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Victorian Certificate of Education
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VCAA Bulletin Supplement 1

Text list 2005

English/ESL

Literature



English/ESL

Text list 2005

The following texts proposed by the English Text Selection Panel have been approved by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) as suitable for study in 2005.

This list is presented alphabetically by author, grouped according to kind of text. Abbreviations in brackets after the titles signify:

A This text meets the Australian requirement

PF This text meets the prose fiction requirement

(#) This indicates the number of years this text has appeared on the English/ESL Text List prior to 2005.

The annotations are provided to assist with selection of texts in accordance with the requirements in the English study design. It is important to avoid genre confusion. Where, for example, the text is designated PF (prose fiction), a non-print version is not acceptable for purposes of the examination, although it might be used in the classroom for teaching purposes.

Teachers are reminded that:

At least three of the four texts studied should be selected from a list published annually in the VCAA Bulletin. The fourth text, if not chosen from the set list, should be selected in accordance with the guidelines published annually in the VCAA Bulletin. At least one of the selected texts must be by an Australian or about Australians.

It should be noted that there will be no provision for students to write in the examination on any text not on the list. Such texts may be used for the achievement of outcomes, but not for the examination. The guidelines referred to are provided at the end of this notice, after the annotations.

Note: Whilst the VCAA considers all the texts on this list suitable for study, teachers should be aware that in some instances sensitivity may be needed where particular issues are raised in certain texts. In selecting texts for study teachers should make themselves aware of these issues prior to introducing the text to students.

Novels

Ammaniti, Niccolo, *I'm Not Scared* (PF)

Barker, Pat, *Border Crossing* (PF) (1)

Camus, Albert, *The Plague* (PF)

Chevalier, Tracy *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (PF) (3)

Gaines, Ernest J, *A Lesson Before Dying* (PF) (2)

Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American* (PF) (1)

Haddon, Mark, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (PF)

Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (PF) (1)

Keneally, Thomas, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (A) (PF) (2)

Leigh, Julia, *The Hunter* (PF) (A) (1)

Lewis, Janet, *The Wife of Martin Guerre* (PF) (2)

MacLeod, Alistair *No Great Mischief* (PF) (3)

Witting, Amy, *I for Isobel* (PF) (A) (2)

Short Stories

Lawson, Henry *Short Stories* (The stories for study are as follows: 'The Drover's Wife', 'The Bush Undertaker', 'The Union Buries Its Dead', 'On the Edge of a Plain', 'Bill, the Ventriloquist Rooster', 'The Loaded Dog', 'Brighten's Sister-in-Law', 'A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek', 'Water Them Geraniums', 'Telling Mrs Baker', 'A Child in the Dark and A Foreign Father'.)

(**Note:** All of these stories are available in several current editions of Henry Lawson's short stories.) (A) (PF) (2)

Winton, Tim, *Minimum of Two*, (A, PF)

Wolff, Tobias, *The Stories of Tobias Wolff* (PF)

Plays

Harrison, Jane, *Stolen* (A) (3)

Miller, Arthur, *A View from the Bridge*

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet* (1)

Sophocles, *King Oedipus* (2)

Non-print texts

Breaker Morant (A) (2)

Gattaca (2)

Lantana (A)

The Age of Innocence

The Third Man (2)

Poetry

Hodgins, Philip, *Dispossessed* (A) (1)

Silkin, John, *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (1)

Non-fiction texts

Gaita, R, *Romulus, My Father* (A)

Levi, P, *If this is a Man*

Ung, Loung, *First They Killed My Father* (3)

Annotations

These annotations are provided to assist teachers with text selection. The comments are not intended to represent the only possible interpretation or a favoured reading of a text; nor do they represent a VCAA view. The list is arranged alphabetically by author. Films are listed by title. The VCAA does not prescribe editions: any complete edition may be used. The bibliographic information is provided to assist teachers to obtain texts and is correct, as far as possible, at the time of publication. Publishing details may change from time to time and teachers should consult the VCAA Bulletin regularly for any amendments or alterations to the list.

Ammaniti, Niccolo, *I'm Not Scared* (PF, Text, 2001)

In this compelling, powerful and engaging novel, we meet Michele Armitrano, a nine year-old boy living in the small, close-knit Italian village where he was born. His summer holidays are spent in the company of his friends exploring the neighbouring countryside on their bikes. During one of their games he makes a startling chance discovery which will change his life and the lives of all the families in the village forever. Michele has grown up with the people of his village, but his extraordinary encounter forces him to see the villagers and even his own family in a completely different light. In the process, he is faced with a moral dilemma and conflict of loyalties which culminate in a searing final scene.

This internationally acclaimed novel, translated from the Italian, is a concise and accessible text which invites examination at a number of levels.

Barker, Pat, *Border Crossing* (PF, Penguin, 2002)

This powerful and taut novel focuses on what happens when a child convicted for murder, suddenly reappears as an adult in unsettling fashion in the life of the child psychologist whose evidence helped to convict him. Using some of the conventions of the psychological thriller genre, Barker's swift moving narrative is ultimately a profoundly serious exploration of a range of difficult and important issues. Barker offers no easy answers to any of these questions and grounds her exploration in recognisable and hence believable characters and relationships. It is both a challenging and accessible novel.

***Breaker Morant* (Film, A)**

In 1901 the British war against the Boers in South Africa has deteriorated into bitter and brutal guerrilla warfare. A unit of Bushveldt Carbineers, mainly made up of Australians, is ordered by the British High Command to fight the Boers on their terms and take no prisoners, orders that were to prove fatal for Harry Morant and fellow soldiers. Though they acted under orders, the British General Staff, who wanted to distance themselves from the irregular practices of the war, used the Australians as scapegoats. The film problematises the ways in which conventional morality is abandoned in war, and explores the paternalistic relationship between the British generals and the Colonial soldiers.

Camus, Albert, *The Plague* (PF, Penguin, 2003)

Set during the 1940s, Camus' modern classic examines the reaction of the Algerian town of Oran, which is devastated as a result of a plague brought by rats. Described as a 'chronicle' rather than a novel by the author, the text charts the lives of a number of characters during this time of calamity, notably the courageous Dr Rieux who, through his dedicated work and collaboration with others in their fight against the pestilence, comes to recognise that in spite of their foolishness and ignorance, 'men are more to be admired than despised'.

Not only does the novel act as a kind of parable to that other contemporary 'plague', the German occupation of France in the Second World War, but it also provides Camus with a human situation to further explore his philosophical system of the 'Absurd', which has intrigued and challenged students who have in previous years studied his novel *The Outsider*.

