

MEDIA TEXT'S & SOCIETY VALUES
SAC & EXAM
EXAMPLES



Media texts and society's values is the second unit we study in Yr 12 Media.

It is Part B on the Media exam at the end of the year.

The following information is taken directly from the examiner report:

Aspects of this Area of Study still prove problematic for some students. The study design stipulates the study of 'an identified significant idea, social attitude or discourse located in a range of media texts' (p.27, VCE Media Study Design) yet some students appeared to have studied multiple discourses across a range of texts, with some students writing on different discourses in each question. The study of multiple discourses within texts is not appropriate and evidently confused these students. This was also an issue in Question 4, where students who had studied multiple discourses had great difficulty exploring the tension between the values of a singular discourse.

A wide range of texts were studied, but students seemed to have particular difficulty with cartoons or satires. These text types often feature characters that resemble caricatures, or have situations that are exaggerated, and students are not always able to identify or acknowledge these. There also appeared to be continuing confusion regarding the difference between the terms 'discourse' and 'values', and how values are reflected in a particular discourse.

Responses to this section of the exam indicated that aspects of the revised study design need to be taught to students in a more detailed way with explicit use of appropriate terminology. Many students had a weak grasp of the difference between 'social values' and a 'discourse' or 'social issue' and this weakness was evident in answers to Questions 2a., 2b. and 3.

Students needed to be very clear about what a discourse is and how to write about it. As noted in the study design, 'discourse in the media is the social process of producing and organising meaning through the interrelationship of media organisations, media texts and audiences within a culture'.

A discourse is not a social value; it cannot have a value judgment associated with it; for example, 'that women are inferior to men'. A discourse is a wider-reaching discussion about an issue or idea in our society, and the values associated with it are reflected in a range of texts that reference and infer it.

Also of concern was the selection of texts. While responses to this section reflected a very wide range of texts that had been chosen for study, many students wrote about texts that seemingly had no connection to each other through a common discourse or social issue. Without this connection, responses to Questions 2b. and 3 suffered; these were questions where students generally did not perform well. Students should be very clear about the overarching discourse or social issue they have studied, and the associated social values that are reflective of it. Students should be looking across a range of texts in order to respond on the discourse or social issue, rather than analysing texts in isolation and being unaware of the discourse that connects them.

It also seemed that many students expected the questions in this section to be similar to previous exam questions and used terms that are not used in the current study design, such as 'production period'. These students then struggled to answer questions referring to discourse.

Here are some high-scoring questions

This question required students to analyse the relationship between a social issue or discourse and how values were represented and distributed via two or more examples. Some students drew on historical contexts to analyse the relationship between the texts and the discourse/social issue, whereas others focused on the content of the texts to form their response. Both of these approaches were acceptable. Better responses were able to use two or more examples to underpin their analysis of the representation of values in texts and to reference these examples in their analysis.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

In America in the 1960's the youth felt that the 'Establishment' did not have the best interests of the American people and heart and were using them so to speak to further their own political agenda. The authority's manipulative nature could be seen through the major social issue of the time- the war drafting process in which any man over the age of 18 could be selected to serve the country at any time and for this reason the 'system' was viewed as flawed and unjust. The authority's seedy nature can be seen in Bonnie and Clyde through the Texas Ranger. In the film his principles are depicted as being warped and self-serving. For example he talks to Blanche Barrow in the films close purely to extract information from her and leaves her as soon as he obtains the information rendering him a sly and calculating character who cannot be trusted. In the Monkee's movie head the Monkee's are completely indifferent to authority figures. This can be seen when they run through the opening ceremony and the mayor's speech in the film's opening. Furthermore the police men are depicted as brutal, nasty characters when they attempt to ambush the Monkee's once they have escaped the black box.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

