Cold Enough for Snow: Summary

NSW ENGLISH STANDARD 11-12 SYLLABUS 2024 FOR HSC 2027 AND LATER

Where this sits. This is the Summary for Cold Enough for Snow. It sits beside the Text Pack (Document A), the Practice Questions (Document B), the Graduated Exemplars (Document C) and the Glossary. It points to Document A by section number and does not repeat it.

1. What the text is

ITEM	FACT
Form	Prose fiction: a short novel of about 100 pages
Author	Jessica Au, who is living, so none of her words are quoted here
First published	February 2022
Prescribed edition	Giramondo, 2022, ISBN 9781925818925
Narrator	An unnamed daughter, telling a trip to Japan with her mother
Course and paper	English Standard, Year 12. Texts and human experiences. Paper 1 Section II: one extended response, 20 marks
Prescribed	HSC 2027 to 2030 (NESA list checked 3 October 2026)

Texts and human experiences is the same focus area in English Standard and English Advanced. The Section II question is common to both courses. It will not name Au, the book, the narrator or Laurie. This is Au's second book. Her first, Cargo (2011), is not prescribed.

> The book has no chapters, no parts and no page numbers you can trust. The seven movements in this pack are MA99's names. Say so once, in your own answer.

2. The central ideas, in plain words

1. **A daughter cannot reach her mother.** The trip is meant to bring them close, yet almost nothing of substance is said (Document A, section 4.7).
2. **The narrator is not a sure witness.** She cannot say why the trip matters, and a childhood story is denied by her mother (4.1, 4.4).
3. **The form is the argument.** One voice, past tense, no quotation marks. The mother never speaks in her own right (section 5).
4. **The trip is also control.** The narrator plans everything, and the mother is talked into it by degrees. The book shows this and the narrator tells us (section 8, C).
5. **The mother may understand the relationship better.** The ending is a mismatch, not a reconciliation (4.7).
6. **The mother's presence is kept open.** The book never says she is dead, and there is no twist (section 6).

3. How the text is built

- **No chapters.** The text runs unbroken, with no parts or numbered sections (section 2.1).
- **Seven movements, named by this pack:** Arrival, Looking, Digressions, The family stories, The soul, The walk and the inn, The end. Digressions and the family stories run through the whole book (section 4).
- **One voice, past tense.** Everything reaches us through the daughter's sentences. Speech has no quotation marks.

- **Plain, flat prose.** Emotion and the ordinary sit side by side, and the book does this at least twice (section 5.3).
- **Unnaming.** Narrator, mother and sister have no name. Laurie is the only named person. The country they live in is never named (section 5.4).
- **Sixteen pencil marks.** Do these first, because the book has no chapters to cite (section 3.2).

4. Techniques that matter

TECHNIQUE	WHAT IT DOES	WHERE TO POINT
First person retrospective voice	Every fact is a claim by an interested party	Throughout: one voice, past tense
No quotation marks	Removes the guarantee that these were the words said	The soul: the mother's long answer, with the reporting clause
Flattening	The most emotional passage sits beside the most neutral	The walk and the inn: clearing the home, then the tea
Symbol: the camera	Looking spoils the unobserved mother	Looking: the camera raised and the tourist pose
Analogy for form	Two gazes at once, like a narrator who knows what came after	Looking: the Monet room
Digression	The reader learns the narrator by accumulation, never by disclosure	Digressions: Laurie and the question of children
Withholding names	The narrator describes a painting and does not name the painter	Looking: the pots and the paintings
The denial	One denied story puts every memory in doubt	The family stories: the uncle and the television serial
Closing rhyme	A photograph nobody arranged answers the failed one	The end: the photograph, against the camera in the park

5. Key quotes and what they show

Document A quotes none of Au's words. So four rows are moments to point at, and four are critics, each 15 words or fewer and attributed.

