2022 VCE History: Revolutions external assessment report

General comments

The 2022 VCE examination was based on the VCE History study design accredited for 2022−2026, which introduced a new format. Section A required students to answer questions, based on source material, from two of the four revolutions while Section B required students to write an essay focusing on one of the revolutionary contexts. Section A was worth a total of 50 marks and Section B was worth 20 marks.

Generally, students complied with instructions, such as nominating revolution options, writing in the correct sections of the answer booklet and clearly indicating the continuation of responses in the extra space. Students’ familiarity with the published examination specifications was further evidenced in the balance given to both sections of the examination and the completion of all questions from the selected options. Each question contained a specific command word; there is a comprehensive list of these words and associated definitions on the VCAA website.

Suggestions for improved student performance in the 2022 written examinations include the following.

* For the entry level questions in Section A students should respond directly to the question using information from the source. Where the command word is ‘identify’, dot points can be used, but for questions that ask students to ‘describe’, signposted sentences are more appropriate.
* For the middle-range questions in Section A information from the sources should be integrated with students’ own knowledge. The additional knowledge provided should give context and elaboration to the response.
* For the extended-answer questions in Section A, a more sustained response is required. A command word such as ‘evaluate’ requires a judgment to be made about a particular cause or consequence of the revolution. When building a response the argument should relate specifically to the question and be supported with a range of evidence.
* Careful consideration should be given to the wording of the essay question in Section B. If there are multiple parts to the question, all parts must be explicitly addressed. If there are key words in the question then definition of the terms will provide clarity and focus in the response. Paragraphs should be clearly signposted and contain evidence that builds an argument in direct response to the question.
* Perspectives of people during the development of the revolution and on the post-revolutionary society can add depth to an argument. If historical interpretations are included in the argument these should be explained and given context.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding, resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Short-answer questions

Section A consisted of four questions, one for each revolution divided into multiple parts. The Sources book contained the stimulus material and, in each case, comprised a visual representation, primary source document and two historical interpretations.

Each revolution option in Section A began with two entry-level questions designed to assess students’ understanding of historical material. The questions contained the command words ‘identify’ and ‘describe’ and students were required to use the stimulus material to demonstrate these skills; they were not required to go beyond the source. Students demonstrated confidence and a high level of accuracy in responding to these questions.

High-scoring responses used dot points to distinguish between the parts of the answer or signposted with the words ‘firstly’, ‘secondly’ and ‘thirdly’. These responses effectively used direct quotes, and/or contained accurate descriptions of symbols or features from the source. They were succinct and clear examples which answered the question. Responses that did not score well awkwardly paraphrased the source or included irrelevant or incorrect information in convoluted answers.

There were also two ‘middle range’ questions for each revolutionary context. They were based on the sources and began with the command words ‘explain’ and ‘analyse’. Students were instructed to use their own knowledge in the answer.

The word ‘analyse’ requires the identification of components and the significance of the relationship between them. In the study of history this involves looking at the factors which led to events and their consequences. The word ‘explain’ requires the construction of an account of why and/or how with reference to causes, effects, continuity and change, and the interrelationships that are involved.

Responses that scored highly demonstrated a clear understanding of the command words and the question. They successfully integrated evidence from the source with contextualised own knowledge, and throughout their response there were links back to the question. They also formed inferences, using connective phrases like ‘which shows’, ‘this indicates’ and ‘this suggests’.

Many of the responses that did not score as well clung to the sources and provided little information to demonstrate knowledge about the event or understanding of its importance in the context of the revolution. They also did not use own knowledge as instructed. Students could improve their responses by engaging in historical thinking through asking questions.

Question 1 – The American Revolution

Question 1a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 8 | 3 | 89 | 1.8 |

Question 1b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 8 | 2 | 11 | 79 | 2.6 |

Responses to Question 1a. and Question 1b. both demonstrated competency in the selection of salient features from a documentary text or visual image. Students clearly identified the two most important actions of the British government that threatened the colonists as levying taxes without the consent of the American people and suspending the legislative assembly (of New York). The responses to Question 1b. showed skill in the description of key features from a visual image.

