

# Retrospective

2016 Queensland Core Skills Test

Writing Task (WT) (Part 3 of 5)



*For all Queensland schools*

# Writing Task (WT)

This section describes the 2016 Writing Task testpaper and comments on the writing that students produced in response. The comments are based on an analysis of a statistically significant random sample of student responses to the testpaper. Copyright restrictions do not allow the testpaper to be reproduced in this document.

The Writing Task complements the other three subtests of the QCS Test by testing a student's ability to produce a piece of continuous English prose in response to the testpaper. The testpaper provides an overall concept or theme and a number of written and visual stimulus pieces related to the overall concept. Each stimulus piece evokes a different aspect of the concept and is intended to assist the student in prompting and developing ideas for their response to the testpaper. The student response is to demonstrate a clear connection both to the overall concept, and also, to one or more of the stimulus pieces.

Responses to the testpaper are to be about 600 words in length and students may write in any form or style (except poetry). A breakdown is provided here of student responses according to the stimulus pieces used for ideas and the genres represented in the responses.

Each response is marked by three independent markers. Depending on which of the three marksheets has been randomly selected, each marker assigns either four criteria-based standards, or three criteria-based standards and a judgment about Length. Different combinations of judgments are required of the three primary markers. Markers consider the contribution to the holistic worth of the response of each of the criteria they are considering. On the marksheet, they record each of their judgments as a standard (from 1 to 6) with a qualifier (+,0,-) and, if required, they indicate a judgment about the length of the response. Referee marking occurs if required.

The most successful responses to the Writing Task are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 74). The criteria are: Central idea (CI); Vocabulary (V); Responsiveness (R); Grammar, punctuation, spelling (GPS); Structuring & sequencing (SS); and Length (L). The marking guide is provided here to show the criteria and standards used to grade the responses.

Finally, a selection of student responses has been included to exemplify successful writing as defined by the task criteria.

## WT 2016 Overall concept: *Seeing things*

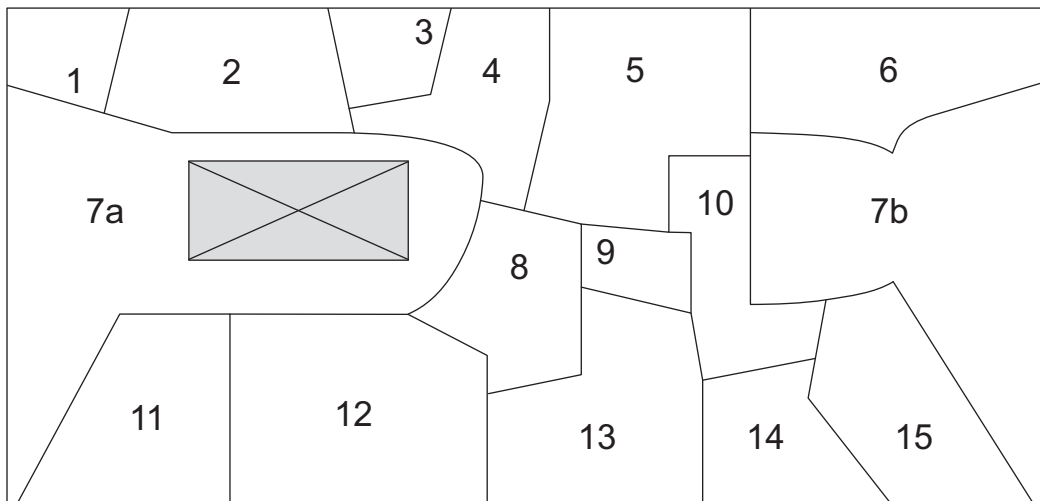
The overall concept linking the 15 separate stimulus pieces on the 2016 Writing Task testpaper is ***seeing things***. Markers needed to be alert to the possible interpretations of this concept as they made judgments on the criterion of Responsiveness.

Students who took the overall concept literally may have written about physical aspects of seeing things, referring to the sense of sight, and so, focusing on the way we experience the world through seeing it. They might have dealt with the importance and value of the sense of sight or the hardship of losing it. If they took the term to represent 'thinking' or 'realising', they might have considered the idiosyncratic ways in which we think about 'things'. A broader interpretation of seeing things could encompass having a vision that can influence one's actions and behaviour, being deluded by what one sees and experiences, or even perhaps, experiencing hallucinations.

Whatever the interpretation of seeing things, this concept provided scope for a range of responses in a variety of text types: expository, imaginative, persuasive and reflective. Students wrote reports, discussions, and arguments about significant things in life, especially those that we see. They also responded in true or fictional accounts of things seen, short stories, or reflections on experiences or events, either fictional or actual. It provided a starting point for responses that focused on physical elements or that tapped into more intangible aspects of the human condition.

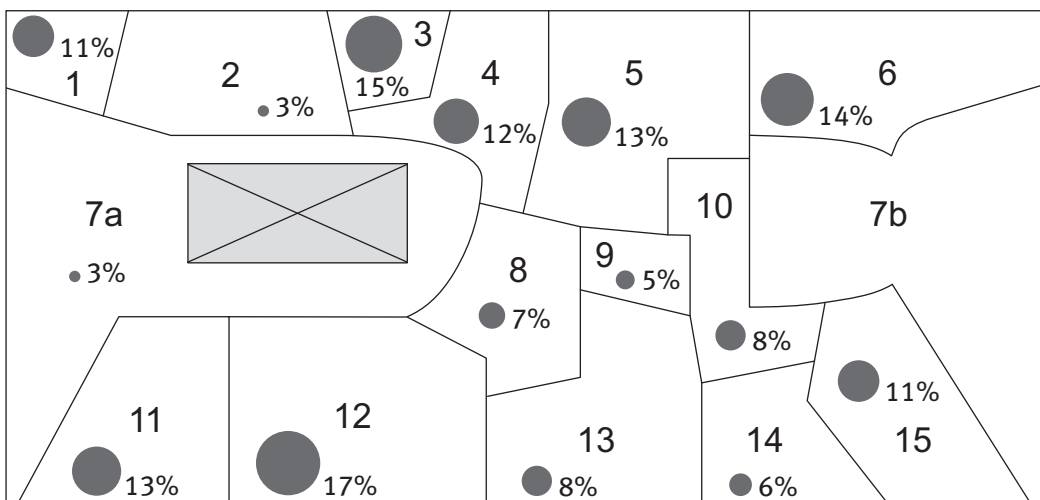
# Diagram of the testpaper

The testpaper includes 15 separate pieces of stimulus material relating to the concept.