MOMENT OR QUOTE	WHAT IT SHOWS
The narrator says the trip mattered for reasons she could not yet name (Arrival)	The first turn is a moment of not knowing. Her limits are announced early
The mother says the uncle's love affair never happened (The family stories)	The hinge of the book. Every memory, and the trip, is now in question
She looks at her watch after her mother speaks about the soul (The soul)	The one honest moment ends in silence. Delivered without any raised voice
The man at the desk says the room was booked for one guest (The walk and the inn)	The mother's presence is kept open. Pair it with the bag of hot food
Isabella Gullifer-Laurie (Chicago Review, 23 October 2024): "easier, always, to understand a painting than a person"	Why the galleries matter. The book is about the gap between looking and saying
Gullifer-Laurie: "Ever there, on nearly every page, the mother is nevertheless a spectral presence"	A safe line for the mother. It does not say dead
Claire Messud (Harper's, February 2022): "the narrator comes to see that there can be mutual acceptance and love without understanding"	The ending read as acceptance, for proposition D

MOMENT OR QUOTE	WHAT IT SHOWS
Adeline Chia (ArtReview Asia, 7 July 2022): "in language that is plain and almost wholly stripped of metaphors"	The plain style, praised and attacked. Use it with a limit

6. How to use it in the exam: Texts and human experiences

Paper 1 is 40 marks in 90 minutes plus 10 minutes reading time. Section II is 20 marks. A 7, 40 and 3 minute split is MA99's suggestion. NESA publishes no split.

1. **Read the stem for its key idea.** It names no text. Circle the abstract word, such as experience, memory, relationship or what is left out.
2. **Write your claim and the best case against it.** Two sentences. Could a reader who knows the book refuse your claim? If not, it is only a topic. Write the denial first.
3. **Match the stem to a proposition** (Document A, section 8) and choose two anchors from different movements.
4. **Write in four paragraphs.** Claim and objection. Proof from two movements. A push where the book resists. The objection answered.
5. **Two anchors a paragraph.** Name the movement, describe the moment in your own words, then say what it proves.
6. **Check in the last three minutes.** Right book? The narrator, not Au? Mother not called dead? No page, chapter or part?

The table for step 3:

IF THE STEM IS ABOUT	USE	ANCHORS FROM
Memory and storytelling	A: she is not a reliable witness	The family stories (the denial), The end (writing alters the past)
How a text is shaped	B: the form is the argument	The soul (the reporting clause), Looking (the Monet room)
Relationships and power	C: the trip is control	Arrival (consent by attrition), The walk and the inn (the walk reversed)
Failure and acceptance	D: the mother has it right	The soul (the watch), The end (the smile and the shoe)
Names, places and identity	E: the unnaming is evasion as much as art	Throughout (no names), Digressions (Laurie)
A famous idea in the text	F: the pentimento passage is not the key	The end, against Looking (the thing she does not say)

7. Three common mistakes

1. **Saying the mother is dead, or that there is a twist.** Au has said the book holds three readings at once: the trip happening, the trip remembered, and a ghostly one. The mother speaks in the church, carries hot food and has a shoe put on. Write that the book keeps the question open.
2. **Using the wrong facts.** The book opens on a walk out of a Tokyo hotel in fine October rain, not at an airport. The country they live in is never named, so do not write Australia. Au was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin, not the winner. Cargo is a different book.
3. **Citing a page or chapter, or writing Au for the narrator.** There are no chapters and the paginations differ. Use a named movement. Write the narrator every time. If you want the author, make it about craft.

Coverage

This Summary gives the study layer, not the story. It follows Documents A, B and C, which were checked against each other, and it quotes only attributed critics. Publication details were checked against the publisher's page and NESA's 2027 to 2030 list.

The first HSC under this syllabus is 2027, so no past paper, marking guide or marked response exists. Nothing here claims to know one.

About this resource

MA99 EDUCATION

Scope

NSW English Standard, Year 12. Written to the NSW English Standard 11-12 Syllabus 2024, Cold Enough for Snow, for students sitting the HSC in 2027 and later years. This pack discusses its prescribed text without reproducing it. Short quotations from critics are attributed. No text by the prescribed author is reproduced.

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MA99 EDUCATION

Cold Enough for Snow: Practice Questions

NSW ENGLISH STANDARD 11-12 SYLLABUS 2024 FOR HSC 2027 AND LATER

Instructions

Every question here was written for this document. The first HSC under these syllabuses is 2027, so no past paper exists for this course and nothing here is adapted from one.

Every stem is deliberately general, and that is not laziness. Paper 1 Section II is one question, common to English Standard and English Advanced, answered by every candidate in the state on their own prescribed text. It cannot name the author, the book or a character. These stems do not either.

What that means on a quiet book in particular. The stem cannot warn you that not much happens in yours. A candidate who has prepared only the events of the trip will find they have four sentences and fifty minutes. Prepare the narration.

1. How these questions work

Read this page once. It explains the paper, the clock and the four tiers.