Question 1d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 9 | 3 | 25 | 45 | 16 | 2 | 2.6 |

Question 1e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 11 | 4 | 18 | 40 | 21 | 6 | 1 | 2.8 |

Question 1d. from the American Revolution asked students to explain the significance of George Washington’s leadership during the War of Independence. The best responses recognised that the source portrayed Washington as an enigmatic character. They referred to McCullough’s observation that Washington lacked ‘brilliance’ as a military leader and linked it to early battle failures. They then countered this with the ‘perseverance’ that Washington showed at Valley Forge where he led the Continental Army through a critical period and initiated reforms to improve military order.

The following high-scoring response to Question 1d. clearly integrates own knowledge with relevant quotes from the source.

George Washington’s leadership during the War of Independence (1775-83) had proven to significantly contribute to American victory given the fact that ‘he learned steadily from experience’ (source 3) how to overcome the power of the British Army. Having learned from the failed campaign in Long Island (1776), Washington tempered the fact that ‘he was not a brilliant strategist or technician’ (source 3) with his ability to learn how to accentuate British problems to the colonists’ benefit, in particular through his adaptations of Fabian tactics to counter traditional European warfare during the Battle of Trenton (1776) which resulted in the capture of 1000 Hessian forces, thus demonstrating the significance of his ‘experience’ (source 3) in advancing colonial victory in the War of Independence (1775-83). Such an ability of Washington to learn from experience would further manifest in his ‘victories of…Saratoga’ (1777) where his manipulations of local terrain to the colonists’ advantage resulted in the capture of 6200 British forces. This successful leadership of Washington further manifested in his ‘letters to Congress’ (source 3) during the battle of Valley Forge (1778) having successfully advocated for increased military funding to the degree of $722,000 that would signify his importance in the War of Independence.

Question 1e. from the American Revolution asked students to analyse one change and one continuity in the conditions for women in the new regime. Most responses struggled to identify examples of societal changes and political continuities beyond those highlighted in the source.

Question 2 – The French Revolution

Question 2a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 3 | 2 | 95 | 1.9 |

Question 2b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 3 | 5 | 24 | 69 | 2.6 |

Both entry questions were answered well, with responses showing a clear comprehension of the sources. When asked to describe the differences between the Estates most students selected three distinct contrasts between the Third Estate and the other two Estates.

Question 2d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 6 | 6 | 29 | 38 | 17 | 4 | 2.7 |

Question 2e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 10 | 9 | 25 | 30 | 17 | 8 | 2 | 2.7 |

The source for Question 2d was a cartoon that depicted the royal family being taken to Paris following their flight to Varennes. The associated question asked students to explain how the event weakened the power of the new regime.

Responses frequently provided a narrative of the events leading to Louis’ decision to leave Paris but failed to go beyond this to explain how the authority of the king was undermined and how this caused significant challenges for the National Constituent Assembly. Most responses provided a very literal reading of the source, stating that King Louis was drawn as a pig but offered no explanation of why, or suggestion of the implications of such a representation.

The following high-scoring response shows how the source could be effectively used in conjugation with relevant knowledge to respond directly to the question.

The satirical mockery of the ‘family of pigs’ (source 7) depicted in this print is indicative of the irreparable damage done to both the royal family and the new regime they presided over following the Flight to Varennes on June 20th 1791. The depiction of Louis XVI as a pig, captured and recovered by the positively portrayed National Guard, broadly expresses the feelings of antipathy felt by the general public towards his ‘ostensible abandonment of his people’ (McPhee). When Doyle declared that the Flight to Varennes was the ‘second great turning point’ of the bourgeois consensus, he observed how the sovereign’s tacit abdication indelibly weakened his standing and influence. The Cordeliers’ petition for the impeachment of Louis XVI, signed by 6,000 prior to the Champs de Mars Massacre on July 17th, 1791, reveals the extent of public distaste towards Louis XVI. The rapid decline in Louis XVI’s popularity- shifting from the saviour of the revolution to a common ‘pig’ (source 7)- ultimately weakened the standing of the Feuillants and the other moderates who advocated constitutionalism, shifting the impetus of the revolution to the radical Jacobins and sans-culottes who displayed their distaste for the monarchy in successive journees culminating in the storming of the Tuilleries on August 10th, 1792. This event, which signalled the demise of the regime’s constitutional monarchy, can be traced to the king’s misguided attempt to flee his ‘imprisonment’ (Schama).

