Road to Perdition

Film Essay Revision Guide 2011

This pack contains notes and information related to the film 'Road to Perdition' and exam material for visual text essays from NZQA. Reading these notes and working through the booklet will aid your preparation for the end of year exam.

A Kirk 2011

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Learning Objectives:

- To discuss the purpose and audience of essay writing
- To develop an understanding of Level 2 assessment criteria
- To evaluate own writing strengths and target areas for improvement
- To apply new knowledge to improve own essay writing

Essay Writing – Purpose and Audience

Complete the boxes below to review your current understanding of the purpose and audience of an essay. You can write in bullet-points, pictures, or full sentences. Make sure you include any questions or concerns that you have regarding essay writing.

What is an essay? Why do we write them? Are there any words that spring to mind when you hear the term 'Essay'? What skills are involved in writing an essay? Do you have any questions that you want answered?

Discuss the notes that you have created in the above box with the rest of the group. Continue the discussion with the person next to you and add more notes to the following box, using the questions to prompt your thinking.

What 'things' would you expect to see included in an essay? What 'rules' have you been taught about essays at Pakuranga College?

Interpreting the Mark Scheme

The following descriptors have been taken from the Level 2 Excellence Band of the *Assessment Schedule*. The words and phrases used are not really 'Pupil-Friendly' as they are designed to be used by the examiners. We are going to interpret and translate the criteria into words and phrases that are easier for you to understand, which in turn will help you to ensure that your own writing achieves at a higher level.

Here are some questions to think about:

- Are there any words or phrases that you do not know the meaning of? If so, highlight them.
- What do you think the criteria actually mean? Can you explain them in your own words?
- Are you able to change the criteria into 'Pupil-Friendly Speak'? Use bullet-points if it helps.
- What will an Excellence essay look like on the page? What 'things' do you think would need to be included?

Level 2 Excellence Criteria	Pupil Speak
Demonstrates insight in understanding of the text. Shows insight in the development of an argument / interpretation. Demonstrates insight and appreciation in discussion of writer's / director's purpose in creating or shaping the text using particular techniques. Succinctly embeds analysis and ideas about the writer's / director's wider society, including historical and social context, into the answer. Shows insight in engagement with the text, and may make links to contexts outside of the text (which are carefully and appropriately tied back to the question). Shows insight in demonstration of how an aspect of the text relates to the wider text. Makes insightful links between aspects of the text. Demonstrates a wide vocabulary in the compelling expression of ideas. Uses terminology and discusses features of text insightfully to support the wider argument. Demonstrates an original or insightful approach to the question. Writes a cohesive, integrated answer. Offers evidence insightfully to support the key argument.	

Deconstructing a Level 2 Excellence Paragraph

The following two paragraphs are part of a longer essay that you have previously annotated. Read the paragraphs and then use different coloured highlighters to identify the following:

- Ideas about the character(s) and references to the bigger themes
- Evidence from the text including quotations and film techniques
- Links and connections to other parts of the film, to other films, or to the 'Real World'
- References to the director and the expected reactions of the audience

The film opens with a long shot of Michael Sullivan Junior as he looks over Michigan Lake. The lighting is overexposed to produce a 'dream-like', almost heavenly quality as Michael's voice-over introduces the main theme of the film – the relationship between father and son. As the camera zooms in on the back of Michael's head, the viewer hears him state "People often ask whether Michael Sullivan (his father) was a good man". This immediately alerts the audience that his father is now dead due to the use of the past tense "was". We soon realise that all of the characters in the film are essentially ghosts as they have all been killed and the narrative is a flashback, and this introduction creates a strong sense of foreboding and a sinister atmosphere that carries throughout the film.

The opening sequence fades to black to indicate that the story has now travelled back in time and Mendes introduces another long-shot of Michael Junior cycling across a snow-scape. The snow visually creates an impression of cold and hard surroundings. This is symbolic of the tough upbringing that Michael is about to be subjected to after he witnesses a murder and as he tries to come to terms with the resulting murders of his mother and younger brother. Special Effects coordinator Allen Hall and his crew had to fabricate "several football fields" worth of fake snow in order to create this wintry landscape and give a strong impression of the bleak conditions in Midwest America. The bleak setting once again reiterates the hard and tough world of organised crime that Michael has been thrown into.

