# English Stage 5 (Year 9) – core texts booklet – representation of life experiences

This document contains the core texts associated with the Year 9 teaching and learning program ‘Representation of life experiences’.



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## Overview

In this program, you will deepen your understanding of how language forms and features are used in narrative. You will compose an imaginative response that represents a thematic concern. This imaginative piece could use hybrid forms of narrative. You will experiment with narrative code and convention. This will help you to craft your ideas with the intention of positioning your audience. Learning in this program can be enhanced through making connections with real life audiences, such as through the school website, a school competition, or an external writing competition.

## Rationale

This core texts resource booklet is created as a student resource. It provides the full version of all core texts that are explored in the Year 9 ‘Representations of life experiences’ program. It is not a standalone resource. It has been designed for use by teachers in connection to Year 9 resources designed by the English curriculum team for the NSW [English K–10 Syllabus](https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/learning-areas/english/english-k-10-2022) (NESA 2022). Links contained within this resource were correct as of 21 March 2023.

### Texts and resources

A succinct overview of the core texts provided in this booklet are outlined in the table below. This brief overview provides the name and details of each text and points of note about each text. These texts have been drawn from the ‘[What Matters?](https://www.whitlam.org/what-matters)’ writing competition.

Table 1 – texts selected and their alignment to the text requirements

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Text | Annotation and overview |
| Emily Fries, ‘[Monsters and Mice](https://www.whitlam.org/what-matters-2021-shortlisted-entries/2021/7/30/monsters-and-mice)’, James Ruse Agricultural High School | This prose short story can be read as a contemporary fable. The author uses allegory to explore the consequences of not challenging assumptions or thinking independently. The author explores the ideas of fear and discovery. This text was shortlisted in the ‘What Matters?’ writing competition, Year 9/10 category, 2021. |
| Eleanor Swan, ‘[Nomad](https://www.whitlam.org/what-matters-2020-finalists-1/2020/8/10/nomad-1)’, Frensham School | This reflective narrative presents a distinctive style through the narrative voice. This is achieved through the way the author plays with form. The author expresses an opinion about the restrictions students face when writing responses to set questions. This text was a runner up in the ‘What Matters?’ writing competition, Year 11/12 category, 2020. |
| Freya Smith, ‘[Stories Matter](https://www.whitlam.org/wm2022#:~:text=Category%20Winner%3A%20Stories%20Matter%2C%20Freya%20Smith%2C%20Hobart%20City%20High%20School)’, Hobart City High School | This is a prose poem about story. It aims to challenge the existing ‘narrative’ about the texts that are ascribed literary value. This is a thought-provoking text that uses anaphora in order to challenge the reader and their thinking about Western notions of the literary canon. This text was a category winner in the ‘What Matters?’ writing competition, Year 9/10 category, 2022. |
| Tanisha Tahsin, ‘[The Masala of My Soul](https://www.whitlam.org/what-matters-2020-finalists-1/2020/8/10/the-masala-of-my-soul)’, Hurlstone Agricultural High School | This memoir style narrative sends a powerful message about the impact of racial profiling on young people who are struggling to reconcile their culture and heritage with their sense of self as an Australian citizen. The author uses extended metaphor and imagery to construct an anecdotal narrative. This text was a competition and Year 9/10 category winner of the ‘What Matters?’ writing competition, 2020. |
| Sindy Zhang, ‘[To Draw a Home](https://www.whitlam.org/what-matters-2022-shortlisted-entries/2022/7/27/to-draw-a-home)’, Sydney Girls High School | This prose short story explores the anguish of cultural assimilation. The author uses first-person perspective to invite the responder to reflect upon the struggles faced by non-dominant cultural groups. The author’s use of personification and connotation position the responder to reflect on the construct of the notion of ‘home’. This text was shortlisted in the ‘What Matters?’ writing competition, Year 11/12 category, 2022. |

## Core text 1 – ‘Monsters and Mice’ by Emily Fries

For as long as Helen could remember, the Monster had been a nameless fear, lurking in the hills. Every villager had different ideas. Some hung rosemary above beds to ward off a dragon. Some poured salt under windows against a lion.

And that, was why Helen was fetching grain to scatter under the beds, her mother's method of keeping the Monster at bay. Helen's lone footsteps padded on the road. No one went outside, not if they could help it. Not with the Monster about. She stumbled, breaking into a jog. Enough of this. She would get the grain and hurry home.