Question 2e. asked students to analyse two challenges to the new regime caused by the war. Most responses to this question quoted heavily from the source and provided little elaboration on the impact of the war.

Question 3 – The Russian Revolution

Question 3a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 2 | 10 | 89 | 1.9 |

Question 3b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 1 | 2 | 11 | 85 | 2.8 |

Responses to the first entry-level question revealed clear understanding of the consequences of Bloody Sunday, with most responses identifying that the Tsar was held personally responsible and that the people were ‘revolutionised’ by the event. Responses to Question 3b. demonstrated skill in extracting information from a visual source, with most answers describing the victory in terms of the abdication of the tsar and the dominating symbols of the people such as celebratory flags and banners.

Question 3d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 3 | 5 | 23 | 45 | 20 | 4 | 2.9 |

Question 3e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 3 | 3 | 16 | 38 | 26 | 11 | 3 | 3.3 |

Here too many responses to Questions 3d. and 3e. clung tentatively to the source and offered little contextualisation or own knowledge.

Answers to the question of why Lenin decided to dissolve the Constituent Assembly were also very general. Some students mentioned the results of the election and the failure of the Bolsheviks to gain a majority, but few students mentioned that the body was a popularly elected institution, and that Lenin closed it at gunpoint, indicating an intention to resort to violence to achieve his agenda. There was also little historical thinking shown in that students did not question why Lenin would have made these comments and whether this was a form of propaganda.

The following response Question 3d. illustrates the use of statistics and other evidence to support relevant quotes from the source.

Lenin dissolved the Constituent Assembly (CA) (January 1918) to prevent bourgeois influences and retain Bolshevik authority. Source 11 outlines that Lenin believed that ‘to hand over power’ to the CA would be ‘compromising with the malignant bourgeoisie’ (Source 11), thus Lenin dissolved the CA to avoid relinquishing any authority to the 52% SR majority. He believed ‘only vagrants and fools believe that the proletariat must win the majority in elections’ (Lenin), Lenin dissolving the CA to protect the ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ from bourgeois influences. Additionally, Lenin dissolved the CA to protect Bolshevik authority. Source 11 outlines that ‘our cry…was all power to the soviets; it is for this that we are fighting’ (Source 11). Lenin would go on to exclaim ‘we will not exchange our rifle for a ballot’, Trotsky believing that ‘Lenin’s theoretical considerations went hand in hand with sharp shooters’ as Lenin was forced to dissolve the CA in order to protect total Bolshevik authority through soviet power. Thus, Lenin dissolved the CA to protect the ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ from bourgeois influence and maintain total Bolshevik authority.

Question 3e. for the Russian Revolution required analysis of two effects of the New Economic Policy. Students easily selected the economic and political outcomes from the source but very few responses included statistics or evidence to develop their arguments.

Question 4 – The Chinese Revolution

Question 4a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 7 | 4 | 89 | 1.8 |

Question 4b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 7 | 2 | 13 | 78 | 2.6 |

As with the entry questions for the alternate revolutions there were good responses for the Chinese Revolution. Responses to Question 4a. correctly identified how the Chinese Communist party used the terrain of Jiangxi to its advantage. Responses to Question 4b. were not quite as strong, with some responses unable to describe three discrete reasons why Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) thought the Long March was important.