## Stimulus pieces

The following diagram shows the percentage of students who indicated (by ticks on the diagram on the front cover of their response book) that they selected ideas from a particular stimulus piece (or pieces) as a resource for their writing. In reality, most students used a combination of two or more stimulus pieces in developing the response, thus opening up a greater variety of possibilities for their writing. For this reason, the percentages shown in this diagram add up to more than 100%.



Indication of stimulus pieces as starting point or resource

# Commentary on stimulus pieces

Students were required to compose a response that demonstrated a clear connection to the overall concept **and** to one or more of the stimulus pieces discussed here.

The following commentary is based largely on the assumption that students used only one of the stimulus pieces as a starting point or source of ideas for their responses to the overall concept of the testpaper. The reality is that many, if not most, drew their ideas from two or more stimulus pieces.

## 1 *A still face*

The main interest in this stimulus piece is in something that is seen but not identified, that is in ‘what he saw’. The words are taken from the novel, *The Historian*. Students who used this stimulus piece as a starting point tried to imagine what that might be and, since the face of the person observed by the narrator is ‘grave’, usually assumed that the unseen thing was probably serious, troublesome, or dark, say, a forged painting, a last will and testament, a bag full of stolen money, someone delivering bad news, a ghost, or even a zombie.

Some students obviously drew upon movies or television programs for some of their ideas. Imaginative responses were frequently the result in responses such as short stories dealing with scientific discoveries, criminal activities, or the supernatural. These responses often involved a first person narrator engaged in solving the mystery of what the anonymous ‘he’ was seeing and why his face was grave.

## 2 *Eyes*

This is another stimulus piece for which the focus can be something seen but not identified. In this case, the eyes in the image appear to belong to a girl or woman (perhaps the nosy woman next door) who has torn a hole in a screen or blind of some kind. The viewer seems to be spying and could be fearful of someone or something, or could simply be curious about something observed.

The image was a starting point for descriptions of the viewer or of the mysterious thing that was seen, or for discussions about some aspect of eyesight. Some students made connections between this and stimulus piece 1, resulting in comments about issues of privacy, including the increasingly common use of technology and the media. It prompted some responses that were linked to the recent census. The image was a reminder that there is now very little in our lives that can be kept really secret.

## 3 *Blind to the future*

This is an adapted quote from the speech delivered by the president of West Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker on the fortieth anniversary of the end of war in Europe, 8 May 1985. This marked the start of German post-war self-examination. Students drawn to this stimulus piece most probably would not have known who said the words or when they were spoken; however, their responses indicated that they clearly understood the advice that we should consider our decisions and actions carefully in the light of what we have learned from the past.

The piece prompted expository or persuasive responses about the danger, either for an individual or for society as a whole, of ignoring our knowledge of past and present events. Some students made links between this and stimulus piece 13 and focused on scientific and medical discoveries and developments. Responses included media articles, editorials, speeches, and transcripts of interviews. The subject matter ranged from one’s personal behaviour to events such as the recent federal election, terrorist attacks and the global migration of refugees.

## 4 *Virtual reality*

There has been an explosion in the technology of virtual reality environments. Examples are all around, in GPS navigators, in animated films and video games, and in the recent and surprisingly short-lived craze of Pokémon Go. The use of virtual reality has become invaluable to education and training in fields as diverse as aviation, warfare, surgery, architectural design and urban planning.

Some students responded to this stimulus piece in expositions, explaining what virtual reality is and describing some of its applications, in some cases revealing a knowledge of robotics. There were media articles examining the truth of the initial statement in the stimulus piece, with many writers arguing strongly for or against the value of virtual reality, pointing out the potential or the hazards involved in this technology. Some students wrote imaginative responses in futuristic stories or fantasies.

### 5 *The kid*

The written text of this stimulus piece consists of three lines from a song written by Robert Mondlock for the singers, Peter, Paul and Mary. Together with the image of the young boy sitting on the rim of the reading glasses, the words evoke a vision of childhood dreaming. The fictional 'kid' confesses to gazing out of the classroom window and imagining other worlds, 'far beyond just the schoolyard'.

The words and the image together provided ideas for accounts of real or imaginary escapes from the classroom. Some students reflected on daydreams about experiences that they hope to have in the future. Some responded in graduation speeches. This piece provided a starting point for articles about travel destinations and for extracts from travel guides or journals. The 'things' prompted descriptions of places waiting to be explored, adventures to plan or paths to tread in the future. It provided ideas for imaginative pieces, such as stories told from the perspective of 'the kid', either as a child, or as an adult reminiscing on the past, and fictional accounts from a teacher.

### 6 *Unseeing*

This stimulus piece, with its image of some of the destruction caused by the 2011 tsunami in Japan, is a darker piece reminding us of the power of the visual. We are bombarded every day by still and moving images, some of which, once seen, are simply unforgettable.

Students who responded to this stimulus piece accepted the connection of the written text with the image. Mostly, they wrote about disasters that they had heard about or viewed. Their responses included descriptions and accounts of an event and its after-effects. Some wrote imaginative responses in a narrative form, about things they were not supposed to see, but now cannot forget. In some cases, the responses focused on something personal and positive, which had imprinted itself on the writer's mind.

### 7a-b *Reading glasses*

Using the written text as the starting point, some students responded to either or both of these pieces with expositions about the invention of reading glasses or the concept of magnification or with personal accounts of their own experience of being diagnosed as needing glasses followed by a description of their joy in being able to see clearly as a result. Others discussed the effects of glasses becoming available to all. This was a piece used more often in conjunction with other stimulus pieces than alone.

### 8 *Disguise*

The written text in this stimulus piece is taken from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The speaker, Viola, is masquerading as a male, Cesario, who has realised that the beautiful noblewoman, Olivia, has fallen in love with the young man she is pretending to be. Of course, this kind of deception has the potential to cause trouble and some students responded with perceptive discussions of the danger in making judgments based on appearances only.

The piece invited expository or persuasive responses that examined the morality of acting in a way that is not true to one's real character or personality. Some described the person who plays a part to cover their real feelings or personality and some of the resulting responses focused on the 'sadness' that can result from such pretence. The playful image that accompanied the words also prompted responses that were imaginative or lighthearted accounts of times and events when people have taken on a disguise.

