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How to use

The Pearson English VCE Comparing Guides have been written to the new Victorian Certificate of Education English and English as an Additional Language Study Design for 2016–2020 and cover Units 2–4 Area of Study 1 Reading and comparing texts.

The Comparing guides are divided into four sections:
1: Knowing: Tracks
2: Knowing: Into the Wild
3: Comparing: Tracks and Into the Wild
4: Writing the essay.

Knowing the texts
These sections provide a deep insight into the texts, covering context and author, structural elements, textual elements and ideas, issues and themes. At the end of each section is a set of learning activities.

Comparing texts
This section outlines how to compare and contrast the two texts. The two texts are compared and contrasted in regards to: themes, cultural context and genre. This section also provides practical tips and ideas on how to compare texts as well as practice topics.

Types of questions
These are three types of questions:
1. The questions, ideas and ideas
2. The narrative, style and method
3. The general and style

Comparing: Tracks and Into the Wild

There are different kinds of comparative questions and different ways to approach them. This section will help you develop an understanding of how to use appropriate strategies when planning your essay about Tracks and Into the Wild. These strategies, or graphic organisers, such as tracks and into the Wild, can help you develop a sense of the similarities and differences between the texts.

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Writing the essay

This section provides a step-by-step guide on how students can plan and write a comparing essay. Four different essay styles have been included as well as an essay sample with annotations.

eBook and online resources

Online resources support the comparing of texts and include:

- essay templates
- graphic organiser templates
- worksheets
Tracks is Robyn Davidson’s 1980 memoir about her solo trek across Australia. The perilous journey took place in 1977. Davidson offers readers the context for her text in the postscript, written thirty years after the events that are described. She claims that to understand her text is to understand its context in Australia in the 1970s.

**CONTEXT AND AUTHOR**

**Society and politics**

Australia in the 1970s was in a dynamic era of growth and political awareness. It was the period in which feminism made tangible progress when the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission ruled that a woman doing the same job as a man should be paid the same wage. Women also won the right to paid maternity leave.

It was a period of emerging social sensitivity. In 1970, Neville Bonner was the first Indigenous Australian elected to the Australian Parliament. In 1972, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was erected on the grounds of what is now known as Old Parliament House, and the ‘White Australia policy’, adopted in 1901, was formally retracted. The Whitlam Government introduced the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 into Parliament, under which traditional affiliation and traditional landowners were given land rights.

**Author: Robyn Davidson**

Robyn Davidson was born in Western Queensland and lived at Stanley Park, an isolated cattle station, with her parents and sister. Her father travelled through Africa and told her stories of his adventures. Davidson’s mother committed suicide at 46. After this, Davidson was sent to live with her aunt, and was then sent to boarding school.

Davidson believes she had a difficult childhood, and felt she didn’t have an identity for a great part of her early life.

In an interview for ABC Radio, on the ‘Talking Heads’ program, Davidson said: ‘During all that time since I’d left school, I’d virtually not seen my dad. I wrote to him and I said, “I need you to come and get me.” And he did […] we decided to go out bush, looking for opals. It was just the most wonderful time with him. In ’73, I decided that I wanted to go to the Australian desert. So I thought I’d go to Alice Springs and I’ll find myself some feral camels and I’ll use them to go through the desert.’

She did this, and that is where Tracks begins.
STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

Genre
This is a memoir and a travel narrative. Robyn Davidson narrates her 2700km journey from Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean on the west coast of Australia. It was written two years after she completed the journey. She is in a flat in London when she writes Tracks, so there is geographic space and considerable time between her setting forth in the Northern Territory of Australia, and writing the text.

The book follows a direct, first person, past-tense linear narrative that focuses on the trip itself. It is not a text that ranges much beyond the experience itself, except in a few places, for example, when Robyn talks of her family’s past and how that lends particular significance to her travels.

