

## Past IB HL Exam Questions

1 "It is impossible for literature to be completely objective." How, and to what extent, does this statement apply to **two** or **three** works you have studied?

"Memory feeds imagination." To what effect has memory been used in **two** or **three** works you have studied?

"It is the role of literature to challenge and confront the conventional values of a society." In what ways, and to what extent, have conventional values been challenged in **two** or **three** works you have studied?

Some writers present a world view that is pessimistic and disorderly, while others present a world of hope and possibility. How, and to what extent, do your writers reflect these views in **two** or **three** works you have studied?

Literature is often about crossing boundaries, both physically and mentally. In what ways, and to what extent, does the crossing of boundaries contribute to **two** or **three** works you have studied?

"The art of the storyteller is to hold the attention of the reader." With reference to **two** or **three** works you have studied, discuss ways in which the writers have employed techniques that hold your attention.

"Mirror or X-Ray or lamp?" Which of these terms do you think best describes the way writers in your study have represented the world? In each case examine how this effect is achieved, using **two** or **three** works you have studied.

Compare the ways that the treatment of time has been used to shape meaning in **two** or **three** works you have studied.

"Some authors prefer to write about 'the real world', while others prefer to be unhindered by the restrictions of reality." Discussing **two** or **three** works, show how the writer's preference helps convey the ideas of the works.

10 Evaluate the effectiveness of devices used to represent internal states of mind in **two** or **three** works of fiction you have studied.

"The real purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by satisfying the reader's love of the uncommon in human experience... but the uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters."

Discuss how far this 'recipe' for fiction – combining unusual events with recognizable characters – is relevant to **two** or **three** works you have studied.

In what ways and to what effect have writers in your study made use of illustrative elements such as anecdotes, analogies, allusions and the like in their works?

"A writer conveys not only experiences but a whole world in which these are possible." With respect to **two** or **three** works you have studied, discuss whether the author has created a coherent, imagined "world".

"Works of literature are often layered, and may require close attention to discover their depth and complexity." With respect to **two** or **three** of the works you have studied, show how valid this view is.

"Art is on the side of the oppressed." Evaluate the means by which **two** or **three** works in your study either confirm or raise questions about the validity of this assertion.

"The characters of a novel can only be individualised if they are set in a background of particularised time and place."

How important is the setting of a particular time and/or place to the development of the characters? Refer in detail to **at least two** novels or short stories.

"My own preference is for a story that is kaleidoscopic, with a number of different voices rather than one character speaking for the entire novel or short story." Focussing on single and/or multiple voices, discuss the effects of viewpoint in the **two** or **three** novels or short stories you have studied.

18 Writers make many deliberate choices in the course of creating their works. Considering one or two stylistic aspects, compare the

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"Some works of literature are universal and timeless; others seem specific to one place and/or time." In what ways do two or three works in your study explore this range of possibilities?

"Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait."

Focusing on **one** of these demands for the writing of fiction, show how it emerges as a significant factor in creating interest in two or three works you have studied.

Acquiring material wealth or rejecting its attractions has often been the base upon which writers have developed interesting plots. Compare the ways the writers of two or three works you have studied have developed such motivations.

"In the end is my beginning."

This is a statement made by an author to describe how he organizes his works. What do you understand by the sentence, and how does it cast light on the literary strategies employed in two or three works you have studied?

A writer may speak in his or her own voice or take on the voice of a character or persona. Comparing two or three works you have studied in the light of this statement, discuss what effects those choices have on each work as a whole.

If one of the roles of literature is to provide insight into human nature, by what techniques and to what degree did your texts offer you such insight? Discuss with reference to two or three works you have studied.

Using two or three of the works you have studied, discuss how and to what extent the writers have shown the pervasive influence of the past.

Symbols and/or motifs are an essential element of many novels and short stories. How have either or both of these devices been used and, in your opinion, how successfully, in two or three of the works you have studied?

How far, and in what ways, do writers present issues of self-awareness and/or self-deception in two or three novels or short stories you have studied?

Consider the use made of music or musical elements in any **two** or **three** works of literature you have studied.

Compare the ways in which writers have explored the relationship between experience and understanding. Refer in detail to any **two** or **three** works of literature in your study.

"In literature the concept of 'home' is often used to locate the thoughts, memories and dreams of humankind." In the light of this quotation, explore the ways in which "home" is used in any **two** or **three** works of literature you have studied.

"Some writers succeed in hypnotising the reader; others compel the reader to think." Compare and contrast **two** or **three** works of literature in your study in the light of this statement.

