



National
Qualifications
2023

X824/76/11

English
Reading for Understanding,
Analysis and Evaluation — Text

TUESDAY, 9 MAY

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Total marks — 30

Read the passages carefully and then attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.



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The following two passages discuss prequels, sequels and spin-offs.

Passage 1

Read the passage below and attempt questions 1 to 8.

In the first passage, Jonathan Dean discusses the film industry's interest in prequels (films consisting of events that take place before the original story), sequels and spin-offs.

For years, people lived happily without knowing or even thinking about what happened to Cruella de Vil before the film 'One Hundred and One Dalmatians'. The demand for a prequel was precisely zero, but they made a prequel anyway. 'Cruella' was released and, in fairness, made \$150 million at the box office. But production line goods such as this do not prove that there is appetite. Put a
5 packet of bland biscuits in front of anyone and they will probably eat them.

Next up is a musical about what happened before 'Beauty and the Beast'. In the 1991 animated film, there were songs and it ended happily, a tale as old as time, until someone decided time needed updating. The 'Beauty and the Beast' prequel tells of Gaston and LeFou — neither Beauty
10 nor Beast, just blokes — and answers questions nobody asked in the first place. And then there is 'F9', the, no kidding, ninth 'Fast & Furious' film. Now bear with me, but have we, possibly, maybe — and I do not want to be judgemental — entirely run out of ideas?

Every week something you thought was over comes back. There are now 180 hours of 'Star Wars' product — quite a leap from the original six hours produced 40 years ago. Darth Vader used to be an icon of heavy-breath horror. Now he is a wobbly buffoon yelling, 'Nooo!' when he becomes
15 more machine than man in the later films. Next in line for a nostalgia massacre is Obi-Wan Kenobi, who gets a prequel series about his early years. Once again mystique will be lost to over-explanation. Similarly, right now a pod of TV 'creatives' are plotting a series about a young James Bond. Nothing is off the table now multi-billionaire entrepreneur Jeff Bezos has bought MGM, the film studio behind Bond. 'MGM owns a back catalogue of much-loved characters and
20 films. We can reimagine and develop this material for the 21st century,' he said. That seems clear — Bond, the character created in 1953, is just another relic ready for a revamp. All these re-inventions and revivals suggest that these characters are now just costumes to be filled with cash.

But these original films, as daft as it seems, mean a lot to people. They offered necessary escapism and comfort, and often influenced our thoughts and feelings when growing up. Prequels
25 and spin-offs, though, are the death of imagination. If — and it's a big if — you ever wondered about what might have happened to characters before the film you saw them in, then all extra material does is add a manufactured explanation where your individual creativity and fond memories once lay.

The reasons for all this exploitation of familiar material are obvious. In a bitter race, the
30 streaming giants Netflix, Disney, Apple and Amazon need to make sure they are the service of choice for customers fed up paying umpteen subscriptions each month. One day one will go bust, but it is unlikely to be whichever has new shows based on something old and popular. It takes effort to launch original work successfully, and there is always a chance it will not catch on. Because of falling revenues from DVD sales and cinemas, big studios can no longer afford to take
35 risks either — they need something surefire, and there is little more surefire than a title that has already taken billions. Really, this is all Marvel's fault. When 'Iron Man' became the first of a massive run of Avengers films, it changed the idea of what could be done with blockbusters. As Marvel titles piled on to each other, it became clear that if you make enough of something, it will block out rivals.

40 If you dare to mention that a plodding parade of films — that all look the same and never go anywhere because every character needs to survive until the next movie — is not the most fulfilling way to create cinema, fans will shout: 'You hate popular things!' Which is not true at all, but is it really great that the Oscar-winning director Chloé Zhao spent years making the Marvel

45 film 'Eternals', which resembles every other Marvel film? This movie production line is not too much of a good thing, rather too much of the same thing. Many great directors have passionately bemoaned this copycat dominance with one saying, 'I don't know if anyone gets anything out of seeing the same movie over and over and over. These films are made as commodities like hamburgers. It's no longer about communicating or finding inspiration or sharing our imagination.'

