

Summary and submission to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) arising out of a VATE consultation meeting concerning the proposed changes to the draft VCE Literature Study Design

Submitted by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English

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Preamble

A meeting was held at the VATE Offices in Collingwood on Thursday 12 June 2014 for VATE members to discuss the proposed changes to the existing VCE Literature Study Design. In attendance were Monika Wagner and Paul Martin, representing VATE Curriculum and Assessment Committee and VATE Council, Sean Box, Curriculum Manager- English VCAA, Kate Gillespie and a small group of VATE members. At the outset of the meeting, Sean Box outlined the key proposed changes and indicated that the implementation of the new Study Design would be staggered. The following submission reflects both the views expressed at this meeting, as well as those conveyed in response to an online survey of members. The small number of respondents to the survey came from the South Eastern, North Eastern and North Western regions.

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- Concerns were voiced about the weighting of the Oral task, suggesting that for a short Oral of 4 minutes, the marking weighting was excessive, and thus inequitable in comparison with the equivalent tasks.
- There was agreement on the importance of oral tasks, as these are integral to Literature teaching and learning. However, it was felt that the task needed shaping. One popular suggestion was to make the Written commentary, which is part of the new Outcome 2 in Unit 3, an oral presentation. The point was made that writing needs to be part of the preparation of an oral task. Further, it was emphasised that we need to make sure that our students are writing consistently throughout the year, and that oral tasks should not replace written ones. The issue of moderation was raised; when more than one class is running, some flexibility is lost. It was emphasised that there are many ways in which an oral task can be completed, depending on the cohort and the text, for instance.
- Consolidation of the Text list: many concerns were raised. Chief among these were:
 1. The diminution in importance of the study of non-print text, in particular, film. The removal of film as text takes us many years into the past, pedagogically speaking. The types of films that might be studied as adaptations would be limited; 'the film of the book' is not necessarily a fine work of art in its own right.
 2. The narrowing of text choices because of smaller overall numbers with the demise of List A. We will find that there will be an increasing reliance on the canon; there will be almost no opportunity to set the edgy, contemporary, more experimental texts that students should be exposed to.
 3. If we are setting texts that have adaptations, this will further limit the scope of texts studied. Concerns about losing the quality texts on List A were raised, and there was some regret at losing the freedom of choice List A

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offered. Survey respondents asked: was suitable literary criticism to be available on all texts on the list?

- The extended response was praised, as encouraging good writing habits in Units 1 and 2, as well as being good preparation for the complex sort of writing required in Units 3 and 4. One comment was that there is not enough time for pieces of this length in Units 3 and 4. It encourages and enables students to get ‘the balance between talking and writing’, by putting the ideas they talk about in class down in writing, something that many students find difficult at first. It will encourage students to form the habit of developing ideas in depth, at length, in writing. Good preparation for the examination, and linked with ‘deep slow reading’.
- The role of literary theory was discussed. Some wondered whether it has a smaller role by being incorporated into the Views and values Outcome. Many saw this, though, as mandating the use of theory in this task. The term ‘literary criticism’ was not particularly popular. It is an additional concern that the choice of texts would be further limited by the number / variety of perspectives available on them. It was felt that Unit 4 was appropriate for this Outcome, as by then students would be ready to test their interpretations against others’. Conversely, the danger of students adopting critics’ views, and thus not responding to the text itself, was raised. However, it was felt that all reading situates the reader in some way.
- The sequencing was seen as important.
- The examination could dictate the role of film as text. It would seem to be counter-productive to have non-examinable texts on the list. But it would be eminently possible to examine film via 3 excerpts from the script or / and 3 stills.

UNITS 1 and 2

- The removal of Unit 1 Area of Study 3 seems to devalue film as text although it would be possible to set a film or excerpt from a film in Unit 1 Outcome 1 or Outcome 2. Film could be incorporated into Unit 2 Outcome 2, and given

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the Adaptations task in Unit 3 this would seem appropriate as preparation.

Students live in a visual, highly technological world so text selection should in part reflect their world.

- The inclusion of a compulsory oral assessment task in Unit 1 is appropriate and will help prepare students for the Year 12 task.
- The extended word length recommended for Unit 2 Outcome 2 offers students the opportunity to explore in depth and detail.