Chevalier, Tracy, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (PF, HarperCollins, 1999)

The seventeenth-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer's portrait of the anonymous *Girl with a Pearl Earring* lies at the heart of Tracy Chevalier's novel of the same name. The novel centres on Vermeer's prosperous Delft household during the 1660s. When Griet, the novel's quietly perceptive heroine, is hired as a servant, turmoil follows. Vermeer employs her as his assistant – and ultimately has Griet sit for him as a model. The novel vividly evokes the complex tensions of the household, ruled over by the painter's jealous, eternally pregnant wife and his taciturn mother-in-law.

Gaines, Ernest J, *A Lesson Before Dying* (PF, Hodder, 2002)

Set in a segregated Cajun plantation quarter in the late 1940s in the United States of America, this novel deals with questions of racism and human dignity, and traces an 'education' which equates with a religious conversion. The turning point for the central character, Jefferson, is when his date of execution is brought down. In the face of death he embraces life, and discovers his self-worth. The lesson is as much the teacher's as it is the pupil's. There is a dual process being traced from ignorance to enlightenment, from cynicism to faith.

Gaita, Raimond, *Romulus, My Father* (Text, A, 1998)

Romulus Gaita fled his home in Yugoslavia at the age of thirteen and came to Australia with his young wife Christine and their four-year-old son soon after the end of World War II. Tragic events were to overtake them, events which Raimond Gaita explores in his story about growing up with his increasingly troubled father in rural Victoria. This is the story of how a compassionate and honest man taught his son the meaning of living a decent life. It deals with friendship and betrayal, with the fragility of existence, with the cruelty of depression and mental illness and the dignity of work. It is about survival and the struggle to establish a sense of self and integrity of character despite [or because of] the obstacles that fate may provide.

***Gattaca* (Film)**

Set in a bleak future where only those who are genetically engineered to be perfect are allowed to play any significant role in society, *Gattaca* explores the notion of dreams and follows the story of a man who refuses to accept his fate.

Vincent, the central character is an invalid – one who was born without any scientific interference. He is biologically inferior and can never hope to enter *Gattaca* facility, which is the launching place for shuttles to the stars, unless it is as a janitor.

Vincent refuses to accept his lot and so takes on the identity of Jerome Morrow who is genetically superior but has been paralysed in an accident. He is accepted into *Gattaca* but must ensure that his true identity is never discovered; a feat that becomes all the more difficult when his eyelash is found and points to him as a murderer within the clinical confines of the facility.

The film explores the relationship between Vincent and Jerome and raises questions about the burden of perfection and the bleakness of a world where emotion is replaced by automatons that move through cold and controlled environments. *Gattaca* is a topical film that deals with the issues of genetic engineering as well as developing suspense and character. (Rating: M)

Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American* (PF, Vintage, 2001)

The narrator of Greene's classic novel, set in Indochina in 1955, is Thomas Fowler, a world-weary English reporter who is nevertheless an acute observer of foreign circles at a time when Vietnam is trying to assert independence from French colonial rule. The *Quiet American* is the idealistic Alden Pyle,

sent to promote democracy under the guise of humanitarian aid. Phuong is the Vietnamese woman for whose affections both men compete. Graham Greene's novel evokes a time and place on the brink of change and turmoil.

The Quiet American raises questions about the motives of individuals and foreign political interests which remain as relevant and interesting now as they did at the time the novel was written in 1955.

Haddon, Mark, *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night Time* (PF, Random House, 2003)

This is a fascinating 'detective' novel that is divided into chapters headed by prime numbers – 'Prime numbers are like life. They are very logical but you could never work out the rules, even if you spent all your time thinking about them.'

It is this judgment that sums up the perspective of the narrator. Christopher John Francis Boone is 15 years old and has Asperger's Syndrome (a form of autism). This moving and often refreshingly funny novel deals with rites of passage, but the main character's journey is exacerbated by the fact that he can neither express nor understand emotions and cannot decipher the world around him.

The story begins with Christopher's discovery of the neighbour's dog impaled by a pitchfork and the rest of the novel follows his 'investigation of the murder' (adapting the *modus operandi* of Sherlock Holmes!). Throughout the 'investigation' he is forced to confront his own fears, and the mystery that unravels ultimately deals less with the 'murder' of Wellington the poodle and more with the dissolution and dysfunction of the relationships of the adults around him.

The detached observational tone of the narration allows the reader to step inside the mind of someone who sees the world in his own idiosyncratic way, yet still manages to reveal much about people and the way they behave.

Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (PF, Penguin, 1998)

Tess Durbeyfield is sent to establish a connection with the d'Urbervilles, unaware that that family has merely assumed the name. Seduced by their son, Alec, Tess returns home, where her illegitimate child dies before being baptised. Seeking a fresh start, Tess travels to Talbothays, where she meets and marries Angel Clare. When she tells him of her past, he abandons her, despite his own previous indiscretions. Alec, apparently reformed, re-enters Tess' life, and pursues her again. Torn between Alec and Angel, who has also returned, Tess murders Alec, is captured and executed. As the novel examines the notions of destiny, free will and religion in an apparently indifferent universe, the contradictions inherent in life itself, and the decline of the traditional agricultural lifestyle of the day, Hardy presents an indictment of the hypocrisy of nineteenth-century England in his sad tale of a 'pure woman' doomed by circumstance and personality.

Harrison, Jane, *Stolen* (Play, A, Currency Press, 2000)

This tender and moving play tells of five young Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their parents, brought up in a repressive children's home and trained for domestic service and other menial jobs. The pain, poignancy and sometimes sheer desperation of their lives are seen through the children's own

eyes as they struggle to make sense of their world. The play's conciliatory tone pleads for understanding between white and black, and for individual respect.

Hodgins, Philip, *Dispossessed* (Poetry, A, Angus and Robertson, 1994)

Set in rural Australia during the bi-centenary, *Dispossessed* is a remarkable verse-novella that centres on a family whose farm is about to be repossessed. The story spans three generations of the family and there are realistic and unflattering portraits of the old man who is bitter and negative; the husband who finds solace in the footy club booze ups and a dream of 'shooting it out'; a heavily pregnant and disillusioned wife and a young girl who is watching the relationships within her family succumb to bickering and the harshness and hopelessness of life in rural Australia at this time.

The text refuses to romanticise the land. The lyrical description of the landscape is littered with evocative images of destruction and despair: myxo affected rabbits, the bloated corpse of a Hereford hanging in a tree after a flood and the foolish birds that nest in the roof even though 'the rats will get their eggs'. These images act as clear signposts to the fragmentation and destruction of the relationships within the family.