Paper 1 carries forty marks in ninety minutes plus ten minutes reading time, in two sections of twenty marks each. Section I is short answer on stimulus and/or unseen texts. Section II is one compulsory extended response on your prescribed text, and the question is common to English Standard and English Advanced.

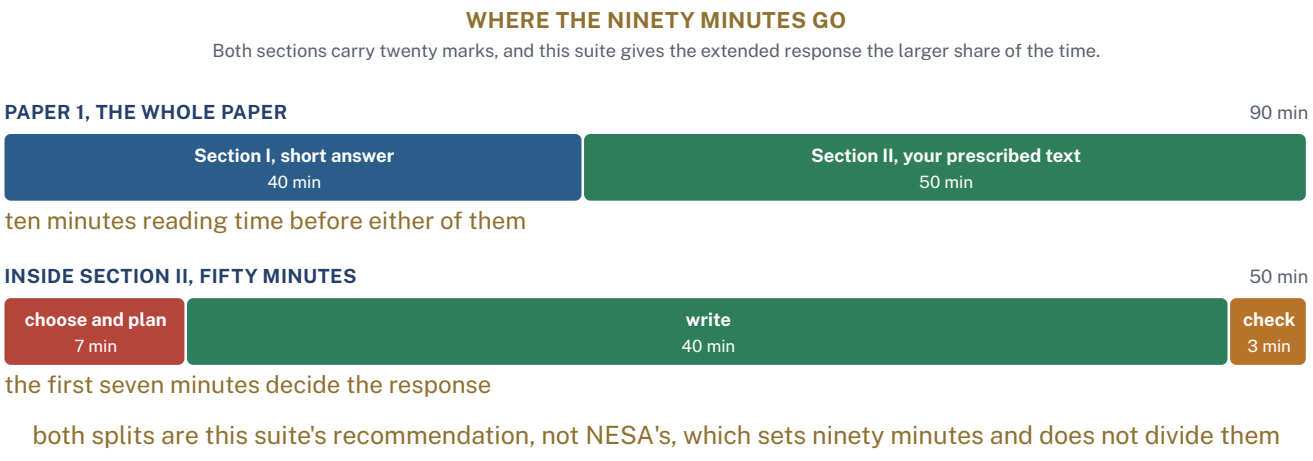


Figure 1 · Where the ninety minutes go.

The seven minutes that decide the response. Inside Section II, decide your position on the proposition, name the strongest denial of it, and choose the movements you will use. Not reading. Deciding.

1.1 What a common question can and cannot say

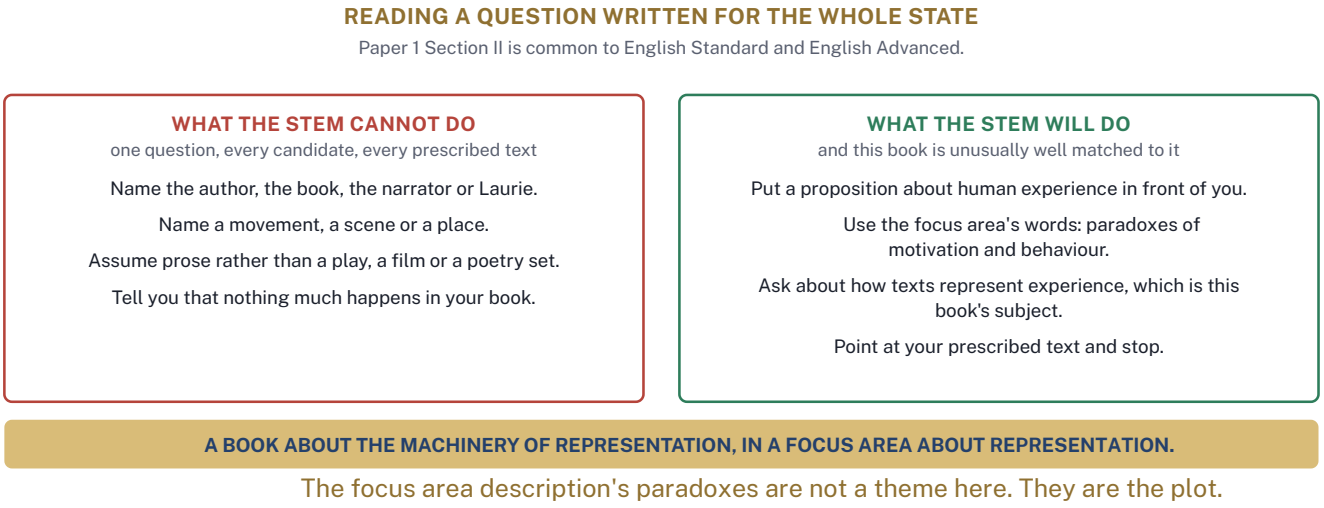


Figure 2 · Reading a question written for the whole state.