Question 4d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 10 | 9 | 26 | 28 | 14 | 10 | 4 | 2.7 |

Question 4e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 9 | 4 | 30 | 37 | 17 | 4 | 2.6 |

Question 4d. required students to refer to a visual source in their analysis of two changes brought about by the First Five-Year Plan. Most responses mentioned the two-pronged focus on agricultural and industrial production, but only the better responses challenged the claim intimated in the propaganda poster that agriculture thrived. Higher-scoring responses also included a range of statistics to demonstrate the sectors of the economy that flourished compared to those that stagnated.

The following high-scoring example demonstrates a balanced discussion of the two economic changes, makes more than a passing reference to the propaganda poster and includes a range of statistics.

A first change brought about by the First Five Year Plan was the focus on industrial growth and production. The First Five Year Plan (1 January 1953-31 December 1957) focused on improving the industrial capabilities of the Chinese proletarian cities. As seen in Source 15, the propaganda titled ‘Turn China into a prosperous, rich and powerful industrialised socialist country’, large industrial machinery, cranes and train trucks were intended to be built by the seminal Communist government. The industrial focus resulted in a 16% increase in industrial production by 1954, improving the industrial sector following the policy of the First five Year Plan. A second change brought about by the First five Year Plan was the introduction of Mutual Work Teams and Lower/Higher Agricultural Collectives. As seen in the propaganda of Source 15 food was pictured in CCP propaganda to fallaciously lead people to believe food production increased through the First Five Year Plan. Mao and the CCP introduced Mutual Aid teams, containing 10-20 families with shared equipment for the agricultural peasantry, and later Lower Agricultural Collectives (50-200 families) and Higher Agricultural Collectives (500-1000 families) were introduced in early agricultural collectivisation. The policies of the First Five Year plan didn’t assist growing agricultural productivity and output, which remained at 2.2%, just keeping pace with population growth.

Question 4e. required students to explain the role of the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution. Higher-scoring responses explained how the enthusiasm of China’s youth was utilized to overturn the established order. These responses also referred to the ways in which the Red Guard were manipulated to raise the status of Mao through their fanatical devotion to his teachings.

Section A – Extended-answer questions

Each revolutionary context in Section A included a 9-mark extended question. In each case the command word was ‘evaluate’, which required students to make a judgement about the proposition and to support their argument with evidence. A commonality across the four revolutionary contexts was a tendency to narrate and a failure to home in on the question. Students should respond precisely to the wording of the question, and given that evaluation involves consideration of other factors it was legitimate to raise counter-arguments, or at least consider other factors involved in the outbreak of revolution.

Strong responses first explored the factor named in the question, before clearly explaining why it was important to consider alternative or counter-arguments. After exploring these alternative arguments, higher-scoring responses returned to the question with a clear, focused final evaluation of the overall importance of that initial factor. The better responses built their argument on a range of evidence in the form of primary and secondary sources.

Question 1c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Average |
| % | 11 | 3 | 11 | 20 | 20 | 16 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 3.7 |

The extended-answer question for the American Revolution asked students to evaluate the extent to which British management of the colonies contributed to the outbreak of revolution. Responses were generally detailed and followed the timetable of British policy from the end of ‘salutary neglect’ in 1763 to the passing of the Intolerable Acts in 1774. Higher-scoring responses were succinct and avoided the temptation to include all events from the period and instead focused on the way in which British policy provoked colonial outrage. More perceptive responses raised the importance of Enlightenment ideas and argued that despite British policy there was always going to be a clash of ideology between England and the colonies.

The following is the first part of a high-scoring response that builds an argument using historical sources (primary sources and historical interpretations).

The British management of the colonies contributed significantly to the outbreak of revolution as their imposition of mercantilist and revenue raising and by ‘claiming the rights to levy taxes on the Americans without their consent’ (source 1) would ‘galvanise the colonists to rise against the mother country’… Indeed, the ending of 150 years salutary neglect with the Proclamation Act (1763) would be a ‘constant thorn of irritation’ (Cantwell) for the colonial elite as it would restrict westward expansion beyond the Appalachians, contributing to the outbreak of revolution by encouraging the colonial elite by restricting their ability to enterprise. Further the impositions of the first revenue raising acts of parliament was part of the British management of the colonies with the Currency Act (1764) and Sugar Act (1764) would contribute to the outbreak of revolution as it would cause Otis to pen his ‘Rights of the British Colonists asserted and proved’ (1764) which birthed the infamous catchcry of ‘no taxation with[out] representation’. Subsequent revenue raising Acts such as the Stamp Act 91765) and Townshend Act (1767) would further inflame the colonists as they would the internal sovereignty of the local colonial assemblies. Indeed, the Stamp Act would contribute to revolution as the ensuing Stamp Act Congress (1765) would be attended by 9 out of the 13 colonies that would all endorse Henry’s Virginia resolves in asserting that external taxation without actual representation was unconstitutional…