Developing Higher Order Writing

Choose a paragraph from your own writing to develop into an Excellence response (alternately, use the paragraph supplied below). Remember, you need to include the same techniques as the previous example contains in order to lift your grade towards the higher marks:

- Ideas about the character(s) and references to the bigger themes
- Evidence from the text including quotations and film techniques
- Links and connections to other parts of the film, to other films, or to the 'Real World'
- References to the director and the expected reactions of the audience

Example of an Level 2 Merit paragraph:

Music combines with visual effects on many occasions as for example when the director shows the closeness between Michael and Rooney as they play the piano together. The music here is slow and peaceful which shows their closeness. In visuals this is accompanied by colours that are warm and lighting that is bright to further show that they are happy at this moment in time. High camera angles show the men side-by-side and we see them from Connor Rooney's perspective as he looks on enviously. Once the song has finished, the two men embrace and walk from the room, viewed from behind again from Connor Rooney's viewpoint. This emphasises the idea of jealousy as he resents not being as close to his father as Michael is.

Your own writing:

When the graphic novel *Road to Perdition* was written by Max Allan Collins, his agent saw potential in the story as a film adaptation and showed it to a film agent. By 1999, the novel reached Dean Zanuck, who was the vice president of development at the company of his father, producer Richard D. Zanuck. The novel was sent to the elder Zanuck in Morocco, who was there producing *Rules of Engagement* (2000). The Zanucks agreed on the story's prospect and sent it to director-producer Steven Spielberg. Shortly afterward, Spielberg set up the project at his studio DreamWorks, though he did not pursue direction of the film due to his full slate.

Director Sam Mendes sought a new project after completing *American Beauty* (1999) and explored prospects including *A Beautiful Mind*, *K-PAX*, *The Shipping News*, and *The Lookout*. DreamWorks sent Mendes *Road to Perdition* as a prospect. Mendes was attracted to the story, considering it "narratively very simple, but thematically very complex". One theme that he saw in the story was of the parents' world that is inaccessible to their children. Mendes considered the story's theme to be about how children deal with violence, and whether exposure to violence would render children violent themselves. Mendes described the script to have "no moral absolutes", a factor that appealed to the director.

Writing

When Spielberg set up *Road to Perdition* at DreamWorks, he contacted screenwriter David Self to adapt the graphic novel *Road to Perdition* by Max Allan Collins into a feature film. Self wrote an initial draft that remained close to the source material and retained most of its dialogue. The screenplay was rewritten by uncredited writers, distancing the script from the graphic novel and leaving the core elements of the story. Director Sam Mendes, who described the graphic novel as "much more pulpy", sought to reduce the graphic novel's background to its essence, seeking the "nonverbal simplicity" of films like *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), and films by Akira Kurosawa that lacked dialogue. Duplicate language in characters' confrontations in *Road to Perdition* was trimmed to the absolute minimum. Mendes described *Road to Perdition* as a "poetic, elegiac story, in which the pictures tell the story". An unspoken scene in the film was the piano duet with Hanks and Newman's characters, intended to convey their relationship without words. In the final 20 minutes of *Road to Perdition*, the script was written to have only six lines of dialogue.

Hanks and cinematographer Conrad Hall, who abhorred violence, requested to Mendes that violence in the film would be meaningful and not gratuitous. The violence of early drafts was minimized as the script became more streamlined. Hanks' character, Michael Sullivan, was known as "The Angel" in the graphic novel and invoked fear in those around him, but his infamy is downplayed in the film. In the novel, he was also an alcoholic, an element which was removed in the adaptation. An addition made to the script was one of the film's antagonists, portrayed by Jude Law, to provide a chase element to the Sullivans' departure from the old world.

The author of *Perdition* graphic novel, Max Allan Collins, originally desired to write the adapted screenplay for the feature film, but was not given the opportunity. He chose to stay out of the scripting process in respect to the different style of writing for a different medium, though he served a consultant in the process. Collins praised the addition of Jude Law's character and considered the minimalist use of dialogue to be appropriate. The author also applauded the film's version of Mr. Rooney as "more overtly a father figure" to Sullivan. The author opposed the reduction of profanity in the script, believing that the vulgar language was appropriate for the era. He also contested the path of Sullivan's son in the film. In the graphic novel, the son kills once, and in the film, he does not kill anyone. Collins also disagreed with the narration technique of the film. In the novel, the son narrates the story as an adult, becoming a priest, while in the film, he narrates while still a young boy.

