

Task 3 – Reading into Writing: Contemporary Art

At a glance

Level: ISE III

Focus: Task 3 – Reading into writing

Aims: Students practise writing an essay based on four texts that they have read

Objectives: Students can demonstrate their understanding of the input texts in a short written text, students can write a coherent text in the required format and students can locate and summarise/ paraphrase ideas and attitudes provided in the texts

Skill: Incorporate information from input texts into a written report

Topic: The arts

Language functions: Expressing abstract ideas, expressing assumptions, developing an argument, defending a point of view, summarising ideas, information and arguments and evaluating different standpoints

Lexis: Vocabulary related to contemporary art

Materials needed: Whiteboard, paper and pens and one student worksheet per student

Timing: 75 minutes

Procedure

Preparation

Print and photocopy one student worksheet per student.

In class

1. Tell students they are going to perform a writing task similar to Task 3 – Reading into writing in the ISE III Reading & Writing exam. Tell students the text will be about the work of a contemporary artist.

2. Write this quote on the board:

“Modern paintings are like women, you'll never enjoy them if you try to understand them” (Freddie Mercury)

Ask students to discuss in groups of 3 whether they agree or disagree. After 5 minutes elicit some feedback.

- Put students in pairs. Give out one student worksheet per student and ask the students to focus on the four texts. Ask them to discuss **what** kind of text they think each text is and **where they would expect to find it**. After two minutes, discuss as a class.

Example answers:

Text A – A review of an art exhibition. It could be found in a newspaper or magazine in the entertainment section.

Text B – A description of a painting. It could be found next to the painting in an art gallery.

Text C – A timeline of Ricky Hemming's life. It could be found on a fan website.

Text D – An online forum on Ricky Hemming's work. It could be found following an online article about the same topic.

- Tell students that in pairs they are going to produce two drawings. Write on the board:
 - A floor plan of the exhibition based on the information in text A
 - A reproduction of the painting based on the description in text BTell students they have ten minutes to produce both. Monitor and check the students' progress. After the task, if possible, share some good examples with the class.
- Now tell the students that they are going to focus on the writing task. Ask the students to read the **Writing Instructions** on the student worksheet.
- Tell the students they have ten minutes to plan the task. In order to help them plan, ask them to note down their answers to the questions in the box. Monitor and make sure they are planning in note form, not full sentences.
- Tell students they have 30 minutes to write the task. After 25 minutes, ask students to stop writing and to check their work for errors.

Collect in their writing and mark for the next lesson. When returning their work, provide the model answer for students to compare with their own work. Ask the students to discuss how they could improve their own work in the future.

Extension activity

Students who finish more quickly can be asked to invent and write more entries for the forum in text D.

Further support activity

For weaker students, the writing task can be broken down into stages. Firstly, ask them to write a paragraph summarising the opinions of those who believe that the artist's work is true art. Secondly, ask them to write another paragraph summarising the opinions of those who do not believe that the artist's work is true art. Thirdly, ask them to write a final paragraph stating their own opinion. Finally, they can add a short introduction and conclusion.

After class

At home, students can research another contemporary artist and produce a timeline of their life.

Student Worksheet

Task 3 - Reading into Writing: **Contemporary Art**

Practise for Task 3 – Reading into writing of the ISE III Reading & Writing exam.

Read the following texts about a contemporary artist, and then perform the writing task below.

Reading Texts

Text A

A review of “Inside” – a new exhibition by Ricky Hemmings

Ricky Hemmings is one of Britain’s best known contemporary artists. This exhibition shows his series of representations of body parts made from steel, plastic and paper. Bold, colourful, and often large in scale, the sculptures are instantly recognisable as the human organs presented in biology textbooks. The same organs are present in three different rooms, but in each one they are in a different medium. In room one, the heart is made of paper, while the lungs are plastic. In room two, the heart is plastic, while the lungs are steel and so forth. The position of the body parts also changes in each room, as does the angle at which each is placed.

London is first to host the exhibition, before it travels to Venice at Palazzo Grassi, then on to other European cities.