Despite her best efforts, the streets were a twisting maze to her, and she somehow ended up halfway across the fields before she realised she'd left the safety and comfort of the village far behind. She glanced back. A set of dull buildings rested against the valley's lush slopes. Quite far back. Helen sighed and sank into the grass. A minute, and then she'd leave. Otherwise, the Monster would take her. She watched a mouse scamper across the grass. The mouse halted.

"One of those villager folks?" it rose to its back feet. Helen shrieked and scrambled backwards. The mouse hopped forward. Helen gave another shriek, heart pounding. "Oh no, I assure you I'm quite friendly." It scuttled forward. Helen kicked at it. She missed. The mouse ducked, glaring. "Now, really! What was that for?" Helen swallowed.

"You shouldn't be able to talk." She leaned forward. The mouse gave a sigh.

"Babies can't either, at first." It tilted its head.

"But..." Helen smoothed her skirts out. She'd had enough of this, of being berated by a talking mouse in a field the Monster was probably watching. "Now, I'll be on my way home." She stood.

"Ah!" The mouse scampered over her shoe. "So you are from the village. I can't, for the life of me, understand why you'd want to go back when you could stay out here."

"Stay out here? Have you lost your mind?" Helen hissed down at the rodent, hitching her skirts out of the dewy ground. The mouse tilted its head again.

"Why not?" It darted ahead of her. Helen scoffed. A mouse, she supposed, was far too minor to know about the Monster.

"Haven't you heard about the Monster?" she asked. The mouse shook its head. "It's terrible."

"What has it done that's so terrible?" Helen paused. The women said it snatched children, yet she'd never seen one vanish. The men said it killed crops, yet the harvest remained plentiful. In fact, now that Helen thought about it, the Monster didn't seem to have ever done anything even slightly terrible.

"...Nothing."

"Then, my dear girl, whatever is the point in being afraid?"

"I suppose there is no point." Helen looked up. The village was only a few steps off. "Thank you for walking me back, Mouse." The mouse tilted its head.

"Well, I suppose that's one way of seeing me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Most people think I'm a dragon. Or a lion. Or a fearsome Monster." The mouse, or, the Monster, Helen realised, sighed. "I suppose if everyone saw a mouse, they wouldn't be nearly as scared. After all, I've done nothing to them."

And with that, the mouse turned and scuttled off through the grass. Helen glanced at the village, curtains drawn shut, roads deserted. It seemed silly to think that a mouse had caused all this. But then again, just this morning, Helen had believed in a monster for the sole reason that everyone else had too.

## Core text 2 – ‘Nomad’ by Eleanor Swan

I sit at a desk, pen to paper. Mind sluggishly attempting to write something. I stare once again at the instructions:

'Write a persuasive essay on what political issue matters to you.”

I half-heartedly begin to write some wishy-washy essay on sexism and the glass ceiling, but the words are coming as slow as a YouTube video with bad internet. My hand twitches whilst holding the pen, dying to fill the page with different words.

It wants to go places.

Places other than the ones I am forced to stay in. My hand feels like a teenager who is fidgeting in their seat for a chance to explore the world. To no longer write essays on the importance of public transport.

I have a nomadic mind.

It wants identity.

It wants to express itself.

It wants to tell a story. A story that hasn't been told yet. A crazy story. It could have dragons,

witches, robots... who knows! It wants to express how I see the world. The little details that

define my humanity. The fact that I always turn power points off if they're not being used.

The fact that I run my fingers over my eyebrows when I'm anxious. These little, quirky

details define me so much better than any work of the Bronte sisters, rewritten to be in my

'voice'.

We grew up as creative beings. In preschool we made artworks out of pasta and glitter

paint. In primary school we dressed up in tiaras and capes and pretended to be the ruler of

a kingdom, conversing with our multiple imaginary friends on what magical plans we had for

the day. We starred as trees in our school plays and sang songs about the alphabet and

albino kangaroos with the biggest smiles on our faces.

We didn't need to be taught to do those things. We just needed the time.

Now that we're in high school, creativity looks different.

Singing requires lessons where you have to sing scales and memorise different Italian words

that indicate tempo, dynamic and style. Writing is about political issues, following the same

template of point, explanation, example and link to thesis. Narrative writing is restricted to

rewriting works of classical literature from the perspective of another character. We have

been conditioned to groan when asked to read a book or a play, leaving teachers to remind

us of the importance of Shakespeare every year in English.

Only $100 million dollars allocated to the Arts.

No government department dedicated to the Arts but instead to 'communication, transport

and infrastructure'.

COVID 19 putting the arts industry in a position of life or death.