Filming

Prior to filming, director Sam Mendes sought to produce a period film that would avoid clichés in the gangster genre. Mendes chose to film *Road to Perdition* on location in Chicago and the nearby town of Pullman. The Armory, the state's largest location mainstay which houses the Illinois State National Guard, was provided to the studio by the Illinois State Film Commission. Sets were built inside the Armory, including interiors of the Sullivan family's home and the Rooney mansion. The availability of an inside location provided the crew complete control over the lighting environment, which was established with the rigging of scaffoldings.

> "Atmospherically, the landscape is a violent and magnificent canvas on which is told a mythic story of a father and son in the last period of lawlessness in American history."
>
> — Sam Mendes

Mendes collaborated with costume designer Albert Wolsky, production designer Dennis Gassner, and cinematographer Conrad Hall to design the film's style. Wolsky designed costumes that were "very controlled, with soft outlines and very soft silhouettes". Gassner built sets that could capture a cold look of the era. Mendes sought a muted palette for the film, having dark backgrounds and sets with dark, muted greens and greys. Mendes filmed *Road to Perdition* using the Super 35 format.

The director filmed exterior scenes in Illinois in the winter and the spring of 2001, using real weather conditions such as snow, rain, and mud for the scenes. Mendes considered the usage of bleak weather conditions and the intended coldness of Gassner's exterior locations to define the characters' emotional states. Pullman became a key location to reflect this theme, having several settings, including the town's historic Florence Hotel, easily redressed by the crew for the film.[16] Filming concluded in June 2001.

Cinematography

Cinematographer Conrad L. Hall set up atmospheric lighting similar to that found in the paintings of Edward Hopper

To establish the lighting of scenes in *Road to Perdition*, director Sam Mendes drew from the paintings of Edward Hopper as a source of inspiration, particularly Hopper's *New York Movie* (1939). Mendes and cinematographer Conrad Hall sought to convey similar atmospheric lighting for the film's scenes, applying a "less is more" mantra. Hall also shot wide open scenes that retained one point in the depth of field sharply focused. Hall considered the technique to provide an emotional dimension to the scenes. The cinematographer also used unconventional techniques and materials to create unique lighting effects. One of Hall's methods was to use black silk in daylight exterior scenes to filter the light enough to create an in-shade look.

Hall purposely distanced the camera from Hanks' character, Michael Sullivan, at the beginning of the film to establish the perspective of Sullivan's son, who is unaware of his father's nature. Hanks' character was filmed as partially obscured and seen through doorways, and his entrances and exits took place in shadows. A wide lens was used to maintain a distance from the character.

Shots in the film were drawn directly from panels in the graphic novel *Road to Perdition*, illustrated by Richard Piers Rayner. An instance of the direct influence was the scene in which Michael Jr. looks up at the Chicago skyline from the vehicle, with the skyline reflected in the vehicle's glass.

A seamless 40-second driving scene in which Michael Sullivan and his son travel into Chicago from the countryside was aided by visual effects. The live-action part of the scene was filmed at LaSalle Street, and due to the lack of scenery for part of the drive down LaSalle Street, the background of Balbo Drive was included with the use of visual effects.

Themes

Consequence of violence

> "[What's] important, in this story, is what the violence does to the person who pulls the trigger, and what it has done to them over the years, how it has gradually corroded them. It has rotted their insides."
>
> — Sam Mendes

The film's title, *Road to Perdition*, is both the destination town of Michael Sullivan (Tom Hanks) and his son and also a euphemism for Hell, a road that Sullivan desires to keep his son from travelling. The character Sullivan, who chooses his violent path early on in life, considers himself irredeemable and seeks to save his son from a similar fate. Ask director Sam Mendes, "[Sullivan] is in a battle for the soul of his son. Can a man who has led a bad life achieve redemption through his child?" Hanks described his character as a man who achieved a comfortable status through violent means, of which he had ignored the likely repercussions. When Sullivan is faced with the consequences, Hanks says, "At the moment we're dropped into the story, it is literally the last day of that false perspective." To keep Hanks' character from justifying his violent actions in the film, Mendes left out scenes in the final cut that had Sullivan explaining to his son about his background.

