

# UNIT 9

## *A Man for All Seasons*

by Robert Bolt

### THE EXCELLENT ESSAY



An excellent text response essay about Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* reflects most of the following top-range grade descriptor qualities as specified in the **VCE English / English as a Second Language Assessment Handbook: 2008–2011** for Unit 4, Outcome 1:

**41–50 marks:** A highly-developed and well-sustained interpretation of a selected text supported by the considered selection and use of highly appropriate textual evidence. Thorough and insightful understanding of the ideas, characters and themes constructed and presented in the selected text. Complex discussion and critical analysis of the ways in which the author constructs meaning and expresses or implies a point of view and values. Highly appropriate use of relevant metalanguage to support analysis. Highly expressive, fluent and coherent writing.

### SAMPLE TOPIC

To what extent does Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* demonstrate Richard Rich's declaration that 'every man has his price'?

#### Content features

- 1 Refers to theme relevant to topic.
- 2 Succinct explanation of quote used in topic.
- 3 Clarification of terms of reference.
- 4 Some background context.
- 5 Previous sentences outline main contention and how it will be argued.
- 6 Clear topic sentence – link to topic and main contention.

#### Excellent essay

The conflict between personal moral integrity and the demands of political expediency in turbulent times is at the core of Robert Bolt's historical drama, *A Man for All Seasons*. **1 (1)** In declaring his cynical view that 'every man has his price', Richard Rich avers that an individual's moral integrity can be traded for the right personal reward in the right circumstances. **2** Rich's own behaviour endorses this view, as do the actions of Cromwell, Wolsey, Chapuys and the nobles who compromise themselves and act hypocritically for political and personal gains. **3 (2)** These characters become corrupt. In contrast, **(3)** this view is challenged by Sir Thomas More's conscientious objection to Henry VIII's divorce and rejection of the Oath of Supremacy **4** on the grounds that compliance would violate his moral integrity. **5**

At the outset, Richard Rich is shown as lacking in moral fibre – he is someone of fickle convictions and allegiances depending on the personal advantages he stands to gain. **6 (4)** His vanity, political ambitions and desire for public social standing lead him to ignore More's astute, but prophetic, advice that, 'A man should go where he won't be tempted'. **(5)** Instead, **(6)** Rich displays his dangerous capacity for corruption by

#### Expression and mechanics features

- 1 Clear introduction of author, title and genre – correctly punctuated.
- 2 Effective vocabulary used to discuss concepts.
- 3 Useful link phrase.
- 4 Good use of key terms. Effective vocabulary used for concepts and character evaluations throughout this paragraph.
- 5 Embedded quote – effectively punctuated.
- 6 Use of link word to vary sentence openings and advance previous idea. Note use of other link words/phrases in this paragraph.

## Content features

## Excellent essay

## Expression and mechanics features

7 Sentence lists evidence to support ideas.

8 Insightful character interpretation in relation to topic.

9 Student draws an interpretation from the evidence in line with topic and main contention.

10 Reference to theatrical element of the play to explain character interpretation.

11 Link to comment offered earlier in this paragraph.

12 Link to topic and main contention maintained here.

13 Concluding sentence sums up in relation to topic and main contention.

14 Clear topic sentence – link to topic and main contention.

15 Link to topic and main contention.

16 In this section of the paragraph, the student incorporates a range of short quotes and brief descriptions of evidence to build argument.

17 Concluding sentence links to topic, and main contention and sums up key point offered in the paragraph.

18 The topic sentence indicates that a range of characters will be discussed.

19 Student demonstrates a selective discussion of interpretations and evidence about other key characters to illustrate the main contention.

