



2003 Contemporary Australian Society GA3 Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Papers in 2003 demonstrated an exciting range of case studies and current issues being studied in the schools. Those students whose work emphasised contemporary examples were the most successful. While some historical background is essential in order to understand the present, it is the present which is the focus of Contemporary Australian Society. More successful students engaged with the questions posed and drew on such study. Less successful students tended to present prepared material that answered questions on previous papers but not the particular questions for 2003. Students need to practise examination skills so that they focus more on analysing and answering the questions on the paper, and allowing appropriate time for each question.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

These answers demonstrated most clearly the diversity in content covered by students across the state. Students referred to communities based on location, ethnicity, sport, religion, lifestyle, shared interests and objectives. The most successful answers drew on student research about communities such as a motorbike club, a community radio station, a football team or a peace network.

Questions 1 and 2 were clearly limited to ‘two factors’ and ‘two ways’ indicating the need for students to select from their coursework and keep to the suggested lengths.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	0	1	2	8	12	15	18	23	12	7	6.79

This was generally well answered. More successful students examined a known community, defined a sense of belonging and clearly identified two factors. Students who not only identified two factors but also explained how these helped create a sense of community for a particular group did particularly well. One such student wrote:

These theatrical productions are an opportunity for people in rural areas to discuss their unique interests which is hard to do in the wider community. Spending three months with a like-minded group of people helps to form strong friendships. Each person is respected and valued for their role in a production as they are all working together to achieve a common goal. Each person develops a sense of belonging due to the high level of socialising and enjoyment through rehearsals, performances and social events. They become attached to the community because of the respect and opportunities provided.

However, less successful students wrote at length in this answer defining community and listing many factors. Such answers displayed student knowledge but only partly answered the question and would have been improved by references to specific communities studied.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	5	0	2	4	9	10	15	15	20	16	4	6.35

This question required students to describe the effects of recent change on a community. More successful students identified a known community and at least one clearly explained socioeconomic, political or technological change. ‘Change’ ranged from the locally micro such as access to a mobile phone, to the cosmically macro of globalisation. Students who achieved well on this question described two effects, sometimes of one change but most often by two different changes, and they described the impacts in a particular community. The first sentences of an answer could clearly indicate such a focus:

Noel Pearson’s community who are the indigenous people of the Cape York Peninsula have been affected by recent political and economic policies. These policies have been implemented by the federal government in regards to welfare and past injustices done to indigenous Australians. This welfare has affected Noel Pearson’s community in that many within the community have become dependent on the welfare or financial handouts. Noel Pearson believes that the federal government policy of financial welfare has had a negative effect in two ways: it has caused dependency and this in turn has meant that indigenous people are not self-empowered.

This student explored the link between community and change discussing the roles of substance abuse and leadership but these links were most often assumed. Students who interpreted ‘community’ to mean the Australian community tended to write very generally and some focused on the changes rather than the effects on a particular community. Some students interpreted ‘recent’ very broadly, discussing changes for indigenous communities at the time of European settlement; this was inappropriate and made it harder to achieve. Students also need to be careful of over generalisations such as:

In the past gay groups have been disadvantaged but that has been overcome.

Section B

This section requires longer answers than Section A and more successful students showed an understanding that more depth was required with Questions 3 and 4 (as compared to Questions 1 and 2) in order to earn high marks. Students displayed the breadth of their studies and wrote interestingly especially about the issues. Some students clearly drew on one case study for several answers but did this very well because of their focus on the different aspects required by each question. However, particular case studies may not have been appropriate for all questions so students need to select carefully from their coursework.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	5	1	1	1	2	4	8	8	10	6	10	10	15	11	7	1	9.16

This question required students to discuss one community, Australian society and the tensions between these. All three parts were needed to achieve well. Most students were at their best in describing the particular community they had studied and pointing out tensions using terms such as ‘difference’, ‘divide’, ‘prejudice’, ‘dispute’, ‘resentment’, ‘discrimination’, ‘conflict’, ‘alienation’, and ‘fear’. However, some students wrote at length about a community where tensions with the wider Australian community were minor or resolved in the past and this meant they did less well. While some historical background is essential in Contemporary Australian Society the focus must be on what is contemporary. Few students explicitly discussed the ‘wider Australian community’ but those who clearly discussed what this could mean and acknowledged complexity achieved highly. One such student discussed the two sides of a debate about the request for women only sessions at a local swimming pool:

The Muslim community of x says that it is only fair that their women have the right to swim like everyone else and that it is just another part of the 1972 multiculturalism policy. The other side states that they believe it is unfair to the male swimmers and the male staff who will lose hours and money, and that segregation is a step back into the past. They feel it is unfair and a breach of male rights.