In the film, most of the numerous acts of violence are committed off-screen. The acts of violence were also designed to be quick, reflecting the actual speed of violence in the real world. The focus was not on the direct victims of the perpetuated violence, but the impact of violence on the responsible person or witnesses to the act.

Fathers and sons

Road to Perdition also explores father-son relationships, not only between Michael Sullivan and his son, but between Sullivan and his boss, John Rooney. Sullivan simultaneously idolizes and fears Mr. Rooney, and Sullivan's son feels the same for his own father. Mr. Rooney's son, Connor, is a malicious man in comparison to Sullivan, and Mr. Rooney is conflicted on whom to protect: his real son or his surrogate son. Connor is jealous of his father's relationship with Michael Sullivan, which fuels his actions, ultimately causing a domino effect that drives the film.

Because Sullivan shields his background from his son, his attempt to preserve the father-son relationship is actually harmful. Tragedy takes place to bring Sullivan and his son together. Sullivan escapes from the old world with his son, and the boy finds opportunity to establish a stronger relationship with his father than before. Tyler Hoechlin, who portrayed the boy when he was 13 years old, explained, "His dad starts to realize that Michael is all he has now and how much he's been missing. I think the journey is of a father and son getting to know each other, and also finding out who they themselves are."

Water

> "The linking of water with death... speaks of the mutability of water and links it to the uncontrollability of fate. These are things that humans can't control."
>
> — Sam Mendes

Water served as a major thematic element in the film. The element was pursued after research for the wake at the beginning of the film informed the director that corpses were kept on ice to keep the body from decomposing. The notion was interwoven into the film, with the presence of water being linked to death.

Soundtrack/Score

Road to Perdition is a mood symphony, awash in bleak melancholy and beautifully sparse melodies. The overall impact is rather chilling, but when processed as whole, can be seen as a sad-but-warm underscore.

Track 6, "Murder in Four Parts", is a dark and dissonant rhapsody that explores the catalystic horrors of the film without forgiveness. It is followed immediately by the piece which captures the pensive nature of the film's journey, "Road to Chicago" (track 8), a piano-with-symphony composition that is trapped in an emotional void that is not anger nor sadness but tortured survival. The theme is reprised briefly in track 19, "Virgin Mary" and track 22 "Cathedral" (with choir), as well.

Track 10: The return of the infamous "out of tune" guitar! (also heard playing very quietly in track 4.) You can hear that there's a tune playing, though it's just "off"...which suggests something is psychologically wrong—"off"—with the image (or the character) on the screen. In Perdition, the guitar is back to underscore Jude Law's character, who is, most assuredly, psychologically "wrong".

Track 13, "The Farm" is the heart of the score, and the softest, most sentimental moment in the music, neither victorious nor defeated, but with hope--a restrained pastoral piano in classic mellow Thomas Newman fashion. This theme is later to be symphonically explored in track 26, "The Road to Perdition." Also noteworthy, a slightly humorous and insolent jaunt follows in track 14, "Dirty Money."

The source music here--not individually unpleasant, but sometimes interruptive—primarily serve to anchor the score in the 1930's, as with many cases of source music. Ending the album is an enigmatic-though-appropriate piano duet, performed on-screen by actors Tom Hanks and Paul Newman. Introduced by a brief smattering of applause, the duet on these black and white keys as played by the two characters who are emotionally bound to each other as a son to a father, is representative once again of the film's themes and symbolism, and is a beautiful closing to this album.

Quotes from *Road To Perdition*

Michael Sullivan: He murdered Annie and Peter!
John Rooney: There are only murderers in this room! Michael! Open your eyes! This is the life we chose, the life we lead. And there is only one guarantee: none of us will see heaven.
Michael Sullivan: Michael could.
John Rooney: Then do everything that you can to see that that happens.

[Maguire has pulled out a camera]
Michael Sullivan: Is that, uh... your profession or... your pleasure?
Maguire: Both, I guess. To be paid to do what you love... ain't that the dream?

Maguire: I shoot the dead. Dead bodies, that is. I don't kill them.

John Rooney: Natural law. Sons are put on this earth to trouble their fathers.

Michael Sullivan, Jr.: I saw then that my father's only fear was that his son would follow the same road. And that was the last time I ever held a gun. People always thought I grew up on a farm. And I guess, in a way, I did. But I lived a lifetime before that, in those 6 weeks on the road in the winter of 1931. When people ask me if Michael Sullivan was a good man, or if there was just no good in him at all, I always give the same answer. I just tell them... he was my father.