50 This is not just old directors raging against a modern world that left them behind. Money aside, no actor got into acting dreaming of brand extension. But there are simply not as many choices available now. 'You can do a superhero movie or an independent movie. That's it!' exasperated actor Robert Pattinson says. In the 1990s, when studios had cash, there were mainstream dramas and adult action films for actors, but the business changed. It is now small, and getting smaller. Or
55 big, and getting bigger, if based on familiar material with a built-in global fanbase that allows a studio to toss out a film or TV series with all its marketing in the title.

What a total lack of daring and ideas! And what did Pattinson do next? Batman. The third new one in 16 years.

Passage 2

Read the passage below and attempt question 9. While reading, you may wish to make notes on the main ideas and/or highlight key points in the passage.

In the second passage, Sofia Leal discusses film prequels, sequels and spin-offs.

Recently, Warner Bros. announced the upcoming prequel film 'Wonka', inspired by Roald Dahl's original story 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'. The reaction from the general public was unsurprisingly critical of the decision to make a prequel about an iconic character, a character who has formed emotional connections with audiences for multiple generations.

5 In the last decade or so, prequel films — including the Disney film 'Cruella' about the origins of the 'One Hundred and One Dalmatians' villain — have become Hollywood's favourite story to tell. Funnily enough, they also happen to be the hardest narratives to pull off successfully. After 'Wonka' was announced, one critic wrote, 'There's just something that doesn't thrill me about a pre-tale tacked onto an existing (and well-loved) character, rather than a film striving for an
10 original moment or unknown destination. We all know where the Willy Wonka story ends up.'

The original 1971 film 'Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory' starring actor-comedian Gene Wilder goes down in history as the most iconic of all film portrayals. Wilder's embodiment was so great it left a longstanding image of a beloved candy wizard audiences came to love. Perhaps this is why audiences seem suspicious of the upcoming origin film. There is a lot of scepticism because
15 many prequels feel like a betrayal of one's original experience.

When you experience an original story for the first time, such as 'Harry Potter', 'The Lord of the Rings' or 'Star Wars', you form an emotional connection to your experience. Ambiguity within a film allows you to interpret the actions and personality of a character that is personal to you. Take the character Darth Vader for example: the mystery surrounding his rise to power in the
20 original films made for imaginative and intricate theories from fans. However, you can watch every 'Star Wars' prequel, sequel and spin-off and still not be satisfied that any of this matches the depth or intensity of your own emotions and experience.

Another problem prequels face is their tendency to come off as fundamentally dishonest. Often they are seen as nothing other than a way for film companies to make more money. After all, from
25 the very beginning filmmaking was always a business. The decision to make a prequel movie telling the back-story of a character from a franchise that already exists — that's a business decision.

Prequels, sequels and spin-offs are a way for companies to capitalise on their original investment.

30 Producing films like 'X-Men: First Class' allowed Marvel to spark an 'X-Men' reboot with fresh faces, as well as continue to cash in on a franchise that so many people already loved. Companies can sometimes do a really great job of re-creating a franchise, as they did with 'X-Men'. But at other times, the end product is virtually unrecognisable and unrelated to the original story that initially drew the crowd in.

35 As to why audiences continue to resist the idea of their favourite characters getting their own prequel film, it all comes down to the rational fear that a prequel will only tarnish or ruin the character from the original story. In the case of Willy Wonka, it's hard to say what the prequel will do to the beloved character, or how it's going to change perceptions of the original film. 'I think that the curiosity factor will eventually win out over people's supposed hatred and disgust online,' says Blair Davis, a cinema studies professor. 'Prequels have the potential to be compelling and 40 they also have the potential to be a useless, empty corporate product. If you end up loving a prequel, it will only complement the original. If you end up hating it, I don't think it should detract from your enjoyment of the original in any way.'

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