Question 2c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Average |
| % | 5 | 3 | 12 | 21 | 22 | 17 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3.9 |

This question asked students to evaluate how the demand for equality by the Third Estate was a cause of the revolution. Many students described in detail the demands made by the Third Estate but did not evaluate the importance of this in causing the revolution. Higher-scoring responses made the link between the grievances of the Third Estate and actions taken. They argued, for example, that the demand for political equality led to a stalemate at the Estates General, which led to the declaration of the National Assembly, which in turn challenged the authority of Louis XVI and thus caused revolution.

Question 3c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Average |
| % | 5 | 4 | 9 | 18 | 21 | 17 | 13 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 4.2 |

Question 3c. asked for an evaluation of the leadership of Tsar Nicholas as a contributing factor to the outbreak of revolution in February 1917. Students were clearly familiar with the Tsar’s actions between 1905 and 1917 but they failed to get to the crux of just how these actions were responsible for revolution. There were frequent factual inaccuracies in the responses such as Tsar Nicholas giving a direct command to fire on protestors in January 1905. The higher-scoring responses began with a contention and developed their response around themes, such as Nicholas’ reluctance to enact democratic reform, his failure to initiate substantive agricultural and economic reform, and his decision to involve Russia in international conflicts where the country’s military unpreparedness would be exposed.

Question 4c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Average |
| % | 15 | 4 | 13 | 18 | 18 | 11 | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 3.5 |

Question 4c. asked for an evaluation of the extent to which the decisions made by the Chinese Communist Party during the Long March contributed to the revolution. The phrase ‘decisions made … during the Long March’ was frequently ignored and instead students provided a narrative of the Long March beginning in Jiangxi Soviet and ending in Yan’an. In part the failure of students to answer the question explains the lower scores for Question 4c. comparative to the evaluation question for the other revolutions. There were also a number of students who did not respond to this question and left it blank in the answer booklet. Conversely, there were skilful responses that focused specifically on how decisions made on the Long March could be seen as influencing later developments at the Yan’an Soviet, during the War with Japan, or during the Chinese Civil War.

The following high-scoring response responds directly to the question and evaluates a range of factors which contributed to the outbreak of the revolution.

The Long March was important in establishing a safe base for the CCP to recover and asserting the undisputed leadership of Mao, the turning point in the revolution was the Sino Japanese War (1937 July-9 September 1945) which destroyed Jiang Jieshi and the GMD.

Firstly, the decisions made during the Long March were essential for the development and expansion of the CCP. The most prominent decision made at the Zunyi Conference (17 January 1935) whereby Mao took leadership and control of the march, changing their predictable path to venture north to Yan’an. As Lynch argues ‘what began as a rout ended in a legend’ as Mao turned the […] military retreat into a propaganda mission as he proclaimed they were going north to fight the Japanese who had invaded Manchuria on the 18th of September 1931. This decision imbued the Red Army with a sense of purpose as they valiantly marched to Yan’an led by Mao who became ‘the prophet who had led the survivors through the wilderness (Meisner), contributing to the perception of ‘Mao as a man of destiny’ (Meisner). Mao’s leadership of the CCP enabled him to establish Yan’an Soviet (12 December 1936) based on the Maoist virtues of usefulness and perseverance which was developed on the Long March and implemented Maoism. This enabled the CCP, as Fairbanks argues, ‘to find the key to power in the countryside’ as Mao appeared to the ostracised peasants promoting the ideals of communism through the mass line, and his land laws which were reinforced in his January 1940 On New Democracy, highlighting a ‘refusal to be owned by a few’. The Yan’an way, built and developed from the Long March, was the ‘crucible of the revolution’, claims Llewelyn with Meisner agreeing, arguing ‘it was the basis of the victory in 1949’.

