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# 3

91473



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## Level 3 English, 2016

### 91473 Respond critically to specified aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), supported by evidence

2.00 p.m. Tuesday 22 November 2016  
Credits: Four

Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
Respond critically to specified aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), supported by evidence.	Respond critically and convincingly to specified aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), supported by evidence.	Respond critically and perceptively to specified aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), supported by evidence.

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

**Write ONE essay in this booklet.**

Check that this booklet has pages 2–12 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

**YOU MUST HAND THIS BOOKLET TO THE SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.**

**Excellence**

**TOTAL**

**E7**

ASSESSOR'S USE ONLY

You should aim to write a concise essay of no more than 5 pages in length. The quality of your writing is more important than the length of your essay.

In your essay, discuss the extent to which you agree with your chosen statement. Respond critically to the statement by making a close analysis of the text(s).

Begin your visual or oral text(s) essay here:

Statement number: 8

American Beauty is a film by Sam Mendes that never goes quite where you think it will. It challenges the very idea of what we think a happy and hopeful movie should be. It turns what we know upside down in this story about a man who is hoping to regain what he has lost. The film very much disproves the idea that a successful text will have a happy ending.

"My name is Lester Burnham. I am 42 years old. This is my house, this is my neighborhood. In less than a year... I will be dead. Of course I don't know that yet. In a way, I'm dead already."

Sam Mendes sets us up with a sense of predictability only to have it veer right off course. The movie is a black comedy that picks apart the expectation of what living 'the American dream' is like. ~~text text text~~ It focuses on people who don't lack anything materialistic but are still otherwise

unhappy. Lester wakes up every morning not enthused at the prospect of a new day. He finds himself in a life that has leached him of all joy through his parental and marital responsibilities. While this is obvious through his narration, we can't help but not question Lester's hatred for his desirable lifestyle. He has a well-paying job, a great home and a beautiful wife and daughter. He should be happy, but he isn't, and it is only at the end where he abandons it all that he is happiest in the film. While he engages ~~in~~ in a lifestyle most of us would be happy to have, he moans about how much he loathes it. His house is dull. It is as bleak as his life is and the only colour in it are ~~the~~ ~~bright red~~ roses, a recurring image in the film. Their bright red petals are the only thing that defy the dull colour scheme. They appear in moments of great contemplation, where Lester pays attention to his desire for a better life. They are present beside photos of his ~~top~~ once-happy family and appear when he fantasizes of Angela. It is a life we want him to have by the end of the film, but at the same time we are shocked by his sexual desire for a ~~young~~ young

girl. He begins a pursuit to seduce her, turning his back on what we consider as what's most important. While most films would focus on the protagonist getting to where Lester began, *American Beauty* tells the story of a man trying to lose it all.

We notice something very profound near the end of the film; Lester is becoming happier even though his life is falling to pieces. His marriage is ending, his child wants him dead and plans to run away, he's lost his job, and has lost almost all consideration for those around him. While we are happy for him, we feel empathy towards those he has neglected and almost resent him for that. This kind of conflict is what helped make *American Beauty* the success that it was. We are constantly entertained by this battle of morals against a desire for happiness. Lester describes himself as "A man with nothing to lose," where in reality, he has everything to lose, and he succeeds in losing it. ~~But~~ ~~the way~~ Mendes uses colourful representation again in regards to Lester's clothing, which he uses to represent his ~~greatest~~ joy in life. At the beginning

of the film Lester is seen in a dull, grey suit and slowly throughout the film, he starts wearing clothes that are brighter and brighter until on the last day of his life ~~we~~ where is seen running in a bright yellow top to The Who's 'The Seeker'. The song is about a man who has gotten rid of all his responsibilities and become a selfish, mean person in search for what he is seeking. Like the film, this song is incredibly upbeat and happy even though the story behind it is far less so. Lester only realises how oblivious he's been to what really matters at the end, but then it's too late for him.

Lester succeeded in regaining what he lost, he succeeded in seducing Angela, and he was able to relight the spark in his life. But he did this by hurting the one's he loves. He briefly realises the error of his ways right before being shot. While the film puts his transformation in a more cheerful light we are left with what we should consider a rather depressing ending; he's dead and his family is in tatters. While some would argue that his new-found positivity until his death would warrant the title of a

'happy ending', most would consider the death of the main character not quite the same way. Sam Mendes has created a masterpiece that questions what true happiness is. That is what can be considered as more entertaining than a movie that would focus on someone getting to a position to where Lester began, and that's why we find it such an intriguing film well worth our time.

Excellence exemplar 2016

Subject:	English	Standard:	91473	Total score:	E7
Q	Grade score	Annotation			
8	E7	<p>Introduction states the argument that will be followed – “...very much disproves the idea that a successful text will have a happy ending”.</p> <p>Topic sentences clearly state the argument – “sense of predictability”.</p> <p>Sophisticated personal response – the candidate shows definite engagement with the text in phrases such as “...we can’t help but not question Lester’s hatred for his desirable lifestyle”, “Sam Mendes has created a masterpiece that questions what true happiness is”.</p> <p>Original argument (although a little “plotty” in places).</p> <p>Some insight and maturity in the argument – “Lester describes himself as a man with nothing to lose, where in reality he has everything to lose, and he succeeds in losing it”.</p> <p>A range of evidence and critical responses are provided – examples and quotes are neatly woven into each paragraph, e.g. “The only colour in it are roses, a recurring image in the film ... they appear in moments of great contemplation...”.</p> <p>Academic writing style in a planned response. Some creative phrases in paragraphs. The response has a strong sense of the candidate’s personal voice. Controlled writing style – succinct essay.</p>			