accepting the 'bribe cup', espousing Machiavelli's principles and expressing admiration for Cromwell. 7 He appears morally weak and, in a last attempt to secure More's mentorship, Rich admits, 'I'm adrift. Help me'. The imagery (7) here of a morally rudderless Rich bobbing in a tumultuous sea of political machinations is striking in implying that he has a fleeting awareness of his shortcomings. 8 However, Rich aligns himself with Cromwell following More's rejection of him as unreliable. Here, we begin to see Rich as opportunistic and self-seeking no matter the cost. 9 His moral integrity disintegrates as he tells Cromwell that his price 'would depend on what I was offered'. Rich is open to bribery and corruption. Bolt charts Rich's materialistic ascent through costuming (8) – the shabby clothes are replaced with ostentatious robes, which highlight his conceit, self-importance and secular values. 10 Rich undertakes a series of treacherous betrayals against More to ensure his own advancement – perhaps these are also motivated out of revenge against More for the earlier rejection. 11 His final, deliberate act of perjury (9) condemns More and illustrates the callous extent to which he would relinquish the value of the law and decency. More, in turn, condemns Rich as one who has traded his soul for hollow, materialism: '... It profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world ... But for Wales!' 12 (10) Rich is very much an exemplar of one willing to trade personal moral integrity for personal gain no matter what it may cost others. 13

Thomas Cromwell's central objective is to do whatever it takes to survive turbulent political times, and this entails compromise and corruption. 14 Cromwell is portrayed as a devious and unscrupulous (11) political operator who is prepared to name his 'price' for whatever needs to be done – indeed, we see his rapid rise in Henry VIII's administration. 15 From the beginning, Cromwell clearly lacks a moral conscience and he appears to have forsaken any integrity in order to achieve his 'price'. He hints at taking unconstitutional actions in order to 'merely do things' the King requires and to achieve 'administrative convenience'. (12) Cromwell uses the law as an 'instrument', exploiting and manipulating legislation for political expediency: 'It's just a matter of finding the right law. Or making one'. He expresses an amoral position when he reports to Rich, '... [the King] wants Thomas More to bless his marriage or Sir Thomas More destroyed. Either will do'. We become aware that Cromwell will undertake underhand measures to remain in favour with the King and ensure his own prosperity in the court. Cromwell disparages the likes of More, criticising those men who are 'upright' and 'steadfast'; he applauds Rich for admitting that he has a 'price' and encourages him to commit perjury for political gain. 16 Throughout the play we witness many acts that suggest that Cromwell has forfeited his soul in order to have worldly affluence – sycrasy, bribery, flattery, intimidation and emotional blackmail. Bolt seems to be suggesting that in difficult times 'every man has his price' for self-preservation, which includes giving up virtues and living a life of corruption – Cromwell is one such man. 17

There are others in this conflict who also name their 'price' out of political expediency and in the hope of personal advantage. 18 19 (13) Cardinal Wolsey resents More's 'moral squint', which shames him as a man of the cloth. His self-interested manipulation of his worldly power shows the extent to which he has compromised his moral obligations for the political realities. Signor Chapuys ironically illustrates his maxim that 'No man can serve two masters' when he places his service to the King of Spain ahead of his religious principles. (14) He is a scheming statesman who tempts More with the vain glamour of martyrdom and sainthood.

7 Literary terminology – metalanguage.

8 Theatrical element – metalanguage.

9 Appropriate legal terminology.

10 Longer embedded quote – introduced with a colon.

11 Effective vocabulary used to discuss character throughout paragraph.

12 Series of short embedded quotes builds argument.

13 Continued use of key word from topic – 'price' – creates a sense of focus and cohesion.

14 Embedded quote – correctly punctuated.

## To what extent does Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* demonstrate Richard Rich's declaration that 'every man has his price'?

### Content features

- 20** Brief concluding sentence – generalised statement to cover the range of characters discussed.
- 21** Opening of topic sentence signals shift in argument.
- 22** Some background offered.
- 23** Detailed knowledge of text and central character demonstrated.
- 24** Relevant discussion of quote by making historical links.
- 25** Concluding sentence sums up the 'costs'.
- 26** Conclusion restates interpretation of quote and sums up key ideas presented.