Philip Hodgins grew up in Shepparton in Victoria and there is an all-pervasive sense of familiarity that runs throughout the text. The characters and the landscape are unflinchingly presented and the use of the Australian vernacular and rhythms of speech make it a text that is reflective of key issues of Australian identity as well as an examination of relationships within families. It is an interesting irony that Hodgins has employed poetry to depict such unpoetic lives.

Keneally, Thomas, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (PF, A, HarperCollins, 2001)

Thomas Keneally's classic study of what it means to be caught irreconcilably between the two worlds of Aboriginal and White Australia, and being unable to really fit into either, remains as powerful, confronting and topical as when it first appeared.

Through his vivid recreation of the life of Jimmy Governor in his tragically divided character Jimmie Blacksmith (son of an Aboriginal mother and a white father), Keneally poses questions, rather than offers answers, as he explores race relations at the time of Federation.

The novel moves swiftly through the various stages of Jimmie's short life, from his fruitless struggles to find acceptance in a white world that has held out the illusion of material prosperity and belonging, to his violent response to the emptiness of this cruel promise.

***Lantana* (Film, A)**

This Ray Lawrence film, released in 2001, explores the intertwined relationships of flawed characters against the backdrop of a murder investigation. Part thriller and part exposé, the relationships tangle and weave like the lantana, a plant that produces a beautiful flower yet has sharp, thorny vines that choke the natural bushland. Dark and haunting, bleak and mysterious, the film showcases characters who must endure a search for their own identity before they can come to terms with their relationships. Grief, betrayal, trust and forgiveness are fundamental issues as the film moves to its resolution. (Rating: M)

Lawson, Henry *Short Stories* (PF, A)

(The stories for study are as follows: ‘The Drover’s Wife’, ‘The Bush Undertaker’, ‘The Union Buries Its Dead’, ‘On the Edge of a Plain’, ‘Bill, the Ventriloquial Rooster’, ‘The Loaded Dog’, ‘Brighten’s Sister-in-Law’, ‘A Double Buggy at Lahey’s Creek’, ‘Water Them Geraniums’, ‘Telling Mrs Baker’, ‘A Child in the Dark and A Foreign Father’.)

(**Note:** All of these stories are available in several current editions of Henry Lawson’s short stories.)

The set stories represent a range of the finest pieces of Lawson’s work. Some of the best-known comic pieces are here, as well as the exquisitely crafted ‘sketch-stories’ that present extraordinary impressions of rural life at the end of the eighteenth century. The selections from the Joe Wilson stories which read as a ‘discontinuous narrative’, an incomplete novel of courtship and marriage, not only provide a window into the past, but also offer keen insights into the human condition.

One may query Manning Clark’s claim that ‘Australia is Lawson writ large’, but the stories are accessible, immensely enjoyable and present an intriguing vision of rural life in this country.

Leigh, Julia, *The Hunter* (PF, A, Penguin, 1999)

Julia Leigh’s prize-winning debut novel is as dark and unforgiving as the harsh Tasmanian landscape in which it is set. ‘M’ is the anonymous protagonist sent by an anonymous bioengineering company to capture the last of the thylacine – that is, the Tasmanian tiger. Boarding with a fractured fatherless family and situated on the brink of society and the wilderness, M, the ‘professional’, braves the dangerous plateau where he tracks and hunts the creature believed to be extinct. As this novel is a strange and haunting study of a man apparently without a past, the tale is set in the present and becomes, essentially, a fascinating delineation of the ‘hunter’ and the ethics of his quest.

Levi, Primo, *If this is a Man* (PF, Abacus, 2002)

In this searing account of his experience of the holocaust, Primo Levi, an Italian Jew, records the ordeal of being captured by the Nazis in 1943 and interned at Auschwitz, the horrific death camp. A distinguished chemist, Levi recounts with almost clinical precision the daily routines and procedures of the camp, the imposition of power and the response of the prisoners. The monstrosity of Hitler’s ‘Final Solution’ is revealed through the ‘funereal science of the numbers of Auschwitz, which epitomise the stages of destruction of European Judaism’.

Lewis, Janet, *The Wife of Martin Guerre* (PF, Penguin, 1996)

In sixteenth-century France, Bertrande is married as a child to Martin Guerre, the son of a prosperous farmer. Martin later runs away to become a soldier, deserting Bertrande and their child. When he unexpectedly returns years later, Bertrande becomes convinced it is not the same man. She finds herself caught between passionate love for a man who may not be her husband, and the dictates of her conscience. This simply-told yet rich tale examines conflicting loyalties to family, moral code, personal interest and religious faith.

MacLeod, Alistair, *No Great Mischief* (PF, Jonathan Cape, 1999)

The narrator, Alexander MacDonald, begins the story in the 1980s but soon takes us back to 1779 when his forebears from the clan *Chalum Ruaidh* were driven out of Scotland. After a terrible journey, the family begins life anew at Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The harsh history of the tightly knit MacDonald family is intertwined with the history of Canada; the present has no meaning without an understanding of the past and the place of duty, loyalty and the bonds of family love. MacLeod has drawn many fine strong characters in this powerful narrative. This is an epic, lyrical, passionate and moving novel full of humour and colour.

Miller, Arthur, *A View from the Bridge* (Penguin 2000)

In constructing his play, Miller has borrowed from Greek tragic form and style: jealousy, betrayal and love complicate the life of an ordinary man, Eddie Carbone, and lead to his inevitable corruption and downfall. Eddie confronts a personal domestic dilemma when he cannot control his affection for his niece, Catherine. Tensions emerge when two relatives, Rodolpho and Marco, are housed by the Carbone after illegally immigrating to fulfil their ‘American Dream.’ Catherine falls in love with Rodolpho, prompting Eddie to fight for Catherine’s affection, firstly through verbal humiliation and later by challenging Rodolpho’s masculinity and sexuality. When Eddie cannot stop Catherine from asserting her independence and marrying, Eddie betrays the immigrants to government agencies.

Miller’s text is accessible and intensely dramatic. It explores notions of justice, identity and honour in the context of an immigration dilemma with contemporary relevance.

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet* (Signet, 1999)

Shakespeare’s revenge tragedy would provide something of a ‘core’ text for students, dealing as it does with a young man’s grappling with timeless questions about the nature of life and death. The play holds a rich double life – on the page and on the stage – and provides the opportunity for rigorous study and individual interpretation.

Silken, John, *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (Penguin, 1997)

This comprehensive collection includes many of the finest British and European poems of World War I but also includes less well-known poets and works by women poets. Patriotism, anger, compassion, grief, death and survival are all encountered in reading the range of verse of the complex and diverse horrific experiences that portray the hideousness of war.

