understand the way they shift our perspectives on texts. Pause the recording to consider this paragraph in the space provided in the student booklet.

There are a number of language devices you could refer to in your analysis of how this extract as a whole is open to multiple readings. Here notice the juxtaposition between the lexical chain of lifelessness and the final authorial comment when the narrative voice becomes more omniscient.

Here's some ideas you might have considered in your responses to the second group of module lens activities. Let's keep in mind as we go through them, the markers warning about using detail like this, to develop a thesis about the purpose of the literary world. Add any ideas to your own if you would like, these are also included in appendix five. One, how the symbolism of the mask evokes war and terrorism, then speaks forward in time presciently to our pandemic context. The novel was written in 2006, many years before COVID-19, but this is the perfect juncture to think about this remarkable quality of literature to speak to the future. Unless, of course the author is a clairvoyant, then literary theory can certainly provide a powerful lens to consider this issue. The focus shifts to the context of reception and the ways we have of reading the intertextual connections between texts. Two, the father's "I'm right here" is an answer to a question that is not asked. What does this reveal about him? Three, the final line can be interpreted as hopeless and hopeful. Notice the deliberate construction of this tension throughout the extract.

[Slide reads: Overview – the deliberate crafting of a literary world. Considering insights as opposed to values.

Insights are gained from the text (by the responder, and expressed through informed personal voice)as opposed to
Values are embedded in the text (through the subtle work of the composer, to be responded to and analysed)]

To prepare for writing in response to a text like this, whether that be analytically or imaginatively, let's look at pulling together your ideas through the insights offered by the text and the values embedded in it. In the second part of this resource, which is the next video, we will explore the possible types of analytical and imaginative response question that you may be asked in relation to an unseen text, such as this one. To conclude this part and prepare for that next phase, let's consider two key terms and how you might organise your thinking around them. It's crucial to your work in this course that you can distinguish between values and insights. An initial approach might see values as being embedded in a text. They are the work of the deliberate representative actions of the composer and are responded to emotionally and analytically by students. Insights on the other hand, are gained from the text by the responder who then expresses a response through an informed personal voice in his or her writing. Before we apply this to the extract from "The Road", let's illustrate this through a very well known example.

Mary Shelley's novel about a scientist, however well-intentioned descending into hubris and creating a living being that he then rejects in horror, has fascinated readers for over 200 years. While this is a prescribed text for the world's of upheaval elective in this course, we're using it here as a quick illustration of the difference between the key terms, insights and values, and our analysis is not connected to the elective. There are plenty of insights to be taken out of a story about an arrogant scientist failing to take responsibility for his creation. Insights gained from the text about the role of science and scientists, the place of the excluded or marginalised monster. But there are deeper values embedded in this early 19th century text. For example, if the creature is made evil, not born evil, the religious doctrine of original sin is being challenged. While insights and values are perhaps best understood as different sides of the same coin. Here we see that we may respond to them differently. Insights are possibly more cerebral; ideas about society we respond to analytically. Considering values draws us more deeply into the subtle but deliberate construction of a literary world that communicates to us the struggles that a composer might be working through in relation to the nature of their world. What makes a person good or evil for example, and does religion have the answer? Considering values asks us to investigate more closely the purposes of the composer. Is Mary Shelley trying to subvert the religious foundation of her society?

Let's return now to our unseen extract from The Road and apply this thinking. It is a challenging task to identify insights from such a short extract, but you might be thinking about such things as: the environmental impacts of an apocalyptic event, the physical and practical needs for survival in such a situation. Pause the recording here and go to activity three in the student booklet. You will find those two ideas, and also an opportunity to expand on them. What other insights could be drawn from the extract, keep our definition of insights in mind and for an extra challenge, try to include at least some textual detail to support your informed response to these insights.

Now, as soon as we turn our attention to values, we cannot avoid exploring McCarthy's potential purpose in creating this dystopic literary world. Is the juxtaposition of the tenderness of the parent with the barrenness of the post-apocalyptic landscape meant to suggest the power of hope and human relationships in the face of such a hostile environment? It's hard to tell without knowing what happens, but perhaps the extract can be responded to very differently? There are many parents who have described reading this after the birth of a child and finding it an incredibly painful and terrifying read. And that's the subtlety that gives fiction it's power.

McCarthy has said that the novel is in some ways a love letter to his own son. But what about the reading context of a parent who has lost a child? The embedding of values, such as an enduring hope for humanity, is done subtly through the creation of a literary world that affects readers in a multiplicity of ways. Authors of texts that have enduring literary value usually find powerful and sophisticated ways to convey values that have a profound effect on readers. As part of your study, you need to analyse purpose, but it is crucial that you do not do this simplistically. In this novel, survival comes at a cost, that complicates any straightforward notions of love and family. Pause the recording again, and complete activity four, analysing values in the student booklet. What other values are perhaps subtly embedded in this extract? (bright music)

To complete this first part of resource two, you have a choice of two extended response writing activities. Please feel free to do them both. The first involves you applying our thinking about literary worlds as a response to modernity back to our unseen text from this resource. The second allows you to apply our thinking about insights and values to a self-chosen case study text of your own.

[Slide reads: Summary and reflection for part 1. Response to the modern and application to your text – activity 5, student booklet. Activity 5 – option 1

Explore the extract from The Road as a response to the modern. Look back to your student booklet from resource 1 and consider how and why the extract ‘responds’ to the concept of modernity.

Activity 5 – option 2

Analyse the ways in which insights are developed through, and values embedded in, one of your case study texts]

Here are the two activity options to round off this first part of resource two. It would be best to try these after you've had a short break, then have a longer break before continuing on with the second part of this resource. Write your answers as extended responses and workshop them with a peer or your teacher to help continue the refinement of your ideas. (bright music)

End of transcript