Secondly, the Sino-Japanese War, which raged on during this expansion exposed Jiang Jieshi’s poor leadership, and disenchanted the Chinese peoples paving the way for CCP victory in 1949. Jiang Jieshi’s poor and […] is highlighted in his decision to blow up the Yellow River Dam (8 June 1938) which led to over 500,000 peasants drowning and 5 million homeless in an attempt to save China through a ‘war of attrition’. This gravely disenchanted Chinese people as Fitzgerald argues the ‘GMD withered in that wintery climate’. Fairbanks furthers this arguing ‘the GMD’s fate was determined by the menace of Japanese imperialism’. As the GMD lost popular support the CCP capitalised on this growing to 1 million members by 1945. While the CCP were in a prime position at the end of the Sino-Japanese War the GMD were ‘manifestly incapable of dealing with the new challenges of the post war era’ (Hsu), thus lost the Civil War and China.

The decisions on the Long March were integral to the CCP’s expansion, but the Sino-Japanese war was a turning point.

Section B

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
| % | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 10.0 |

In Section B students selected an essay topic on one of the four revolutionary contexts. The assessment criteria for the essay and the descriptors used for the holistic marking of the essay were both published on the VCAA website. Consequently, students appeared familiar with the expectations required of essay writing and confidently tackled this component of the examination. The four essay criteria involved construction of an argument in response to the specific question posed, demonstration of historical knowledge, application of historical thinking concepts and use of evidence to support a historical argument.

The structure of the new examination meant that there was more time available for the construction of an essay, and this was reflected in fewer rushed responses or incomplete arguments. Each of the four topics provided scope for students to develop a comprehensive argument based on evidence. Responses that scored highly started with a statement or contention that addressed the premise of the question. Generally, the evidence cited by students was appropriate: dates were mostly accurate, policies were cited, and people’s names were spelt correctly. However, the broad scope of the questions, and reference to the two areas of study, was a challenge for some students who delved into a narrative approach covering the whole revolutionary period. Conversely, higher-scoring responses were judicious in the selection of evidence and did not attempt to cover the whole period or every event.

The fourth essay criterion, ‘use of sources as evidence to support a historical argument, including a range of primary sources, perspectives and historical interpretations’, continues to pose a challenge for most students. Students should be reminded that historical interpretations are conclusions made by historians following extensive research of primary sources. For example, Orlando Figes’ A People’s Tragedy draws on vast original research about the lives of workers, soldiers, intellectuals and villagers whose world was consumed by revolution. From this he has developed conclusions about the effect of the revolution on the lives of different social groups. Thus, it serves no purpose to quote one word or a short phrase and attribute this to a historian such as Figes and claim this equates with historical interpretation. Essays can be enhanced with historical interpretation, but students need to link a conclusion made by the historian to their own argument and evidence. There were also many instances where students mentioned the name of a historian who wrote on an entirely different revolution. In short, responses are only enriched by the inclusion of a historical interpretation if it is fully explained in the context of the argument and if the view presented is accurate.

The proposition for the American essay stated: ‘By 1776, most Americans were united in their aim to separate from Britain, but the new regime faced many significant challenges in attempting to consolidate its power’. Students were asked to what extent they agreed with the proposition and there were many ways in which this question could have been addressed. Some responses looked at the extent of colonial unity in pursuing independence from Britain, but many accepted the proposition at face value. Having argued that there was unity by 1776 some responses proceeded to describe the challenges from colonial loyalists during the War of Independence: this was a contradiction to their earlier argument. However, there were strong responses with most focusing their arguments on the challenges of the new regime. There were interesting discussions of the economic difficulties that needed to be overcome, and the inclusion of statistics strengthened the cogency of these arguments. Overall, a defining characteristic of the responses to the American option was the use of evidence to support the discussion about challenges in the new regime.