Sophocles, *King Oedipus* (in *The Theban Plays* trans. E.F. Watling, Penguin, 1963)

This monument of Ancient Greek drama tells the searing tale of the ill-fated Oedipus who, inadvertently, killed his own father, married his mother and, as a consequence, experienced the tragic ‘fall’ from an apparent situation of security and power. The play, which is often titled *Oedipus Rex*, examines the dominating character of the ruler, so full of pride and self-assurance, seemingly unaware of the precariousness of human existence.

Alongside him we have the frightened cynicism of Jocasta, the nearly puritanical loyalty of Creon, the awesomeness of Teiresias and the uncertain voice of the Chorus.

The dynamic pace of the drama and the profound insight it offers into human motive and circumstance ensure that this accessible and rich study will provide a challenging study for many students.

The Age of Innocence (Film)

Martin Scorsese's sumptuous adaptation of Edith Wharton's classic novel, tells the story of a relationship made impossible by the social context of the characters. The convention-bound society of 1870s New York, with its complex hierarchies, its rules and barriers, is powerfully represented. These conventions form a web that enmeshes Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis), his fiancée, May (Winona Ryder), and her cousin, Ellen (Michelle Pfeiffer), the woman he loves. The film explores the interrelationship of individuals and their society, and the issue of honour and loyalty in collision with personal fulfilment.

The Third Man (Film)

Set in the symbolically divided post World War II Vienna, *The Third Man* shows the journey of an innocent, Holly Martins, writer of mediocre Westerns, into the heart of cynical European darkness. Martins has come to meet his old college buddy Harry Lime only to learn that Lime is dead, and was a war criminal who made his fortune in the drug trade. As the film evolves, it becomes a complex study of friendship set in a world whose codes often place betrayal above loyalty. *The Third Man* has become one of the hallmarks of modern cinematography with its dark, angular and quirky photography reflecting the characters' stories.

Ung, Loung, *First They Killed My Father* (Harper-Collins, 2000)

Whilst many adults will be aware of the horrors of the killing fields in Pol Pot's 'Kampuchea', most students are unaware of this recent holocaust and its consequences.

Loung Ung's autobiography is a searing account of the plight of her family as the Khmer Rouge attempted to deny history, begin time again with Year Zero, and implement an agrarian revolution based upon the brutal slavery of the Cambodian people.

The power of *First They Killed My Father* arises from the fact that this compelling picture of the horror of this brutal regime is the tragic tale of one particular family – when that very institution was dismantled – but it comes to represent the plight of all besieged people in that blighted nation.

Ultimately this most accessible text is a life affirming account of endurance, humanity and a celebration of family life.

Winton, Tim, *Minimum of Two* (PF, A, Penguin, 1987)

This well known collection of stories from the West Australian writer addresses a number of themes (adolescence and death; swimming/drowning; friendship; thriller/mystery), but, for the most part, examines the way in which characters work to come to grips with past experiences which have often been left unresolved. Indeed, the ritual act of exorcising the past is repeated, and usually it is the male characters who find this most

difficult. This on-going concern is very much the subject of the Jerra Neilson stories, which are threaded through the collection as a kind of discontinuous narrative, showing the young man's changing perspective as he struggles toward maturity.

In style and subject, *Minimum of Two* is a delightfully varied collection. Whilst some of the tales are explorations of moral dilemmas and present subtle delineation of character, others are nothing less than a brief slice of life, distinguished by irony and humour.

This accessible collection provides students with a wonderful introduction to this esteemed Australian writer.

Witting, Amy, *I for Isobel* (PF, A, Penguin, 1989)

Amy Witting's *I for Isobel* is a female rites of passage novel, a 'portrait of the artist as a young woman'. Isobel's quest for independence and separate identity is marked by her intelligence, her anxiety and her sense of the absurd. The story is structured in a series of five self-contained episodes, each luminous with Isobel's insights or epiphanies as she moves from her working-class Sydney home to a Catholic school, a boarding house, encounters with university students and the world of work. Her 'getting of wisdom', that takes her from the entrapment of family into transcendent awareness of her identity as a writer in the 'word factory', is told with compassion, mordant humour and powerful dramatic realism.

Wolff, Tobias, *The Stories of Tobias Wolff* (PF, Bloomsbury, 1997)

Widely regarded as one of America's finest writers of short stories, Tobias Wolff delivers a diverse collection that highlights many of his distinguishing literary qualities.

Wolff's stories display an acute eye for the details of modern life as he explores the moral dilemmas his very ordinary and utterly believable characters confront.

Ranging widely in setting and theme, Wolff's collection reveals a subtle mastery of tone, and his gift for recreating his characters' ways of speaking and thinking render his stories exemplars of the kind of realism associated with Richard Ford and Raymond Carver. Wolff's quirky and at times mordant humour, though, coupled with a darker vision in which his frequently misguided and muddled characters stumble through life, make his voice distinctive and compelling. There really is an abundance of riches for all kinds of readers in this collection.

Guidelines for text selection

The text selection panel selected these texts in accordance with the following guidelines.

Each text selected for the VCE English and English (ESL) text list, including school-selected texts, will:

- have literary merit and be worthy of close study
- be an excellent example of form and genre
- sustain intensive study, raising interesting issues and providing challenging ideas
- be appropriate for both male and female students
- be appropriate for the age and development of students and, in that context, reflect current community standards and expectations.

The text list as a whole will:

- be suitable for a wide range of students, including second language students;
- reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community
- include a balance of new and established works
- include texts that display affirming perspectives.

The text list for VCE English/ESL must:

1. Contain 30 available texts.
2. Represent the full range of texts indicated in the study design in the following approximate proportions:
 - 13 novels
 - 3 collections of short stories
 - 2 collections of poetry or songs
 - 4 plays
 - 4 non-print texts
 - 4 non-fiction texts.
3. Contain at least ten texts by or about Australians, distributed across as many of the text categories (see point 2) as possible.
4. Contain both popular and frequently-taught texts.
5. Contain print and non-print texts that are freely available, preferably for sale.
6. Contain no titles in common with those on the VCE Literature list.
7. Be reviewed annually, with approximately 25 per cent of the texts being changed. No text should appear for more than four consecutive years and newly selected texts should appear on the list for at least two years to allow for consolidation of use in the classroom.
8. Be accompanied by full bibliographic details where necessary.

Text list 2005

The following texts proposed by the Literature Text Selection Panel have been approved by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) as suitable for study in 2005.