Because one stem has to work for a novel, a play, a film, a memoir and a poetry set, it will point at the focus area rather than at a text. The vocabulary available to it is the focus area's own: human qualities and emotions, individual and collective human experiences, human behaviour and motivations, the paradoxes of motivation and behaviour, and what a text invites a reader to see, feel or think about.

This text is unusually well matched to that vocabulary

Paradoxes of motivation and behaviour are not a theme you have to hunt for in this book. A daughter who arranges a journey to be close to her mother and feels relief when the train leaves is one. A woman who asks a direct question about belief and answers the reply by mentioning the closing time is another.

And the focus area description asks how texts REPRESENT experience, which is this book's actual subject. Section 5 of Document A is the section to learn.

The risk that comes with it. A book with no plot invites a beautifully written tour. Write the denial of your own proposition before you write the introduction and the tour becomes impossible.

1.2 The four tiers

FOUNDATION One idea, clearly stated, with movements attached to it. Answer these first and fully.

BUILDING Two ideas held together, or one idea tested against a denial. Most of the work sits here.

STRETCH A question that resists its own premise, or asks for a judgement.

EXAM-STYLE One proposition, general, twenty marks, fifty minutes, written as the real one is written.

The tier names describe the question, not the course. Every stem here is answerable by a candidate in either course, because the real one is.

2. Foundation

Six questions. One idea each. Every stem is text neutral, as the real one is.

FOUNDATION One idea, clearly stated, with movements attached to it.

1 Explain how your prescribed text represents an individual human experience. (20 MARKS)

Where to take it. Proposition A. Start with the admission on the opening pages that the narrator cannot yet name why the trip matters. An individual experience the person having it cannot account for is a more interesting answer than a summary of where they went.

What sinks it. Retelling the trip in order. On a book with no plot that produces a travelogue with a thesis pasted on top.

2 Analyse how your prescribed text represents a relationship between two people. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The camera in the park and the conversation in the church, in that order. The first is a daughter trying to see her mother unobserved and destroying the unobserved state by looking. The second is the mother finally speaking and the daughter answering with the closing time.

What sinks it. Making it warm. Kirkus called the two kind with each other, almost formal, but not close, and formal is the word doing the work.

3 Explain how the form of your prescribed text shapes the experience it represents. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The absence of quotation marks. Speech is run into the narrator's sentences, so the mother's account of her own beliefs arrives already inside her daughter's syntax. Section 5.2 of Document A gives four effects and all four are arguable.

What sinks it. Saying the book has no dialogue. People talk on almost every page. What it has is no quotation marks, and the difference is the whole point.

4 Analyse how your prescribed text represents a moment of change in a person. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The denial of the uncle's love affair. Before it the reader has been taking the narrator's memories as furniture; after it every memory in the book is in question, including the trip.

What sinks it. Calling it a twist. Nothing is revealed. The book simply lets the denial sit there and moves on.

5 Explain how your prescribed text represents an emotion arising from a human experience. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The imagined day of clearing her mother's home, and then what the book does immediately afterwards, which is to return to the walk and the tea. Name the flattening after the peak. It happens at least twice and one reviewer names the pattern in print.

What sinks it. Quoting the emotional passage and stopping. The neutral sentence that follows it is the technique.

6 Analyse how a single image in your prescribed text carries an idea about human experience. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Take one and stay with it. The handmade pots seen deliberately without their labels is the book's aesthetic creed and also a statement about people: she wants to meet an object with nothing attached to it, which is what she cannot manage with her mother.

What sinks it. Listing five images. One image examined beats five images named, and on this book the images are quiet enough that a list reads as scenery.

3. Building

Six questions. Two ideas held together, or one idea put under pressure.

BUILDING Two ideas held together, or one idea tested against a denial.

7 Human experience is more often endured than chosen. Analyse how your prescribed text represents this. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The mother endures the trip; the narrator chose it. Then complicate it: the narrator did not choose to be unable to say what she means, and the whole book is about that inability.