Plot

PART 1
• Robyn arrives in Alice Springs in 1975. She works at the Polsel place, training camels. Later she goes to work with Sallay Mahomet.
• She goes to Brisbane and on her return to Alice Springs, chooses two camels – Zeleika and Kate, and moves to Basso’s farm to train them in March, 1976.
• Eighteen months later, the camel Kate becomes sick and Robyn shoots her while Zeleika is pregnant. She continues to use the facilities at Basso’s farm.
• Two years later, in midsummer 1977, Robyn’s dog, Blue, dies from strychnine poisoning.
• Robyn meets Rick Smolan who convinces her to contact National Geographic to sponsor her trek.
• The camel Zeleika’s baby, Goliath, is born.
• Robyn sets off for the eight-day trial run to Utopia.
• She meets with National Geographic and is offered $4000 in sponsorship.
• Robyn returns to Alice Springs for preparations and, in March 1977, begins her journey.

**PART 2: SHEDDING BURDENS**

• Robyn is on her own until she hears the ‘click’ of Rick’s camera. After taking some shots, he leaves, arranging to meet her at Ayers Rock.
• Day 3 crisis – the map is inaccurate.
• Robyn arrives at Areyonga Aboriginal community.
• She beats the camel Bub for panicking the other camels.
• Robyn is in Tempe, where she makes calls on the two-way radio but gets no reply. On the trip to Ayers Rock she stops at Wallera Ranch but leaves because they were ‘typical ockers’. She enters wild bull country and at Angas Downs station, the Liddles ‘stuck me in the shower [and] fed me up’. She arrives at Ayers Rock.
• Rick arrives and brings Jen, who is injured, which leads to tension. Jen leaves.
• At the Olgas, Rick and Robyn fight, and eventually resolve their issues about his presence and photographs. She comes to the realisation that she has to ‘take full responsibility for his being there’.
• Dookie the camel cuts his foot two days out of Docker. Robyn spends six weeks in Docker waiting to see if Dookie is going to recover. Rick stays for two days and tension is high.
• Rick films a secret women’s ceremony and in doing so, distances Robyn from the Aboriginal community. She cannot find a guide to take her across the desert to Pipalyatjara.
• Out of Docker, Robyn is attacked by bulls and kills three of them.
• Four days out of Docker, she has an emotional breakdown and then moves into a euphoric mania. In this state she meets a group of Aboriginal men, including Mr Eddie, who offers to go with her across country.

**PART 3: LITTLE BIT, LONG WAY**

• Robyn travels with Mr Eddie to Pipalyatjara where she talks with Glendle. She feels herself ‘knitting together again, putting things into perspective, clearing my confusion’.
• She leaves for Warburton with Mr Eddie, crossing the desert. Five months from Alice, they arrive in Warburton, Rick arrives and Eddie leaves with Glendle.
• Robyn leaves Warburton in July, travelling along the Gunbarrel Highway alone.
• She develops the metaphor of the ‘net’ to explain the connectedness of everything, including herself. She determines that the ‘self’ is a ‘reaction between mind and stimulus’.

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**Did you know?**

Uluru was previously known as Ayers Rock. It was named by William Gosse in 1873 after Sir Henry Ayers (1821–1897), an early legislator and businessman. Uluru is the Aboriginal and official name.
Into the Wild is a 2007 film. It is based on a non-fiction book of the same name, about the death of Christopher McCandless. At 22, after graduating from university, McCandless abandons his family, and his wealthy upbringing to travel north into the Alaskan wilderness. He carries very little: only 5 kg of rice, a .22 calibre rifle, and a backpack of his favourite books. When he finds a deserted school bus, it becomes his home for 113 days. He suffers from starvation and eventually dies, and his body is found nineteen days later.