This isn't what art was supposed to be.

Artistic expression is the way society has developed since the cavemen drew the stories of

their lives on cave walls. It is the definition of civilisation: to have moved past the level of

survival, giving us time to express ourselves artistically.

...

My name is Eleanor.

I have things that I want to say.

A vision of my world.

A world where colours are so bright that they startle me.

A world where music is my heartbeat.

I want to tell you who I am.

I want you to hear my silly stories.

I want to sing as loud as I can.

I want to dance from my heart, not from Tik Tok.

I want to watch plays and movies, listen to music and look at artworks.

But I can't do that without art.

## Core text 3 – ‘Stories Matter’ by Freya Smith

The rare freedom of a story.

Whether it begins with Once Upon a Time,

And has pages that smell like a comforting kind of old,

Or the furiously typed words written of the world, and fed to us from paragraphs of hopelessness.

Or maybe the letter which you received this very morning, in your mailbox

Or even the chatter you heard from passers by

But which is more real?

All, or maybe none.

A story can be born from your imagination,

Or it can grow from the truth you hold so tightly

A story can be spoken

Or written

Or drawn

Or signed

Or grown

It can be anything you want it to be,

It's a story, it can be as real as you care to believe.

Over a hundred million books have been written,

Hundreds of those, I believe, have swirled and shaped the person I am today.

These strangers' stories mould and influence everyone.

We learn from their mistakes,

And cry for their heartbreak.

We travel with them through fearsome jungles,

And slay dragons with our shiny swords.

We meet eccentric friends,

And lose more than we can count.

We climb the height of a princess' tower,

And diminish evil from the kingdom that surrounds her.

And now I make my own mistakes,

And learn from them.

I cry my own tears,

And travel through lively cities.

And although I've never truly slayed a dragon,

It's a story I'm prepared to tell.

These stories matter.

The first ever handwritten letter was said to be sent in 500BC,

I wonder what story was told in the secrets of those words?

Over time, letters began to flourish,

They became signed, sealed and stamped,

Little envelopes of stories and feelings,

Awaiting their arrival to be torn open and fawned over for days.

Stories would grow like roots from an apple tree,

'Have you heard?' They would say

And parade the stories they had read earlier that morning,

New ones would grow, and change,

Working their way through the hands of many,

And then, they would be found years later

Maybe in a dusty draw in the attic of a very old house

The discoverer would sing the stories here and there

Of the one small letter that had made it so very far.

These stories matter.

History is a rather marvelous thing,

That one small word, contains so many exceptional stories.

Stories of war

Stories of protest

Stories of discrimination

Of poverty

Of Kings and Queens

Of pyramids

Of sailors

Of violence

Of leaders.

Stories that have been the very foundation for the world we live in,

Whether we have learnt from them or not.

The stories of history have left a mark, not just the events, or places, or actions.

But the people, and the stories they wrote for themselves.

These stories matter.

This is my story, of what matters to me.

You too have a story

It is strong

It is wanted

It is rich and beautiful

But what makes a story even more powerful?

Everyone has one to tell.

## Core text 4 – ‘The Masala of My Soul’ by Tanisha Tahsin

I gaze at my Grandma-whom I call Nanu-with wonder as she placed the still bubbling pot of curry on the table. In her eyes, I see a twinkle. Of love? Of Fairy dust, maybe?

Where I'm from we call that spice. A sensation that runs through your body - more than a feeling, spice is an emotion in itself that resonates within you. Stronger than magic - it's a way of life.

I inhale the through my nose till there is no longer space in my lungs, and I'm overcome with joy.

I'm embraced by the aroma of cumin and cardamom, saffron and cinnamon, garam masala and garlic. The nature of these spices encompasses an experience that transcends my very senses.

I spoon some on to my plate, along with some rice, and I begin dancing in my seat.

Every tickle of tumeric, every zinging of ginger and the torching of my tongue reminded my soul of being home.

In my head, it repaints memories of hot summer days splashing in the riverbank, flying through ricefields, drowning in confectionery from my village's local sweet shop. Adventures of racing to the rooftop of a 12 storey building, getting scratched by stray cats, giggling on the way to the farm till our bellies ached. It reminds me of my cousins' loving smiles; grins that echoed “this is what makes life beautiful: home”.

But I didn't always see the beauty in my home. For so long, I saw ugliness.

My beautiful memory takes me back to darker, masala-less days. Days where I was once stuck in a town where no other girl had copper skin like mine, or spice enduring tastebuds, or brokenly spoke a jumbled concoction of languages.