What sinks it. Answering only on one of the two women. The stem is about experience, and there are two people having one.

8 Analyse how your prescribed text represents the tension between agency and conformity. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The camera. The mother's instant tourist pose is conformity to a convention nobody imposed in the room, and the narrator's decision to take the picture anyway is agency exercised over somebody who has just surrendered hers.

What sinks it. Reading the pose as comic. It is the book's central image of the problem and it is not a joke.

9 A text that represents collective human experience risks losing the individual inside it. Analyse how your prescribed text manages that risk. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The family stories. Three people remember one story three ways, and one of them says it never happened. A collective memory that does not survive contact with the people who hold it.

What sinks it. Treating collective experience as a synonym for society. Here the collective is a family of three and that is more useful.

10 Analyse how your prescribed text uses what it withholds. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Proposition E. No name for the narrator, the mother or the sister; no name for the country they live in, while Japan and Hong Kong are named; artists and buildings described and not identified, two of them confirmed by the author.

What sinks it. Calling the unnaming universal and stopping. The sharper version is that the one place not allowed a name is the place the narrator is from.

11 A representation of human experience is also a representation of what the narrator cannot see. Analyse this in your prescribed text. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The mother's tiredness. The narrator reads it as lack of interest; at least one serious reader argues she is misreading a body for a mind. The book does not settle it, which is exactly why it is arguable.

What sinks it. Deciding for her. The strong answer holds both readings and says what the ambiguity is for.

12 Analyse how your prescribed text represents a person acting from a motive they do not state. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Proposition C. The planning, the consent by attrition, the thought she decides not to say, the walk reversed rather than given up. And then the denial: she supplied all of that evidence herself.

What sinks it. Turning it into a character assassination. A person who hands you the case against herself is not acting only out of control.

4. Stretch

Six questions. Each resists its own premise, or asks for a judgement.

STRETCH A question that resists its own premise, or asks for a judgement.

13 Evaluate the view that a text represents an experience most powerfully through the way it is told rather than through what it tells. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Proposition B. This is the evaluative wording of question 19, which is the stem Document C answers in full. One voice, past tense, no quotation marks, an unbroken text and a reporting clause that recurs inside the one long speech.

What sinks it. Asserting that form has meaning. The denial is that first person retrospect is the ordinary default and carries no special claim, and you have to answer it.

14 Assess the proposition that a text can be honest about a person and still fail to reach them. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The church. The narrator asks a direct question, gets a full answer, and finds she can neither agree nor pretend to. She is honest about her own failure and the honesty does not help.

What sinks it. Praising the honesty as a resolution. The scene ends with a remark about the closing time.

15 Evaluate the view that a text which refuses to resolve has said something a resolved text could not. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The ending, which supplies no reversal, no reconciliation and no death, and does so deliberately. The journey fails on the narrator's terms; her mother smiles as though glad of the company and needing no words.

What sinks it. Writing that nothing is resolved as a complaint. The refusal is the book's last statement about how much of another person anybody gets.

16 Assess the claim that the most quotable moment in a text is rarely the most important one. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Proposition F, and it is the sharpest question in this bank. The passage about the layer under a painting is the most quoted thing in the book, it is performed for an audience, and the narrator ends it by telling her listener not to believe anything she reads.

What sinks it. Quoting it as the book's thesis. That is the mistake the question is built to expose.

17 To what extent can a text make a reader distrust the person telling it without making them dislike her? **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Every proposition at once. She reports her own cowardice without excusing it, and she supplies the evidence for the harshest reading of herself. Distrust and sympathy from the same material.

What sinks it. Choosing one. The stem asks how a text holds both, not which one wins.

18 Evaluate the view that the plainest style is the most demanding to read well. **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Set the praise against the attack. One reviewer called the prose precise and finely grained; another found the same evenness a stoic blandness; a newspaper reviewer could not decide between subtlety and dullness. Name the outlets.

What sinks it. Stacking reviewers who agree. Three people saying the prose is spare is not an argument.

5. Exam-style

Six questions written as the real one is written. One proposition, twenty marks, fifty minutes.

EXAM-STYLE One proposition, general, twenty marks, fifty minutes.

Answer these under time and without the book open. That is the only way to find out whether your anchors are learned or merely read.

