Extended writing: Critique (Year 11)

This sample is intended to inform the design of assessment instruments in the senior phase of learning. It highlights the qualities of student work and the match to the syllabus standards.

Criteria assessed

- Critique

Assessment instrument

The response presented in this sample is in response to an assessment task.

**Year 11 Critique: Individual formative**  
**Key concepts:** Representations and Audience

**Task**  
By watching Baz Luhrmann’s films *Strictly Ballroom* and *Australia*, comment on the representations, symbols and stereotypes constructed in these productions and how they reinforce or challenge the stature of our egalitarian Australian society.

Use the films in conjunction with events in Australian politics and history to discuss how Luhrmann is attempting to change the ideology of the Australian audience. In order to do this:

- analyse and evaluate products and the context of production
- discuss, compare, construct arguments, interpret, research, judge, justify, summarise and challenge ideas
- substantiate evaluations with evidence from a variety of sources
- use relevant terminology and conventions of critique writing.

**Conditions**

- Length: 600–800 words (quotes not included in word count)
- Five weeks in class including screening of films, class discussion, drafting and completion.
- A bibliography is not required in this response.

Original images of characters and film screen shots included as part of the task are not printed here due to copyright restrictions.
Instrument-specific criteria and standards

Student responses have been matched to instrument-specific criteria and standards; those which best describe the student work in this sample are shown below. For more information about the syllabus dimensions and standards descriptors, see www.qsa.qld.edu.au/1245.html.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard A</th>
<th>Standard C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critique</strong></td>
<td><strong>Critique</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• effectively applies the key concepts of Representations and Audience, to make cohesive and substantiated judgments by thoroughly analysing and evaluating the films <em>Strictly Ballroom</em> and <em>Australia</em>, and their contexts of production and use.</td>
<td>• applies aspects of the key concepts of Representations and Audience to make some judgments by analysing the films <em>Strictly Ballroom</em> and <em>Australia</em>, and their contexts of production and use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Colour highlights have been used in the table to emphasise the qualities that discriminate between the standards.

Key: Qualifiers
Characteristics
Aspects of the general objectives
## Student response — Standard A

The annotations show the match to the instrument-specific standards.

| Comments | Cinema is a sounding board for directors to express, reinforce and challenge ideologies, representations and stereotypes within society. Film makers often rely on cinematic techniques such as symbolism, metaphor, settings, events, props, costuming, characterisation and even deconstruction of stereotypes to isolate particular ideologies and themes. These techniques also aim to convey and challenge audience interpretations and opinions related to historical and political events. Baz Luhrmann attempts to challenge Australian opinion on several historical and relevant issues, including the White Australia Policy, immigration, woman’s and Indigenous rights, the Stolen Generation and ultimately the Australian concept of egalitarianism using his films “Strictly Ballroom” and “Australia”, as a medium and the aforementioned techniques as vehicles of expressions. Both films hold messages for audiences and strive to alter their perception and opinion towards concepts and events. Therefore, Baz Luhrmann’s films, “Strictly Ballroom” and “Australia” challenge the stature of an egalitarian Australian society using cinematic techniques to portray ideologies, representations and stereotypes. In Strictly Ballroom, Luhrmann expresses the progression of Australian ideologies away from egalitarianism, to the xenophobia of the White Australia Policy, multiculturalism and finally, pluralism. The character of Doug Hastings epitomises the concept of egalitarianism at Federation that has since been oppressed and abused by the White Australia Policy. “Australia”, however, builds upon this theme by presenting the audience an egalitarian Australia that by the end of the film, has accepted Aboriginals and women into its definition of egalitarianism. The Drover in “Australia” represents a new lovable and related breed of an egalitarian Australian. Both films effectively challenge the audience’s position toward historic events, but mainly target their perception and definition of egalitarianism. Symbols and representations throughout “Strictly Ballroom” and “Australia” allude to various ideologies and make reference to several chapters of Australian history. Ideologies refer to “the body of doctrine, myth, belief … that guides an individual, social movement, institution, class, or large group”. (http://thefreedictionary.com/ideology)

1 Note: All URLs in student responses were current at time of assessment. |
| Introduction directly contextualises the response in relation to the question in the task. | Relevant directorial and production techniques are identified, in relation to purpose and use. |
| Deconstruction of the task and what this means in relation to the selected films. | Synthesis of film and understanding of filmic language. |
| Analysis of characters with reference to the director’s portrayal and influence of Audience. | Establishes meaning of language and usage in this response. |

1 Note: All URLs in student responses were current at time of assessment.
The dance floor of “Strictly Ballroom” is profoundly symbolic. The viewers' attention is often drawn to the competition sign above the dance floor, where only the words ‘Australian’ and ‘Federation’ are lit by spotlight. Furthermore, scenes showing competitors dancing in couples on the floor feature only Anglo Saxon dancers, thereby implying that Australia is a country reserved especially for people of Anglo Saxon descent. Ken Railings, with his peroxide blonde hair, plays a dual role in this respect. He is idolised as an ambassador of dance, or more specifically, as a symbol of the White Australia Policy, an era where policy and legislation effectively restricted the immigration of immigrants of non-Anglo Saxon backgrounds and sparked xenophobic attitudes to foreign races and cultures. (http://members.optusnet.com.au/griff52/immigration1988.htm)