The French Revolution topic was focused on the use of violence as a tactic to achieve a goal in both the old and new regimes. Students took note of the key words in the question: ‘violence’, ‘storming of the Bastille’, ‘people’ and ‘government’ and they used these to frame their response. However, few responses considered the prompt as a whole, and many slipped into an imprecise narrative account of where there were instances of violence rather than looking at the instrumentality of it. Higher-scoring responses made the point that although violence was a tool utilised by both the government and the people to prompt and then regulate the trajectory of the revolution, the reforms of 1791 were largely achieved through intellectual means rather than violence. Higher-scoring responses also articulated why violence was employed. For example, students identified that the sans-culottes and the working classes of Paris used violence as it was their only means of protest due to a lack of political voice, while the Terror was instated as a response to perceived and real internal and external threats to revolution. However, most responses focused on the storming of the Bastille, the Great Fear and the Terror without making links with the aims and objectives of revolutionary violence.

The following extracts from a high-scoring response demonstrates the student’s use of evidence and the logical structuring of an argument though clear topic sentences.

Violence was undoubtedly used as a prime mechanism by different groups to achieve their aims, however not all groups resorted to violence to do so. Violence was used by the Parisian urban workers and peasants as a means to express their revolutionary desire for change, as illustrated through the storming of the Bastille and actions of the sans-culottes. Moreover, violence was utilised by Robespierre on behalf of the Jacobin Assembly to force upon the people obedience….

Violence was employed by the Parisian urban workers and peasantry as a way to achieve their ideals. The everyday Parisian urban workers and peasants had no political voice throughout the revolution, hence they resorted to violence as a source of language and a mechanism to achieve their aims. The storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789) was a form of violent uprising for the workers to challenge the despotism of Louis, to which Paris had 20,000 soldiers employed by Louis as a means to express his royal will. Yet the workers appalled by the sacking of Necker (11 July 1789) had to resort to violence to reinstate Necker and end Louis’s arbitrary and deeply autocratic control over Paris, which was fully militarized. Moreover, the sans-cullottes, whom according to historian McPhee as ‘the backbone of the revolution’ had solely utilised violence to influence policy decision in the Assembly. The sans-culottes close proximity to the Assembly had evoked fear amongst the deputy members whom had at appease the sans-culottes by passing legislation in their favour, namely the Law of General Maximum (29 September 1793) which was desired amongst the workers to reduce prices of food…

The French Government…resorted to violence as means to consolidate and maintain power. In response to heightened threats, those being external enemies and internal enemies of the regimes, Terror was utilized to preserve the revolution by acting as an instrument to force the people into submission. This is demonstrated through the Vendee and Federalist revolts, where Danton claimed, ‘let us be terrible so the people should not have to be’, and the Assembly declaring ‘let terror be the order of the day’. The Federalist and Vendee regions of France had 90% of the terror directed at its people, where in the Vendee 2000-4000 people were drowned…

Question 3 was the most popular option, with more than 50% of students responding to the proposition that read ‘In both Tsarist Russia and in the new society of the Bolsheviks, most Russian people suffered great hardships’. When asked to what extent they agreed with this proposition most students responded in the affirmative. However, the term ‘hardships’ was rarely defined and instead students developed a narrative of the problems encountered under each regime. The higher-scoring responses developed a clear understanding of what was meant by ‘hardships’ and often organised their arguments around themes rather than chronology. Themes that worked well included the agrarian systems in Tsarist and Soviet Russia, the oppression of the working class in an under-industrialised Russia and later under the policies of War Communism, and the flagrant disregard for civil liberties before and after October 1917. There were several responses that leaned heavily on the sources from Section A to provide evidence for their essays. While this is not penalised or discounted, the evidence was generally limited to the event of Bloody Sunday and hence the argument was limited. There were also some responses which analysed the hardships of the period of the Provisional Government, which was not part of the question.