Text B

A description of “The Zoo” – a painting by Ricky Hemmings

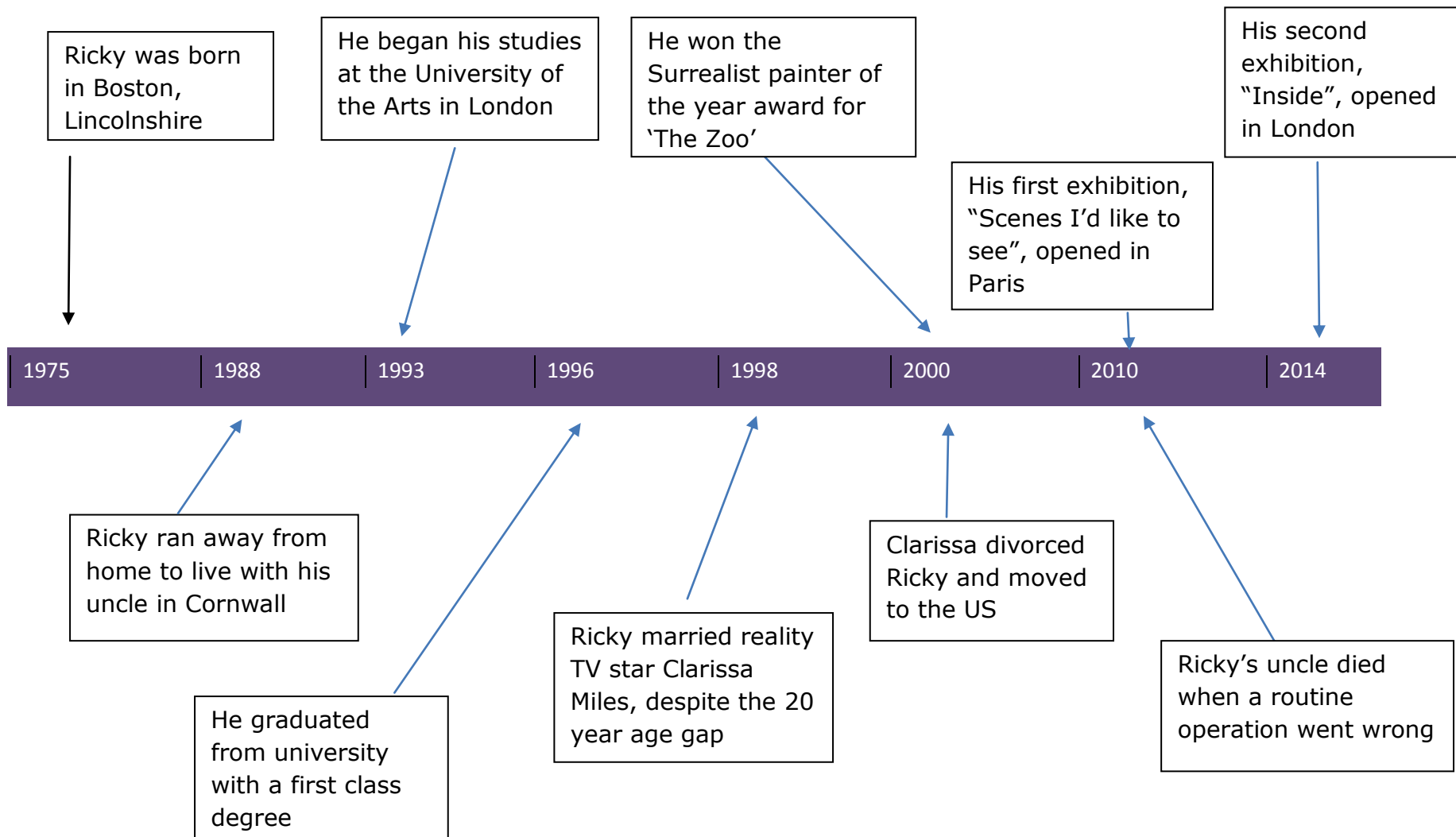
“The Zoo” won Ricky Hemmings the Surrealist painting of the year award in 2000. It is an oil painting on canvas. The painting has the simple, childlike quality that is present in much of his work.