## 9 *The Arts*

This comment, from *The Decay of Lying* by Oscar Wilde, gives opportunities for students to explain their perceptions of particular works of art that especially impress them or influence them to hold particular views. Some students wrote about the influence of the arts in their lives or on society. The comment allows for consideration of artistic fields as diverse as dance, music, theatre, media arts, literature, design, as well as the visual arts. Expositions, descriptions and personal reflections were most common amongst the responses and some students gave accounts of how their perceptions of the world had changed over time with exposure to particular art forms.

## 10 *Other senses*

This stimulus piece focuses on the physical senses, vision being the one most clearly related to the overall concept of the testpaper. Although the written text stands alone, it is backed by a wallpaper of braille (a copy of a page from the braille version of the Reading Magazine of the 2016 NAPLAN Test). The piece suggests that other physical senses may be developed and strengthened to compensate for a weakness in a particular sense.

Some students reflected on the significance of vision in their own lives or speculated on how they would live their lives if one of their senses were to fail. Responses included real-life accounts and expositions about aspects of vision or the effect of blindness. There were accounts of the work of charitable medical missions that treat blindness and poor eyesight for people in remote places. Linked with stimulus piece 14, this piece prompted some accounts of the support that guide dogs provide for their owners. Some students wrote imaginative responses in short stories in which vision or lack of vision played a part.

## 11 *Insights*

The written text of this stimulus piece is accompanied by an image of the spines of several books and a DVD case. Reading and viewing widely is valued in our schools and communities and students were able to use one or more of the titles shown, or other titles entirely, as starting points for responses. Some reflected on the role of specific books and films in developing their own particular views of the world. Expositions and reflections predominated amongst the responses, although there were also imaginative narratives in which a fictional character was influenced by something read or viewed.

## 12 *Seeing things differently*

Understanding ideas and issues is fundamental to anyone living in a democratic society. This stimulus piece promotes the importance of developing and expressing one's personal views. Some students explained how they had formed certain opinions and how they had faced reactions from others. In recent months, issues of politics, race and religion had given them much to think about: a looming election in America, the Brexit decision in the UK, attacks by terrorists in many countries, and disquiet about the global refugee immigration. Students argued their cases with passion and emotion in editorials, media articles and transcripts of speeches and debates.

## 13 *Observing systematically*

This stimulus piece deals with the role played by observation in many areas of human activity. There is an emphasis on the idea of the observation being 'systematic' rather than random or subjective. The ellipsis in the written text was intended to leave the way open for students to nominate their own area of interest. This made it possible for them to discuss, as they did in expositions or persuasive pieces, what has been and can be learned and achieved through careful examination and analysis of scientific phenomena, world events, political actions, and human relationships. Responses included stories about personal successes and failures, science reports, explanations of how historical events unfolded, accounts of medical breakthroughs, and discussions of past, and even future space exploration.

## 14 *Keep your eye on the ball*

The written text in this stimulus piece provides a command that refers to a different kind of observation from that of stimulus piece 13, one in which the focus is moving, or changing. It is an instruction that has wide application, especially in competitive situations. It allowed for students to write a report or an imaginative piece about a sporting experience. Some told the story of a real or fictional sporting star who succeeded against all odds, or of one who tried and failed. Some used the recent Olympic Games for material about competitors, their coaches, and issues that arose.

Some students used the written text and the image of the dog and the soccer ball together, to generate stories about the path to success, the way to failure, or even accounts of walking the dog when the dog did or didn't keep watching the ball. Applied more widely, persuasive or expository pieces resulted, with a focus on other areas of human endeavour, such as business, science, education, government, politics, health or human relationships. Some students related the words to their studies and to their ambitions in life.

## 15 *Pics*

This stimulus piece refers to the current preoccupation with recording images of one's own activities. At no other time in history have people been so obsessed with recording themselves and their experience of the world. The selfie reigns supreme. In this stimulus piece, the Tower of Pisa 'leans' on the man in the photo. The message on the phone indicates an ever-present demand for proof. The stimulus piece presents an image deliberately constructed for effect. It is a reminder that we shouldn't believe everything we see. We know that those who create images of this kind present what they want us to see, in the make-believe of adventure and comedy movies and in the manipulative messages of advertising. Even knowing this, we are aware that we are being influenced. The power is not only in the hands of the professionals. As the image shown here indicates, anyone can do it.

This stimulus piece prompted mostly imaginative responses, such as holiday anecdotes, stories of blackmail or the stories behind the picture. However, it also helped to generate some 'too good to be true' real-life accounts, expositions about the technologies that we use and persuasive pieces about the hazards of foreign travel. Some students made links between this piece and stimulus piece 6 as they developed their ideas.

## Stimulus pieces: Visual, written or combination?

Students have the option of responding to the visual images, the written texts, or a combination of both. This year, 42% of students responded to both visual and written stimulus pieces. An additional 47% responded to only written stimulus pieces and a mere 8% responded to only a piece of visual stimulus. Stimulus pieces for the WT are selected to maximise appeal for a wide cross-section of the Year 12 population. The material chosen is designed to engage students and prompt ideas for their writing. When considering a stimulus piece (or pieces) and what to write, students should remember that, by the time they reach Year 12, they have a wealth of personal and subject-based knowledge and experience that they can draw upon.

When students use ideas from the written stimulus pieces, there is a danger that they may quote large portions of text directly. This can affect markers' judgments of Length (words from the stimulus pieces are not counted) and the Central idea (if the ideas being presented are not the student's own). Direct quoting can also detract from a response when the language style of the quoted material differs from the student's style, or when quotations are used out of context or incorrectly (affecting Structuring & sequencing, Vocabulary, and Grammar, punctuation, spelling).

## Choice of text type

Student responses to a WT testpaper may be categorised, according to their purpose, into four major text types: imaginative, expository, reflective and persuasive.

In 2016, the most popular text type for students was the expository response, with 35% of students writing in this form. This was closely followed by imaginative pieces, written by 31% of students.

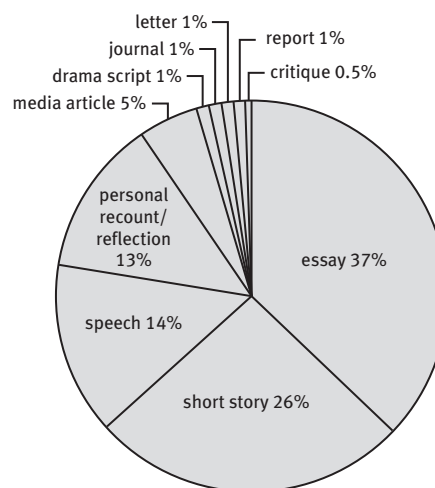
Persuasive responses accounted for 20% of scripts and 14% of responses were reflective.