The following extracts from a high-scoring response demonstrates a strong use of evidence, especially primary sources and historical perspectives.

Despite the social and political change that took place in Russia between the Tsarist society and the founding of Bolshevik Russia, the lives of the majority of Russians remained difficult. Both the Tsarist and Bolshevik regimes oppressed civil liberties and, through economic mismanagement, increased the plight of the working and peasant classes. Yet where Tsarism failed to make any significant improvements in the lives of the Russian people, Bolshevism was able to achieve some positive outcomes in the early period of the Sovnarkom, emancipating many demographics who had been oppressed in Imperial Russia. However, ultimately Bolshevism ‘continued a long Tsarist political police tradition (Legget) and ‘the decentralized vision of socialism associated with 1917…was permanently sidelined’ (Smith), as the hardship largely continued under the new regime.

Tsar Nicholas and his repressive regime, coupled with the failures of Tsarism to manage Russia’s fledgling industrial economy, oversaw great hardship in Russian society. Nicholas’ industrialisation program, overseen by Sergei Witte, greatly reduced the standard of living among Russian workers. Such workers who ‘were raised on the frugal habits of rural life’, were ‘much more easily satisfied’ with poor working conditions than other European counterparts, in the words of Witte. The industrialization program led to massive influxes of people, with Moscow’s population growing from 1 million to 1.5 million in a ten year period (1890-1900) and St Petersburg growing to over 2 million, which led to people sharing apartments with up to 16 others according to Perfect… yet calls for improvements in the lives of these people was met with nothing but repression. For example, under the repressive measures of Prime Minister Pytor Stolypin (1906-1911) some 15k were hanged, as the noose became known as ‘Stolypin’s necktie’. Moreover, the Tsar’s Okhrana, under the direction of Stolypin, were prevalent and exiled any opposing the regime with some 60k being exiled during Stolypin’s term to Siberia…

While the Tsar’s inability to manage the economy and instincts for violent oppression were strong, Bolshevism’s ruthless rule of Russia garnered even worse outcomes for the populace. Despite rising to power on the back of popular support of the urban working class, the Bolshevik party failed to improve their lives. The policy of War Communism, Lenin’s attempt to materialize the Marxist view of a socialized economy, led to devastating famine that killed 9.5 million people. Indeed the grain requisitioning that formed part of the War Communism policy meant that ‘the slavery of Tsarism was again clearly visible’ on the faces of the peasantry, according to one local food brigade leader and resulted in many resorting to cannibalism to survive…

Despite its many failings, the Bolshevik government was able to implement some measures that improved the lives of some. Lenin sought to ‘burn everything, on the ruins build [his] temple’ with the early Sovnarkom decrees. Such decrees, such as the Workers’ Control decree of 27 November 1917, led to an emancipation of the working classes of Russia, who became able to manage their own affairs and decide on wages and working conditions- a far cry from the oppression of Russia…Moreover, the Bolsheviks decree on marriage allowed women to free themselves of ‘the servitude of marriage’ (Kollantai) by legalizing their right to seek divorce. Indeed, the Bolsheviks also legalized abortion, making the procedure a state supplied operation in a Dec 1917 decree, further emancipating women. Thus although largely unsuccessful in improving the lives of Russians, the Bolsheviks did implement some measures which emancipated certain demographics…

Students who selected to write their essay on the Chinese Revolution were required to discuss the extent to which political and social policies were used by the GMD and, after 1949, by the CCP to maintain power. The higher-scoring responses divided their discussion equally between the two governments and concluded that both were determined to develop social cohesion. For example, the New Life Movement initiated by the GMD was seen as an attempt to rejuvenate discipline and traditional values, while the Hundred Flowers Campaign was seen as the CCP’s attempt to weed out dissident thinkers. These strong responses also discussed the way policies were introduced by both governments to eliminate political enemies; for example, Jiang Jieshi used the blueshirts to target the Communists, while under Mao the Red Guards were used to eliminate political rivals. However, there were many responses that were general narratives lacking in specific knowledge about campaigns or an understanding of the chronology of policies.