The best answers gave a sense of really knowing their specific community and the complexity of the lived experience of being part of a larger national community, emphasising change over time. Less successful answers often contrasted a problematic mythologised past and an uncomplicated and harmonious present.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	7	1	3	2	3	7	7	9	10	7	9	9	7	13	5	1	8.34

More successful students showed clearly their understanding of globalisation and discussed two or more examples of its effects in Australia. Students interpreted the word ‘cultural’ broadly and many discussed several interrelated effects often exploring the relationship of globalisation and economics or Americanisation. One student argued:

As a result of increased technology and communication the world is now rapidly adopting a new world culture based in the USA. This is evident in Australian culture as many Australian youth spend their time listening to rap music they downloaded off the web in minutes, which was written in the black suburbs of Los Angeles. Overall, because of globalisation Australia’s culture is becoming more and more impersonal and based on global culture, it can even be argued that Australia no longer has a national culture and is moving closer and closer towards adopting America’s culture.

Another student pointed out that globalisation can also enhance aspects of Australian culture:

The Australian culture has managed to surface in other countries with shows like Neighbours spreading Australian culture.

Many comments about multiculturalism were more related to the 1950s or 1960s and some students needed to indicate more clearly the time period being discussed.

Section C

Question 5

This representation elicited a range of interpretations. Many students explained their interpretations well but often students were less successful in referring to evidence. This occurred for part a and part b but was mostly a problem for part d where so much more is expected.

a

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	15	30	28	23	2.49

The most successful answers kept the focus on views of the future and looked at both details of the representation and the representation as a whole. They were then able to avoid repetition when answering b. where they focused on change. They explored the impact of the words in the representation as well as the graphics. While most identified the society represented as Third World or Asian (not necessarily synonymous), more sophisticated answers discussed the implications for Australia in this view of globalisation.

Most students recognised the cartoon presented a strongly negative view centred on economic/cultural/environmental exploitation as seen in, for example, the fat man bringing in money, the bicycle no longer used as transport or the palm tree gone. However, some students interpreted it as showing a positive view of modernisation, with employment and economic activity replacing inactivity as seen in the lack of jobs at the start replaced by industry and dollars. To achieve well on this question students needed to explain their views and refer to details from the cartoon as evidence for their interpretation. Those who only gave an interpretation received half marks.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	16	33	31	14	2.30

Most students recognised the way change is shown in this cartoon in the contrast between the before and after. They explained how the cartoon showed globalisation changing the way of life of people living an isolated and simple life to people working with machinery, causing pollution, losing vegetation, and possibly gaining diseases through the rat. The fat man was identified as leaving with the same dollar and students speculated appropriately that there was probably no change in wealth for the locals. Students received full marks for this answer when they explained the changes fully and made reference to details in the cartoon commenting on globalisation, capitalism, exploitation or cultural imperialism.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	13	24	27	23	13	2.00

Many students provided a simple description of possible responses to the exploitation they had identified in the cartoon. They explained that although the individuals in the cartoon seem to have little control over their lives, change does not have to occur like this, as communities can join together to choose the nature and pace of development they want.

Workers, consumers and investors can refuse to support exploitation: they can boycott places or products, publicise exploitation, support human rights and promote ethical investment. Many students referred here to particular organisations or actions and applied the cartoon's message to Australia. One student wrote:

People can protest in front of the stores which sell the products manufactures under exploitative conditions. An example of this is the protesters who march every Friday in Melbourne in front of particular stores and try to pressure the managers of these stores to sign a homeworkers' code of practice.

Some students interpreted the cartoon positively and wrote of workers gradually improving their conditions. Less successful answers were very brief and general; more successful ones explored a range of possible responses both by the society directly affected and by the (implied) Australian society.

d

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	10	6	14	16	19	8	17	8	2	3.71

Many students stated that exploitation is clearly undesirable for those being exploited but it may seem desirable for those profiting from it. It may be desirable for individuals in the short term or could lead to higher standards of living in the future. They discussed economic, environmental, ethical, social and political factors.

Very few students achieved full marks on this question as many made general statements or referred to this cartoon but few developed an answer that was twice the length of the previous answers and that discussed material other than the cartoon. Students are not realising that to earn twice the marks (compared to Questions 1–3) they really needed to complete a much more detailed answer. Many also neglected to refer to other material they had studied this year. Stronger answers supplied a theoretical context for globalisation and saw it as a complex process which contained many, often contradictory, forces. As a result they avoided dogmatic and moralistic answers and were tentative, though informed, in their responses.

Section D

The essay is worth 30 per cent of the total marks for this paper and students need to allocate sufficient time to argue their responses. They also need to consider all the criteria when preparing for this section of the paper.