When determining which text type to use, students need to consider the ultimate purpose of their writing. Do they wish to entertain their audience (imaginative)? Do they want to convey information (expository)? Would they like to recall, contemplate or share experiences (reflective)? Is it their intent to convince their audience of a particular viewpoint (persuasive)? Understanding this can help students to plan effectively and give focus to their writing.

## Choice of genre

Within the broader categories of genre, students may write in whatever genre they wish, with the exception of poetry. This enables them to draw on their knowledge and strengths, and to match their ideas from the stimulus with a suitable style of response. They need to decide which genre will allow them to demonstrate their best writing. They should keep in mind, as they plan their response, that some genres, e.g. the speech and the essay, can have a variety of purposes such as exposition or persuasion. Also, when they choose a genre, they need to be sure they can control its conventions. A short story, for example, should cover a short span of time; a media article should have short paragraphs.

As shown in the diagram here, in 2016, the most popular genre was the essay, the next most popular the short story. Personal recounts, reflections and speeches were the next most popular. It is worth noting that, while genre conventions are not assessed specifically (although they may affect Structuring & sequencing), students should aim to make use of, and indeed exploit, these conventions for effect. Students should be encouraged to discover in which genres they write most confidently and competently. This should allow them to produce their best writing.



Popularity of genre: total sample

### Essay

The definition of the essay is vague, as it has become a genre required in many school subjects. Perhaps the simplest definition is that it is a piece of writing that usually expresses the author's personal point of view.

The essay was a popular choice. This is perhaps because essay writing lends itself to a range of different topics, is a writing style that students use across the majority of subject areas, and has elements that are similar to several other genres. The most successful of these responses were very clearly focused on purpose and audience and developed a clear thesis. Essays that were well written followed a clear structure, consisting of: an introduction (including a thesis statement); a body of writing (containing development and explanation of main points); and a concluding paragraph (presenting a summary).

### Short story

The short story was one of the most popular genres and, not surprisingly, stories covered a wide variety of topics. The most successful were those that drew on students' own knowledge and experiences and made effective language choices such as varied sentence length and use of description (including metaphor and personification). Also, successful stories tended to be written with a goal in mind from the outset — that is, there was an effective establishment and development of ideas, a clear resolution and a compelling conclusion. Students should be wary of some strategies that are likely to have a negative impact on achievement. An example is the story that ends with the narrator waking to find it was all a dream or one that is written in the first person with the narrator dying at the end. This is significant to the criteria of Central idea



and Structuring & sequencing. Many such stories indicated a lack of planning and, consequently, a lack of direction. Other common problems were inconsistencies and inaccuracies in using tense and narrative perspective.

### **Speech**

Speeches ranged from the informative to the persuasive. Having a clear understanding of the purpose and audience of the speech is crucial for success. This can be achieved by creating a context that establishes the speaker's credentials and the audience's potential interest. This means students need to ensure that their topic is suitable for this genre; that is, it should be a topic that is not contrived and that would interest the intended audience.

### **Personal recount/reflection**

Students can elect to write about themselves. They may produce a piece that recounts or reviews a personal experience or a piece that reflects on their lives or their ideas. This genre is reminiscent of some blog entries. The popularity of this genre is not surprising.

### **Media article**

This genre includes texts such as feature articles, editorials and journal articles. Predominantly expository in nature, media articles require students to have a reasonable knowledge of their topic. Therefore, students should carefully consider their own background knowledge and expertise when selecting this approach to respond to their chosen stimulus piece/s. They should also consider the conventions of the genre. For example, feature articles usually have shorter paragraphs than essays.

### **Drama script**

Drama scripts made up only a small percentage of the responses this year. Students who write in this form need knowledge of the specific conventions of the genre, and need to be able to use them to effect.

### **Journal**

Journal writing included texts such as a diary entry and these were usually reflective in style. This genre is often difficult for students, because writing 'as themselves' may limit opportunities for selecting and demonstrating a wide or discriminating vocabulary. Also, they tend to lose focus in this kind of writing, which can affect the criteria of Central idea and Structuring & sequencing. If students do choose to write a diary, the entries should not be short as the result can be a rather disjointed response. Paragraphs are still essential.

### **Letter**

Letters can often provide challenges in Vocabulary and in Structuring & sequencing. To be successful, students should ensure that the purpose, and consequently, the content of the letter will be substantive enough to justify the choice of genre and to meet length requirements.

### **Report**

A small percentage of students chose to write a report. Many of these were scientific, perhaps suggesting that students were aware of the genre best suited to their knowledge and experience. The genre conventions of a report should be used. Reports should make use of features such as subheadings as well as sections including, for example, objectives, conclusions and recommendations, to add to the authenticity of the writing and, consequently, to the authority of the writer. It would not be a good idea to write up a scientific experiment with just a list of materials and procedures. Rather, the writing should focus on a discussion of the findings.

### **Critique**

Many of the students who wrote in this genre chose to write reviews about books or films that have had an impact on their lives.

## Achievement in specific criteria

In discussing specific criteria, reference is made to selected student responses that begin on page 77.

### Central idea

When assessing this criterion, a marker is essentially asking what the response is about. That is, what is the student writing about and how well has the student deliberately and clearly developed this idea to reach an intended conclusion? The most successful responses will demonstrate direction — whether explicit or implicit — and resolution. Responses suffer in the criterion of central idea when there is uneven development of the idea or when there are several, perhaps vague, ideas present. A lack of resolution often results from lack of direction and, consequently, this has a negative impact on the judgment of this criterion.

### Vocabulary

Many believe that ‘the bigger the word, the better’. However, this is not necessarily the case. It is never a good idea to sacrifice meaning for style. Success in Vocabulary is determined by word choices: words that have been selected deliberately for effect and exactly fit their location within the text. While students should aim to demonstrate a knowledge and range of vocabulary, their control of language is also crucial. Incorrect and/or inappropriate word choice, lack of variety, and language that gets in the way of meaning will all influence a student’s success in this criterion. Trying too hard to use complex vocabulary can also detract from a response. The biggest word is not always the best word, and sometimes, something as simple as using the wrong preposition can destroy meaning.

Making use of language devices such as metaphor and personification, as well as using ‘technical’ language suited to the context, proved to be very effective for many students. Less effective was the often jarring use of exaggeration and hyperbole, tautology and sweeping generalisations. Maintaining an awareness of the purpose and audience of the writing is essential for success in this criterion.