In addition, the fact that Fran, an immigrant with Spanish heritage and Doug Hastings, a broken man with egalitarian principles, are only spectators at the beginning in the film, reinforces the idea of institutionalised racial discrimination and the rejection of an egalitarian Australian society. However, during the course of the film the audience learns about multiculturalism through Scott Hastings, as Fran shows him the beauty of her culture and her desire to both share culture and integrate into Australian society. Effectively, Scott’s experience with Fran reveals to the audience how unfounded the fear-based discrimination truly is. This is further demonstrated by Fran, Doug Hastings and the other spectators as they symbolically step over the boundaries separating them from the dance floor, demonstrating an embrace of pluralism and the redefinition of egalitarianism, as discussed in the Barton Lectures, in which “sameness” and “homogeny” was discarded and replaced by tolerance and acceptance of racial and cultural diversity. (http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sunspect/stories/s274042.htm)

Likewise, the bar setting in “Australia” is used to expose the racist and sexist past of Australian history, and the Drover’s character represents a new concept of Australian egalitarianism. At the beginning of the film, the Drover’s brother-in-law is denied entry into a bar based solely on the fact he is Aboriginal. Similarly, Lady Ashley is told explicitly to go to the ladies lounge in the bar and is discriminated against due to her gender. However, in the second bar scene, the Drover and the other patrons do not accept the barman’s ruling, and oppose his refusal to give Lady Ashley a drink. The fact that the barman concedes is reflective of the woman’s rights movement and the fact the women “were finally included into the magic circle of egalitarianism”. (http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sunspect/stories/s274042.htm)

After the bombing of Darwin, the barman initially refused to serve the Drover’s brother-in-law a drink from the same size and style of glass as the Drover. In protest the Drover tells the barman “Just because it is doesn’t mean it should be”, or more specifically that racial discrimination need not exist. When the barman concedes, a close up of the three equal glasses are shown and “Waltzing Matilda” begins to play. These elements symbolise Aboriginals finally being awarded the same constitutional rights of all Australians and their inclusion in the concept of egalitarianism.

Moreover, the Drover’s character provides the audience with a new symbol of an egalitarian Australian male. Unlike Ken Railings from Strictly Ballroom, the Drover can control his drinking, and has a strong sense of social equality. His steadfast insistence to Lady Ashley that “going walkabout” is an important part of Nulla’s development as an Aboriginal child, is reflective of the recent reconciliatory apology made by Kevin Rudd to the Aboriginal community for the forceful removal of Aboriginal children “by governments, churches and welfare bodies to be brought up in institutions or fostered out to while families” during the years of the White Australia Policy. (http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/)
“Strictly Ballroom” and “Australia” leave the audience with two major messages: “a life lived in fear is a life half lived” and “just because it is doesn’t mean it should be”. In “Strictly Ballroom”, Baz Luhrmann’s entire narrative is based on the idea of breaking down the xenophobia associated with foreign culture, to promote acceptance and pluralism in Australia. Doug Hastings’s acceptance and encouragement of Fran, an immigrant with a Spanish background, further demonstrates a willingness to embrace egalitarianism once more. His proclamation that, “We had a dream, but we lived our life in fear” reinforces to audiences the old ideal of the classless Australian society built on merit rather than the race based hierarchy of the White Australia Policy.

Australia appeals to the idea of a new breed of egalitarian able to recognise social injustices and inequities, and challenge these institutions. The Drover’s readiness to defend his brother-in-law and Lady Ashley from racism and sexism respectively, using “just because it is doesn’t mean it should be” the basis of his argument, emphasizes to audiences the need for proactive measures to combat undesirable situations in regard to racial and gender issues. His bold statement also encourages audiences to reconcile past injustices and move toward acceptance through education and greater understanding.

Baz Luhrmann uses a range of cinematic techniques to highlight political ideas and historic themes. His films “Strictly Ballroom” and “Australia” portray the White Australia Policy, immigration, women’s and Indigenous rights and the Stolen Generation, but more specifically, the constantly evolving Australian concept of egalitarianism. By presenting these ideas through a cinematic format, Luhrmann not only challenges the audience’s prejudices, but promotes an egalitarian Australia.

**Bibliography**

http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/representations (Date accessed: 11/05/10)

http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ideologies  (Date accessed: 11/05/10)

http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sunspec/stories/s274042.htm (Date accessed: 10/05/10)

http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/52.htm (Date accessed: 16/05/10)

http://www.convictcreations.com/culture/egalitarianism.html (Date Accessed: 19/05/10)
### Australian Voices

“Hence, if someone drinks, swears, says g’day, loves his footy, dislikes bludgers and big noters and speaks all sorts of slang, then he is a fair dinkum Aussie”, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 April 2002.

