**Typical exam question: What theorized close reading of the selected stimulus could** **you produce by applying aspects of text-centred and world-context-centred theoretical approaches? Stimulus: “Caged”**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Introduction | The central idea conveyed in the free form lyric poem “*Caged*” is that family violence is abhorrent. The poem examines the concept of domestic violence predominantly through the use of symbol, metaphor and imagery, depicting the miserable predicament of a mother living with an abusive partner, emphasizing the entrapment of the woman and her children. The poem exposes the injustice of an overwhelming power imbalance in this intimate relationship with the aim of changing attitudes and social opinions. | Underline theme statements |
| Para 1 | Obviously, the binary oppositions woman/man, love/hate, protective/harmful and free/imprisoned position the reader to sympathise with the woman rather than the brutish man,while also structuring the idea that domestic violence is incredibly destructive to families. The woman’s care and kindness for her children, who she hugs “*in tight*”, is in strong contrast to a father who has no qualms about bashing their mother in his quest to maintain power. “*The eagle on his chest has its claws dug in hard on her.”* It is clear that the woman desires the freedom to live without fear, to escape the symbolic *“cage*” and the threat of “*that .38 in his top draw*”. The poem is thus underpinned by values of love and protection for children and the value of individual freedom whilst it views toxic masculinity as an abomination. The reader readily accepts that the woman is in the morally privileged position within the female/male binary, despite her comparative physical weakness, as we live in an age where feminist ideology is mainstream, thus our ready acceptance of the woman as being morally privileged even though she is physically weaker than the male. | Underline t-c strategies  Underline w-c-c strategies. |
| Para 2 | The extensive use of metaphor and symbol enhance the idea of the powerless victim status of the beleaguered woman. An extended metaphor structures the poem, likening the woman to a caged bird. This is connected skillfully to the man’s many tattoos. Among these symbols of his power and virility he has “*an eagle on his chest*” which “*has its claws dug in hard on her*”. These emphasizes his cruelty and her subservience. Furthermore, as the title suggests, the woman is *“caged*” with “*no flying away wings clipped by two kids*”. The tattoos, particularly “HATE blueprinted” on the man’s fingers, symbolize the wretched plight of the woman. | Underline t-c strategies  Underline w-c-c strategies. |
| Para 3 | In addition, the pitying third person narrative voice focalizes on the woman, “*she’s caged to a life of aspirins and empties*”, positioning the reader to sympathize with her plight. This perspective allows the poet to emphasize the suffering of the woman and her children. Dialogue is used to further elicit compassion for the children the mother seeks to protect, “*all I can do is hug the kids in tight when he gets home she sobs”.* In contrast*,* the representation of the father is unsympathetic with the strong inference that he “*belts*” his wife.There is also a suggestion that his anger is fueled by alcohol with “*empties*” strewn around the house. The woman tries to blunt her pain with “*aspirins*”. The injustice of extreme masculinist ideology is laid bare in an age when such savage and controlling male behaviour is not tolerated by society. | Underline t-c strategies  Underline w-c-c strategies. |
| Para 4 | The evaluative language and poignant imagery employed by the poet also uphold the dominant world view that power should be more equally shared in monogamous relationships. The woman “*sobs* *and its*” euphemistic “*dewdrops on the nostrils hayfever eyes for all seasons*” that dominate her existence as a victim. She is “*caged*” and instead of watching late night television, she watches her husband for signs of danger as there is “*HATE blueprinted*” in tattoo ink across his knuckles. The rhetorical contrast of the power imbalance between the two further highlights the poem’s quest for justice for the victims of domestic violence. | Underline t-c strategies  Underline w-c-c strategies. |
| Conclusion | Although the resistant reader might invert the male/female binary in order to argue that men are unfairly negatively stereotyped in the poem, it is clear that the invited reading of the poem privileges the woman’s values, attitudes and beliefs. It is true that mythic representations of men and women are activated in order to normalize the idea that men are aggressors and women blameless martyrs but such exaggerations seem necessary in order to emphasize the repugnance of the misuse of patriarchal power. There are harm filled consequences for women from ‘toxic masculinity’. | Underline w-c-c strategies. |

**Other possible paragraphs**

1. A **psychological interpretation** of the poem also suggests that the male is the uninhibited perpetrator and the woman the upholder of social values. The husband’s **id** is in an ascendant position; that is, he has allowed his innate instinctive impulses to hurt and to control to dominate his self-critical conscience, or **super-ego**, which reflects acceptable social standards of behaviour. He has, for instance, a *“.38 in the top drawer*” suggesting that he might not even stop at murder to satisfy his primeval rage and impulse to dominate. The woman at least acknowledges “*I don’t think he’d belt”* the children. The woman, on the other hand, is not only motivated by the need for self-preservation; she also hugs the kids “*in tight*” demonstrating her motherly instinctive impulse to protect her children. She is, however, daily facing the **abject** with the threat of extreme bodily harm and even death never far away. Although the mother is fulfilling her **performative** role in the family as suggested by the customs of society, and thus also by her **super-ego**, the abuser has abdicated his socially sanctioned role as a father.

1. The poem activates the familiar **myths** of violent husband and long-suffering wife in a way that obviously privileges the role of the mother. The husband “*belts’’* the mother, is heavily tattooed and surrounded by “tinnies”, or beer, which seems to fuel his anger. These elements evoke very recognizable **connotations** in the form of a well-known **myth** which is powerfully effective in conveying the destructive nature of hatred and male violence. The women is something of a household ‘drudge’ who is constantly crying, with “*dewdrops on the nostrils*”, and seeking solace in “*aspirins*”. Despite her downtrodden powerlessness, she elicits the reader’s sympathy as she is her children’s protector and holds the moral high ground.
2. **Patriarchal ideology,** which suggests that a man is entitled to hold power over his wife, is exposed as being hugely unjust, especially in the circumstance of domestic violence. The poem undermines this misogynistic **ideology**, showing that it is underpinned by hatred and cruelty. The wife-beating male has “*HATE”* tattooed on his *“claws”* which are *“dug in on her”* together with the threat of a “.*38”* in his “*top drawer*”. The reader is positioned to abhor this masculinist **ideology** while championing the plight of the helpless mother whose selfless protection of her children, who she *“hugs in tight”,* privileges her **worldview**. The poem not only critiques extreme patriarchal **ideology;** it also makes a plea for the empowerment and **gender** equality of women.

**Note: It’s probably ok to bring in a theory like this as long as it contributes to the unified interpretation you are constructing.**

**Also, the poem is a very short text so the same evidence is used more than once in the essay. Avoid this in EA.**

**Questions and thought processes**:

What is my interpretation of this text?

Which strategies (t-c and w-c-c) most assist me in constructing meaning?

Which quotes from the text best support me in applying those strategies?

How can I use significant evidence to best present my case but without needless repetition?

How can I fashion my paragraphs into a cohesive essay, using topic and (subtle) linking sentences?

How can I order my sentences into well-structured paragraphs?

How can I express my ideas in clearly and concisely expressed sentences?

How can I choose and use precise vocabulary?

How can I integrate technical terms from t-c and w-c-c theory?