Criteria for text selection

Each text selected for the VCE Literature text list will:

- have literary merit and be worthy of close study
- be an excellent example of form and genre
- sustain intensive study, raising interesting issues and providing challenging ideas
- be appropriate for both male and female students
- be appropriate for the age and development of students and in that context reflect current community standards and expectations.

The text list as a whole will:

- be suitable for a wide range of students, including second language students
- reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community
- include a balance of new and established works.

Guidelines for text selection

The text list for VCE Literature is determined within the following guidelines:

1. Forty texts should be available for the school-assessed coursework. (List A)
2. Thirty texts should be available for the examination. (List B)
3. The list must represent a range of forms, experiences and voices, as described in the study design.
4. Genres for List A must be represented in the following approximate numbers:
 - 10 Novels
 - 10 Performances
 - 8 Poetry
 - 6 Stories
 - 6 Other Literature.

Genres for List B must be represented in the following approximate numbers:

- 9 Novels
 - 9 Performances
 - 6 Poetry
 - 3 Stories
 - 3 Other Literature.
5. One third of the texts should be Australian.
 6. Approximately 75 per cent of the texts must be standard texts that would be expected to be familiar to most Literature teachers.
 7. There must be no overlap with the VCE English text list.
 8. Full bibliographic details must be supplied where necessary.

Note: Whilst the VCAA considers all the texts on this list suitable for study, teachers should be aware that in some instances sensitivity may be needed where particular issues are raised in certain texts. In selecting texts for study teachers should make themselves aware of these issues prior to introducing the text to students.

The VCAA does not prescribe editions: any complete edition may be used. However, it should be noted that editions nominated for titles from List B are those from which the passages for the examination will be selected. The bibliographic information is provided to assist teachers to obtain texts and is correct, as far as possible, at the time of publication. Publishing details may change from time to time and teachers should consult the VCAA Bulletin regularly for any amendments or alterations to the list.

No specific editions or poems are nominated for poets from the List A list as the choice of poems is a teacher decision.

List A

(#) This indicates the number of years in the current cycle this text has appeared on the Literature text list prior to 2005.

Novels

- Collins, Wilkie, *The Woman in White*, Penguin Classics, 2003
- Burke, James Lee, *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead*, Orion, 1997 (3)
- Dickens, Charles, *David Copperfield*, Penguin Classics, 1996 (1)
- Eliot, George, *The Mill on the Floss*, Penguin Classics, 1980 (2)
- Fforde, Jasper, *The Eyre Affair*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2001
- Gibson, William, *Pattern Recognition*, Penguin, 2003
- Ham, Rosalie, *The Dressmaker*, Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000 (A) (2)
- Hewett, Dorothy, *Bobbin Up*, Vulgar Press 1999 (A) (3)
- Marquez, Gabriel, *Garcia Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Penguin, 1996 (2)
- Scott, Kim, *Benang*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1999 (A)

Plays, film or television mini-series

- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* in *Four Plays by Aristophanes*, Penguin, 1994 (2)
- Black Chicks Talking* (TV documentary, SBS Productions) (Available for purchase from Film Australia) (A) (1)
- Bovell, Andrew, *Speaking in Tongues*, Currency Press, 1998 (A) (1)
- Far From Heaven* (Film) (Rating M) (Available for borrowing from video rental stores and for purchase from Maxwell's Tel: 02 9973 2277)
- Ibsen, Henrik, *A Doll's House*, Penguin Classics, 1986 (1)
- Jonson, Ben, *Volpone*, Penguin Classics, 1998 (2)
- Lawler, Ray, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Currency Press, 1978 (A) (1)
- Lorca, Federico García, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Penguin, 2001 (1)
- Pinter, Harold, *The Birthday Party*, Faber, 1991 (1)
- White, Patrick, *A Cheery Soul*, Currency Press, 2001 (A) (2)

Short stories

- Allende, Isabel, *The Stories of Eva Luna*, Penguin 1991 (2)
- Carey, Peter, *The Fat Man in History*, UQP, 1994 (A)
- Ford, Richard, *Rock Springs*, Harvill Press, 1966 (2)

- Hospital, Janette Turner, *North of Nowhere South of Loss*, UQP, 2003 (A)
- Jolley, Elizabeth, *Woman in a Lampshade*, Penguin, 1992 (A) (1)
- Lahiri, Jhumpa, *Interpreter of Maladies*, Flamingo, 2000 (2)
- MacLeod, Alistair, *Island – Collected Stories*, Vintage, 2002 (1)

Other literature

- Bayet-Charlton, Fabienne, *Finding Ullagundahi Island*, Allen & Unwin, 2002 (A)
- Fuller, Alexandra, *Let's Not Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Picador, 2002
- Pham, Andrew X, *Catfish and Mandala*, Flamingo, 2000 (1)
- Rees, Siân, *The Floating Brothel*, Hodder, 2001 (A) (2)

Poetry

- Atwood, Margaret
- Bishop, Elizabeth
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley (2)
- Keats, John (2)
- Neilson, Philip (A) (2)
- Pope, Alexander (2)
- Porter, Dorothy (A) (1)
- The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* (Ed. Tranter & Mead), Penguin, 1991 (A) (1)
- Williams, William Carlos (1)

List B

Novels

- Austen, Jane, *Sense and Sensibility*, Penguin Classics, 2003
- Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness*, Penguin, 1995 (1)
- de Kretser, Michelle, *The Hamilton Case*, Knopf, 2003 (A)
- Doctorow, E L, *Ragtime*, Picador, 1985
- Fitzgerald, F Scott, *The Great Gatsby*, Penguin, 2000
- Forster, E M, *Howards End*, Penguin, 2001 (1)
- Garner, Helen, *The Children's Bach*, Penguin, 1999 (A)
- Messud, Claire, *The Last Life*, Picador, 1999 (2)
- Miller, Alex, *Conditions of Faith*, Allen & Unwin, 2001 (A) (2)
- Patched, Ann, *Bel Canto*, Fourth Estate, 2002

Plays, films and television mini-series

- Chekov, Anton, *The Cherry Orchard*, translated by Peter Carson, Penguin, 2002 (2)
- Davis, Jack, *No Sugar*, Currency Press, 1996 (A) (2)
- Euripides, *Women of Troy* in *The Bacchae and Other Plays*, Penguin Classics, 2000 (1)
- Shakespeare, William, *Measure for Measure*, New Penguin Shakespeare, 2000 (1)
- Shakespeare, William, *King Lear*, Penguin, 1999
- Shepard, Sam, *True West*, Faber, 1997 (1)

Short stories

- Farmer, Beverley, *Collected Stories*, UQP, 1996 (A) (2)
- Joyce, James, *Dubliners*, Penguin, 2000 (1)
- Raymond Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, Vintage, 2003

(The stories for study are: 'Fat', 'Neighbors', 'They're Not Your Husband', 'The Father', 'Nobody Said Anything', 'Sixty Acres', 'Jerry and Molly and Sam', 'How about This?', 'Bicycles, Muscles, Cigarettes', 'Signals', 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?')