With close reference to **two** or **three** novels or short stories in your study, compare the ways in which writers have used narrative strategies and with what effect.

Compare the ways in which writers of **two** or **three** novels or short stories in your study have sought to make their portrayal of characters and/or situations credible.

Ambiguity has often been considered an enriching aspect of literature. Discuss what has been gained or lost by the inclusion of what you define as ambiguity in works you have studied.

"Language itself is a work of art; it selects, abstracts, exaggerates and orders." In what ways have writers in your study compelled you to support or question such a view?

"A writer cannot put literature and politics on an equal footing without failing as a writer." How far does writing you have studied confirm or question this view?

"The last sentence in a piece of writing is an adventure. It should open the work up." Choosing either the closing line or lines, or a final section of the text, discuss the likelihood of endings opening up a text.

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"My characters are contradictory, not only in their language but in their behaviour as well." Discuss the ways in which you see contradictions within individual characters as adding to the interest of fiction you have studied.

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<p>"There are three principal sources of interest in narratives (such as novels or short stories): suspense, mystery and irony." Discuss both the ways writers in your study have used <b>one</b> of these sources and the effect this feature has on the narratives.</p>
<p>In what ways does the concept "freedom of choice" inform your reading in any two or three works you have studied?</p>
<p>To what extent have you found it possible, in your consideration of literary works, to separate the individual from his or her public role? In your answer you should refer to any two or three works you have studied.</p>
<p>'Fact versus fantasy; this is a clash that can have comic or tragic results.'" Bearing this statement in mind explore the results of using realism and fantasy in any two or three works you have studied.</p>
<p>Compare how writers in your study have explored the themes of judgment and punishment, or disguise and deceit, or love and friendship, and with what effect.</p>
<p>"Not rounding off, but opening out." Comment upon the way the writers of the novel and short story deal with the ending in relation to the whole. In your answer you should refer to two or three novels or short stories you have studied.</p>
<p>To what extent would you agree that plot should be valued more highly than style in the novel and short story? In your answer you should refer to two or three novels or short stories you have studied.</p>
<p>To read work which was produced in a culture other than your own has difficulties, but differences between audience and text may be productive. How far do you agree?</p>
<p>Literature admits conflicts between good and good, as well as between good and evil. Which two or three works would you choose to discuss to illustrate this generalization, and why might both types of conflict be important?</p>
<p>Compare in some detail the use made of the cinema or techniques from the cinema in two or three works you have studied.</p>
<p>How far has your study of two or three works of literature suggested that the idea of the writer's "intention" is beset with difficulties or is a useful approach, or is both.</p>
<p>In novels and short stories, characters tend to have both an "inner life" and a "public life". Both of these may be part of the fiction, if not equally so in every work. Choose examples from your reading to discuss how and how effectively these two aspects of human existence are presented.</p>
<p>A story has to be told by somebody. Compare in detail your impressions of the "story-tellers" in two or three novels or short stories that you have studied. Was the "story-teller" the same as the writer (implicitly or explicitly) or not? How does this question influence your reading?</p>
<p>Discuss in what ways argument and persuasion are included in literary works you have studied. Compare their effects in the works you choose.</p>
<p>"The best lack all conviction/While the worst are full of passionate intensity". Consider works you have studied in the light of this statement.</p>
<p>"Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own." How far have you found that the enjoyment of satire or satirical elements in your reading arises from such a view?</p>
<p>To what extent, and with what effect, have works in your study incorporated either conflict and/or reconciliation between the values of science and those of art?</p>
<p>One writer speaks of preferring works "that are rigorously and symmetrically constructed, with a definite beginning and a definite end". How far have such features been important in the overall success of works you have studied?</p>
<p>"Traditionally, the hero somehow represents the community and carries with him its hopes and fears." Consider to what extent and with what effect this statement can be seen as a valid one for works you have studied.</p>
<p>"Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending." Discuss, comparing the validity of this proposal in works you have studied.</p>