[after seeing his father kill someone]
Michael Sullivan, Jr.: Does Mama know?

Michael Sullivan: Your mother knows I love Mr. Rooney. When we had nothing, he gave us a home... a life... and we owe him.
What is happening in this scene and what does it tell the viewer about the characters and themes in the film?

[Talking to Michael Jr]
John Rooney: A man of honour always pays his debts... and keeps his word.

Michael Sullivan, Jr.: So when do I get my share of the money?
Michael Sullivan: Well... how much do you want?
Michael Sullivan, Jr.: Two hundred dollars.
Michael Sullivan: Okay. Deal.
[Michael Jr. stops eating and thinks for awhile]
Michael Sullivan, Jr.: Could I have had more?
Michael Sullivan: You'll never know.

[Sullivan is teaching his son how to drive]
Michael Sullivan: Look out for the tractor, Mike. Michael... look out for the tractor. You're coming up now. Watch out for the tractor. Watch out for the tractor! Watch out for the tractor!
[Sullivan, Jr. swerves to avoid the tractor in the nick of time]
Michael Sullivan, Jr.: We made it!
Michael Sullivan: [sarcastically] Oh, yeah, yeah. We made it.

John Rooney: I'm glad it's you.

Finn McGovern: [to John Rooney] You rule this town as God rules the Earth.

Assessment Report 2010 – Level 2 Visual Text

The following comments were made by the national moderator for English based on the exam responses from 2010. The bullet-points outline what the examiners decide make the difference between the grade boundaries – they will be helpful in letting you know what you need to do in order to achieve the grade you want.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH EXCELLENCE

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement with Merit, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Excellence typically:

• addressed all aspects of the question appropriately to produce responses that showed a clear development of argument and idea
• analysed the relationship between the director and the audience
• linked relevant material from beyond the texts appropriately
• interwove filmic or technical language and quotations effectively in essays
• showed insight, perception and high level thinking
• whether succinct or long-winded, offered an answer which showed real understanding of crafting, manipulation and the director's purpose
• sometimes demonstrated an original in point of view.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Merit typically:

• used appropriate filmic/technical language in their essays
• had a thorough understanding and knowledge of the text
• structured their responses fluently
• used evidence and explained its significance
• demonstrated awareness of the crafting behind the text
• showed flexibility in their approach, so that they could respond to the question chosen.

ACHIEVEMENT

Candidates who were awarded Achievement for this standard demonstrated the required skills and knowledge. They typically:

• provided straight-forward analysis
• focused on the question
• structured their answer appropriately
• showed understanding of film techniques
• made some specific references to the film by using details and quotations
• used keywords from the question.

NOT ACHIEVED

Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved for this standard lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement. They typically:

• retold plot without addressing the question
• gave little or no supporting evidence
• made simplistic statements
• added an analytical statement on at the end of the essay
• did not write enough
• wrote a prepared essay which did not address the question
• gave generalised techniques and details to support their ideas
• did not use appropriate film terminology or technical terminology.

Past-Paper Exam Questions – Level 2 Visual Text

2010 Examination:

1. Analyse how particular **techniques** are used to encourage the viewer to form **a positive or negative view of a character** in a visual text you have studied.

2. Analyse how **visual techniques and sound or verbal techniques** are combined to manipulate **viewer response** in a visual text you have studied.

3. Analyse how **mood or atmosphere in a setting** is created for a particular purpose in a visual text you have studied.

4. Analyse how **time** is manipulated for a particular purpose in a visual text you have studied.

5. Analyse how **visual techniques** are used to develop deeper **ideas** in a visual text you have studied.

6. Analyse how particular **techniques** are used to challenge **society's ideas or beliefs** in a visual text you have studied.

2009 Examination:

1. In visual texts, characters are developed through aspects such as set, props, positioning and movement of actors, costume / make-up, framing, lighting, camera techniques, and sound. Analyse how **a character is developed** in a visual text you have studied.

2. In visual texts, editing decisions about aspects such as camera shots and techniques, sequencing, and sound are significant both within scenes and at the points where scenes change. Analyse how **editing decisions and techniques create impact** in a visual text you have studied.

