



2003

Australian History GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2003 examination reflected the continuing interest and enthusiasm that teachers and students of this subject have displayed over recent years. Although the number of students attempting the subject was down slightly on last year, a high level of engagement with the subject matter, ideas and themes of the study continued to characterise many responses.

There were some excellent papers which presented relevant, well thought out and well supported arguments in response to the questions and documents tackled. Such responses are testament to some outstanding work that is being done by teachers and students. There were also many solid papers that displayed sound knowledge and reflected an attempt to come to grips with some of the more complex ideas and concepts of the course. However, there were still students who presented with inadequate knowledge of the subject matter and did not address the specific questions asked or follow the instructions given.

In the 2002 Assessment Report, reference was made to some inadequacies in the way that students were tackling Section B. The 2003 responses reflected an improvement in this area; there was a much greater attempt by students to analyse the given documents. It was noticed, however, that responses in Sections A and C were less relevant than in 2002. Some answers clearly reflected knowledge and understanding but did not address the issue or angle suggested by the question. There was a slight increase in the number of students not completing all sections of the paper. Most students did attempt all parts, but there were some who completely ignored, or wrote only sketchy responses in Section B.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Responses to Section A generally displayed a sound knowledge of the subject matter and a reasonable attempt to address the specific questions asked. Most students identified the context that they were dealing with early in the response and the more successful answers continued to use the specific terms in the question throughout the response.

Most students dealt with both questions in this section and provided answers that met and often exceeded the word limit. The popular contexts for Question 1 included women and war and the experiences of the great depression. Question 2 responses covered a wider range of contexts including the Vietnam War, immigration, indigenous relations including the Mabo and Wik decisions, communism and the Whitlam dismissal.

Question 1

a

How important was a sense of duty in determining the way that people reacted to the event that you have studied?

This was the second most popular question in this section and it provided a springboard for some excellent answers, especially in relation to the depression and World War Two (WWII). The most successful answers did not accept the proposition completely, arguing that a sense of duty was important in determining reactions but that there were other influences as well. They were able to support points made with specific examples. In answers on WWII, many gave examples (from texts but also from interviews) of women entering the work force or the services in order to support the war effort. In depression answers, a number quoted stories of men actually escaping their duty by taking to the road or abandoning families.

Answers in the middle range tended to accept the idea that duty was the only influence on reactions and to support the argument with more general information. Less successful responses simply gave an account of the event and showed little evidence that they were addressing the question at all.

b

How useful as historical evidence are memories and observations of the event you have studied, if they are not recorded until decades after the event?

Answer with reference to representations relating to the people and event that you have studied?

This was the least popular of the three parts of Question 1, yet was a fairly straightforward question which addressed one of the key questions relating to historical evidence. As much of the source material available on the popular topics falls into the category of *'memories and observations ... not recorded until decades after the event'*, it is hoped that

students would have grappled with this question as they examined works such as those of Wendy Lowenstein and Patsy Adam Smith.

The most successful answers were able to identify the reservations and questions that the historian must have in accepting material recorded many years after the event, but also to acknowledge the value of such observations. Several outstanding responses actually talked about how these observations could be verified and what could be learnt about the event from the fact that it was recalled inaccurately.

A large number of responses to this question simply ignored the words '*not recorded until decades after the event*', and simply examined the value of memory and observation. Some addressed this question well but they were unable to achieve more than an average score on the relevance criterion. There were very few very weak answers to this question.

c

To what extent were traditional roles changed as a result of the major event that you have studied?

This was the most popular question in this section and it produced the full range of responses. The most successful responses took note of the words '*To what extent*' and recognised that all traditional roles did not change as a result of the major event. Some sophisticated and well thought out answers examined the concept of traditional roles and estimated the impact of the event on both the change and continuity of the positions of various people and/or groups. They were able to offer specific examples of ways in which roles changed and which remained constant. These more successful responses also often spoke of short- and long-term change, arguing that many of the changes were only temporary.

Many middle range responses completely agreed with the proposition and gave a general account of role change. A number, writing on the depression, completely disagreed with the idea of change and used evidence about the rich as proof that lives were unaltered. The least successful answers simply offered unconnected observations about the topic and people involved and made little or no attempt to address the question.

