Reflective Statement examples

1. Based on *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

From reading the book, I could relate to a lot of events that were presented in this rural, conservative area of Columbia. The Interactive Oral help put into perspective - and in greater detail - why Marquez wrote about this culture and how his values can be seen through the way he writes.

I liked reading the book because I could relate it to aspects of Indian culture. How Marquez describes the small rural town reminded me of similar villages in India. Marquez shows how the town is so small and is such a tight knit community that one family's problems become everyone's. Also, the way in which everybody hears about the death threat before the victim does. The themes of pride and virginity in Colombian culture that are exhibited in the story are very similar to those in India. The Interactive Oral helped to show me why the virginity of the woman in Colombian culture was so sacred. It also helped me understand why the family's name is ruined or disgraced if the daughter loses her virginity before wedlock. In India, in smaller conservative villages, under the Hindu religion, the bride is supposed to be a virgin until marriage. The custom is that the mother in law checks for blood on the sheets. In certain cases if the woman is not, she could be either killed or disowned. Hence, this aspect of the novella was very similar to Indian culture, which made it easier for me to relate to.

These cultural relations are prominent through the entire novella. With the help of the Interactive Oral, it made me understand the background to the culture Marquez was writing about which was to some extent his own. This showed me a glimpse of Colombian culture and helped me see that although Columbia and India are in completely different continents, there are still cultural similarities.

2. Based on *Death in Venice*, by Thomas Mann

During the discussion, several different ideas and themes were explored, which I knew little about beforehand. These topics included the autobiographical aspects of the novella, intertextualisation with Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, and classical imagery within the novella.

The notion that the novella could be a direct account of Thomas Mann's own trip to Venice in 1911 is one that strikes me as quite likely. I learned that the journey of Aschenbach from Munich to Venice and also his journey of self exploration are nearly identical to the one that Mann took. Also, I learned that Aschenbach’s moment of crystallisation with the young boy and continuous stalking and adoration was a reflection of Mann's own encounter with a classically beautiful
Polish boy on his own travels. The novella can therefore be read quite easily as a fictionalised account of Mann’s own journey.

Also during the discussion, the fact that the novella includes many references to Friedrich Nietzsche’s work, ‘The Birth of Tragedy’ was presented and discussed. I now know that Nietzsche’s notion of the two extremes, Apollonian and Dionysian, are frequently referred to and symbolised in the novel. For instance, Aschenbach himself has an abundance of Apollonian aspects to his character, mostly inherited from his paternal ancestry. However, there are glimpses of Dionysian characteristics within him also, obtained from his mother - a daughter of a musician and a woman from Bohemia. Aschenbach experiences an internal conflict over his maternal inheritance and tries to stick to his Apollonian roots, but is overcome by the Dionysian surroundings of Venice and his inner maternal seeds of Hellenistic heritage, growing more and more significant; this eventually leads of course to his death.

The final part of our discussion was concerned with the classical imagery within the novella. I learned that the main classical references are expressed through Tadzio, and we see glimpses of classical deities in the surrounding population around Aschenbach. Tadzio is often referred to in classical terms and is portrayed as a Greek sculpture-like figure of beauty.

All of these ideas and themes gave me extra knowledge that I did not have before.

3. Based on Three Sisters, by Anton Chekhov

Through our class discussion we discussed the symbol of Moscow and what it meant in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Through discussing this, we just gathered that the sisters have a misguided perception of what living in Moscow is like. The sisters seem to be under the impression that if they return to Moscow, their lives will become a lot better than they currently are. This leads them to experience frustration with the area in which they live, believing that if they were to move back to the city, they would have more successful lives. We also discussed that continuous thinking of Moscow is also what limits them from ever returning because seeing as nothing will ever compare to their happiness when they were in Moscow, the sisters idly wait to move back in the hopes that their dreams will be realised. Chekhov makes this clear as he indicates to the reader that they will never venture back to Moscow through its constant repetition in the play, thus leading to the audience to feel that their goal is unachievable.