### Excellent essay

In doing so, (15) Chapuys reveals his hypocrisy and how corrupt he has become in order to maintain his status in the Spanish court. More derides the nobles for their spineless fawning to the King when he tells Normandy, 'You and your class have given in ... because the religion of this country means nothing to you ...'. The acquiescence of the nobles can be purchased as long as their status quo is not upheaved. Self-preservation and the desire '... not to get out of your depth' in the difficult times drives the actions of the Common Man, whose shifting loyalties show just how opportunistic he really is. Finally, it is evident that Henry VIII 'has his price' and exploits the members of his court to pay for his political wishes. Unable to face his conflicted conscience about his divorce and the fact that he 'wrote' in support of the seven sacraments, the King corrupts both religious and English laws and blames More. Henry VIII achieves his 'price' – Anne Boleyn and supremacy of the Church of England – at great moral cost. Generally, support can be easily purchased during upheaved political times if the players name their 'price'. 20

In stark contrast, Sir Thomas More disproves Rich's view that 'every man has his price' (16) – More is incorruptible and his uncritical (17) support is not for sale. 21 He has a genuine religious faith, which gives him the moral focus through which to evaluate the dire political situation. His refusal to sign the oath presents an ethical challenge to the political circumstances and players. (18) More believes that divine law is above man's laws and that to support Henry VIII's Oath of Supremacy would be a violation of divine law. He fears that in taking the oath the salvation of his soul would be jeopardised. 22 Consequently, More remains steadfast to his principles and maintains his moral integrity: 'In matters of conscience, the loyal subject is bounden to be loyal to his conscience than to any other thing'. (19) As a scholar and religious man, More can foresee the sinister implications of individuals selling off their moral decency for personal gain when he warns: '... when statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of public duties ... they lead their country by a short route to chaos'. 23 (20) Indeed, history has proven him correct given the abuses of the laws that followed and the many decades of religious conflict in England. 24 The fact that he has been 'commanded into office' shows that More lacks what the others have in abundance – political ambitions. He is reluctant to accept the materialistic vestiges of office as he rejects bribes and doesn't wear the gold chain of office. His austere and devout demeanour confuses his opponents. Indeed, his integrity is tested by Cromwell who sarcastically derides More's 'noble motive' and 'conscience' as 'frivolous self-conceit'. (21) Despite the high costs of maintaining his stance – loss of 'fellowship' with Norfolk, loss of family life, loss of scholarship (books), loss of his esteemed status in society and, eventually, loss of his life – Sir Thomas More's moral integrity could not be purchased for any price. 25

When Richard Rich declared that 'every man has his price' he was alluding (22) to the fact that an individual's integrity could be purchased. In his play, Robert Bolt has illustrated how in complicated and tense political times most individuals are willing to sell their integrity for personal gain and self-preservation. Corruption appears to be the modus operandi. It is in the case of Sir Thomas More, who resisted selling his soul for the purposes of the administration, that we see hope in the resilience of humanity to maintain the value of principles in tough political times. 26 (1400 words)

### Expression and mechanics features

- 15** Range of link words/phrases used to open sentences showing links and variety in expression.
- 16** Use of quote from topic gives sense of focus.
- 17** Effective concept and character vocabulary throughout.
- 18** Varied sentence openings.
- 19** Embedded quote – correctly punctuated.
- 20** Key quote.
- 21** Effective use of short quotes to build argument.
- 22** Literary terminology – metalanguage.

## THE SATISFACTORY ESSAY



A satisfactory text response essay about Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* reflects most of the following medium-range grade descriptor qualities as specified in the *VCE English / English as a Second Language Assessment Handbook: 2008–2011* for Unit 4, Outcome 1:

**21–30 marks:** A generally well-sustained interpretation of a selected text supported by textual evidence. Knowledge of the ideas, characters and themes constructed and presented in the selected text. Discussion and some analysis of the ways in which the author constructs meaning and expresses or implies a point of view and values. Use of mainly relevant metalanguage to support analysis. Generally expressive, fluent and coherent writing.

A satisfactory text response essay presents a mostly relevant response to the topic and also contains adequate content and adequate expression. An essay of this standard reads as though it is unfinished, or 'half-baked'.

Read the following sample satisfactory text response essay on *A Man for All Seasons* and complete the tasks in order to improve the standard of the essay.

It is clear that the student has learnt many relevant key quotes; however, their discussion of these in relation to the topic is limited.