As you can see, in the cage in the middle of the picture are a man, woman and child, presumably a family. Outside of the cage are a lion, tiger and bear, all looking in. The most striking thing about the painting is the colours. While the people in the cage are colourless, depicted solely in beiges and greys, the animals are painted in luminous orange, green and yellow.

Critics described The Zoo as thought-provoking and surreal. For some viewers, the image is disturbing, as it subverts the natural order of things. Others find it comical. Notice how the child in the cage is pointing a toy camera towards the tiger, who in turn appears to be posing for the photograph.

Text C

Timeline of Ricky Hemming's life



Text D

An online debate about the work of Ricky Hemmings

Ricky Hemmings – the greatest artist of our times?	
Carla	There is no doubt in my mind that RH is number one. I've just been to see "Inside" at the Royal Academy and it blew me away.
Aslan	I'm not keen on the sculptures, but I love his paintings. "The Zoo" is hilarious.
Mariola	RH isn't an artist. His paintings are ridiculous and his sculptures look like they form part a nursery school project. How can a gigantic plastic blue heart be classed as art?
Carla	@ Mariola. You need to go to see the exhibition. One sculpture taken out of context doesn't tell the whole story.
Mariola	What story is that?
Guido	I quite like "The Zoo" – but I'm not sure what it means?
Carla	@ Mariola. My interpretation is that "Inside" is a comment on our organs, how they are all the same, but different. How one heart is more fragile than another heart, and so on.
Mariola	Whatever. They're just a bunch of ugly models to me.
Carla	@ Guido. "The Zoo" was painted in the same year that RH split up with CM. I think it expresses his disillusion with humanity and family life.
Aslan	I don't think you need to understand art to appreciate it – if a painting provokes an emotion in me then that's enough. I actually think "The Zoo" is funny, it makes me laugh.
Guido	But there is something unsettling about it – it made me uncomfortable at the same time as making me laugh.
Sun	@ Carla. I completely agree with you about "Inside". I read somewhere RH recently lost the uncle that brought him up thanks to an operation that went wrong...
Raquel	It's all a load of rubbish. Art should display talent and skill. RH paints and sculpts like a five-year-old!

Writing Task

Use the information from the 4 texts you have read to write a short essay (200 - 230 words) entitled:

"To what extent do you agree that the art of Ricky Hemmings is true art?"

Plan your report before you start writing. Make some notes in response to the questions in the box to help with your planning:

- 1) What type of art does Ricky Hemmings produce?
- 2) What do people who like his art say about it?
- 3) What do people who don't like his art say about it?
- 4) What is the definition of "true art"?
- 5) In your opinion, does Ricky Hemmings' art fit this definition?

Now write your essay of **200-230** words. Try to use your own words as far as possible.

Model Answer:

In this essay, I am going to discuss the work of one of Britain's most controversial contemporary artists, Ricky Hemmings, and evaluate whether his work can be classed as "true art".

"The Zoo" is an oil painting of a caged family, observed from outside by three wild animals. The animals are painted in fluorescent colours, while the people are painted in neutral colours.

"Inside" is an exhibition made up of a series of representations of large, colourful body parts in steel, plastic and paper. There are three different rooms each containing the same body parts, but in each room they are made of different materials and placed in different positions.

Both works have received a mixed reaction. Some think that "The Zoo" is essentially a humorous piece, while others find it disconcerting. Many believe that it is an expression of Hemmings' disillusionment with family life.

Many have commented that the sculptures that constitute "Inside" are infantile and meaningless. On the contrary, others argue that they form a comment on the fragility of the human condition.

In my opinion, any work which compels us to spend time looking at it and pondering its meaning is true art. Therefore, Hemmings' work is indeed true art. There may not be universal agreement about its aesthetic value, but it definitely provokes people to ask questions about the artist's intentions.

Websites used:

<http://www.artbeyondsight.org/mei/verbal-description-training/samples-of-verbal-description/>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/henri-matisse-cut-outs>

http://www.saatchigallery.com/current/ben_quilty.htm

<http://www.yorkblog.com/artist/files/2014/06/Jeff-Koons-timeline-big.jpg>
<http://makingamark.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/major-art-competitions-in-uk-in-2013.html>