

Task 2 Sample Plan/Ideas 1

'Modern literature shows isolated characters as being profoundly damaged.'

Compare the significance of isolation in '*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*' and '*Revolutionary Road*' .

[NB one drama text and one prose text.]

AO1 is tested through the way the students organise their writing and express their ideas as they analyse the significance of isolation. Value is placed on technical accuracy, appropriate terminology and the quality of the discussion.

AO2 requires reference to the ways that meanings are shaped. Students should illustrate their answers with relevant textual detail wherever possible – with quotations and other close reference – to support the points in their comparison and discussion.

AO3 is addressed when candidates demonstrate an understanding of the various contexts of isolation, including the physical and psychological. In exploring the nature of isolation as presented in their two texts, students will engage with the contexts of when texts were written and of reader response to the representation of isolation.

AO4 students will make comparisons between their two chosen texts, as directed in the question. Different forms of isolation might be considered, e.g. gender, culture, language, religion, belief, attitude or age.

AO5 tests students' skill in engaging with different ways in which significance can be found in their chosen texts and in showing an understanding that through comparison different meanings can be opened up.

For a **prose text**, attention could be paid to narrative structure (the division into three parts which each show a different stage in the marriage and in April's mental decline, the use of flashback to add context to character, the anti-climactic ending) ; the delineation and presentation of character (most notably of Frank and April but also of figures such as John Givings); point-of-view and narrator's 'voice' (the use of an ironic omniscient narrator who heightens tension by switching between characters, his thoughts on loneliness in suburban middle America, the absence of April's point-of-view until immediately before her suicide); the use of dialogue and of indirect speech (the imaginary dialogue in Frank's head which lets readers see the breakdown of the marriage from his point of view and the better life that Frank imagines, the ordinary conversation between Frank and April which

reveals cracks in the marriage); the sequence or chronology of events; the description of settings (New York City where Frank works and from which April is now excluded, Revolutionary Road which now ironically represents a failed attempt at independence and freedom, Paris as an imagined escape from the isolation of middle-class suburban life); ways of influencing the reader's response to character and incident, which includes figurative language features.

For a **drama text**, candidates could write about aspects of overall structure and the placing of scenes in time and place (the whole play takes place in one time and one room; the scenes move from a focus on Maggie and Brick to a focus on Big Daddy and Brick to an unsatisfactory resolution: none of the isolated characters find peace); dramatic irony (the impending isolating revelations of Brick's homosexuality and Big Daddy's cancer); the importance of stage directions; direct and indirect ways of communicating ideas and 'messages' (the symbolism of the bed, which acts as the ghost of an unnatural homosexual love which haunts Maggie and Brick, and of Brick's crutch, a phallic symbol, which is removed by both Maggie and Big Daddy as a symbol of Brick's castration); ways of presenting character and the interaction between characters (Maggie is presented as dispossessed in her childlessness in contrast with Mae as 'monster of fertility'; key points in dialogue are punctuated by interruptions by other characters and the off stage telephone so that the height of tension is frozen).

To address **AO3** students will need to explore: the nature of isolation as it affects the key characters of Frank and April, and Maggie and Brick; the nature and impact of physical isolation on the one hand, and of psychological isolation on the other; other forms of isolation due to for example: gender (the stereotypical expectations of women in 1950s American society that April and Maggie cannot meet), sexuality (Brick is living in a time when America did not tolerate deviation from the heterosexual norm); comparison with others who are theoretically less isolated (the contrast between Brick and Maggie and Gooper and Mae); how the presentation of isolation is connected to other themes and subjects in the literature of Modern Times.

AO4 will be addressed when candidates explore the 'significance' of isolation in their two texts, thereby connecting with the representation of one of the central issues of the literature of Modern times: 1945 to the present day. They could cite examples of changing ideas (particularly between the 1950s and today) about the nature of isolation and of the profound damage experienced by those involved, whether directly or indirectly. They should, however, concentrate on the differences and

similarities noted between their two chosen texts and attempt to make valid comparisons at all significant stages of their answers, as directed in the question.

The criteria of **AO5** are met if students are able to show that they have fully 'explored the significance of isolation' in their chosen texts. They should be ready to initiate and manage a debate around the nature and possible forms of isolation as expressed in those texts and to evaluate the extent to which the contrasting genres – here prose and drama – affect the ways in which isolation in particular is presented and meanings generally are understood by the reader.

'Revolutionary Road'

- the corrosive impact of alcohol dependency on addicts and their families
- the destructive nature of dysfunctional family life: Frank blames April's emotional instability on her rejection by her parents and her subsequent unhappy childhood; April's inability to connect with her own children; how children are shown in the novel to ruin the Wheelers' plans; the disconnection and lack of understanding between Frank and April
- the fallacy of the American Dream; the myth of post-war hope for a better life: neither Frank nor April can escape what they were born into. April's attempts to escape the solitude of her existence lead her to suicide.
- the role of women in the 1950s: a struggle between independence and societal expectation. April's self-deluded attempts to escape her containment through amateur dramatics and a move to Paris; the futility of April's rebellious behaviour; her reflection on her past mistakes and blaming herself for her unhappy situation; her eventual suicide
- the attitude of the middle classes; a focus on the emptiness of American suburban life which renders everything and everyone insincere. Frank's denunciation of the shallowness of suburbia, and pretence at non-conformity, itself becomes insincere
- the concept of history repeating itself even when characters try to escape it (Frank and his father; April and her father)
- personal and social identity: Frank and April act out the roles of the people they want to become; the move to Paris is supposed to enable Frank 'to find himself'; April admits to Shep that she does not know who she is
- the function of the tragi-comic novel: the tragedy of the inescapable loneliness of individuals in modern society is told in an absurdly comic fashion, which culminates in the anti-climactic final sentence.

'*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*'

- the corrosive impact of alcohol dependency on addicts and their families: Brick has withdrawn from the world at large and his loved ones in particular into an alcohol-infused haze; Brick's dependency on drinking to the point of 'the click' to achieve oblivion; Maggie uses Brick's dependency on alcohol as a bargaining tool
- dysfunctional family life: Big Mama believes the fantasy of family unity; the greed and avarice of Mae and Gooper who try to manipulate their inheritance; the irony of Brick as the rightful heir who cannot continue the family line; the portrayal of the children as grotesque in their constant interruption of the adults
- dreams, hopes and plans: all of the main characters realise that their dreams cannot be achieved
- the role of women in the 1950s: Maggie's childlessness contrasted with Mae's fertility; ideas around femininity and feminine desire (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*); Maggie's position in the love triangle with Brick and Skipper as a trophy wife
- Manliness and homosexuality: Brick's repression of his true self because of society's expectations
- the destructive concept of living a lie: Brick blames disgust at his own mendacity as a reason for not admitting his homosexuality; Brick blames mendacity for Skipper's death; Big Daddy also feels disgust at living his life with a woman he detests; Maggie's fabrication of a pregnancy