19 A text may represent an experience most powerfully through the way it is told rather than through what it tells. To what extent does this reflect your understanding of your prescribed text? **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The question Document C answers, and the pack's recommended one. Two paragraphs on the narration and one on the denial of it will beat any amount of description.

What sinks it. Describing the form without saying what it does. A list of techniques is not an argument about a family.

20 The most truthful representations of human experience are the ones that admit how little is understood. To what extent does your prescribed text support this view? **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The opening admission, the denied memory, and the ending, where the narrator states that the journey achieved none of what she wanted. Then the counterweight: acceptance and love without understanding, which one critic reads as an arrival rather than a defeat.

What sinks it. Treating not understanding as a failure the book regrets. Argue about whether it is.

21 Texts represent the experience of a relationship most honestly at the moment one person fails the other. To what extent does this reflect your understanding of your prescribed text? **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The watch, in the church. The book gives the daughter the thing she has wanted for a hundred pages and she answers it by mentioning the closing time, narrated by the person who did it, with no self exculpation and no self accusation.

What sinks it. Sentimentalising it. The commonest thing said about this book is that it is tender. It is, and this is a small act of cowardice.

22 What a text will not settle can be more revealing than what it settles. To what extent does your prescribed text support this view? **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. The ambiguity about the mother, handled as section 6 of Document A requires. Three readings, authorised by the author, none excluding the others, plus a senior critic who reads the scene flatly and a bag of hot food.

What sinks it. Resolving it. A candidate who writes that the mother is dead has chosen one of three readings and called it a discovery.

23 An individual's account of a shared experience is never the whole of it. To what extent does this reflect your understanding of your prescribed text? **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. One voice, past tense, nobody else narrating, and speech absorbed without quotation marks. The mother has no acoustic space of her own, and that is a formal fact you can point at rather than a claim about her feelings.

What sinks it. Writing that the mother is silenced. She talks constantly. What she does not have is a sentence of her own.

24 Texts that seem to be about a place are often about something else entirely. To what extent does your prescribed text support this view? **(20 MARKS)**

Where to take it. Most places in the trip are never named, while Japan and Hong Kong are. The travel is where the action would ordinarily go, and the author has said so. The digressions are where the meaning of the trip is.

What sinks it. Turning it into a paragraph about setting. The claim is about what the travel replaces, not about scenery.

6. Turning a stem into a plan in seven minutes

One method, two shapes, and only one of them argues.

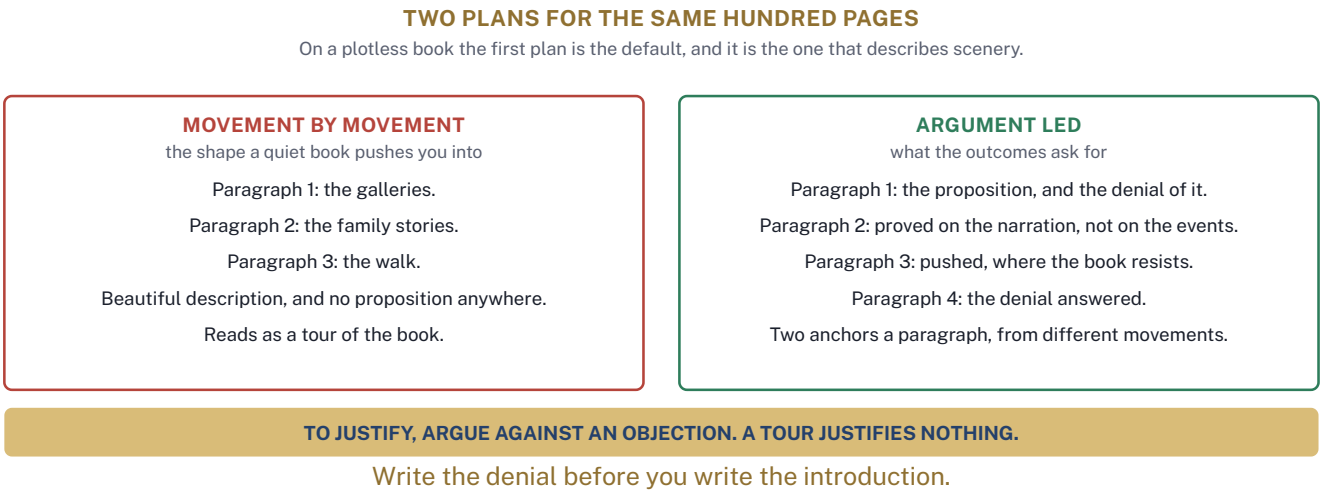


Figure 3 · Two plans for the same hundred pages.