### Responsiveness

The piece of writing that a student produces must clearly be a response to the testpaper on the day, showing a connection to both the overall concept and the stimulus piece/s. Therefore, of all the criteria, Responsiveness is weighted most heavily. Achievement will suffer where the connection is weak, or where the student responds to either the concept or stimulus, but not to both. The higher achieving scripts in this criterion will exhibit a strong and sustained connection to both. It is important to be aware that simply repeating the concept, ‘*seeing things*’, several times is not demonstrating the criterion of Responsiveness. Evidence also suggests that responding to too many stimulus pieces reduces a student’s likelihood of achieving well in this criterion. This is because a piece of this kind tends to make only passing or glancing reference to the concept or the stimulus pieces.

Students may benefit from a different approach in their planning. Rather than looking at the testpaper and asking, ‘What can I write about?’, it may be better to ask, ‘What do I know a lot about that I can relate to something on this testpaper?’

### Grammar, punctuation, spelling

Within this criterion, grammar is deemed more important than punctuation which, in turn, is more important than spelling. This is because each one of these can affect meaning more than the next. To achieve a high standard, students must consistently demonstrate precise and effective use of grammar, punctuation and spelling with few errors. This includes exploiting the conventions of writing for specific purposes and effects. Student achievement in this criterion will be affected by the degree to which errors detract from meaning. Proofreading is vital.

Regardless of achievement level, this is the criterion in which students performed most poorly. Some of the most frequent problems evident in responses were:

- inconsistencies with tense
- errors in antecedent agreement (particularly with singular, plural and indefinite pronouns)
- omission or incorrect use of punctuation, e.g. failing to end questions with question marks
- absence of apostrophes to identify possession or adding apostrophes to plurals.

### **Structuring & sequencing**

This criterion requires markers to consider the architecture of the piece, that is, the way in which the ideas in the response are arranged. To be successful, the writing must demonstrate controlled structuring and deliberate sequencing of ideas. The writing needs to be fluent, logical and flexible. Achievement is hampered where there are weaknesses evident, such as gaps in logic, poor paragraphing or randomness in the arrangement of ideas.

Some of the problems with Structuring & sequencing arise when students do not clearly establish the context of their writing and, consequently, the development of ideas is less sequential. Also, poor editing can have a negative impact, particularly when students include information that is superfluous to the purpose, thereby weakening the response. In short stories, this often results from including too much unnecessary description. Of course, one thing that students can do to contribute to a well-structured response is to plan a clear strategy that is best suited to their individual writing abilities.

Students should consider their choice of genre when thinking about the structure and sequence of their writing. Although poetry is the only genre that is specifically forbidden, they should think about whether their genre choice will allow them to develop an idea in a clear sequence. For example, writing a 600-word grocery list would be a very bad idea. Students need to consider and discuss what genres or forms will allow them to develop and demonstrate their best writing in about 600 words of continuous prose.

### **Length**

This subtest requires students to produce a piece of continuous prose, approximately 600 words in length. Penalties are applied for too short, far too short, too long, and far too long responses. While each criterion is considered and assessed independently, Length has the potential to have the greatest impact on achievement in other criteria. In terms of overall performance, scripts that are far too short are the most likely to be among the lower achieving responses.

2016

**Grading a script**

- Read the script as a whole.
- Think about the worth of the script holistically.
- Make a judgment about the contribution to the holistic worth of the script of each criterion you are considering (CI, V, R, GPS, SS).
- Assign a grade and a qualifier, then record each judgment.

**Writing Task marking guide:  
Criteria and standards**

Contribution to the holistic grade made by:						Decision about:
CENTRAL IDEA	VOCABULARY	RESPONSIVENESS	GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING	STRUCTURING & SEQUENCING	LENGTH	
<p><b>For a 1+</b> the writing demonstrates the deliberate, focused development of a clear, central idea (explicit or implicit).</p>	<p><b>For a 1+</b> the writing demonstrates the use of words selected for their effect and exactly fitted to their location (the right words in the right places).</p>	<p><b>For a 1+</b> the writing demonstrates sensitivities to nuances of the concept and stimulus material.</p>	<p><b>For a 1+</b> the writing consistently demonstrates a command of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the conventions of writing (subject-verb agreement, participle use, antecedent agreement, pronoun choice, tense, etc.)</li> <li>• correct punctuation</li> <li>• correct spelling.</li> </ul>	<p><b>For a 1+</b> the writing demonstrates coherence and cohesion through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• controlled structuring</li> <li>• deliberate sequencing of ideas and images.</li> </ul>	<p><b>about right</b> 500–750 words</p>	
<p>identifiable for intended audience; direction and resolution revealed</p> <p>identifiable but unevenly developed</p> <p>identifiable but poorly developed or not readily identifiable but some development evident</p> <p>not identifiable</p>	<p>1 controlled (discriminating, imaginative)</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 appropriate</p> <p>4 inappropriate, interfering with meaning at times</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 limited</p>	<p>1 strong (immediate or subtle) and sustained connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 connectedness to the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>4 connectedness to either the concept or stimulus material; <i>or</i> weak connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 no connectedness to the concept or stimulus material</p>	<p>1 precise and effective use</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 lapses intrude but do not detract from meaning</p> <p>4 lapses obtrude and detract from meaning</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 inept</p>	<p>1 fluent, logical and flexible</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 weaknesses are evident</p> <p>4 weaknesses detract</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 incoherent</p>	<p><b>too long</b> 750–1000 words</p>	
					<p><b>too short</b> 400–500 words</p>	
					<p><b>far too long</b> &gt; 1000 words</p>	

## Selected student responses

The responses that follow were selected from those that met the standards for successful writing as defined by the criteria and standards for judging student responses. These responses appear in their original handwritten form. They may contain errors in expression but, for the sake of authenticity, they have been published as they were written. They may also include some factual inaccuracies but it is important to note that accuracy of information is not one of the criteria by which the responses are judged.

With respect to handwriting, students should be aware that legibility is important. Markers will make a committed attempt to read poor handwriting but they cannot ignore errors due to missing or indecipherable letters. In schools, teachers may become familiar with a student's handwriting and may guess at their meaning or their spelling. Markers of these responses cannot do this. They must assess what they see. While there is no specific criterion that applies, it is inevitable that illegible handwriting will affect the judgments that can be made in all the criteria.

The selection of the examples here does not indicate a preference for any particular form of writing; nor are the sentiments expressed in these responses necessarily endorsed by the QCAA.

Before publication, the QCAA attempted to establish, but cannot guarantee, the originality of the writing in the responses.