Other literature

Modjeska, Drusilla, *Timepieces*, Picador, 2002 (A)
Dalrymple, William, *City of Djinn*s, Flamingo (1)
Drewe, Robert, *The Shark Net*, Penguin, 2001 (A) (2)

Poetry

Note: 1. Each poem listed for a poet must be studied
2. Teachers should note that in the case of longer poems, extracts from the poem may be used in the examination.

The Riverside Chaucer, Oxford University Press, 1988

Either The General Prologue or The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale (3)

Adamson, Robert, Mulberry Leaves, Paper Bark Press, 2001 (A)

The cow bird
Domestic shuffle
Fathers' Day
Mulberry Leaves
Goshawk over Broken Bay
Berowra Waters
My fishing boat
Growing up alone
The channels
Wild colonial boys
The language of oysters
The gathering light
Drum of fire
After Brett Whiteley

Forbes, John, Collected Poems, Brandl & Schlesinger, 2001 (A) (2)

poem
Antipodean Heads
Speed, a Pastoral
Europe: a guide for Ken Searle
Death an Ode
Love Poem (page 158)
Police Elegy
On Tiepolo's *Banquet of Cleopatra*
Anzac Day
3 songs for Charles Darwin
Ode on the Beach: A Bicentennial Poem
Ode to Karl Marx
Going North

Harwood, Gwen, Selected Poems, Penguin, 2001 (A) (1)

In the Park
Suburban Sonnet
Littoral
The Violets
Father and Child
The Sea Anemones
The Secret Life of Frogs
Mother Who Gave Me Life
The Lion's Bride
Class of 1927
Night and Dreams

Shakespeare, William, Sonnets, Penguin Classics, 1999 (2)

12 When I doe count the clock that tells the time
18 Shall I compare thee to a Summers day?
35 No more bee greev'd at that which thou hast done
65 Since brasse, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea
73 That time of yeeare thou maist in me behold
94 They that have powre to hurt, and will doe none
104 To me faire friend you never can be old
110 Alas 'tis true, I have gone here and there
116 Let me not to the marriage of true mindes
129 Th'expence of Spirit in a waste of shame
130 My Mistres eyes are nothing like the Sunne
138 When my love swears that she is made of truth

Rich, Adrienne, The Fact of a Doorframe, W.W. Norton & Co., 2002 (2)

Storm Warnings
Aunt Jennifer's Tigers
The Knight
Necessities of Life
Diving into the Wreck
White Night (N.B. First line: Light at a window. Someone up.)
Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law
Twenty-one Love Poems (Poems for study: 1 and 21)
North American Time
Integrity

Wright, Judith, Collected Poems, HarperCollins, 1994 (A)

South of My Days
The Company of Lovers
Age to Youth
Double Image
Eve to Her Daughters
Fire Sermon
Some Words
Tightropes
The Dark Ones
Smalltown Dance
Woman to Man
Woman to Child

Yeats, W B, Selected Poems, Penguin, 2000 (2)

When You are Old
The Song of Wandering Aengus
The Wild Swans at Coole
Easter 1916
On a Political Prisoner
The Second Coming
A Prayer for my Daughter
Sailing for Byzantium
Meditations in Time of Civil War
Long-legged Fly
Among School Children
An Irish Airman Foresees his Death
At Galway Races

Annotations of texts new to the Literature List 2005

These annotations of texts new to the Literature list in 2005 are provided to assist teachers with text selection. The comments are not intended to represent the only possible interpretation or a favoured reading of a text; nor do they represent the view of the VCAA. The list is arranged alphabetically by author or poet. Films are listed by title.

Adamson, Robert, *Mulberry Leaves, Paper Bark Press, 2001 (A)*

Bob Adamson, born in 1943, who by his own account was 'hopeless at everything at school, except for drawing and English composition', left school at 13 and spent his 21st birthday in prison. At the age of 17 he won a prize for the best wedding cake at Sydney's Royal Easter Show, when working as a pastry-cook. Many of his poems are autobiographical and would therefore be immediately accessible to students. The flat realism of these poems describes an angry and lonesome adolescent world in bleak domestic settings, but there's also sudden lyricism and transcendence. As he lives and has spent much of his life living on the Hawkesbury River in New South Wales, the chief drama of Adamson's poetry lies in the natural world, precisely rendered: the early morning light, the sounds and movements of fish, birds, the tides, the smell of the river. The relationship between this world and the human one is uneasy. Even in the triumphant moment when a fish is caught, there's a sense of human destruction and impermanence, reinforced by the extant Aboriginal culture still to be felt all along the river.

Atwood, Margaret

Atwood is a prolific poet as well as an acclaimed novelist. *Eating Fire Selected Poetry 1965–1995*, Virago, 2000 includes selections from three collections of her poetry and would be a good place to begin an exploration of her poetry. In elegant, erudite and ironic verse Atwood challenges our perceptions of the world and ourselves. Students who take up the challenge might find it interesting to read one of her novels. There are interviews, essays and reviews on the Internet, and fans would enjoy Rosemary Sullivan's literary biography *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out*.

Austen, Jane, *Sense and Sensibility, Penguin Classics, 2003*

Two sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, represent the qualities of sense and sensibility. But the novelist is interested in more than simple contrasting qualities, with the sisters both displaying more complexity than suggested by the dichotomy embodied in the title. Austen uses her characters as a starting point to examine the popular literary 'sensibility' which idealised a romantic embracing of nature and an excessive indulgence of emotions at the expense of restraint, balance and insight. In the world created by Austen, money dictates many aspects of human behaviour, and she subtly examines, criticises and judges the varying moral responses found in 'human nature in the midland counties'.

Bayet-Charlton, Fabienne, *Finding Ullagundahi Island, Allen & Unwin, 2002 (A)*

This is strongly autobiographical, says the author, but not an autobiography. It is a memoir woven with retellings of

conversations with her Nana, stories of the Dreaming and personal responses to landscapes as different as Yamba and Coober Pedy. It is also an exploration of belonging. A meandering and poetic work, fresh and immediate in style.