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In what ways, and to what ends, have writers in your study combined opposing facets of human experience?
With specific reference to two or three works you have read, including drama if appropriate, compare the effects of an identified or unidentified narrative voice.
"Realism is as contrived a way of writing as any of the methods of writing against which it is defined." With specific reference to two or three works which you have read, say how far you would agree with this proposition.
Compare the subject matter and style of two or three works you have read, which highlight regional locality, saying in each case what is gained by this local focus.
"Reading against the grain is a phrase often used to describe reading that identifies but refuses to accept unspoken or implicit assumptions that lie deep within texts." In what ways could you read two or three texts against the grain and with what validity?
"Literature ends where propaganda begins." In what ways, and with what effects, is such a view true or untrue of works you have studied?
"There is a school of fiction which objects to the passing of moral judgment on anything or anybody." In the fiction you have studied, what evidence have you discovered that would lead you to either agree or disagree with the approach of this "school", and how would you compare the effects of either strategy?
Compare the openings of novels (and or short stories) which you have read, saying how these openings have drawn you into the fiction, and how a re—reading of them reflects the primary concerns of each work.
Novels and short stories often present the inner or private thoughts of the characters involved. Discuss how and to what effect novels (and or short stories) which you have read made use of such 'inner or private thoughts'.
Using the fiction you have studied, discuss the degree to which the writers have offered a strong image of the social setting, and estimate the importance a sense of social context has for the effect of the work.
Compare uses and/or abuses of power as a theme in the novels you have read. Say what this theme and its presentation contributes to each work you discuss.
Say what the title of some individual works you have studied indicated to you at the outset. In what ways were your first impressions reinforced or altered as you read and explored each work?
Comment on how a sense of place is established in novels which you have studied, and say what this contributes to each novel as a whole.
Discuss the part played by minor characters in novels which you have studied, indicating what you think are the effects of their presence.
'Conscious and unconscious motives, assisting and frustrating circumstances: this is the territory of the novel's action.' How have motives and circumstances figured in novels you have studied, and to what effect?
The scale of the novel has always allowed the novelist the fruitful use of time and history. How have novelists employed time and/or history to good effect in your chosen novels?
What is the importance of characters in novels? Illustrate your answer by choosing a main character from two novels you have studied, giving some idea in each case of how the writer constructed the character.
Some novels draw attention to the fact that they are inventions or constructions of the writers; others seek to conceal this artifice. Consider chosen novels in the light of this distinction, and say what the procedures adopted add to the effect of underlining or concealing the fictional status of the writing.
What do you find your chosen works say about the role in society played by women and men, and how have these works influenced your own ideas?
Personal convictions and shared beliefs, the private and the public life, sometimes seem at odds in the modern world. How did you find your chosen contemporary works touched on this conflict, and with what effects?

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<p>From your own experience, say how far it is possible to read with sympathy, novels by writers whose views of society are - whether because of the author's personal convictions or because of changes of time and circumstances - different from, or even directly opposed to, your own.</p>
<p>Consider the presentation in novels you have studied of justice and/or crime and the criminal, saying what contribution was made in each case to the novel as a whole.</p>
<p>'The novel has always been an international form, hard to contain within territorial boundaries. It has become increasingly a medium of global expression.' From your own reading of chosen novels, how far do you agree with this view of the novel?</p>
<p>Some readers perceive and enjoy a 'dialogue between the reader and the novelist' Have you found any such 'dialogue' in novels you have studied, and to what effect?</p>
<p>Consider how and to what effect contemporary works you studied have confronted and presented either race relations or relations between other groups or classes.</p>
<p>'A central concern of contemporary writing is the art of writing itself~ stories are often about narrative, fiction about imaginative creation, reporting about the reporter...' Discuss works you studied in the light of this statement, and go on to say how this affects the role of the reader.</p>
<p>'Money, money, money and what money makes of life': this famous statement of his subject by a novelist draws attention to an important element in many novels. Discuss the relationship between money, society and the individual in novels you have studied.</p>
<p>Consider the presence, or absence, of the novelist's explicit argument and judgments in novels you have studied: what were the benefits and drawbacks of the presentation in each case, and how was it carried out?</p>
<p>The novel is sometimes viewed as a powerful instrument by which to sharpen the reader's sense of vice or virtue. From your study of novels, would you agree that this statement by a novelist is an apt description of what engaged you in the reading of the works?</p>
<p>'Betrayal,' one novelist has written, 'means breaking ranks and going off into the unknown.' In what ways has the sense of betrayal functioned in the novels of your study to intensify the depth and interest of the plot?</p>
<p>One contemporary writer has said 'I am looking for new narratives to replace old ones.' From your reading of contemporary writing, what has struck you as truly new, both in the content of the writing and the means by which it is conveyed?</p>
<p>'In a world where the natural environment is subject to many threats, it may be that poets and writers feel an obligation as well as an impulse to speak in defence and celebration of the natural world.' In what ways have the writers in your study most effectively devoted their energies to such a task?</p>
<p>It is very difficult for the writer who is attentive to the characteristics of the society in which a novel is set to avoid the kind of critical comment on that society which involves an ironic view. In novels in your study, show how the author uses satire to sharpen the portrait of the society and to criticize it with heightened effect.</p>
<p>How can a novel written years before the present time have any use or relevance as a critique for people in modern society?</p>
<p>Examine the ways in which your novelists have chosen to present their characters' thought processes, making clear what you think each author's presentation contributes to the effect of the novel.</p>
<p>Discuss the interplay between setting and action as part of the meaning of the novels you have read.</p>
<p>Write an essay discussing, in the works you have studied, 'the particular insights which contemporary writing affords into the life it describes, or interprets, or even distorts' saying what part you think is played by description and/or interpretation and/or distortion.</p>
<p>Basing your answer on the works you have studied, say to what extent and in what ways you think contemporary writing takes as one of its themes either revolt against authoritarianism or the nature and effects of oppression. If you so wish, you may consider both themes.</p>
<p>Compare the ways in which, in the works you have studied, different novelists have raised awareness of social issues in their readers.</p>

