

Australian History GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2002, most students addressed all sections of the paper. Many students wrote up to or exceeded the suggested word limits and the level of interest in and engagement with the subject, which has been increasingly present in recent years, was again evident in many papers.

Whereas in 2001 there was a decline in the ability of students to address questions specifically and provide relevant answers, this problem was less evident in 2002. While there is still room for improvement, there was a discernible increase in the number of answers that were clearly and strictly relevant. More students are using the words and concepts of the questions to frame their answers and fewer students are throwing away marks through answers that are not to the point.

Over the past two years, the strongest section of the paper has been Section B, but in 2002 many of the responses in this section were rather disappointing. Fewer students than usual actually **analysed** the given representations in any detail and there was more of a tendency to simply write all they knew about the overall topic.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Most students displayed a reasonable knowledge of the chosen contexts and there were some very strong answers which reflected a sound knowledge of the material and a well developed ability to think about and discuss the issues. Relevance was better than in 2001, with the best answers clearly addressing the particular questions asked and excluding superfluous detail or ideas. More students are beginning with and continuing to use the words of the question and this assists them to remain on track. Nevertheless, there were still too many answers that simply gave an account of the event or debate, or that provided the answer to a previously asked question.

Students are getting better at identifying the group, event and debate at the start of the response, and there were generally tighter definitions of the chosen contexts. The most popular contexts for Question 1 were the two world wars and the Great Depression. Groups studied included women, children, soldiers, unemployed city and country people, business people. For Question 2 most students wrote on the immigration debate, the communist bill, Vietnam (involvement or conscription), the dismissal or the land rights debate. All of these contexts worked well.

Question 1

a.

What factors influenced the reaction of one or more groups to the major event you have studied from the period 1901–1914?

The central idea in this question was the influence on the **reaction** of groups to the event. The most successful answers were able to identify a variety of factors (age, gender, economic status, occupation, place of dwelling) and to address the specific question of how they affected people's reactions or responses – what people actually did, what decisions they made, what they chose to put up with. More successful answers showed a detailed knowledge of the groups and events. Mediocre answers showed a fair knowledge of the group and event but tended to interpret the question as 'what was the impact of the event on the group'. Less successful responses merely gave a sketchy account of the event/group and made little attempt to address the question.

b.

Why is it that a major event can dramatically change some lives while it barely affects others?

This question focused on the differing effects of an event on different people and groups. It required students to recognise the range and complexity of impacts of the same event. The most successful responses dealt with two or three groups or sections of groups and were able to explain why they were affected differently. On the Depression, for example, students who had a good knowledge of relative unemployment in different occupations or different suburbs were able to show why a bricklayer living in Collingwood was at greater risk of poverty than a bank teller living in Ormond. Students writing about women in WW II, could show how different family circumstances shaped the impact of war for different women. Less successful responses just talked in general terms about the impact of the event and made little reference to differences.

c.

What insights into an event can be gained by examining representations produced at the time of the event? How reliable are these insights?

Very few students attempted this question but among those who did, there were some very good responses. The most successful answers dealt with two or three representations (written and/or visual) and referred specifically to details, views, attitudes and values which added to their understanding of the event. On war, for example, students who examined recruiting posters were able to draw conclusions about the way that patriotism, duty and fear of the enemy were exploited to get men (and women) to enlist.

On the second question, most suggested that these insights were reliable because they were from the period of the event but a few recognised that there are some problems with this type of evidence. The most successful answers looked for some support from later research to back up the insights contained in representations from the time.

Question 2

a.

Do you agree that significant debates and divisions are never fully resolved?

This was tackled by a small number of students and the responses were of varying quality. The degree to which students agreed with the question varied according to the context. Some excellent answers on immigration agreed that the debate was ongoing while many of those writing on the communist bill tended to suggest that it had been resolved. Some very good responses neither agreed nor disagreed, pointing to aspects that had been resolved (e.g. conscription) and to others that lingered (e.g. post Vietnam trauma).

b.

To what extent was fear a significant factor in the debate or division you have studied?