The stem gives you a proposition. Decide whether you agree, then name the strongest reason somebody would not. Both happen before you choose a movement, because the movements are chosen to serve the argument.

MINUTE	WHAT YOU ARE DOING	WHAT IS ON THE PAGE AT THE END OF IT
0 to 2	Deciding your position, and naming the denial of it.	Two sentences: your claim, and the best case against it.
2 to 4	Choosing the movements. Two to prove it, one to test it.	Three movement names and, beside each, the proposition it carries.
4 to 6	Picking anchors. Two per paragraph, from different movements.	Six anchors as a movement plus four words.

MINUTE	WHAT YOU ARE DOING	WHAT IS ON THE PAGE AT THE END OF IT
6 to 7	Writing the thesis in one sentence that could be refused.	One sentence you will not change.
7 to 47	Writing.	Four paragraphs, the fourth of which answers the denial.
47 to 50	Checking.	No page, no chapter. The movement names marked as the pack's. The mother not declared dead.

The one line test, again

Read your thesis aloud before you write paragraph one. Could a competent reader who has also read the book refuse it?

If not, you have written a topic. On this text that failure is almost invisible, because a topic about a quiet book can be described very beautifully for eight hundred words.

A thesis you can refuse is a thesis you can justify, and justifying means arguing against an objection.

7. Marking your own response

Ten questions. Eight are ticks and two are crosses, and the two crosses are the point.

Mark against the three verbs rather than against a feeling: explain, analyse and justify. A response can explain well and justify nothing, and that gap is what Document C section 4 exists to show.

MARK YOUR OWN RESPONSE AGAINST TEN QUESTIONS

Eight of the ten are ticks. Row three is the trap and both of its questions are crosses.

Is there a proposition a reader could refuse? ☐	Is it proved on the narration, not just the events? ☐
Does every anchor name a movement and a moment? ☐	Are the movement names marked as the pack's own? ☐
ROW THREE, ANSWER NO: is a page or chapter cited? ☐	ROW THREE, ANSWER NO: is the mother said to be dead? ☐
Is the strongest denial stated? ☐	Is the denial actually answered? ☐
Is every review named with its outlet? ☐	Does the last paragraph add, or repeat? ☐

Two crosses among the first four is a rewrite, not an edit.

Figure 4 · Ten questions. Answer each with a tick or a cross.

Row three should be answered no, twice. If you have cited a page or a chapter, cut it: the book has no chapters and three editions carry at least two paginations. If you have written that the mother is dead, cut that too, because the author has said the book holds three readings at once and none of them cancels the others.

The three checks that are specific to this text

Did you say that the movement names are this pack's rather than the author's? The book names nothing.

Did you name the outlet and the date for every review you cited? There is no scholarship on this book, so everything you have is reception and it should be labelled as such.

Did you write about the narration, or only about the trip? A response that never mentions the way the book is told has answered a question about a holiday.

> Twenty four stems, none of which names your text. Neither will the real one.

Coverage and limits

This document is twenty four original practice questions for Texts and human experiences, examined in Paper 1 Section II. The focus area content is identical in the English Standard and English Advanced 11-12 Syllabuses (2024) and the question is common to both, so this document serves both courses. No stem names a text, an author, a character or a place, because the real question cannot.

Every question was written for this document. No past paper exists for this course: the first HSC under these syllabuses is 2027, and no claim is made about how responses are marked.

It was authored against the prescribed edition, Giramondo 2022, ISBN 9781925818925. NOT ONE WORD OF JESSICA AU IS QUOTED ANYWHERE IN IT, she is living and the book is in copyright, and no page number or chapter is cited.

The timing recommendation inside Section II is this suite's, not NESA's.

About this resource

MA99 EDUCATION

Scope

NSW English Standard, Year 12. Written to the NSW English Standard 11-12 Syllabus 2024, Cold Enough for Snow, for students sitting the HSC in 2027 and later years. This pack discusses its prescribed text without reproducing it. Short quotations from critics are attributed. No text by the prescribed author is reproduced. Document A, Document B and Document C are the three files of this set: the Text Pack, the Practice Questions and the Graduated Exemplars. References to them in this resource point to those files.

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