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'Often enough the novelist favours certain characters, even waxing sentimental about them, and becomes annoyed with others, even feeling contemptuous of them: one way or another, the reader detects bias in the portrayal of the society.' How far have you found your chosen novelists to be biased or unbiased in their presentation of their characters and what has been the resulting effect in each novel?

"Nearly all novels are feeble at the end. . ." To what extent, and for what reasons, would you defend the works you have studied against this charge?

How far do you think that the way in which a writer chooses to tell a story gives indications of his/her attitude to the issues raised in the work? In your answer, refer to works by three authors.

Have the contemporary qualities or the regional qualities contributed most to the effect of the works you have studied?

What do you regard as the virtues of either fantasy or realism in two or three of the contemporary regional works with which you are acquainted?

Compare the part played by major characters with the part played by minor characters in two novels by different authors, saying why you think each writer has adopted that arrangement in that particular work.

How far has the presentation of the narratives you have studied departed from the chronological? Looking at two or three works, consider how appropriate the sequence of the narrative is to what each work is about.

"Preaching a social message can seem dull and off—putting to a reader." How far and by what means have the novelists you have read avoided this fate and made their works attractive to their readers?

"It soon becomes clear, from the episodes a novelist chooses to present in detail and from those he/she chooses to gloss over, what his/her attitude to society is." How far have you found this to be the case in the novels you have studied?

A writer of short stories has said that "if we examine some of the best stories of modern times in order to distinguish the essential and more valuable from the accidental and less valuable elements, we will find that the least essential element of all is the actual story or anecdote on which the tale hangs." In relation to this statement, what would you distinguish as "the essential and more valuable elements" in the stories you have studied? Give clear reasons for your view, supported by reference to the stories, whether from "modern times" or not.

One author of short stories, commenting on the work of another, writes "...when he describes a snow—storm or a summer's day, it is fitted, by its tone—value or by its sub—audible comment on the action, into the story." Compare the uses of description in three stories by different authors, saying how appropriately the description "is fitted...into the story."

What attitudes to traditional customs have you found in two or three of the works you have studied? Say what part has been assigned to such customs by the author in each of the works in question.

"Finding out who one is, defining one's own identity, has occupied a large part of the regional writer's time and energy." What forms has this search for identity taken in two or three of the works you have studied? How major a concern has it been for each writer?

"Some novelists invite the reader to experience the fictional world from inside the consciousness of one or more of the characters; other novelists remain omniscient. Neither method is better in itself: the sole concern is how well the narrative method fulfils the author's particular purposes." Discuss either or both of these kinds of narrative technique in relation to their appropriateness in two or three of the novels you have studied.

"A novel's setting, its home ground, very often plays a more active part in the plot than is at first apparent." How far do you think this remark applies to two or three of the novels you have studied?

What elements of protest—and against what—have you found in the novels you have read? How important a place in the narrative have the different authors given those elements?

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"Some of the most famous heroines represent what men desire in women, but not necessarily what women are in themselves." Write about the parts played by women in two or three novels, saying how convincing you have found the authors' portrayal of them.

From your own reading, would you agree that "Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society"? Discuss the authors' presentation of the characters in the stories you have read.

"Suggestion is everything and direct telling is employed as little as possible." What do you understand by the terms "suggestion" and "direct telling" in relation to the short story? Discuss the use your chosen authors have made of either or both of these approaches.