This was by far the most popular question in this section and it produced some excellent answers. Most responses addressed the question specifically and remained relevant – many continuing to use the word ‘fear’ throughout the answer. Many students accepted the question and wrote about a variety of ways in which fear was a cause, a result or a defining factor in the way that the debate unfolded. They were able to provide detailed evidence to support their points. The most successful answers challenged the quote to some degree, pointing out that fear was not the only factor in the debate and offering evidence of other significant factors such as economic benefit (immigration) or justice (land rights).

c.

How can our understanding of an issue be extended through the examination of representations produced at the time?

This was the least popular question in this section but it was generally well done. Some excellent answers really tackled the notion of ‘extended’ and referred to aspects of the debate, issues, people, attitudes and values that were illustrated by representations from the time. Less successful answers simply described one or two representations without explaining how they enhanced understanding of the event.

Section B

In the past two years, this section has been handled well by most students; however, in 2002 there were some disappointing responses, especially to the first question. The required skills of analysis of written and visual material were less evident than in the past. It is suggested that teachers and students read carefully the instructions for tackling Section B, published by VCAA in 2000 in order to refocus their skills for addressing this part of the paper. The appropriate section is included here, for reference:

In preparing students to deal with Section B, teachers should look very closely at:

The preamble to Unit 3 Outcome 2, From colony to nation 1850–1901, the bullet points, and the key knowledge and skills.

Note that teachers have to choose only one of the eight suggested topics on page 111 of the study design – ONE representation will be offered on each of the eight topics.

The representations offered may be in the form of written documents, cartoons paintings or sketches, so students should be prepared to respond to all forms of representations. All representations offered were originally produced in the period 1850–1901.

Teachers should also look at the two instructions given in the preamble to Section B on the examination paper.

Identification of the ideas and values reflected in the representation.

This requires students to examine the representation and comment on what the representation suggests about the trend or event **or** on what it suggests about the ideas and values of the producer of the representation, **or both**. A comment on the context of the representation could also be appropriate here.

The student may also explain how the representation adds to their knowledge or understanding of the trend or event **or** expand upon one or more of the ideas or details contained in the representation. The student could also speculate on the motivation of the producer of the representation **or** the purpose and impact of the representation. Essentially, this part of the response should concentrate on an analysis of the representation itself.

Evaluation of the degree to which the representation reflects the prevailing events, ideas and values related to the trend, movement or event you have studied.

This requires students to look at the representation in the wider context of the topic. Students should be able to comment on ways in which the aspects of the topic reflected in the representation are similar to, or different from, other aspects of the topic.

They may argue that the representation does reflect the prevailing ideas etc, and support this argument by providing evidence from other representations reflecting similar ideas etc. **or** they may argue that the representation reflects only one side or aspect of the topic and support this argument by providing evidence from representations that reflect different aspects, ideas, values etc. Essentially, this part of the response should concentrate on comparing the representation with others reflecting similar or different aspects of the topic.

Note: The two parts of the response should be given roughly equal time and space. The two parts may be dealt with separately, or they may be integrated into a total response.

A. Gold Rushes

This was by far the most popular topic in this section. It dealt with the issues of the licence system and of goldfields unrest and most students displayed a good knowledge of the subject matter. The most successful answers looked at the wording of the petition and drew conclusions about its purpose and underlying values. They picked up the egalitarian nature of the petition and the references to liberty and a few commented on the significance of its appearance in the Melbourne Herald. Some set the petition in the context of the build-up of goldfields unrest (some mentioned the Red Ribbon movement), others picked up issues about the purpose of the licence system and the way that the money was spent (or not spent). In the second part, some went on to discuss other representations and evidence relating to the licences or goldfields unrest, many relating the petition to Eureka. Others focused on other aspects of gold including success and failure, the emergence of democratic ideas and the social impact of the gold era. Less successful responses simply made a brief reference to the petition and then moved into a 'tell all you know' answer on the gold period.

B. Cultural expressions of national identity

This was a reasonably popular choice and was handled well by many students. The most successful answers identified the various threads of national identity present in this song – commenting on the elements of youth, natural richness, promise for the future, history, British identity and ethnocentrism and saw the song in the context of the rather tangled loyalties of late nineteenth-century Australians. In part two, some responses made references to other examples of the various elements mentioned above – Australian identity (e.g. the bush writers and the Heidelberg painters), British identity (e.g. buildings, schools, imperial wars) and suspicion of foreigners. Most agreed that this representation did reflect prevailing ideas and values to some degree and were able to support this.