### Response 1

*If You Could See Me, Just Maybe* is an account of a visit by Hugo to an uncle who suffers from dementia. The purpose and the central idea are clear from the start. The narrative begins with some establishment of the context, including an evocative description of the bleak and dispiriting weather that sets the scene for the equally depressing visit. The development of the central idea continues with Hugo's growing frustration over the observation that his uncle's eyes can see but that 'Henrik himself saw nothing'. After trying to make a connection, Hugo acts violently. Immediately regretting his loss of control, he apologises.

It is only then, as Hugo turns to leave, that his uncle shows any recognition or reaction. That is when 'he saw, and he smiled'. The central idea has been developed deliberately and effectively to a strong climax and then to a sensitive resolution.

### Response 2

This untitled response, set in the future, looks back to a fictional past, when people have been introduced to an optical implant, 'Optique', that augments reality so that the human mind can 'visually shape' what it sees. This is a first person description of the implant and its powers and an account of its dangers. The writer, the fictional Alexander Gallows, is writing a letter to request the removal of his implant because he wants to 'embrace reality'. He argues that Optique encourages people to see what they want, rather than allowing them to be challenged by seeing and drawing meaning from what really exists. For the actual reader, it provides a subtle and persuasive warning about how blind we may be to the unintended consequences in the future of many of the decisions and actions that we take.

The response demonstrates the use of words selected for their effect. The name of the device, 'Optique' is imaginative. The vocabulary varies, at times being quite conversational and so, appropriate to the discursive nature of this kind of letter. Some of the language is colloquial: 'It still blows me away to this day', 'it was the coolest idea ever', 'Your product is amazing'. Occasionally the writer addresses the reader directly: 'You know how parents can be; not wanting their child to miss out'. There is also an effective use of more formal vocabulary: 'an optical implant that augments reality', 'the procedure', 'the protagonist', 'a meaning ... that they can identify with viscerally', 'a stagnant imagination'. The response reflects an ability to use the right words in the right places.

### Response 3

*Reality in Fantasy* suggests that we should not dismiss books such as the Harry Potter series and *Alice in Wonderland* as simply stories of magic and fantasy. They are also examples of books that provide lessons that we need to learn, about ourselves and about the real world. The discussion connects characters with real world figures and fictional actions with world events.

The discussion is concise and is clearly responsive. With its warning that we should not close our eyes to what we can learn from 'other worlds', it makes a strong connection to both the overall concept and the stimulus material.

### Response 4

*Seeing is believing* is a thoughtful discussion about the importance of systematic observation in developing our scientific knowledge and understanding of the world. This is an exposition that points out the need for us to learn from past observation, measurement and experimentation. Copernicus, Faraday and Rutherford are cited as examples of those who 'had to see it to believe it', who broke new ground and so laid foundations for future work. It ends with the suggestion that the reader may be amongst those who go will further.

The exposition is easy to read, clear and fluent with an engaging mix of formality and informality. There is an admirable variety in sentence structures and in the use of a range of punctuation.

### Response 5

*The library of looking-glasses* is a fictional description of people reading books and a reflection on what books can do for us. There is a poetic quality to this response. A boy is in a library reading a biography of 'the world's smartest man'. The book inspires him to dream of a better future for himself. A woman sits in her kitchen reading a romance which provides an escape from her 'loveless life'. A grandfather reads a story to a little girl, regretful that he can never be the hero to her that the main character is. A librarian observes each of these people when they come to the library, 'seeing a reflection of herself in each of them'. She sees the library as a 'looking-glass to her whole life' and acknowledges the importance of books.

The response has a clear structure and simple, logical sequencing. Each paragraph, except the final one, begins with 'In the corner of the world ...'. Each of the readers described is presented separately, in a vignette that brings the person to life by describing the obstacles or disappointments in their lives. They come to life in these short accounts. The paragraph about the librarian brings them together effectively. The final paragraph presents a comment on the possibilities provided by books. The final sentence restates the repeated introductions to the paragraphs with, 'In the corner of the world, someone just opened a book'.

## If You Could See Me, Just Maybe

As always, he went to visit him, like he did every winter. It was almost ritualistic by now. No one but him did it, but it was understandable, he supposed.

After all, he was the one who had found him in the first place. Two months of incessant searching, while the rest of them sat around staring at the phone and dabbing dry tears off their cheeks.

Hugo shook his head and looked out the window of his train, at the petals of snow that fell peacefully onto the earth, one by one.

~~He wound his thick scarf around his neck and tightened it firmly, put his gloves on, and curled his fingers around his coat.~~

When the train came to a stop, Hugo didn't hesitate before jumping onto the platform and leaving the fuming train behind with his long strides. "~~Abba abba~~" ~~he muttered to himself and proceeded in his track on the snow covered walkways, searching for a way to get him there.~~

The bleak weather never did anything for this place. People had the tendency to proclaim that it was 'beautiful in the Summer', but it was always said by those who had never been here, or stayed long enough to realise it was never quite beautiful, in any season.

The weather didn't do much for his destination either. The Institute looked pleasant outwardly; clean and welcoming, with flowers blossoming down the sidewalks (they were frozen now, the cold breath of winter having gotten the better of them), and a sense of quietness that permeated even to those outside.

Hugo trudged up the pathway, shoes clinging with wet mud. Snow, he thought, always ends up ugly if left alone. Or anything for that matter.

~~Inside, however, it was warm. As soon as he entered, a receptionist stood up with a small smile, eyes wide like a doe's. "Can I help you?" she asked, her voice a staccato of eagerness.~~

~~"Merry Christmas," he replied first. "Doctor Henrik. I come to see him this time every year."~~

~~She kept smiling. "Of course. He's waiting."~~

So, he looked better, Hugo concluded. His wrinkles seemed less deep, and his hands weren't trembling anymore. The nurses had told him he was too still at times, but... no, he was doing well otherwise.

"Uncle Henrik?"

But perhaps Hugo had expected too much, because the silence that followed settled heavily in his chest, tightening



his throat almost to the <sup>point</sup> that he choked out another, "Uncle Henrik? How are you?"

Still, nothing. Hugo, with a crease between his eyes, stepped closer to rest a hand on the older man's shoulder. "Hey, Uncle Henrik. It's me."

Henrik blinked, but nothing else. "Merry Christmas," Hugo said, his voice a fraction louder.

Yet again, his uncle blinked. It was as if he simply could not see, or perceive anything that surrounded him, everything that went on constantly around him... His eyes could see, yet the connection to his brain flickered on and off. ~~the nervous system unable to do its job~~ His eyes could see people, animals, breathtaking art work even - but Henrik himself saw nothing. Everything was just a hum in the slow, unremitting drone of life.