"Instead of the compelling heroic figure of traditional literature, the modern writer, less confident of the glorious possibilities of man, portrays a diminished figure, the antihero, an ordinary man with familiar experiences, seeking his own definitions and values. The hero may be portrayed as trapped by the web of routine, bound to his community as one more cog in a huge machine; or the isolated hero may be portrayed as outcast, stripped of his social position and his material property." Does this seem to you a fair summary of the heroes and heroines of the contemporary writing you have studied? Are there other "heroic" qualities that you would add in the light of the contemporary literature you have studied?

The following statement was written by a critic who praises an African novel written by Lenrie Peters on the grounds of its similarity to novels from other parts of the world: "That it is set in Africa appears to be incidental, for except for a few comments at the beginning, Peters' story might just as easily have taken place in the southern part of the United States or, say, in the southern regions of France or Italy. If a few names of characters were changed one would indeed feel that this was an American novel or a French or Italian novel. In short, Peters' story is universal." If you wanted to recommend the works of the region you studied, to what extent would you emphasize their "universal" themes rather than any qualities and preoccupations peculiar to that region?

"If human nature does alter it will be because individuals manage to look at themselves in a new way." By what means have the writers you have studied made us look at ourselves "in a new way"? You should refer to the work of two or three writers in your answer.

Discuss a range of ways in which some of the writers you have studied have moved away from realism.

"The modern author is greatly influenced by the movie camera reporting accurately all it sees. Through shifting points of view, he captures immediate experience, the fleeting impression. He has devised various means of arresting the flow of time, accelerating it or compressing it; like a camera, he may cut from one scene to another." Discuss in detail a range of ways in which the authors you have studied seek to convey a vivid impression of the world of the novel. Are there any important differences between the techniques of modern authors as opposed to those used by nineteenth-century writers to create a fictional world?

Here is the first paragraph of a novel written in the first person: "I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th 1947. And the time? The time matters too. Well then, at night. No it's important to be more .... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And outside the windows, fireworks and crowds. Now however time is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps. If my crumbling, overused body permits." Choose one type of narrator and describe, with detailed examples, the advantages to the writer of using this particular type of narrator.

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"In the newspapers and in everyday conversation about life a hero or a heroine is normally someone who has done something brave and outstanding - the guide who has rescued the party trapped in a blizzard in the mountains, the woman who outwitted the burglar, even the sportsman who saved his team from defeat. Traditionally the hero somehow represents the community and carries with him its hopes and fears. But in general the everyday journalistic use of heroic doesn't help us much to define the function or role of the hero in literature." Consider two or three of the heroes or heroines of the novels of social criticism that you have studied. Could they be said to represent to any degree the "everyday" kind of hero described in the passage above? Could they be said to embody other kinds of heroic qualities?

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The nineteenth-century novelist George Eliot wrote: "The only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the fact of being struggling erring human creatures. To what extent would you say that the aims George Eliot describes are reflected in the work of any of the writers you have studied? Discuss some of the different means by which the writers you have studied have tried to arouse their readers' reactions to the "pains and joys" of the "struggling human creatures" they describe

Symbols and images often play an important role in short stories. Describe the effect of such devices upon the reader in two or three of the short stories you have studied. Compare and contrast the different roles that such symbols or images play generally in the work of the short story writers you have studied.

The following quotation comes from the closing paragraphs of a nineteenth-century short story:  
"... At length the summer of 1832 drew to its close, and the pestilence raged no more among us. But my attendance upon the sick had introduced to my notice many cases of want. My sphere of duty was ample, nor has it ever lessened, and I still find my happiness in contributing to that of others.' She ceased; but her simple story had left its impression. I drew from it just her views of life and human responsibility. It has left me wiser, if not better, and so I trust it will leave my readers." Short stories are often concerned with a personal crisis-point or a sudden change of perspective on the part of a character. To what extent do you think this limits their power to move their readers' emotions or leave them "better and wiser"? You should compare and contrast the work of two or three writers of short stories in your answer.

Compare and contrast the presentation and function of minor characters in the plays you have studied. [Drama]

Discuss several of ways in which writers use contrast and comparison in the works studied. What different ends do they achieve by doing so?

"No man is a problem in himself, but society may become his problem." Discuss the extent to which you find this a helpful generalization about the works which you have studied.

Literature forces the reader or audience to work hard to grasp the writer's purpose and meaning. To what extent could this be said to be true in the works you have studied?

Is love more important a theme than friendship in the works you have studied?

What is the significance of the title of a work? Basing your answer on precise examples, discuss the role and importance of the title and how it is related to the work itself

Compare the unfolding of the narrative in the novels you have studied, illustrating the ways in which the reader's attention is engaged and directed.

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Examine the ways in which rebels, outsiders, or characters alienated in some other way from their society, have been presented in the works you have studied.