Days where my Nanu, old and non-English speaking would walk me to school and back. Though her bones ached and her legs struggled, she'd hold her hand out to me every day as she guided me to school. Though Nanu's hands were warm and welcoming, I refused to hold them. I didn't want anybody to think I associated with her, because I wasn't a hijab-wearing, old, non-English speaking girl. I was just like everyone else,

Or I wanted to be.

I stole whitening creams from my auntie's cabinets, hoping I'd become white enough that my classmates didn't notice I was from a country where people lived in tin houses and didn't have wifi and ate curry almost every day. I cut jeans into shorts, hoping I'd fit in. I stopped speaking my native language because I refused to accept who I was, where I was from, and what made me, me.

No child should ever have to feel like they don't belong because of the colour of their skin, or the dialect they speak, or what they eat.

Then why do we live in a world where this happens every day? To people like you and me, or even our family or friends.

Our children should be able to grow up proud of their identities, their cultures, their homes.

I finally take a bite.

And as the taste of home hugs me tight, I gaze back into Nanu's eyes with a heavy but loving heart.

This is what matters to me, and I know it matters to her too.

## Core text 5 – ‘To Draw a Home’ by Sindy Zhang

A triangle at the top.

A square in the middle.

A rectangle at the bottom.

Done. A house.

Whenever my kindergarten teacher used to tell us to draw 'our home', twenty nearly identical structures would appear on twenty identical desks. Slight variations would only occur after this shape had been completed-each child adding their own gardens, skies and stick-figures. Although many people in the class, myself included, lived instead in apartments or units, this modest, brick-walled house was our standard.

At such a tender age, we could not understand the dynamic nature of home.

I had to move houses, again, when I was seven years old, leaving my first three dwellings oceans away and approaching the next three that I was yet to know about. We brought as much as we could, essentials and valuables squeezed into bulging suitcases. However, even with my own luggage packed behind me, I was overcome by a sense of emptiness, a notion of loss at the fact that my whole lifespan's worth of treasures could be compressed into half a square metre. How could a home be so small? So diminishable? So transient?

My first dawn under Australia's clouds was bizarre. I remember the surprise on my dad's face as he rushed into my tiny bedroom, his fear suddenly dispelled by my dazed face peeking from the blankets.

'I thought I heard you cry out,' he said in our native tongue.

'Huh? No, not me... I heard it too, I think it was from outside.'

Later, we realised that the culprit was only a crow, an unfamiliar creature that my dad had mistaken for me.

This air of unfamiliarity persisted throughout my brief stay here, sweeping through the modest rooms and making itself more at home than I was. It labelled me as an outcast when my tongue wouldn't yield to foreign syllables. It taunted me when I heard the laughter of parties next door. And it looked at me in the mirror when I tried to find out what it actually was.

Escaping my loneliness in the busy city streets, I would gaze up at the grand, gleaming skyscrapers, wondering what my life would be like if I, too, lived there. Was there some type of magic hidden behind those reflective windows? Magic to ward off the loneliness? Magic to clear out this envy?

Trying to find answers to these questions was futile. But somehow, I seem to have eventually found this magic elsewhere. It's hard to pinpoint how exactly, though moving into my second house in Sydney, into a closer-knit community definitely helped, and maybe mum's cheesy 'Home is Where the Heart is' wall hanging did too.

I guess it's largely to do with my perspective. I've realised that those shiny, elusive windows are still only glass, that the space behind them is not so different from mine. Instead of looking for value in mere facades, I started looking within them.

Dad's special stir-fry dishes permeating our dining room every night. Mum's calming voice as she read aloud English picture books with me. Even small things, like my pillowcase, hand-sewed by my grandma, with swirling dragons said to guard the sleeper against malevolent spirits. Such treasures are embedded in my home, my sanctuary, and I've finally realised that they are more precious than any penthouse view of the city.

If I were given that kindergarten drawing task now, what would I do? No triangles, rectangles or squares could ever entrap such a dynamic and precious thing.

I guess its closest image can only be drawn from my heart.

My values.

My home.

## References

Emily Fries (2021). [Monsters and Mice](https://www.whitlam.org/what-matters-2021-shortlisted-entries/2021/7/30/monsters-and-mice). In [*Whitlam Institute: What Matters? Writing Competition*](https://www.whitlam.org/). Reproduced and made available for copying and communication by NSW Department of Education for its educational purposes with the permission of Emily Fries, James Ruse Agricultural High School. Accessed 25 March 2023.

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