Question 2

a

Do representations of debates or divisions always offer solutions?

Answer with reference to written or visual representations of the debate or division you have studied.

This was the least popular of the three questions in this section. It asked students to examine representations of the debate or division studied and to estimate the extent to which they offered solutions. The most successful answers acknowledged that some representations (e.g. newspaper editorials in the lead up to the dismissal) do offer solutions or ways of resolving an issue, while others (e.g. some cartoons relating to Vietnam and conscription) merely offer comment, criticism or even ridicule. These high standard answers were able to offer detailed analysis of several representations in order to come to a conclusion about the question.

Middle range and weaker answers either focused on solutions to the debate without reference to representations, or referred to a few representations but made little or no links to the specific question asked.

b

To what extent were positions on a particular debate or division motivated by resistance to change?

Answer with reference to the debate or division you have studied.

This was a challenging question which elicited some very well thought out responses. Those who paid attention to the words '*To what extent*' were able to produce well balanced answers which acknowledged the role of resistance to change (e.g. in the reaction to immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in the 1950s) but which also dealt with other factors shaping views on a particular issue (e.g. fear of communist takeover in relation to Vietnam). Many students simply agreed that all positions were based on a resistance to change and some of these answers, if well supported with information were of a high standard. Less successful responses simply outlined the debate or division and offered little or no explanation for the various positions or views.

c

Why did the event, issue or campaign that you have studied cause such debate and division in Australian society?

This was by far the most popular question in this section. It was a straightforward question and produced some excellent responses, but many students did not really come to grips with the question of '*why*' the issue caused debate. A number simply gave an account of the debate, referred to different groups or sides and made some reference to whether (and how) the debate had been resolved. While they were able to score quite well on knowledge and understanding they could not do well on the relevance criterion.

Those who made a determined attempt to answer the question were able to refer to a range of reasons why the issue caused debate. For Vietnam, for example, they referred to uncertainty about the threat of communism, doubts about the way that Australia came to be involved, increasing opposition as a result of growing deaths and injuries, traditional opposition to conscription and the method of its implementation, the amount of information available through television and the activities of anti-war campaigners such as Jim Cairns.

Section B

Question 3

There was a slight improvement in the way that students tackled Section B. In 2002, there had been a tendency to ignore the first part of the task (analysis of the representation) and to focus on the overall topic. In 2003, there was evidence of students making a greater attempt to examine the set representation, comment on the ideas, themes and values reflected and suggest the techniques used to convey these ideas. In the second part of the task, most students were able to offer comments on the wider topic and some made excellent and perceptive links between the set representation and the overall trend or movement studied.

A. Gold Rushes

This was one of the two most popular choices in this section. The representation offered was a visual from ST Gill, showing the skeletal remains of a digger, with the caption 'unlucky miners that never returned.' Some took a literal approach to the graphic, suggesting various reasons for the miner's death but the most successful answers examined features of the picture which symbolised the hardship and ruthlessness of goldfields' life. In the second part, students explored a range of themes that either supported this harsh image of life on the goldfields, provided an alternative view, making reference to successful diggers and to examples of mutual support and mateship.

B. Cultural expressions of national identity

This newspaper extract at the time of the Sudanese War reflected three of the interrelated strands of late nineteenth-century national identity – pride in individual colonies, desire to show what Australia can achieve and loyalty to the British Empire. The most successful answers recognised these themes and pointed to words and phrases that reflected them. Some then went on to explain the context of the Sudanese war and to talk about how support for imperial wars was a way of showing loyalty to Britain (often with reference to the Boer War). Others showed different examples of imperial loyalty or provided evidence of other manifestations of national identity such as Australian art and literature and belief in white supremacy.

C. Environmental impact of settlement

This document was a parliamentary speech by Alfred Deakin in support of irrigation. Students analysing the representation commented on the evidence and statistics used to argue the case for irrigation and on the confident tone of the speech in which no possible negative consequences of irrigation were considered. Some referred to the fact that it was a parliamentary speech, thus it could be likely to focus on short-term consequences. Others saw it as a reflection of the values of the time, either in support of Australians adapting to the harsh, dry landscape, or in support of the desire to maximise yields and profits at all costs. Some also commented on the failure to consider the longer-term impact of irrigation. In the second part, some students suggested that these ideas were common, also giving examples of other ways in which the environment was manipulated or altered. Others focused on those who did not, or were not successful in adapting their farming practices to suit the Australian conditions, making reference to farmers who struggled without adequate water or with other problems natural to Australia.