"Mum passed away." Hugo's eyes traced the tiled floor of Henrik's own little room. "Your sister, you know. She died."

Nothing.

A cold wash of something washed down Hugo, from his head, down to his chest, down to his curled toes. Momentarily freezing, it turned red-hot, a blaze of - "She died, Henrik. Last week. She's gone." he shouted, hand coming to grab the nearest thing it could find, flinging it down into a crash, pieces littering the floor. Jagged pieces of china, into a mosaic on the cool, blue tiles.

Henrik moved. Hugo couldn't see what he saw, but he saw him see it. His weathered face was suddenly grave — a still face, and not one that Hugo knew. His eyes twitched; a miniscule movement, but it was there. A ghost that only he could see, maybe.

His eyes were hot, too hot, and Hugo rubbed harshly at his face. "I'm sorry. That was mean." wearily he stooped down and picked up the broken china, cringing at the unsettlingly bright colours painted on. His eyes stung. "I won't do that again."

Standing silently, broken glass in hand, head bowed, Hugo swallowed. He turned around and took the three short steps to the door and turned the handle, when a sound pulled back his hand, clawing at him to stop.

"Hew... hew... go." Henrik stared at him, eyes fixated on his figure.

He could see him. Hugo inhaled slowly, dragging every inch of air into his chest. His uncle could recognise him.

"Hey, uncle Henrik."

As if to match Hugo's wavering grin, Henrik crinkled his eyes. He saw, and he smiled.

## Response 2

It's been twenty years since the modern world was introduced to 'Optique'. An optical implant that augments reality around you, so that the human mind can visually shape what it sees. It still blows me away to this day.

I remember seeing it on social media, way back when it first came out, and thinking it was the coolest idea ever. "Finally!" I thought to myself, "All my sci-fi childhood fantasies are being realised". I was about twelve when I got the procedure done because the school I was attending at the time made it compulsory. All their lessons from 2030-on were taught within the 'Optique' system, and boy was it mind-blowing.

You could see science come alive around you; the birth of a star, the physiology of a woolly mammoth, even the atomic structure of your school desk. Education became the most interesting aspect of my life, but the wonders of 'Optique' didn't stop there.

As you casually walked down the street, you saw people's projected avatars in any environment you could imagine. Sunsets could become nebulas and anyone could be beautiful. Needless to say, the concept swept social media, and anyone with enough money to buy a smart-phone could afford to have the implant. The newest generation now have the procedure done at birth. You know how parents can be; not wanting their child to miss out.

As I sit here on this park bench as a fully grown man, I only now realise that 'Optique' actually robbed us of something. That despite all the benefits this procedure has for society, we're more disconnected than ever. There are all these people at the park with me, but all I'm seeing are projected husks of who they desire to be. We're all looking up at the same sunset, but each of us see a different visual overlay. We might as well not even be at the same park.

People read books to draw meaning from what's written on the page. Every person who reads the exact same book sees a completely different set of images. They imagine the protagonist slightly taller, or the weather a bit darker, or a murder more gruesome. In short, the meaning they draw from the words they see are completely individual to them. A meaning that is their own and that they can identify with viscerally.

'Optique' doesn't actually allow anyone to draw their own meaning from the world around them, because people are allowed to see what they want. It doesn't introduce new outer stimulus to the mind, so all the person does is stay within their own imagination - a stagnant imagination. One that cannot morph and change as we see and experience new things. This 'augmented reality' we have is safe and comfortable, but that's its biggest crime. The human mind needs to be challenged in an ever-changing dynamic environment to grow and

develop artistically. Just like how a reader draws different meanings from the words he sees, a park-goer should be free to draw their own meaning from a sun set.

And because of this, I've decided to have my 'Optique' implant surgically removed. I miss the real world and all the gifts reality has to offer. Being so cut off from everyone else, in my own little imagined world, feels like we never share any genuine experiences. I want to see a real sun set without all the 'razzle dazzle' of virtual reality; one that I can draw my own meaning from. My friends and family will probably think me radical because of this decision, but I feel that it's necessary for me to continue my journey as a human being.

So please, I hope you'll accept my request for surgical removal of the 'Optique' virtual reality lens. Your product is amazing and I've enjoyed my time using it, but I can no longer bear not seeing things the way they're intended to be seen. It's my time to embrace reality.

Kind Regards,  
Alexander Gallows



### Response 3

## The Reality in Fantasy

Fantasy novels have been widely considered as fantastical works that prove to be futile in educating us about our world. Upon first glance, this may seem true; what could we possibly learn from 'Harry Potter' and 'Alice in Wonderland' where magic and mysticism prevail? However, it is precisely <sup>in</sup> this 'first glance' that the danger lies. By refusing to open our eyes wider and delve deeper to the themes explored in these works, we effectively blindfold ourselves from the lessons we could learn from these 'other worlds'.

The 'Harry Potter' series by J.K. Rowling has been critically acclaimed as one of the most compelling fantasy works of our time. With its complex yet lovable characters and thrilling storyline, it is no wonder that there is hardly a person who doesn't know their Hogwarts House. However, 'Harry Potter' is more than just a fairy tale; beneath the layers of witchcraft and wizardry lies a complex framework of themes that are relevant to our society. One of the most prevalent concepts is the unquenchable thirst for power, presented in the character of Voldemort. At first glance, Voldemort is the cliché 'bad guy' whose only purpose is to throw infinite obstacles in the benevolent hero's path. By 'zooming in' with our mind's eye, we see that Voldemort is a dictator whose thirst for power clouds his rationality to the point where he sacrifices his own soul to obtain power. In our world, irrational power-hungry dictators are an ugly reality. Leaders such as North Korea's Kim Jong Un continue to put thousands of lives in danger, making Voldemort's character a starkly accurate reflection of the 'real world'. Furthermore, Draco Malfoy's hatred of non-pureblood witches and wizards is a mirror of society's often racist and homophobic views. By closing our eyes to the lessons we can learn from other worlds, we continue to ignore our own harsh reality.