3. The beginning and ending scenes of a visual text are significant to the development of ideas in the text as a whole. Analyse how the **beginning and ending scenes work together** to develop one or more **ideas** in a visual text you have studied.

4. The structure of a visual text is often arranged for effect. Analyse how the story is **arranged** in a visual text you have studied, and explore how this creates **impact**.

5. Visual texts often use the conventions of genre to amuse the audience, create a mood, or develop an idea. Analyse how the director of a visual text you have studied uses the **conventions of one or more genres** to create particular **effects**.

6. In visual texts, mood can be created through aspects such as colour, shading, lighting, line, proportion, shape, costume, symbols, genre, camera techniques, and soundtrack. Analyse how **mood** is created in a visual text you have studied.

2008 Examination:

1. Analyse how **techniques** were used to create a strong impression of at least ONE **character or individual**.

2. Analyse how the presentation of at least ONE **setting** helped develop an **important theme**.

3. Analyse how BOTH **internal and external conflict** were **important** to the text as a whole. *Note: "internal conflict" means conflict within a character, and "external conflict" means conflict between a character and other individual(s) or group(s).*

4. Analyse how **techniques** were used to create impact in ONE **important section**.

5. Analyse how the text **influenced the audience** to think differently about an **idea or issue**.

6. Analyse how the text is **typical** of its **genre**.
Note: "genre" might include science fiction, romance, drama, documentary, political speech, etc.

Assessment Schedule 2010 – Level 2 Visual Text

Below is the mark scheme / assessment schedule that the examiners use to grade your essay in the end of year exam. Read the descriptors and assess your own work.

Achievement	**Achievement with Merit**	**Achievement with Excellence**
Shows familiarity with, and some understanding of, the text.	Demonstrates a convincing understanding of the text.	Demonstrates insight in understanding of the text.
Develops some relevant ideas about the text.	Develops convincing ideas about the text.	Shows insight in the development of an argument / interpretation.
Shows some understanding of the writer's / director's purpose in creating or shaping the text using particular techniques.	Conveys a convincing sense of the writer's / director's purpose in creating or shaping the text using particular techniques.	Demonstrates insight and appreciation in discussion of writer's / director's purpose in creating or shaping the text using particular techniques.
Shows some awareness of the context of the text.	Shows a convincing grasp of the context of the text.	Succinctly embeds analysis and ideas about the writer's / director's wider society, including historical and social context, into the answer.
Shows some evidence of engagement with the text.	Shows convincing engagement with the text, which may – as appropriate to the question – move beyond the text in the analysis.	Shows insight in engagement with the text, and may make links to contexts outside of the text (which are carefully and appropriately tied back to the question).
Shows some understanding of an aspect of the text.	Shows convincing understanding of a particular aspect of the text.	Shows insight in demonstration of how an aspect of the text relates to the wider text.
	Makes some connections between aspects of the text.	Makes insightful links between aspects of the text.
Uses language suited to analysis.	Is articulate and shows some originality of expression.	Demonstrates a wide vocabulary in the compelling expression of ideas.
Uses terminology with some accuracy.	Uses terminology and discusses features of text confidently and accurately.	Uses terminology and discusses features of text insightfully to support the wider argument.
Uses the key words in the question to structure an answer.	Takes a broad view of the question.	Demonstrates an original or insightful approach to the question.
Writes in a mostly structured and focused manner, with most points addressing the question.	Writes a well-structured answer with: • a clear introduction • linked paragraphs which directly answer the question • a thoughtful conclusion.	Writes a cohesive, integrated answer.
Provides some appropriate quotations and evidence from the text.	Offers a range of appropriate evidence to support the main ideas.	Offers evidence insightfully to support the key argument.
Note: Points cited above as evidence are indicative and not exclusive.		

Excellence Exemplar Essay – Level 2 Visual Text

Analyse visual / oral techniques used to establish a strong first impression of the setting and how this first impression was important to the text as a whole.

"Road To Perdition", directed by Sam Mendes, follows the story of a father and son as they travel across America on the run from a relentless hitman. The film is set in 1930s America when the country was in the grip of the Great Depression. Prohibition was still the law of the land and gangsters like Al Capone were at the height of their power. The audience is thrust into this Underworld of crime as we follow the Sullivans on their journey to Perdition.