In the opening of Bonnie and Clyde there are a dichotomy of social values occurring. The film opens with a close-up of Bonnie's lips which reflects Bonnie's sexuality and the highly oppositional social value predominantly held by the youth at the time that women are sexual beings who are entitled to displaying their sexuality. In this opening scene Bonnie is pictured naked which may be considered a dominant representation in that Bonnie is portrayed as a passive sexual object. However this is challenged as the scene is not portrayed from the point of view of a male character but instead from the perspective of an impartial third observer or Bonnie's point of view. This reflects oppositional values of the time that women can possess agency in their own lives without the presence of a male figure. The film juxtaposes the characters of Bonnie and Blanche. Blanche's character can be considered to be the embodiment of the older conservative generation, as seen through her clothing which is reminiscent of the nineteen thirties. Blanche's character can be seen to support the dominant social value that women are defined by their household duties and have no personal prospects of their own. This sentiment is reflected in her husband Buck Barrow's statement. 'It's the face powder that gets a man interested but it's the baking powder which keeps him home.'

Julie Barnes in Mos Savad can be seen to represent the emerging social value that women can be an asset in the workforce. This can be seen in the chief's comments towards her ' Glad to have you aboard' and 'you were right Julie' when she furthers the case. However she is portrayed as not being as competent with her job as her male colleagues Linc and Pete. This can be seen in the show's opening in which Linc and Pete are represented as strong and persevering as shown through their agility and purposeful running. Julie however is breathless and cannot continue and the males resort to physically supporting her and dragging her along. This can be seen to reflect dominant values that women are fragile and passive and require the support of men.

The following example describes a discourse well and acknowledges it beyond just one time period.

The discourse on gender refers to the way in which gender, gender roles and gender equality is viewed. This discourse has evolved alongside the developments in gender roles – for example, a show like ‘I Dream of Jeannie’ portrays woman as less than men as is reflective of the discourse in 1960s, which still viewed women as inferior to men. Now female-centric shows like ‘Girls’ reveal the discourse currently assumes female equality.

... As of the 1990s, the discourse on gender assumed female equality and viewed feminism as almost obsolete – as reflected by a 1996 cover of Time magazine that asked ‘Is Feminism Dead?’ This post-feminist aspect of the discourse on gender is reflected in Buffy the Vampire Slayer in the representation of the titular character. She is a slayer, there to fight the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness – in short, she is highly capable in stark contrast to Claire’s (The Breakfast Club) need to rely on the Jock and Andrew for protection. This demonstrates the way in which the discourse on gender no longer assumed gender roles and instead examined people as individuals unhampered by gender inequality.

Again, students who did not correctly understand the difference between a ‘value’ and a ‘discourse’ or ‘social issue’ had difficulty attaining high marks for this question.

The following example attempts to identify and discuss values held across texts.

This episode of The Flintstones acknowledges an emerging social value of 1960s America that women deserve equal payment rights and employment opportunities through the representation of Wilma Flintstone ... this representation reflects the emerging value of 1960s America. However, due to the fact that Wilma gets fired and returns to being a homemaker with Fred once again becoming the primary breadwinner, it can be seen that this text ultimately rejects this emerging value ... however in The Jetsons this emerging social value of 60s America is completely ignored and not acknowledged as Jane Jetson does not attempt to gain employment and is simply represented as a homemaker while her husband is the primary breadwinner.

The following extract is an example of an effective description of one attitude in society at the time the film Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner (1967) was made. As this response shows, it was not always necessary to refer directly to the text for this question.

The dominant value that interracial marriage is unacceptable existed in America in 1967, Interracial marriage had only recently being legalized in all states of America, however it was still frowned upon in many states – particularly those in the south. Civil Rights was also relatively new in American society, and was introduced only a decade earlier.

Aspects of this requirement can be seen in the following extract from a response referring to The Defiant Ones (1958).

Another emerging value held in society in 1958 was the Black and White people are bound in society, where one cannot have freedom without the other. This has shaped The Defiant Ones as seen in the plot, where Noah jumps off the train to freedom because Noah cannot make it, and also a symbol of the chain which binds Joker and Noah. The ending of the narrative also has been shaped by the production context because the ending is not happy, both men return to jail, this shows that the problem is going on in society.

Most students were able to provide a satisfactory definition of the term social value.

The following is an example of a good response.

A social value is a value which a society or [parts of] a community believes to be important and will influence the way they live their lives. Values may be dominant, emerging or oppositional.