The many representations Australia has of its people, are both in media and some opinion goers. Through the eyes of television viewers and media readers, an Australian is seen as a rough and tough man who’s white skin has seen far too much sun causing his complexion and hair to be tanned bronze. But Australia would rather be seen as egalitarian than this false image of the stereotypical Australian. Challenging this stereotype is something rarely seen, but Baz Luhrmann has created two films that do so through a variety of symbols, metaphors, stereotypes and specific representations. By creating “Strictly Ballroom” and “Australia” the characters contrast what has been represented through the media as an “Australian” person and they investigate another persona that can also be accepted as Australian. As well as the stereotype in Australia, Luhrmann included people and events that relate to past historic Australian events such as the Stolen Generation, the White Australia Policy and the role of women in society.

The purpose of the film “Strictly Ballroom” is to challenge the stereotype that being Australian currently holds; therefore Baz Luhrmann involves a number of different characters that represent a broad Australian community. Ken Railings is a specific illustration of a representative from the White Australia policy which was an event that involved the government making strict restrictions on immigration in Australia. Rules were made and guidelines were followed to make it hard for any coloured people to live in the country. Ken represents the ideal dancer through the eyes of the dancing community and symbolises him as the ideal white Australian through the eyes of the government. “Ken Railings is a ballroom king” said by Liz Kicks (in “Strictly Ballroom”) illustrates just how idolised Ken is from the other dancers, and how he was valued. Because of his white Australian nature who abides by the ballroom rules, wears a large amount of white and has peroxide blond hair, compliments the idea of him being a white Australian and emphasises his relation to the historic event. Ken is idolised by the other dancers who aspire to be as “talented” at dancing as he is because he dances the way he’s “supposed” to which makes him also favoured by the dancing officials, specifically Barry Fife, who value the fact that he abides by the rules because they are immune to accept any differences that conflict with traditions. This in turn makes the character of Scott Hastings one that symbolises the changing attitude in Australia at the time and in contrast to Ken’s persona, accepting different cultures and dancing techniques he strives to try something new and innovative. For this, Scott is disliked by the dancing officials who expect him to do the same steps as everyone else which are considered “normal”. “Maybe I’m just sick of dancing somebody else’s steps all the time” says Scott Hastings. He wants to be his own person and not follow in the footsteps of others, especially the steps of Ken. His Mother, his dancing partner and the dancing officials all want him to be just like Ken Railings and display the idolised dancing steps, but Scott accepts change and we see him interpreting other dance techniques for other cultures, showing him as a fair egalitarian Australian that shows tolerance and acceptance of difference. This idea of acceptance is also seen in the film “Australian” but in a way that the Australian women can be accepted to be shown in a more equal to a male role.

### Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishes a stereotype by opening with this reference.</th>
<th>States a position to confirm the support of the view of Australian society. Confirming broadly that the director is challenging this stereotypical Representation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reiterates task question that establishes context for further detailed judgments.</td>
<td>Makes links to historical and political events basing the film around a perceived reality for the Audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some understanding of Representations.</td>
<td>Statements supported through reference to the film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Representations and influence on Audience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the film “Australia” the idea of a woman’s capabilities and stereotypical roles in society are challenged by the character of Lady Ashley. At that time, women were seen to obtain a role that has less authority than the male. But in the film, Luhrmann has created a persona that challenges this idea and portrays the character with more authority and independence, by Lady Ashley carrying the responsibility of a large cattle property. When her husband dies, she becomes responsible for the property, and takes charge and shows her ability. She makes proactive decisions concerning the solution of the problems she faces. The young Nula calls her "Mrs Boss" which exhibits how she is seen as the commander of the situation. Also, after she is part of the mustering of the cattle and getting them on the ship, she is accepted by the bar owner, who doesn’t allow women to use his facility. After the Drover proposes that he serve her a drink he first refuses, then accepts. This shows how women do not always have to acquire the roles with less authority and that they can be equal to males and accepted by males. By the end of the film the character of the Drover accepts this, although at the beginning he doesn’t believe Lady Ashley is capable of performing such a male task like mustering cattle. However overtime, she proves herself by performing the difficult task of mustering the cattle over unfamiliar terrain, making a large contribution to resolving the current problem. He is convinced that Lady Ashley isn’t capable of doing so due to her sophisticated and proper nature and because she comes from a wealthy English heritage as well as the fact that she values measurable objects that display her wealth. With the development of the Drover character, he symbolises a male acceptance of a female who has taken authority and shown the equality towards him.

“Strictly Ballroom” and “Australia” make strong statements on both current and past events that have determined the country of Australia today and defined the people who live in it. Overall, Luhrmann’s purpose with films are to inform the viewer that the typical Australian is much more than just a white muscular male, who has a very manly personality and wrestles a crocodile in their spare time. An Australian person can also be accepting of different cultures or genders, of a different nationality or race, and then demonstrate this.

Acknowledgments

The QSA acknowledges the contribution of Varsity College in the preparation of this document.