D. Capital and labour relations

This cartoon which appeared in a labour magazine uses the symbolism of a vice to illustrate the way in which capitalism exploits the workers. There was much for students to comment on in the analysis. The most successful responses were able to comment on the demonic figure of capitalism, so much larger than the haunted figure of the worker gripping hunger with one hand as he uses the other to hold up the last remaining pillar. They also commented on the words 'competing employers' making links to the fallout from the 1890s depression and the subsequent strikes. Most saw the message of this cartoon as unreservedly pessimistic, but some noted that the trestles marked 'democracy' presented a hopeful sign. In the second part, most students provided further information and evidence of exploitation of workers during the 1890s. Many suggested that the treatment of workers suggested in this picture was typical but some also referred to the birth of the Labor party as a sign that workers were fighting back.

E. Urbanisation

This article from the *Herald* focused on one of the negative aspects of urbanisation, the ever present threat of disease, especially in the inner, industrial suburbs. It was one of the more popular representations in this section and produced some excellent answers. The most successful responses set the article in context by explaining how industrial areas with cheap housing and poor sanitation had grown rapidly in the 1860s and how (as the article suggested) the connection between dirt and disease was being recognised. There were also responses which picked up the suggestion that the government had the power to dismiss a poorly performing council. Some commented on the fear that if smallpox were to take a hold in Collingwood it could then spread into 'the more aristocratic dwellings of East Melbourne'. A perceptive few picked up an indication that working class lives were not so valued but then noted a contradiction in the last line. In the second part, most students offered evidence of other inner urban areas where conditions were squalid and disease was rife. They also offered contrasting images of the urban environment including the grand inner city buildings, the upper class mansions of East Melbourne and Toorak or the new middle-class outer suburbs such as Camberwell and Hawthorn.

F. Federation

This poem in support of Federation appeared in 1898 in the *Melbourne Argus*. It was among the more popular representations in this section and generated some very well thought out and well supported responses. Students recognised many of the features of pro-Federation arguments – appeals to peacefulness, British heritage, the beauty of the landscape, wealth, the bother of customs barriers. Some also commented on the tone of the poem with its many

emotive words and phrases (Brave, steadfast ...; For right and might ...), or they wrote about the place where it was published (noting that Victoria was a leader in the federation movement) and the audience to whom it was directed.

They then went on to indicate that, although this poem reflects some pro-federation arguments, there were others such as defence, transport links, a universal immigration policy and economic advantage. Some also commented on the fact that many people opposed or were indifferent to federation and gave evidence of these attitudes.

G. Aborigines and government policy

Only a small number of students attempted this representation; a few answered it very well but others missed the key points. This was an unusual document for the time, in that it reflected a very sympathetic and positive attitude to the indigenous people, yet it also implied that their days were numbered. Perceptive students picked up the implication of paternalism (with reference to instruction in Christianity as well as the provision of comforts and luxuries). Some obviously knew a little about Ann Bonn while others deduced from the information below the document that she was an exceptional woman, firstly in that she was a pastoralist and secondly in her attitudes to indigenous people. The second part produced references to other settlers or government policies that reflected similar views and to attitudes and actions that contradicted Ann's approach. They commented on government policies which also recognised the demise of full-blood Aborigines but were less concerned for their welfare. They also provided evidence of the displacement and mistreatment of Aborigines by settlers, and to negative government policies relating to mixed-blood people.

H. Women's suffrage

This leaflet supporting women's suffrage was tackled only by a small percentage of students but it produced a full range of responses. Students commented on the nature and tone of the language, the use of rhetorical questions, the appeal to justice, fairness and equality before the law and also the suggestion that votes for women would be advantageous to men as well. Some referred to the date of the leaflet and commented on the length of time that it took for votes to be won by women in Victoria. In the second part, there were several approaches. Some noted similarities to other arguments and campaign materials in favour of women's suffrage while others offered information about those (male and female) who opposed votes for women and explained some of the arguments and methods that they used. A few also made reference to other campaigns (such as temperance and protection against violence) that were related to the suffrage movement.