The film opens with a long shot of Michael Sullivan Junior as he looks over Michigan Lake. The lighting is overexposed to produce a 'dream-like', almost heavenly quality as Michael's voice-over introduces the main theme of the film – the relationship between father and son. As the camera zooms in on the back of Michael's head, we hear him state "People often ask whether Michael Sullivan (his father) was a good man". This immediately alerts the audience that his father is now dead due to the use of the past tense "was". We soon realise that all of the characters in the film are essentially ghosts as they have all been killed and the narrative is a flashback, and this introduction creates a strong sense of foreboding and a sinister atmosphere that carries throughout the film.

The opening sequence fades to black to indicate that the story has now travelled back in time and we are now introduced to another long-shot of Michael Junior cycling across a snow-scape. The snow visually creates an impression of cold and hard surroundings. This is symbolic of the tough upbringing that Michael is about to be subjected to after he witnesses a murder and as he tries to come to terms with the resulting murders of his mother and younger brother. Special Effects coordinator Allen Hall and his crew had to fabricate "several football fields" worth of fake snow in order to create this wintry landscape and give a strong impression of the bleak conditions in Midwest America. The bleak setting once again reiterates the hard and tough world of organised crime that Michael has been thrown into.

The scene cuts to a shot of Michael Junior cycling through the streets of Illinois as he passes lots of factories, men leaving work and old-fashioned cars. This again indicates to the audience that the setting of the film is in an industrialised era which is associated with poverty and hardship. We realise that Michael's upbringing is going to be tough, but it still doesn't prepare us for the extent of adversity that he will have to face.

As the camera pans from right to left we see Michael arrive at his home. As the actor playing Michael Sullivan Senior (Tom Hanks) says, "it's one of the bigger houses in town… And it's been paid for with fear, intimidation, violence and blood". This causes the audience to question how they can afford to live in the biggest house on the block and we are soon shown how – he is a "Gangster" he collects money for his boss and father figure, John Rooney.

As Michael Senior's car pulls up, we have a mid-shot of Michael Junior standing alone by a tree. The camera zooms out and we get a visual representation of the distance between father

and son. Due to an increased curiosity on the part of the son we find out that his father is involved in organised crime. We almost immediately cut to a close up of the father's hands dismantling a gun, viewed from the son's perspective. This introduces the theme of violence and murder and we later see Michael Junior's romantic ideas of his father's occupation shatter as he witnesses the murder of Finn McGovern. This revelation that his father is in fact a 'Hitman' throws Michael Junior's world into turmoil and instigates their perilous journey together.

The opening scene introduces us to the central character as he narrates the story of the "six weeks on the road" that he spent with his father. The harsh conditions created through special effects, the industrialised era represented through the factories, and the symbolism of the gun all create a strong first impression that we are in 1930s America in a time when life was tough and crime was rife.

Assessment Report 2010 – Level 3 Visual Text

The following comments were made by the national moderator for English based on the exam responses from 2010. The bullet-points outline what the examiners decide make the difference between the grade boundaries – they will be helpful in letting you know what you need to do in order to achieve the grade you want.

COMMENTARY

Most candidates generally wrote structured essays including the use of a conclusion. Some candidates appeared not to understand academic writing conventions such as referring to authors by their surnames and underlining or using inverted commas and capital letters for the titles of texts.

Stronger candidates made connections to wider aspects of the world beyond the text. Some candidates failed to articulate the relationship between the texts and their own lives, often stating the relationship was there without any evidence to support their answer.

Some potentially strong candidates were at times disadvantaged because they chose not to respond to the question being asked, opting instead to commit to a pre-prepared essay based on last year's questions.

Texts with deeper meanings and themes lent themselves to successful responses but they still need to be themes students can relate to and understand.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH EXCELLENCE

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement with Merit, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Excellence typically:

- demonstrated appreciation of the background or context to the film incorporating reflections on a director's body of work and on critic's responses
- integrated bountiful examples, and appropriate discussion of techniques
- were able to form judgments about the text, reflecting on what it said about the human condition
- provided a coherent and perceptive argument using sophisticated language and syntax
- explored the director's intention/s and how viewers are positioned as a result of the intention/s
- created a lucid, fluent, cohesive response to all aspects of the question
- presented insightful, judicious comments, judgments and reflective evaluations
- demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how viewers respond to film.