'Alice in Wonderland' also provides insight into reality's struggles through the character of the Red Queen. She is a meticulous perfectionist who

judges others based on appearance and only allows unusual-looking people like her into her court. She makes irrational demands, such as condemning any unfortunate individual who dares oppose her to immediate capital punishment. Of course, perfectionism is not entirely a negative disposition and can be the very driving force to success. However, it is when perfectionism is coupled with a discriminatory mindset that disaster arises. For example, Hitler's irrational leadership and thirst for perfection resulted in the senseless murder of millions of Jews to create a 'perfect' world of only Aryan people. His perception of the world was shrouded by an intense longing for perfection, much like the Red Queen. Consequently, modern society must open their blinded gaze to the needs of others rather than their own wants before lives are at stake once more.

By analysing the lessons presented in fantasy worlds, it is evident that many of 'unreality's' struggles are present in reality. From dictatorships to racism, stories like 'Harry Potter' and 'Alice in Wonderland' provide much-needed insight into modern society's turmoils. Rather than dismissing these novels as childish tales, we must widen our perspective and acknowledge that we as a society need to open our eyes to our own reality.

## Seeing Is Believing

Our knowledge of the world is built entirely on observations. Without them, we wouldn't be able to tell an aardvark from a zebra. Only through carefully planned observations are we able to prove or disprove our theories of how the world works. Building on past knowledge, we can formulate new ideas, and construct experiments to sort the wheat from the chaff.

Through observations, our view of the world can be quite literally turned upside down. The fundamental idea that the Earth revolves around the Sun was once considered heresy. However, ~~through~~ by regularly observing and measuring the movement of astronomical bodies, Copernicus was able to prove that all the planets of the Solar System do indeed orbit the Sun, including the Earth. This idea now forms a central tenet in our modern world, being taught to us from primary school. Why did Copernicus come up with such a novel, unheard-of way to view our planet? Because he refused to be restricted by hearsay and untested ideas - he had to see it to believe it. And lo and behold, when he actually took the required observations, the previously held beliefs came crashing down. Like Copernicus, we need to be brave enough to test unproven theories, not just accept them as gospel. Without observations or experimentation, theories consist of little more than old wives' tales.

Once a theory is proven, future generations are able to build upon it. The ancient Greeks were the first to observe static electricity, when someone rubbed a piece of amber on some wool. Eons later, the great experimentalist Michael Faraday built on those observations to create the first capacitor. At the time, his experiments may have seemed to have absolutely no real-world applications. <sup>Indeed</sup> when Faraday demonstrated his Faraday jar to a politician, he was asked what



electricity was useful for. "I don't know," he replied, "but I'm sure someday you'll tax it." How prophetic those words were! Hundreds of years later, we have supercomputers that can perform quadrillions of calculations per second, and they contain millions upon millions of miniscule capacitors, crammed on to tiny circuit boards. Without the observations and experiments performed by those in the past, we would have to make do with watching a stone wall instead of a TV, just like the Flintstones. Today, scientific development is continuing at an unprecedented rate - thanks to the observations of those in the past. As Isaac Newton famously declared, "If I have seen further than other men, then it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants."

Sometimes there is no way to test a particular theory, and we must wait until technology develops sufficiently before we can prove or disprove it. And sometimes we must provisionally accept one theory in order to move forward, later altering our outlook when it is superseded. JJ Thompson's theory of a 'plum pudding' atom was accepted at the time it was formulated, for want of a better theory. Only after careful observation of the angle that alpha particles were deflected off a gold foil sheet was Ernest Rutherford able to present a better model - the planetary atom. Like Copernicus' heliocentric solar system, Rutherford's hypothesis that electrons revolve around the nucleus of the atom has become everyday knowledge. But first, it had to stand the test of observation and experimentation.

Somewhat paradoxically, the way we see the world is based on what we see. The concept that 99.99% of the volume of a rock is composed of empty space would have been incomprehensible to Aristotle, as would the idea of a supercomputer or TV. However through carefully planned experiments, which build on the observations of others in the past, we have come to accept that it is so. ~~There~~ Slowly but surely, we have built a clearer picture of the

world around us. There are still gaps in our knowledge that need to be filled, and through observation we can continue to create a crisper, more detailed picture of our incredible world. Perhaps you will help fill some of these blank pieces of canvas.

## The library of looking-glasses

In the corner of the world, there is an overlooked library. This library holds many stories and dreams of people. In this library, sitting at the darkest table, wearing nothing but baggy rags, is a boy. No one in the library pays him any attention or even looks at his direction, but it does not matter to him. He is too focused on his book which is the looking-glass to his future. He is a poor and unloved boy holding a biography on the world's smartest man. The boy devours every word in his sight and dreams about how one day, he too will matter and have people looking at his biography. He dreams a different future than what everyone expects of him. The boy stays there from dawn until dusk, viewing his future.

In the corner of the world, there is a woman sitting in her white and bland kitchen, grasping at her romance novel. There is not a speck of colour in the room or any photos hanging on the wall to be seen. The woman does not mind though, because all the colour and pictures she wants to see is in her hands. She reads every word and sees everything in the novel as if she is the woman in distress. The book distracts her from her lonely and loveless life. The woman sees the book as her escape. She views the character as herself, a woman in desperate need of being saved by a strong man who is going to sweep

her off her feet. This novel is the looking-glass to what the woman really wants, love.

In the corner of the world, lays a young girl in bed with her grandfather reading a book.

They always read this book before bed as it is their favourite. The little girl views the main character as her hero. He goes around the world on many adventures, saving everyone from the bad guys. The grandfather can see the excitement in the girls eyes as she drifts off into her dreams that will showcase the main character in the story. The grandfather cannot help but regret his life after 'reading' the story. The old man sees the book as the life he wished to have lived. He is old and frail now, and can no longer walk very far without pain and so he knows that he will never go on an adventure like the character does, and will never be his granddaughters hero. To her this book is the looking-glass of what a hero really is, and for him it is the looking-glass for the life he wish he did not waste.

In the corner of the world, there is an overlooked library with an unseen librarian. She sits at her desk and observes all that come in to her little home. She notices the little boy in the corner who reads so that he will be important. The librarian can see how lonely the woman is everytime she comes to loan a romance novel. She also observes the regret in the grandfathers' eye as he comes in every week

to extend his hire of the same book. The woman understands those that come into her world as she sees a reflection of herself in each of them. She sees herself in the boy because she too wanted to be important, she sees herself in woman as she is lonely as well since her husband passed and <sup>she</sup> was barren. The old man is a reflection of her regret, for he has had children and lived a loving life. To her, the library is the looking-glass to her whole life.

Books allow people to see things. They allow us to see what we really want. They can help us see a pathway to greatness or let us see what our hearts really want and to feel loved. Books allow us to see the life we wish we had or they allow other people to observe who we really are. In the corner of the world, someone just opened a book.