Question 6

a (30 marks)

This question gave students the opportunity to discuss the nature of citizenship and to make precise comments about what participation in the political system could mean as well as what rights and responsibilities might be involved and how different groups within Australian society experience such citizenship. This question elicited responses which discussed citizenship as participation in the political system by informed voting, supporting political parties, lobby

groups, protest groups, but also by involvement in community organisations like Neighbourhood Watch, CFA, Meals on Wheels and op shops.

More successful students discussed responsibilities such as obeying the laws, paying taxes and accepting the unwritten 'contract', as well as rights such as equality before the law and rights to health and education. Some students discussed the ideas of citizenship as very broad and changing, an ideal which people experience in a wide variety of ways. Students used a range of experiences to explain citizenship, for example the experiences of young people, refugees, Aborigines or women. Less successful students tended to outline the experiences of citizenship of two groups without really responding to the terms of this question.

A relevant answer could be signalled by a good introduction such as the following:

A citizen is a person of a nation state who lives under one political system. An individual becomes a citizen by being born in a nation state and/or by adhering to a nation's citizenship procedures. Being a citizen does mean more than just participating in a 'political system'. There are three main elements of citizenship: civil, political and social. This response will look at the experience of women and the indigenous community in regards to these three elements of citizenship.

More successful students also provided evidence to support their arguments:

In a study by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling it was found that the poorer half of the Australian population owned about 5% of the wealth while the top half owned about 95% of the country's wealth. This means that these people are excluded from enjoying benefits such as home ownership, good education and health. This gap between rich and poor is growing as the figures for homelessness increased 400% in the last decade according to Mission Australia.

b

This question required students to discuss both Australian citizenship and global citizenship in the context of one current issue. Those who chose an issue where Australia has been perceived as not adhering to international standards and global responsibilities were able to discuss conflict.

Apart from defining *Australian* and *global* citizenship clearly, more successful student focused on the word *may*. They were appropriately tentative in seeing the potential for conflict but pointing out that it was not necessary. Most students chose to discuss the treatment of refugees to illustrate their case but less successful students rapidly slipped into a diatribe against the Federal Government.

More successful students wrote well of global citizenship with regard to the issue of asylum seekers, highlighting human rights concerns and international agreements but also discussing Australian citizenship. Those who referred to the responsibilities of national loyalty or obeying the law were able to discuss conflict between national and international citizenship. One such student wrote:

In 2001 and early 2002, the Howard government put 'illegal' asylum seekers into Woomera, Baxter and Port Hedland Detention Centres. This divided Australian opinion in that many took the Australian citizen stance that the asylum seekers were illegal under Australian law, but others like the Australian Greens and pressure groups like Amnesty International took a global citizen stance. Thus we can see conflict occurred between being a global citizen and respecting and defending human rights as defined in the UN charter and being an Australian citizen and defending Australian law that prohibits entry to any unlawful person and detains them if they have entered Australia.

c

This question required students to define active citizenship, Australian and/or global, and to argue that the Internet is or is not damaging this. More successful students made the effort to explore the idea of active citizenship and realised it could take many forms. Those who explained that active citizenship means exercising rights and taking responsibility for the way communities at every level operate – local, national and global, achieved well. Those who argued that the Internet was damaging explained that many people were distracted from active citizenship into spending time and money in commercial or frivolous Internet-based contacts than involvement in their face-to-face communities. They argued that the global nature of the Internet blurs local and national attachments.

Those who argued that the Internet was not damaging active citizenship discussed the ways the Internet brings people together instantly and provides information about political/social/cultural developments in Australia and overseas. They discussed ways the Internet allows marginalised people such as those outside the metropolitan areas, disabled people or people with dependants to engage in the 'outside' world. They presented the Internet as a powerful tool for disseminating information including alternative information and for organising, mobilising and coordinating forms of dissent and other components of active citizenship. One student wrote:

The internet provides a valuable resource for accessing and sharing information, as well as giving people the ability to start campaigns to improve the rights and responsibilities of citizens all over the world. Through the internet many global and national organisations such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, can develop campaigns for a wide variety of issues from genetically modified food to illegal refugees. The internet allows these campaigns to be seen and accessed by a wide range of people all over the globe, giving more people the chance to sign up and become involved than ever before. This promotes global citizenship and has caused an explosion of active citizenship. For example, Greenpeace's campaign against genetically modified food was able to inform and involve many more people via the internet than they would have been able to do if they had to rely solely on traditional campaign methods. This resulted in a surge of people actively expressing their rights as citizens. The internet was a major factor in developing this movement of active citizenship.

Less successful students concentrated on the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet with little or no explicit discussion of citizenship of any kind. This made it impossible for such students to achieve high marks.

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