ACHIEVEMENT WITH MERIT

In addition to the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement, candidates who were awarded Achievement with Merit typically:

- wrote a convincing response
- answered the question, and supported their argument with apt details
- wove film techniques, references, and quotations through the response
- made relevant comments which indicated understanding of the film and the genre.
- provided appropriate personal response
- demonstrated convincing engagement with the text
- dealt with each highlighted aspect of the question and understood their relationship
- understood the director's intention in using various techniques
- included viewer response and positioning with some confidence
- took a clear stance and argued this throughout
- developed an often quite simple critical response with moments of insight.

ACHIEVEMENT

Candidates who were awarded Achievement for this standard demonstrated the required skills and knowledge. They typically:

- responded in a straightforward but focused way
- discussed at least two filmic techniques or at least two filmic conventions
- displayed some understanding of the director's intentions
- provided accurate supporting details
- provided a judicious personal response
- developed a critical response.

NOT ACHIEVED

Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved for this standard lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge required for the award of Achievement. They typically:

- did not address all parts of the question
- did not discuss film techniques or conventions
- wrote prepared essays which failed to respond to the topic
- provided limited detail or examples
- did not consider the viewer's position
- wrote short essays.

Past-Paper Exam Questions – Level 3 Visual Text

2010 Examination:

1. "Successful films present **characters** who are both **heroic and realistic**."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

2. "With film, it is the **acting and action** that enthrals – **ideas** are of lesser importance."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

3. "'Location, location, location!' The **setting** of a film is central to how viewers respond to it."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

2009 Examination:

1. "The best films allow viewers to reflect on **key ideas**."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

2. "The **creative vision of the director** is the most important factor in how a film is finally presented."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

3. "**Action and sensation** – nowadays these triumph at the expense of the development of **character and / or theme**."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

2008 Examination:

1. "Films are primarily concerned with the **issues** of **everyday people**."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

2. "The use of a range of **production techniques** can help a director to develop **characters**."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

3. "**Dramatic conflict** lies at the heart of a film."
To what extent do you agree with this view?
Respond to this question with close reference to one or more films you have studied.

Assessment Schedule 2010 – Level 3 Visual Text

Below is the mark scheme / assessment schedule that the examiners use to grade your essay in the end of year exam. Read the descriptors and assess your own work.

Achievement	**Achievement with Merit**	**Achievement with Excellence**
Develops a critical response to relevant text(s), demonstrated by: • a recognisable essay structure • satisfactory organisation but with stylistic inconsistencies	*Develops a critical response to relevant text(s), demonstrated by:* • a carefully structured essay	*Develops a critical response to relevant text(s), demonstrated by:* • a lucid essay with: -an introduction giving scope and focus -a range of accurate and relevant points (with accurate referencing) -a reasoned conclusion
• attention to, but possibly narrow interpretation of the question, possibly unbalanced and / or undeveloped (it will address the question) • a conventional response • straightforward, predictable conclusions and / or judgments • the ability to use writing conventions with control and accuracy	• answering the question; being clear in argument through developing a reasoned reader-response to the text in relation to the question • keeping to the question • maturity of expression and thinking • accurate use of academic writing conventions and style features, but may include some occasional irrelevancies and / or clumsiness	• taking a clear stance on the question and convincingly arguing this stance throughout • sophisticated understanding and wide-ranging discussion of the topic • coherent and balanced argument and judgement • accurate use of academic writing conventions
using supporting evidence, demonstrated by: • familiarity with the text(s) • engagement with the text(s) • some specific references to text(s) linked to discussion of the question • attempts to support points with appropriate evidence.	*using supporting evidence, demonstrated by:* • some accurate / comprehensive knowledge of text(s) • some accurate referencing • some apt detail in support of relevant points • some 'quote weaving' • some accurate use of terminology *and showing convincing understanding, demonstrated by:* • some maturity and perception • suggestion of inferences based on personal understanding and awareness of themes, craft and purpose, etc.	*integrating supporting evidence, demonstrated by:* • accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the text(s) • sustained, accurate referencing • generous and apt detail in support of relevant points • sustained 'quote weaving' • accurate use of terminology *and demonstrating perceptive critical response, shown by:* • maturity and insight in evaluating the text(s) in terms of the question • judicious personal response to the text(s) • moving beyond and / or across text(s) in evaluation • presentation of the candidate's own position as reader.

Note: Points cited above as evidence are indicative and not exclusive.

Additional Notes