Bishop, Elizabeth

While Elizabeth Bishop wrote for over 50 years, her *Complete Poems* contains just over 140 works. These works, however, offer an incredibly rich perspective on language and the medium of poetry. Bishop's poems were always admired for the purity and precision of her descriptions, and now readers have come to see how, even in her early poems, the attention to external detail reveals an internal emotional realm. Her early works use surrealism and imagism to create a new reality in which she minimises the reference to self in poetry, but her later poems become more autobiographical and more concerned with a quest for personal identity.

Carey, Peter, *The Fat Man in History, UQP, 1994 (A)*

The twelve stories in the collection, originally published in 1974, are well worth revisiting from a twenty-first-century perspective. The near future of their original setting is startlingly and disturbingly familiar. Carey's concerns – including identity, human relationships, communication, alienation, and the pervasiveness of American culture – are still pertinent today. The stories are humorous, sometimes surreal, always compelling. Teachers familiar with *Collected Stories* will remember how well the stories work for the Creative Response in Unit 4. Carey's depictions of Australian life, and the concerns he raises, also provide a context for the study of other contemporary Australian works on the list. The collection would be a particularly interesting text for Views and Values in Unit 3.

Carver, Raymond, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please, Vintage, 2003*

(The stories for study are: 'Fat', 'Neighbors', 'They're Not Your Husband', 'The Father', 'Nobody Said Anything', 'Sixty Acres', 'Jerry and Molly and Sam', 'How about This?', 'Bicycles, Muscles, Cigarettes', 'Signals', 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?')

Raymond Carver's short stories are set in small town America, mainly in Washington State. They reflect the small, seemingly inconsequential, but often cataclysmic things that happen in ordinary people's lives. He is concerned with the arbitrary way these things occur and the wide ranging ramifications they may have. Carver's prose has been termed 'dirty realist' or 'dark' and its bluntness often belies a rich observation about people and their relationships and the forces that work to shape them.

Literature teachers may be familiar with the collection 'Short Cuts', and many of the stories appear in this anthology. While the stories lend themselves most obviously to a creative response, they are equally rewarding for the more analytical tasks.

Collins, Wilkie, *The Woman in White, Penguin Classics, 2003*

The Woman in White famously opens with Walter Hartright's eerie encounter on a moonlit London road. Engaged as a drawing master to the beautiful Laura Fairlie, Walter is drawn into the sinister intrigues of Sir Percival Glyde and his

'charming' friend Count Fosco, who has a taste for white mice, vanilla bonbons and poison. Pursuing questions of identity and insanity along the paths and corridors of English country houses and the madhouse, *The Woman in White* is the first and most influential of the Victorian genre that combined Gothic horror with psychological realism.

de Kretser, Michelle, *The Hamilton Case*, Knopf, 2003 (A)

Michelle de Kretser writes in an exquisite style about the lives of the local elites in British-controlled Ceylon. Her evocations of the unrelenting jungle and the unforgiving tropics are occasionally scintillating and often overwhelming but this novel is not intended to be read as some kind of exotic orientalism. Rather, this is post-colonial writing as strong in its self-consciousness as it is rich in irony. Sam Obeyesekere, the central character, has been privileged and cursed by an Oxford education and a career in law that is haunted by the shadows of life-long guilt, the accessories of English gentility, the novels of Agatha Christie and the Hamilton case that he alone was able to solve – incorrectly. *The Hamilton Case* is both an Australian novel and a piece of world literature. Rich in ideas about the relationships between colonised and coloniser, about logic, law and emotion, about the family, the state and ethnicity, *The Hamilton Case* would lend itself to the Views and Values Outcome. De Kretser's style, her use of descriptive writing, of memory, dream and dialogue would lend themselves to the Creative Outcome

Doctorow, E L, *Ragtime*, Picador 1985

The events of this compelling novel cover almost the first two decades of the twentieth century. Thoroughly engaging and highly readable, its multi-layered narrative is peopled with real and fictional characters: from the magician Houdini and the psychoanalyst Freud, to Jewish artist Tateh and the tragic figure of Coalhouse Walker Jr. The latter stands for the many oppressed and discriminated against in American society of that time, a society that is in so many other ways so obviously affluent and forward-moving. The stories of the novel's many characters are intricately and cleverly inter-woven with a busy, pulsing rhythm worthy of the ragtime tunes from which the novel takes its title. Great care is taken by Doctorow to bring all the strands of his story to appropriate ends, to endow his characters with rich and interesting lives and to explore some critical moral dilemmas of the twentieth century. The writing is tight and polished, offering excellent scope for exam passages; the text would also serve Views and Values and Creative Responses very well.

***Far From Heaven* (Film) (Rating M) (Available for borrowing from video rental stores and for purchase from Maxwell's Tel: 02 9973 2277)**

Set in 1957, this 2002 film both celebrates and condemns both the increasingly remote world, deceptively stable era of the fifties. It also comments on, celebrates and mimics the genre of the melodrama. There are many allusions to the films of Douglas Sirk, especially to 'All That Heaven Allows'. However, in its depiction of the narrow parameters constricting the life of middle-class matron Cathy Whitaker, the film makes both an historical and universal point. All characters are, to a degree, imprisoned – by race, class, gender, sexuality. Society is inflexible and unforgiving of deviation, suggesting that the

film is ultimately pessimistic. Visually, the film is stunning, using setting and costume as metaphor, and framing as a device to convey meaning.

Fforde, Jasper, *The Eyre Affair*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2001

Described on the cover as 'an out-of-this-world tornado of adventure and imagination featuring the feistiest literary detective to hit the page', *The Eyre Affair* is part science fiction, part detective story and part literary satire. It is set in an alternative 1985 where dodos are still extant and kept as pets, the Crimean conflict remains unresolved and Thursday Next works as a literary detective (SO-27) with the Special Operations Network. It is also a world where the boundaries between fictional characters and real ones have been blurred, so much so that Thursday finds herself being shadowed at times by none other than Mr Rochester, straight from the pages of *Jane Eyre*, and subsequently spends part of the narrative trapped inside the pages of that novel. The pace is fast, the humour engaging and the characters deftly drawn. Some of the literary jokes are obvious, some more subtle but there is plenty to engage the uninitiated. This text would offer particularly rich scope for Creative Responses as well as Views and Values.

Fitzgerald, F Scott, *The Great Gatsby*, Penguin, 2000

Long recognised as an icon of American Literature, Scott Fitzgerald's novel evokes the 'Jazz Age' of America in the 1920s and offers a strong critique of its material values. Jay Gatsby, rich, flamboyant socialite seems to embody the spirit of the age. He has it all, but does this bring him happiness?