CONTEXT AND DIRECTOR

The United States in the 1980s to early 1990s

Into the Wild opens in 1992, when Chris McCandless arrives in the Alaskan wilderness. The film moves between 1992 and 1990, when Chris began his journey. Although the film’s timeline is the early 1990s, Chris McCandless’s formative years were the 1980s. This was a decade characterised by consumerism and extravagance. Under President Ronald Regan, the United States economy was revamped and consumerism and materialism increased. The term ‘shop till you drop’ became popular, and this attitude of spending was popularised in programs such as Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous. Globally, the 1980s was also the time of the Ethiopian famine, the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown and the rise of AIDS. In 1990, when McCandless began his journey, the United States President was George HW Bush, who had been Regan’s Vice President. The excesses and impacts of the 1980s were still ever present.

Director: Sean Penn

Sean Penn is an American actor, director and has also been described as a political activist. Penn has received numerous acting and directing honours during his career, including two Academy Awards for best actor. Born in Los Angeles, California in 1960, he began his acting career as a child on the series Little House on the Prairie in an episode directed by his father, also an actor and director. Penn has specialised in playing dramatic roles in films with a social message such as Dead Man Walking and Milk. Penn began his directing career in 1991, with the film The Indian Runner. Into the Wild is Penn’s fourth feature film. Penn is also well known for his political and social causes. He wrote an open letter in the Washington Post critical of then-President George Bush’s war on terror, and after Hurricane Katrina, he travelled to New Orleans to assist with the rescue effort.

Sean Penn directed and wrote the script for Into the Wild in 1996, after reading Jon Krakauer’s book of the same name and acquiring film rights. In the documentary, The Making of Into the Wild, Penn claims that he wrote the film adaptation without re-reading Krackaeur’s text. He says that the images were ‘leaping out from the pages’ and speaks of a close connection between Krackaeur’s version of Chris McCandless journey, and his own version.
INTO THE WILD

screenplay and directed by Sean Penn

Emile Hirsch
Marcia Gay Harden
William Hurt
Jena Malone
Catherine Keener
Brian Dierker
Vince Vaughn
Zach Galifianakis
Kristen Stewart
and Hal Holbrook

Sample pages
STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

Genre

The genre of the film is biographical drama. *Into the Wild* begins with Chris McCandless leaving Annandale, Virginia. As he takes on the frontier in Alaska, the film takes on the style of an adventure story. Because it follows Chris’s life story, it is biographical. However, it is told through Sean Penn’s lens, which is based on Jon Krakauer’s interpretation of Chris McCandless’s writings, and interviews with those who knew him. Although the audience of *Into the Wild* knows Chris dies, the drama is heightened as we see his deterioration and anticipate his death.

Chronology

The film does not follow a conventional chronology. It flashes forward to Alaska, to Chris’s death, before taking us back, to show the journey leading up to that moment. The narrative flashes back even further to grainy images of Chris’s early years. By doing this, Penn explores Chris’s psychological rationale for leaving as he did. The sequencing affords greater suspense and drama, because the film takes a long time to reach what we know will happen.
Comparing: Tracks and Into the Wild

There are different kinds of comparative questions and different ways to approach them. This section will help you develop an understanding of how to use a range of strategies when planning your essays about Tracks and Into the Wild. These strategies, or graphic organisers, such as Venn diagrams, scales and data charts are especially useful tools in assisting you to explore the similarities and differences between the texts.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

There are three types of questions:
- the themes, issues and ideas
- the social, historical and cultural context
- the genre and style.

Common words used in essay questions include the following.
- **Discuss**: Debate the arguments for and against the topic backing up these ideas with selected evidence from the text. Provide a conclusion.
- **To what extent**: Assess the evidence in your text that would support an argument. Also look at alternative explanations.
- **Do you agree?**: An opinion is being sought as to the extent to which the statement or quote is accurate. Evidence will be provided to support or contend the point of view.
- **Quotations**: Essay questions that use quotations are a way to delve into the issues embedded in a text. You should make reference to the quote and the ideas that it raises.

