

OIB Essay Practice

2. Literature is not just for art's sake, but also a vital critical reflection of the spirit of its time. How do two literary works from your OIB program both reflect and challenge the spirit of the times in which they were written?

In their novels The Picture of Dorian Gray and Intimate Apparel, Oscar Wilde and Lynn Nottage both reflect the spirit of their generations, though challenge it through feelings of love and gender roles. Wilde uses an ambiguous morality, forcing the reader to reflect on how their vision changed throughout the story whilst Nottage has a clear and sweet message - can you be more specific?

Firstly, Oscar Wilde strongly demonstrates how his generation represented itself. The Victorian Era demanded a very proper and sophisticated way of living one's life, though people claimed to naturally be that way, which Wilde hated. In one of his epigrams from the novel, he states "being natural is simply a pose, and the most uninteresting pose I know". The author perceived these people as posers and hypocrites and helps the reader reflect

relations, helping us believe he might be trying to defy this societal construct that men can only love women. Additionally, the play Intimate Apparel also portrays an unconventional love story. Mr Marks and Esther grew feelings and a mutual attraction towards each other, yet they never act upon it. Mr Marks is a Romanian Jewish fabric seller who shares the same passion as Esther. Their relationship never grows due to tradition, regardless of what the heart desires, they let social and financial constraints keep them away from being with each other. In both cases studied here, a reader in the 21st century imagines the anguish and pain of having to deny their feelings for societal reasons.

Lastly, both works reevaluate gender roles in different ways. Wilde makes the subject of attraction to beauty solely men, and not women as we are more used to. Furthermore, the three men in the story are unhappy with the role they are forced to play to prove their masculinity. Lord Henry shows no concern for his wife and sees his marriage as a responsibility and an obligation. It is only to adhere to society's expectations, thus he develops a secret life which he uses to go against the confinements of society and to push the boundaries of gender roles. The author also brings up the subject of vanity and metrosexuality for the male characters, in such a

can you give specific examples/ proof of this?

upon this idea throughout the whole novel, with an ambiguous moral without direction. Nottage, on the other hand, has a much sweeter approach on morals in her novel, involving sensuality, intimacy and expression of feelings. Nevertheless, she equally reflects the spirit of her generation. She speaks on the

American dream and the sacrifices countless generations had to make for their future descendants. The Author decided to write her play about people who have been marginalised and have been erased from public record, by writing something simple and gentle, whilst still exposing the societal expectations of the early 20th century.

The theme of love, in both works, is subject to controversy, therefore challenging their society's expectations. In The Picture of Dorian Gray, Wilde creates an ambiguity in the feelings Hallward has toward Dorian Gray. In this quote "from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary power over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power, by you. I worshiped you. I grew jealous of everyone to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself.", Hallward confesses to Lord Henry his overwhelming sense of obsession toward Dorian. This could be hinting towards an ambiguous undertone of homosexuality. This idea was far from accepted at the time, yet we knew Oscar Wilde himself was known for his homosexual

way that makes the reader understand that it was all a part of the hedonistic lifestyle but the consequences of which were supposed to be swept under the rug. Yet we are clearly faced with the fatalities and conflicting feelings the characters are dealing with. Secondly, the characters in Lynn Nottage's play also defy the social constructs that were placed on women at the time. Esther is a fiercely independent woman who carved out a successful career on her own and stocked a lot of money away to fulfill her dream of one day opening a beauty parlor. She does not rely on a man's wealth to get by, contrarily to the American Dream's ideals of men gaining money and women staying at home. Furthermore, if she were to find a man, it would be someone she truly loves, not a simple bachelor to live a picture-perfect life. Mrs Van Bunen is also an example of this societal criticism, as despite her fine clothes and social connections, she is hopelessly alone in a loveless marriage.

To conclude, using love and gender roles as tools, Oscar Wilde and Lynn Nottage both reflect and challenge the spirit of their times. Their works, both ambiguously and clearly show the flaws in their societies' ideals. These ideas were revolutionary at the time, and remain knowledge for us today.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR OIB AMERICAN OPTION WRITTEN EXAMINATION: ESSAY

N.B. A short response may require assessment to be lowered.

Category	Below Level -0.5 or more at the discretion of the examiner	Level 0	Level 1 + 0.5	Level 2 + 1.0	Level 3 +1.5	Level 4 +2.0
Knowledge & Understanding	No true understanding or first-hand knowledge shown. Factual inaccuracies void argument.	Some understanding but superficial. Learned response replaces first-hand knowledge. Factual inaccuracies affect argument.	Satisfactory understanding and knowledge. Development may be limited with some inadvertent or minor factual inaccuracies.	Good overall understanding. Knowledge is full and developed.	Very good and thorough understanding, including some subtlety. Levels of meaning are apparent.	Excellent understanding, including some subtlety. Levels of meaning are apparent. Detailed and pertinent knowledge.
Response to the Question	Off-subject or no clear response discernible. Observation, commentary or opinion may be present but no attempt to form an argument.	Response is partial or muddled. Argument is directed at the question but may be confused or superficial.	A satisfactory response to the main implications of the question. Some aspects of the question may be ignored.	A good response. Argument addresses the question but may need more development.	A very good response. Argument is complete and well-targeted, and the question is well-understood.	An excellent response. Argument demonstrates original thought and addresses the question with clarity and depth.
Analysis & Depth <i>(Includes discussion of style at Level 2 and above)</i>	Plot summary or generalizations dominate. No successful attempt at analysis.	Plot summary or generalizations frequent. Little or unsuccessful analysis.	Inconsistent analysis that does not always address important elements. Analysis may be uneven or lacking in depth.	Good analysis that appropriately addresses important elements. Generally appropriate analysis of style illustrated by relevant examples.	Very good analysis. Thoughtful, pertinent analysis of style.	Excellent analysis and argumentation. Insightful, sophisticated and coherent analysis of style.
Organization of the Essay & Integration of Evidence	No logical sequence of ideas. Chronological confusion. Development is so inadequate that clarity is in danger of dissolving completely.	Weak or mechanical structure. Development is barely adequate and examples are either impertinent or lack clear connection to the argument.	Satisfactory structure and development. Sequence of ideas generally logical. Examples not always pertinent and integration may be awkward.	Good structure with some transitions. Sequence of ideas logical. Examples are generally pertinent and most often integrated appropriately.	Very good essay structure with solid transitions. Clear development throughout and good integration of supporting evidence.	Excellent essay structure with clear transitions. Carefully planned, persuasive development throughout. Sophisticated integration of supporting evidence.
Expression	Meaning often cannot be surmised. The essay is very difficult to read.	Prose can be read and its meaning surmised even if hampered by weak control (or French interference).	Prose conveys the writer's ideas adequately. Vocabulary is sufficient and notions of good English usage are evident if sometimes inconsistently applied.	Prose shows evidence of good writing skills. Lapses are minor and do not impede understanding. Some care is shown in word choice and register.	Prose is clear and coherent. A rare lapse does not mar ideas or flow. Effective use of vocabulary and register.	Prose is articulate, fluid, and displays an excellent command of written language. Sophisticated use of vocabulary and register.
Totals						