This novel will be well known to Literature teachers who will find it a rich source for discussing views and values, as well as for other analytical tasks. Teachers may also choose to refer to the various film adaptations of the novel for completing other outcomes.

Fuller, Alexandra, *Let's Not Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Picador, 2002

How do you come to terms with the knowledge that the values your parents supported were wrong, yet continue to love them? Alexandra Fuller's memoir of life growing up in Rhodesia before majority rule is written from a child's perspective. 'Bobo' sees everything, and describes everything with a degree of matter-of-factness that is sometimes disturbing, yet enormously engaging and often very funny. In some respects her child self is reminiscent of Harper Lee's Scout, though the book lacks an adult narrator who is able to emphasise the changes that have occurred. Fuller's growing realisation that the rest of the world does not share her views of her parents and their friends is very finely nuanced and the tension between her apparently unapologetic stance and her obvious affection for Africa has divided readers.

Garner, Helen, *The Children's Bach*, Penguin, 1999 (A)

First published in 1984, this classic tale of loss of innocence is set in the context of the shifting sexual and familial mores of the late twentieth century. Despite the challenges of parenting a severely disabled child, the homely Athena and her partner, Dexter, whose unrepentant lack of worldliness is both annoying and admirable, have established a warm, domestic, if shambolic life, somewhere in inner city Melbourne. When exposed to

the world beyond this suburban block, Athena's restlessness is awakened and the bewildered Dexter is drawn unwillingly into a new moral universe. This novel has sufficient narrative drive to keep students interested and the acute observations of daily life should provide stimulus for much creative writing. The Melbourne setting should also be of interest.

Gibson, William, *Pattern Recognition*, Penguin, 2003

Cayce Pollard is a unique individual: allergic to brand names and so exquisitely attuned to the global cultural psyche that she is much sought after as a consultant to major corporations. Her speciality is an unerring ability to instantly tell if a marketing campaign – especially a logo – will work. This ability is worth a lot of money, and it is not long before Cayce is caught up in an intrigue of inter-continental proportions. Technical wizardry in state-of-the-art computing is combined with a narrative framework that houses sharp and witty commentary on the modern obsession with brand names and the corporatisation of culture. There are lots of possibilities of inducing good student work in the views and values task and in the creative response.

Hospital, Janette Turner, *North of Nowhere South of Loss*, UQP, 2003 (A)

As the title of the collection suggests, Janette Turner Hospital explores the tension between dislocation and a sense of belonging in fourteen beautifully written stories that vividly evoke her homeland Australia and America, where she now lives. In poetic, allusive prose she invites readers into the complex inner lives of her characters. Some of the stories are set in Australia, others in America. Turner Hospital is interested in postcolonial writing and women's writing, and has said that her writing is about 'rendering the strange familiar and the familiar strange'. The collection would be a rich text on which to draw in a study of context, culture and human experience. Good for Views and Values and the Creative Response.

Modjeska, Drusilla, *Timepieces*, Picador, 2002 (A)

With her customary elegance and deftness, Drusilla Modjeska ranges across times and places and ideas in these liberating essays. Most are new; all offer a fresh and personal perspective on writing and life by one of Australia's most popular authors. The major concerns of the essays in the collection are: the links between life, the life of writing and life writing, and the condition of being both a woman and an artist.

Patchett, Ann, *Bel Canto*, Fourth Estate, 2002

In a South American country, a reception for a Japanese potential investor is interrupted by the arrival of terrorists appearing from the air-conditioning system. Based on the occupation of the Japanese embassy in Lima, Peru in 1996, with tinges of magic realism, Patchett's novel examines the effects of the situation on both hostages and guerrillas. In an attempt to woo investments from Mr Hosokawa, his favourite opera singer has been brought in to provide entertainment. When the other women are released, she chooses to remain, because 'no-one was going to shoot an opera singer'. Patchett examines the possibility of human beings connecting to each

other, using the catalyst of music, which offers the characters hitherto unexperienced beauty, and the means of transformation. Bel Canto, the 'beautiful music' transcends politics, race, language; the author poses the question whether if the deprived and underprivileged are given access to an experience that will feed their souls, some kind of togetherness and harmony might be achieved.

Scott, Kim, *Benang*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1999 (A)

Set in Australia, *Benang* is a historical novel, narrated by the central character, Harley. The prose employs an intimate wry tone that immediately engages the reader. Although fiction, the depiction of the white impact on black culture is harrowing and uncompromising. However, the graphic realism is tempered by the interplay of humour. Elements of other-worldliness transcend the brutality and provide an enlarged vision of meaning and purpose. Harley's personal idiosyncrasies – his ability to float in air, for example, re-engage the reader regularly in the present. The history of his family's generations provides the historical scope, with several extracts referring to A.O. Neill as Protector. The book provides a provocative and intense discussion of personal identity in a hostile culture. It would generate fruitful student work in the views and values task, and in the creative response.

Shakespeare, William, *King Lear*, Penguin, 1999

One of the last plays written by Shakespeare, *King Lear* is a study of an old man's vanity and pride, and the danger it poses to the stability of society. Lear, the ageing English king, announces that he will divide his kingdom between his three daughters according to the degree to which they love him. His two elder daughters flatter him and are rewarded, but Cordelia, the youngest will say only that she loves him, as a daughter should. In a rage Lear banishes her. She flees to France. In time Lear falls out with first one, and then both, of his older daughters and is rejected by them. Driven insane by grief and disappointment he wanders on the heath accompanied by his jester. Civil war erupts as Cordelia returns leading a French army to depose her sisters and restore her father to his throne. She is captured and sentenced to death. Lear returns to sanity just in time to attempt to rescue Cordelia from prison, but the messenger arrives too late. Lear discovers her dead body, lapses back into madness and dies.

Wright, Judith, *Collected Poems*, HarperCollins, 1994 (A)

Diverging from the dominance of bush legends and mateship, Wright's poems articulated a new vision of what it means to be Australian. This selection of her work covers poetry written over several decades and displays a variety of poetic form. Her work introduces a female perspective that helps to redefine Australian cultural identity. The poems explore the nature of relationships, the communication between generations and genders, both in bush and in urban settings. Australians' connection to the bush is re-examined to create fresh perspectives. The poems would appeal to students of both genders, and would provide rich source material for presenting an interpretation.

NOTES

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Published by

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

41 St Andrews Place East Melbourne Victoria 3002 Australia

TELEPHONE +61 3 9651 4300 FACSIMILE +61 3 9651 4324

EMAIL vcaa@edumail.vic.gov.au

WEB www.vcaa.vic.edu.au