Theme questions

Themes are prominent, recurring ideas that pervade a literary work. Both Tracks and Into the Wild explore themes related to:
- the journey of self-discovery
- landscape
- unreliability of representation
- stereotypes of women and men in nature.
You can also explore concepts within themes, as shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Concepts within themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The journey of self-discovery</td>
<td>adulthood, coming of age, morality of the individual, integrity, individual and social values, transformational experiences, motivators, conviction and individual power, individual need and collective will, autonomous action, guilt, forgiveness, personal responsibility, selfishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>wilderness, frontierism, exposure, fear, resilience, transcendence, freedom, letting go and resistance, exclusion and inclusion, uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreliability of representation</td>
<td>whose story is being told?, authenticity, reality, creative licence, interpretation, memory, limitation, the power of distance (temporal, geographical, spiritual, emotional), the importance of text, storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes of women and men in nature</td>
<td>being seen as ‘the other’, survival, enrichment, defying the odds, alienation, social non-conformity, expectations of gender, power of gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cultural context questions**

Cultural context questions ask you to consider the cultural background in which the text is set, the events in history that shape the text, and the social worlds that both texts reflect. You might be asked to explore the aspects of society the authors, or characters see as important (views) and their judgements on those views (values).

Robyn Davidson is a woman in the 1970s trekking across the Australian desert, and Chris McCandless is a man in the 1990s in the Alaskan wilderness, however, there are commonalities between the worlds they leave and the worlds they enter.

**Genre questions**

Genre questions could ask you to think about the conventions of the genre and consider how and why the authors conveyed their ideas in certain ways.

Despite the different genres of these texts, we need to consider the features they share, and differences in their representations of setting, narrative perspective and other textual elements.

**THE COMPARISON**

**How to compare**

The following section shows you a number of ways to compare the two texts. A variety of methods have been used, such as tables that allow you to chart and track data and graphic organisers that let you see quickly the links and variations.

In a comparison essay, you must critically analyse any two texts pointing out their similarities and/or differences. It could also be called a compare and contrast essay. Your task could be comparative only (looking only at similarities), contrasting only (pointing out the differences) or both comparative and contrasting.
Theme

■ THE JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

At the core of both of these texts is a protagonist on a journey. Over the course of the texts, each protagonist develops a new understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Both protagonists are young, and reject the concept of adhering to a predetermined notion of who they should be and how they should behave.

Starting points
Both texts identify that the journey of self-discovery is a conscious process. Each journey has a distinct starting point, spurred by a discontentment.

Robyn embarks on her trip because she is not content with the expectations society has on women. She rebels against the concept that women should find security and contentment in the usual institutions of marriage and motherhood common in this time period.  
Chris sees his father as an example of what he is expected to become. This sets off his desire to leave it all for the great wilderness of Alaska.

Preparing for the journey
Both Davidson and Penn focus on the preparations the protagonists make before setting out on the actual journey.

Robyn spends two years in Alice Springs trying to learn the skills she needs for her journey. In doing so, she learns about herself and her world, which informs the eventual journey itself.  
Chris spends two years travelling around the United States, in preparation for his final journey. In doing so he learns about himself and his capabilities, this informs the eventual journey itself.

Going solo
Both protagonists believe that the true journey of self-discovery cannot be done in the company of others, and that true transformation begins when we are alone.

Robyn spends some of her time with others as she moves across the desert, but it is only when she sets out alone that the true connection with the landscape occurs. The ‘net’ appears, and she loses herself into it.  
From the moment Gallien drops Chris off at the beginning of the Stampede Trail, Chris’s transformation begins in the quiet of the Alaskan wilderness.

■ Comparing texts on the theme of the journey of self-discovery

■ LANDSCAPE

Although the landscape is vastly different in each text, the impact of the journey on the protagonists is immense. Both Robyn and Chris, despite their fears seek freedom, and ultimately learn about the importance of landscape.