Section C

In the essay section, the Aboriginal question was the most popular, but there was an increase in the numbers that tackled Question 2 about the nature of the life that was constructed in the colonies. There were some improvement in the identification of the chosen colony but still too many wrote in general terms and only suggested the colony by implication or reference to people or incidents.

Relevance was something of a problem, especially in relation to Questions 5 and 6, and there were still weaknesses in the way that students addressed Criterion 15 (understanding of historical sources and/or historians' approaches). This criterion is central to the study of history and it should form part of the teaching on all aspects of this area of study. It was disappointing that the assessors, faced on occasions with otherwise outstanding answers, were unable to award the highest possible marks, because this criterion had been ignored.

Question 4

'The breakdown of Aboriginal societies was an accidental consequence of European contact.'

How far do you agree? Answer with reference to the colony, district or settlement that you have studied.

This was a very popular question and most responses made an attempt to develop relevant answers, addressing the issues of 'breakdown' and 'accidental'. Some accepted the quote but most challenged it to some degree, commenting on ignorance and disease as accidental factors but also mentioning violence, sexual exploitation of women and uncaring destruction of sources of food and survival. The more sophisticated responses explored the question of whether ignorance could be regarded as accidental. Sound responses supported the various points they made with specific evidence (quotes, figures, reference to particular incidents) and were able to comment on the sources of that evidence and its reliability.

More average responses still scored on Criterion 15 if they made reference to the difficulty of gaining accurate information on the breakdown of Aboriginal society because of the absence of written records and the possibility that certain information may have been omitted from white accounts from the period. Less successful responses simply outlined aspects of the breakdown of Aboriginal society with little reference to the set question.

Question 5

'Europeans who came to the colonies tried to construct what they saw as a better life than the one they had left behind.'

How far do you agree? Answer with reference to the colony, district or settlement that you have studied.

It was reassuring that more students than in past years tackled this question based on the nature of colonial society. Unfortunately, this question was not well handled as many students seem to have read the question as '*came wanting a better life*' rather than '*tried to construct ... a better life*'. They tended to focus on reasons for migration, push- and pull-

factors, rather than on the nature of the life that they were building once they arrived. The most successful answers were those that referred to physical patterns of life in the new colony (homesteads, towns, industries), social organisation (town life, sports, clubs, schools), economic and political institutions. Some students' writing about NSW suggested that convicts did not try to construct a better life, but found, once they gained their freedom, that life was better than the one they had left.

A few very well thought out answers challenged the quote and suggested that the immigrants simply tried to re-create the lives that they had left behind (not a better life) and some gave examples of those who were disappointed with the life they found and wanted to return.

The most successful answers supported their arguments with specific examples of immigrants and the lives they developed. Many used personal accounts from the period but not enough took the opportunity to comment on the value and reliability of these sources.

Question 6

'The nature of the society that developed in the colonies was shaped more by colonists' British origins than by the needs and conditions of life in Australia.'

How far do you agree? Answer with reference to the colony, district or settlement that you have studied.

This was the least popular of the three questions in this section. As with Question 5, a number of students focused on motives and expectations rather than on the nature of colonial society. The most successful responses examined the influence on colonial society of both British origins and Australian needs and conditions, offering a range of evidence (housing, clothing, social and cultural institutions, government, attitudes to indigenous people, environmental responses and industries such as the pastoral industry). Some of these strong answers also commented on the difficulty of discerning the real influences shaping colonial society. If these comments about difficulty were linked to sources they helped students to score well on Criterion 15.

Middle range responses tended to accept the statement and support it with general reference to the British influences on colonial life while the weakest answers ignored the question and just offered some observations on colonial life.

Those who addressed Criterion 15 well were able to integrate comments on sources, often comparing two pieces of evidence which appeared to be contradictory or reflecting on the fact that many 'ordinary' colonial voices were unheard. Many students ignored Criterion 15.

© VCAA 2003

Published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

41 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne 3002

Photocopying: This publication can only be photocopied for the use of students and teachers in Victorian Schools.