C. Environmental impact of settlement

This was not a popular choice and the quality of responses was mixed. The most successful answers recognised that there were two views of the environment expressed here – the author was saying that some see the Australian environment as strange and harsh but those who have lived in the bush for some time can recognise the beauty. They were able to give other evidence of this slightly contradictory approach to the Australian landscape. Less successful responses simply picked up words like 'strange scribblings' and 'land of monstrosities' and suggested that the whole piece was a lament about Australian ugliness. In the second part, more successful responses offered other evidence of this gradual adjustment to the landscape suggesting that this change in attitude through familiarisation was fairly common. They also offered evidence of changes that people made to allow them to live and work in the bush. Some also provided examples of people who failed to adjust or to ever find any beauty in the bush.

D. Capital and Labour relations

Very few students attempted this representation. Those who did examined the report carefully, noting the context for the meeting and explaining something of the exploitation suffered by female factory workers. Some commented on the fact that most of the talking at the meeting was done by men and that the use of the term 'girls' could be seen as patronising. A few also suggested that the Trades Hall was providing more support for the striking women than it would for men. In the second part, some students noted similarities and differences with other unionists and strikers (male and female) and others spoke in more general terms about attitudes to workers. Most suggested that the enthusiasm for a union of female workers, reflected in this report was relatively unusual for the time and did not echo prevailing attitudes and values.

E. Urbanisation

This was a fairly popular topic and it generated some very competent responses. Most students were able to set the advertisement in context, explaining the break up of large estates, the suburban sprawl, the tendency to work in the city and live further out and the popularity of land sales. Some also picked up features of the poster – the snobbish appeal of the words 'very cream ...' and the large letters alerting buyers to the proximity of the station. Some students were able to give other examples of suburban land sales and to see this as an integral feature of urbanisation in the 1880s. A few made reference to the terms of sale and saw this as an example of the plunge into debt that characterised the late 1880s. In the second part, students made reference to a range of other aspects of urbanisation including the grand buildings and boulevards of the inner city, the upper class suburbs of East Melbourne and East St Kilda and the slum suburbs such as Collingwood.

F. Federation

This was the second most popular topic and it produced some very good answers. Most picked up the central point which was to allay any fears that NSW would lose any power or influence through federation. Many were able to set the piece in context, noting that the people of NSW were not as enthusiastic about federation as those from some other colonies (especially Victoria) and therefore Parkes had a greater task to convince them. There were also many references to Parkes as the father of federation and to his Tenterfield address. His tone of confidence in the nation that would be created by federation was also identified by a number of students as was the enthusiastic response which his words drew from the audience. In part two, many referred to other arguments for federation and representations showing support for union. A smaller number also identified people, speeches, arguments and cartoons which offered an alternative view and opposed federation.

G. Aborigines and government policy

This was not a popular choice but it was handled well by most who tackled it. Students picked up the many indications in the picture that Aborigines were being forced into a European way of life (e.g. dress, buildings, cricket, cleared land) and were able to see these features as evidence of the policies of the Protection Boards. A few also commented that a photo like this could be used as proof that the indigenous people 'were well looked after and happy'. Some made reference to other manifestations and outcomes of protectionist policies and gave examples of other ways in which Aborigines (particularly half caste people) were treated. In part two, most suggested that this happy and harmonious scene was not typical and referred to policies and situations where Aborigines were exploited or mistreated.

H. Women's suffrage

This was not chosen by many students. Most responses identified the arguments put against giving votes to women and some also commented on the tone and language used. They referred to the very patronising tone and to the fact that these views echoed many sentiments in the society of the time – even among other women. More successful answers were able to quote other examples of these sentiments as well as the views of those supporting women's suffrage. Most suggested that these views did reflect prevailing attitudes but were able to offer examples or evidence of those women (and even men) who did support, and finally won, votes for women.

Section C

In the essay answers in Section C, it was evident that more students were making a determined effort to answer the question than in recent years. Most students identified the colony early in the response and many used the actual words contained in the question at various times through the essay.