### SAMPLE TOPIC

**More says, 'I know what's legal not what's right. And I'll stick to what's legal'. Discuss the different conceptions of the law presented in *A Man for All Seasons*.**

### Satisfactory essay

Robert Bolt's intense play *AMFAS* (1) is about the extremely serious political, legal and religious consequences of Henry VIII's divorce and Act of Supremacy, which rejected the authority of the Pope. Sir Thomas More's disagreement with the divorce and his refusal to sign the oath because of his conscience thrusts him into major conflict. (2) Sir Thomas More values the law. In complete contrast, Thomas Cromwell exploits the law for political reasons. Robert Bolt shows us that in very troubled times the law is not absolute, but changeable. In this play, the laws of the land become corrupted because of differing conceptions of the law. (3)

Thomas Cromwell is an ambitious, self-interested and practical politician who illustrates the idea that in troubled times the law can be corrupted. He ignores the importance of the law and, in fact, manipulates the laws to suit his political and personal reasons. He uses the laws for his own benefit. This is seen when he says, '... it must be done by the law. It's just a matter of finding the right law. Or making one'. (4) Cromwell abuses the laws to achieve 'administrative convenience' as he wishes to find a legal way of getting rid of More. Cromwell shows complete disrespect and defiance of the legal processes when he encourages Richard Rich to lie about More under oath; this is called perjury. Unfortunately, this devious tactic leads to More's guilty verdict. Cromwell attempts to put More in a very negative light when he accuses him of '... perverting the law'. This is extremely ironic because Cromwell is perverting the course of justice in this tragic historic saga. (5) Cromwell has a negative conception of the law in this play. (6)

### Improvement tasks

- 1 It is inappropriate to refer to a text in this manner. Give the full title with correct punctuation.
- 2 The student provides some context. How could this be rewritten so that it is more focused on the topic?
- 3 The quote in the topic should be explained and contextualised in the introduction. Add a few sentences giving the context and an explanation for the quote in relation to the topic.
- 4 Develop an interpretation of this quote.
- 5 Illustrate and explain this comment in relation to the topic.
- 6 Rewrite this so that it links to the topic and the next paragraph.

## Satisfactory essay

Sir Thomas More is determined to stay true to his faith and his conscience and, therefore, hides in 'the thickets of the law'. Although he does not consider 'Man's law above God's law'. (7) Like everyone else in Henry VIII's court, More trusts that the laws will protect people's rights and also protect them from unjust persecution. In a very important exchange, More argues with his son-in-law Roper about the absolute value and importance of the law in dangerous times. He firmly believes the law will provide safety and says, 'I'd give the Devil the benefit of the law for my own safety's sake' and 'Whoever hunts for me ... God or Devil, will find me hiding in the thickets of the law'. (8) More judges his own actions by referring to the law when he says 'I stand on the wrong side of no statute and no common law'. (9) More relies on his wit and incredible scholarship when he uses the law to defend his stance against the oath by pointing out the blurry areas in the new Act of Supremacy: '... in so far as the law of God allows'. How far the law of God does allow it remains a matter of opinion, since the Act doesn't state it'. (10) More (11) believes that his 'case is watertight' because '... in silence is my safety under the law'. Even though we know his true stance, More says in his defence, 'The maxim of the law is: Silence Gives Consent'. (12) He is being very hypocritical here and, probably, a bit cowardly for not speaking up and hiding behind the law. (13) Unlike Thomas Cromwell, More values the processes of the law and throughout the play he relies on 'witnesses' and says, 'The court must construe according to the law'. (14) More even says, 'The law requires more than an assumption; the law requires a fact'. His almost blind belief in the processes of law leads to his condemnation in the court because he is unaware of the extent to which the laws of the land have become corrupted. (15) In the end, it is very ironic that Sir Thomas More is condemned by assumptions and Richard Rich's falsehoods. (16) (17)

Robert Bolt shows the different views about the law that people have during troubled times by contrasting Sir Thomas More with Thomas Cromwell. More believes in the power of the law to provide safety in difficult times, while Cromwell believes the law can be manipulated for particular purposes. Overall, Robert Bolt shows that the law can be corrupted because of differing views and that people can become the victims of corrupt laws. (18) (19) (20) (720 words)

