

Section I: Language, identity and culture

20 marks · Allow about 40 minutes

Prescribed text: Jhumpa Lahiri, The Namesake (prose fiction)

STIMULUS

Names and languages are the first things we inherit, and the hardest to put down.

QUESTION 1 (20 marks)

How does your prescribed text explore the ways in which language and culture shape a person's sense of identity? In your response, make detailed reference to your prescribed text.

A MODEL RESPONSE AND GUIDANCE FOR THAT TASK

Worked Response: Language, identity and culture

Question 1 · Jhumpa Lahiri, The Namesake (prose fiction)

The official 2027 marking guidelines were not published when this paper was written. The bands below are TPH's own practice rubric, built from the syllabus outcomes (EST-12-01 to EST-12-06). They are a guide, not NESA marking criteria.

How this section is judged (TPH practice rubric, 20 marks)

Criterion	What the top band does	Common slip
Interpretation (EST-12-01, 12-03)	A sustained argument that answers the question about language and identity; shows how culture, context and values shape the representation of identity in the text.	Retelling the plot; listing cultural differences without connecting them to identity.
Analysis of language, form and structure (EST-12-01)	Specific evidence analysed for effect, with accurate metalanguage (narrative voice, metaphor, structure, motif, symbol).	Quotations without analysis; naming techniques without effects.
Composition (EST-12-05)	A thesis, paragraphs that build the argument, linked evidence, controlled expression and a conclusion that adds an insight.	Paragraphs that repeat one point; informal phrasing; confusing character names.

Section I: model extended response

Outcome: EST-12-01, EST-12-03, EST-12-05

How to tackle it, step by step

1. Underline the key ideas in the question: 'language', 'culture', 'sense of identity'. The stimulus gives you an angle (inherited names and languages); you can use it or ignore it.
2. Write a thesis that says HOW the novel explores identity, not just that it does. Here: identity is shaped by inherited names and customs that do not travel cleanly, so it must be negotiated rather than chosen once.
3. Plan three focus points: the first generation's displacement (Ashima), the name as the central symbol (Gogol), and the second generation's negotiation (Gogol/Nikhil), with a technique for each.
4. Use short quotations you can remember. If you cannot recall an exact line, describe the moment precisely instead.
5. Keep language and culture linked in each paragraph: say what a language feature does AND what it shows about identity.
6. End with an insight about identity, not a summary of the plot.

Model essay (about 675 words)

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* argues that identity is not a possession but a negotiation between the names, languages and customs we inherit and the world we inhabit. Through a family that moves from Calcutta to Massachusetts, Lahiri shows how culture can be carried across a border only in fragments, so that each generation must decide what to keep, translate or refuse. The novel suggests that a name, the smallest unit of language, holds the largest questions of belonging.

For the first generation, identity is held in place by memory and routine, and displacement is felt as a condition of the body. Lahiri describes Ashima's life as an immigrant through a striking metaphor: being a foreigner is "a sort of lifelong pregnancy", "a perpetual wait, a constant burden". The comparison makes cultural dislocation physical, unfinished and endless, a state she carries rather than resolves. The third-person narration stays close to her thoughts, so readers experience the ordinary world of Cambridge as she does: unfamiliar, noisy, and measured against home. Her

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