**“The past is not a package one can lay away.” (Emily Dickinson) Explore how far this statement is true for characters from two works you have studied in OIB.**

“The past is not a package one can lay away” said Emily Dickinson. The past is a series of events that happened and which usually makes us who we are and what we are going to be. They usually never leave one unchanged. The past is very important as it shapes the present and the future. It helps one to move forward and to see all they have achieved. It’s a kind of trophy, positive or negative that follows us during our whole life. Everyone is granted this treasure but not all uses it wisely and ignoring it is ignoring our true nature. The past plays a major role in our everyday life but also has a major role in literature. The past typically is filled with mistakes that makes it impossible to forget. It is a challenge that many characters hold on to and can’t let go. Chance from Sweet Bird of Youth and Offred from The Handmaid’s Tale both struggle to balance their past and present lives. Although Tennessee Williams and Margaret Atwood portray characters who hold on to their past as if it was yesterday, Atwood represents the past as something that one should hold on too and that helps to move forward and to survive in difficult moments, whereas Williams represents the past as an opportunity a moral, a lesson that prompts us to remember our sins and not to repeat them.

First, Foremost, in The Handmaid’s Tale, the past is used not only to compare two different societies but also to help the protagonist to survive under the Gilead regime. It helps Offred to have a memory, good memories about her past that she doesn't access anymore. The past here is represented as a kind of freedom, the only real freedom granted to the Handmaid’s under the regime. Atwood mostly makes reference to the past by using Flashbacks. The flashbacks show the past life of Offred and makes her dream and have hope. The example “Or in a park somewhere with my mother. How old was I? we were going to feed the ducks” shows the deep-seated memories of motherhood that the narrator has. It brings her back to her youth days which is her past. This reference to the past, reminds her of another type of freedom she had back then. By talking about the past, Atwood wants to incorporate the difference between the past and present regime. Offred is holding on to the past and can’t let it go. By using the rhetorical question “how old was I”, the author shows how the details are fading away. Even though these details aren’t here, the memories remain sacred. By remembering time spent with her mother, Offred remembers that she also had a daughter once. A striking example could be “I’m running, with her holding my hand, pulling, dragging her through the bracken”. This quote shows that the past of the protagonist still haunts her to a point that she dreams about the events. She is being nostalgic and remembers a day in the past where she tried to escape with her husband and daughter. Even though she was in danger at the moment, the flashback is still one of the rarest trophies that she has left of her daughter and husband. Atwood also uses metaphor and the past tense to refer to the past. An example that could be pointed out could be “Newspaper and coffee, on Sunday morning…”. The Newspaper here is a metaphor for the freedom that Offred and her husband, Luke felt before they had to be separated. The past in The Handmaid’s Tale refers to the old regime. It refers to the freedom talked previously. The past helps the narrator to move on and to be grateful for the things she had. Even though some memories are fading away, Offred still holds on to it as if it was yesterday. “My yesterdays walk with me. They keep step, they are gray faces that peer over my shoulder.” is a quote by William Golding that perfectly describes the role of the past.

This reference to the past is also seen in Sweet Bird of Youth. Unlike Atwood, Williams makes reference to the past by addressing the topic of youth, time and aging. Indeed, Williams portrays characters that are chained and imprisoned with their past which they can’t let go. While Atwood represents the past as a positive thing that makes one survive in a hard time, Williams, on the other hand, believes that it should serve as a lesson and mistake that one should inspire to be better. Chance Wayne, the protagonist went back to St Cloud for only one reason which is “to retrieve his youth by rekindling an innocent relationship and time in his life”. By going back to his hometown, Chance believed that he could regain his youth, a youth that is long time gone. And to get hold of this youth, he tries go back in a toxic relationship he had. A striking example here could be “the biggest of all differences in this world is between the ones that had or have the pleasure in love and those that haven't and hadn't any pleasure in love, but just watched it with envy, sick envy”. This quote is a clear reference to the past. Chance is talking about how he fell in love with Heavenly. For him, the people that have tasted love are the “performers” and those that haven’t are the “spectators”. In other words, Chance considered himself as a performer and he wants to regain this title again by falling in love and dating Heavenly again. This can be linked to Atwood works. But instead of comparing people who have felt love or not, Atwood portrays people who have felt the freedom before and after the Gilead regime. Chance is still stuck with his past and can’t let it go. He is chained to his past and he is doing everything in his possible to make the past become present. By doing that Chance defies the law of nature and tries to go against time. Another example that shows that Chance defies the law of nature is “Chance, you've gone past something you couldn't afford to go past; your time, your youth, you've passed it. It's all you had and you've had it.”. In this quote, Princess is telling Chance that his youth is part of the past now and that he would not have access to it anymore. By saying that Chance “couldn’t afford to pass” over his past shows that the latter is still attached to his past. As Atwood uses Flashbacks to give hope, Williams uses this sentence to give a moral and a lesson to Chance. This lesson is that you should never try to live in the past but use the past to help you live in the present. The author is showing that the past is here to give a chance to everyone to make their future better.

In Conclusion, Margaret Atwood and Tennessee Williams both use the past in their work as something important in one’s life. Atwood portrays the past as a series of precious, identity constructing events that is granted to everyone and that helps one’s to get over a hard time and remember one’s self. The past represented by Atwood is considered as a source of achievement that gives hope. On the other hand, Williams represents the past as a lesson, a moral that should be taken into account to move forward and live in the present. The past should remain in the past and should help you live the present.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR OIB AMERICAN OPTION WRITTEN EXAMINATION: ESSAY

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

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| 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(Includes discussion of style at Level 2 and above) | 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 |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Adopted Nov 2015 OIB

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