## Development tasks

- 7 In this essay the student fails to address More's conception of 'Divine Law'. Where could you incorporate a discussion of this in the essay?
- 8 This is a central quote about More's conception of law. Develop an interpretation and include a discussion of the imagery of the land/forest/forester More uses to explain his view. This is an opportunity to show knowledge of the construction of the text by using metalanguage.
- 9 Provide an interpretation.
- 10 Provide an interpretation.
- 11 This sentence commences like the previous ones. Vary the sentence openings.
- 12 Develop an interpretation in relation to the topic.
- 13 Is this point relevant?
- 14 Provide an interpretation.
- 15 Is this accurate? Rewrite.
- 16 Add a concluding sentence.
- 17 This is a lengthy paragraph. How could it be made concise?
- 18 Is this conclusion an adequate summary of the key ideas?
- 19 Does the conclusion suggest any new ideas?
- 20 The student focuses on More and Cromwell. Could other characters be considered?

## BUILDING THE TEXT RESPONSE ESSAY PLAN BLOCKS

Complete the following tasks in order to plan your response to *A Man for All Seasons*.

### ESSAY TOPIC

'Sir Thomas More is not the only "man for all seasons" in the play'.  
To what extent do you agree?

### 1 Key words

Write out the key words and phrases in the topic.

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## 2 Synonyms

Give synonyms for the key words and phrases.

## 3 Paraphrase of topic – #1

Write a paraphrase of the topic by directly substituting the key words and phrases with appropriate synonyms.

## 4 Paraphrase of topic – #2

Write a paraphrase of the topic by reversing the order of ideas in the original topic statement; that is, begin with the second half of the topic statement sentence.

## 5 What do I have to think and write about?

Complete the following sentence in order to understand the demands of the topic.

*In order to answer this topic, I must think and write about* \_\_\_\_\_

## 6 Questioning the topic

List your own questions about the topic and consider possible answers.

## 7 My point of view – Agree? Disagree? Maybe?

Revise your responses to the preceding tasks. Based on these responses, determine your point of view on the topic. Using a combination of words and phrases from your responses, write a sentence stating your point of view.

## 8 My first reason (body paragraph one)

Complete the following proforma by stating your reason for asserting this point of view. You may add more evidence as appropriate.

➤ *Reason* \_\_\_\_\_

➤ *Evidence* \_\_\_\_\_

➤ *Evidence* \_\_\_\_\_

### 9 My second reason (body paragraph two)

Complete the following proforma by stating your reason for asserting this point of view. You may add more evidence as appropriate.

➤ **Reason** \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **Evidence** \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **Evidence** \_\_\_\_\_

### 10 My third reason (body paragraph three)

Complete the following proforma by stating your reason for asserting this point of view. You may add more evidence as appropriate.

➤ **Reason** \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **Evidence** \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **Evidence** \_\_\_\_\_

### 11 My fourth reason (body paragraph four)

Complete the following proforma by stating your reason for asserting this point of view. You may add more evidence as appropriate.

➤ **Reason** \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **Evidence** \_\_\_\_\_

➤ **Evidence** \_\_\_\_\_

### 12 Conclusion

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## THE TEXT RESPONSE TRAINING ESSAY



Complete the following essay by writing appropriate paragraphs for each topic sentence by drawing on your knowledge of the text. Ensure that you develop your ideas in line with the contention and topic sentences. Incorporate both direct and indirect references to the text. Also write a conclusion for the essay.

When you have completed this essay, brainstorm other approaches to the topic.

## ESSAY TOPIC

### How does the use of the Common Man influence our understanding of this play?

Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* opens with a direct audience address by the Common Man. This instantly alerts us to his role as a guide in helping us achieve an interpretation of the tumultuous events and ideological positions arising from Sir Thomas More's historical 'crisis of conscience'. The function of the Common Man extends beyond mere stage-hand. The Common Man serves to provoke the audience's critical engagement with the play through his commentary and participation in the action of the play.

At a basic level, the Common Man provides the modern audience with the historical context of More's refusal to swear the oath and the implications of this.

The multiple roles played by the Common Man highlight the theme of self-preservation during turbulent times.

It is through the words and actions of the Common Man that we gain an insight into the widespread corruption of the times.

Finally, the Common Man's humorous asides provide critical commentary on key players and events.

Conclusion