The idea of social class was also brought up in discussion and how the roles of society and the people within it have changed throughout the play. Natasha starts off as being a socially lesser character in terms of status, in comparison to the three sisters, however, at the end of the play the roles are reversed and she suddenly has control of the entire estate on which they live. Andrey is expected to be a professor at Moscow University; however at the end of the novel he becomes a cuckolded secretary of the local council, which is a role in society that is much below his inherited status. This is important as it emphasises the struggles that the sisters and Andrey have had to overcome throughout the play.
These two themes were the major ones discussed. However, literary techniques were also mentioned – such as the aforementioned repetition of Moscow, in order to emphasise the fact of the sisters would never return to the city, or the constant use of images of clocks, which show the passing of time without their dreams being realised.

4. *Antigone* by Sophocles

The interactive oral gave me a unique opportunity to understand Sophocles’ *Antigone* in further detail. Our discussion began by focusing on Aristotle’s conventions of tragedy. I now appreciate the importance of the plot when studying Greek tragedy and the notion that the tragic hero must perform an evil deed. Clearly, both Creon and Antigone embody many characteristics of Aristotle's tragic hero, such as hamartia and the performance of an evil deed, portrayed through Antigone’s illegal burial of Polynices and Creon condemning Antigone to her unjust death.

We moved on to discuss the role of the chorus in Greek Theatre. I hadn’t realised that in Greek antiquity the Chorus consisted of 12 males speaking in unison. Furthermore, I now understand it can be used in a variety of ways – from a regulatory tool to a single voice conveying the beliefs of the public or the importance of reason. We agreed that Sophocles made use of the Chorus as a means to advise Creon with this ‘reasonable’ voice - against the execution of his niece.

This stimulated a more general discussion of the role of religion in Greek society. We found that polytheism was deeply rooted in society at the time. We discussed the issue of divine law juxtaposed with human law and how this aided a deeper understanding of the actions of Creon and Antigone. We agreed that Creon embodied human law and that this could be his hamartia, as he chooses to disregard divine law. However, we disagreed whether this was a consequence of his dedication to his role as leader or a character flaw where power had catalysed his demise. In contrast, Antigone disregards human law out of respect for the gods, providing Polynices with the burial she felt he deserved.

Antigone’s disregard for the law then stimulated discussion about the role of women in Greek society and how Sophocles uses her to challenge social norms. I discovered that women were expected to be of submissive character and experienced great prejudice in Greek society. Antigone's character challenges this notion through her disregard for the will of the leader and with her entry through the Parados. I believe Sophocles did this to elevate her status to that of a tragic heroine.
5. Based on Kokoro by Natsume Soseki

We began the discussion by considering the period of history within which the novel is set. We discussed how, at the time, women were domesticated. However, with reference to characters like Okusan, some female characters do demonstrate an element of independence. Then a student raised the point that the relationships between the genders was not a major theme of the novel. I felt the same way, and having heard this point I suggested that the reason that we may have put such emphasis on gender is use is because of the cultural differences between Japan in the 1900s and our modern times.

Next, we talked about the characters and which period we believe they belong to, based on their ideals. Sensei, we decided, was the most interesting as he experienced the conflict between traditional Japanese beliefs and western individualism. We thought that Sensei believed that he belonged to the Meiji era, as shown by his interest in following General Nogi’s example - to die with the Emperor. Also, one of the students mentioned that Sensei was more western than the narrator as it is established at the beginning of the novel that he socialised with foreigners. Contrastingly, the narrator expresses a sense of intrigue and unfamiliarity when he sees a westerner. The question was then brought up about K and whether or not he represented old Japan. K followed traditional values whilst his parents wanted him to follow western ideals and pursue a financially secure occupation – the conflict between the old and the new Japan.

We agreed that the novel was written in very simple language, with little complexity in structure. As a result the text itself appeared quite plain and that's it made the implications of the language crucial in interpreting the novel. Also, the author used to small hints throughout the novel to create suspense, for example the way that the narrator decides not to read the letter, having received it, knowing that it subject matter is of great significance.

This Interactive Oral helped me to understand that cultural aspects of the novel have to be looked at by considering the social norms of the time. The exploration of the selfishness in conventional ideas like love also contextualised the circumstances in which inner conflict arose for the characters.