As in previous years, the most popular question was the one that focused on Aborigines. Although a number of students tackled the question relating to immigrants, very few responded to the question on the development of colonial society. It is a matter of some concern that many teachers seem to focus exclusively on the impact of European contact and colonisation on Aboriginal communities, with the result that students do not understand the experience of the Aborigines against the background of developing and expanding colonial societies. An understanding of the nature of colonial society in the chosen colony is an essential part of this area of study. The preamble identifies economic, cultural, social and political changes over the colonial period as areas for examination. Only a small number of students displayed any recognition of developments and changes in policies, attitudes or actions over the duration of the colonial period.

The response to Historians/Sources (Criterion 15) is still disappointing. Whilst there were some excellent responses which addressed this throughout the essay, many students whose answers were otherwise very competent threw away marks because they failed to address the matter at all. Teachers and students are reminded that an awareness of the sources of their historical knowledge and ideas is an integral part of the study of history and is an important criterion in all three VCE histories.

Question 4

'The unambitious stayed at home. Those who came to Australia arrived with hope in their hearts and skills in their baggage.'

Comment on this statement in relation to the people who came to the colony, district or settlement that you have studied.

This question was attempted by a reasonable number of students and it generated some very strong responses. Most students wrote about Port Phillip. The most successful answers tackled the three concepts mentioned in the question – ambition, hope and skill and they were able to discuss and provide evidence to support or challenge each concept. Many agreed with the quotation and discussed the ways in which the ambitions were attracted to the colonies, the expectations that they had (often giving evidence from emigration posters or letters from settlers) and the skills and attributes that they employed once they arrived.

Some accepted the quote in part but suggested that immigrants may have had ambition and hope but little skill; others commented on convicts who succeeded through skill even though they had not arrived with hope.

The most successful answers were able to support the points they made with evidence from actual settlers. The Henty brothers, John Batman, Katherine Kirkland, Georgiana McCrae and Edward Curr were all mentioned frequently, but there were few references to urban dwellers. There would have been scope for students to write about those who displayed skills in building, town planning, tanning, food processing and brewing, quarrying and retailing in early Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide or Hobart but most focused only on the pastoral aspects of colonial life.

Very few responses, even those that were otherwise well done, addressed the issue of historians or sources.

Question 5

'We can really only guess at the reactions of Aboriginal people to the impact of colonisation.'

Discuss this statement in the light of representations of colonial society in the colony, district or settlement you have studied.

This was the most popular question and it produced some excellent responses. The most successful answers were those that did not accept the quote completely. They spoke of the difficulties presented by the fact that Aborigines had no

written language and little English and also of the fact that most representations from the time reflect a white European and male perspective. They were also able to support what they said with reference to specific representations.

These very strong responses then went on to challenge the quote, pointing out that certain insights into Aboriginal reactions can be gained from the examination of white sources, records of Aboriginal actions (e.g. attacks), records of the impact of colonisation such as those recording the declining birth rate, and the observations of sympathetic colonists. Moreover, some referred to the wide body of research and writing about the impact of colonisation on Aborigines that has been produced in the last 30 years. Because of the nature of this question, most students addressed Historian/Sources to some degree. The most successful answers addressed this throughout the response. Mediocre answers simply agreed with the quote and offered general observations as to the reasons. The least successful responses ignored the question and offered some simplistic ideas about the impact of colonisation on the Aborigines.

Question 6

‘As time passed, colonial societies became more complex and colonists began to demand a greater role in decisions affecting their future.’

This was a fairly straightforward question in the essay section and it was disappointing that it was attempted by so few students. It asked students to examine the ways in which the chosen colonial society grew, expanded and changed over the colonial period and then to comment on the impact of this on demands for a greater say in decision making. The question used words from the study design and covered material and concepts that should have been fundamental to the study of the chosen colonial society.

Successful responses made reference to such features of colonial development as geographical expansion, urban development, the social mix, cultural institutions and developing economies. They then went on to show the developing interest in self government either through the growth of political institutions (e.g. legislative council) or through movements such as the desire to separate Port Phillip from NSW. Some also referred to newspapers as ways through which some citizens showed their desire for a say in decision making.

As with Question 4, few responses, even those that were otherwise very strong, addressed Historian/Sources.