

## PART A

Read Texts 1–2 and answer questions 1–21 in the Question-Answer Book for Part A.

### Text 1

#### *Star Wars Episode VIII: The Last Jedi*

1 [1] *The Last Jedi*, the 2017 blockbuster in the *Star Wars* franchise, ticks a lot of boxes for any fan of the series. There are epic space battles, awesome lightsaber fights, and a host of familiar and beloved characters. Unfortunately, none of this quite makes up for the mediocre script full of confusing storylines. On the whole, the movie is a bit of a disappointment.

5 [2] The story picks up where *Episode VII: The Force Awakens* left off. Resistance Forces, led by Leia, are locked in battle with the evil First Order, an organization that has grown incredibly powerful. On the other hand, disturbed that his nephew, Kylo Ren, has embraced the dark side of the Force, Luke Skywalker has abandoned this war and isolated himself on a lonely planet. Kylo Ren is now a firmly established member of the First Order, fighting alongside his new mentor Supreme Leader Snoke. Plucky young heroine Rey, meanwhile, is busy  
10 searching for Luke, hoping to convince him to return to fight with the Resistance and save the galaxy.

[3] Right away, there is too much going on—and that is part of the problem with this movie. Writer and director Rian Johnson is trying to cram too much into it. With many simultaneous storylines, it is easy to get confused and lose track of what is at stake for all these characters. Although most of the individual storylines are interesting, they do not always intersect in satisfying ways. It can feel like pure distraction to follow some of the subplots,  
15 such as the stories involving Resistance commanders Finn and Poe or Captain Phasma or even fan-favourite Chewbacca, when the main action is clearly with Rey and Kylo Ren. As a result, the many separate pieces do not fit together as well as they might have.

[4] Adding to this is the problem of unnecessary plot twists. There's a moment, for example, when it looks like Kylo Ren has decided to join Rey, betray Supreme Leader Snoke and finally redeem himself. But just a few  
20 minutes later, it is revealed that he is still deep in the dark side and has been all along. It is frustrating to watch these progressions that wind up going nowhere. In fact, the movie ends pretty much where it started. Rey is still tapped into the light side of the Force, Kylo Ren is tapped into the dark side, and the Resistance is still in a galactic battle with the First Order. Nothing much has changed.

[5] *The Last Jedi* may be a smash hit at the box office and a triumph of mind-blowing visual effects, but it is  
25 lacking in one of the most basic elements of movie-making: good storytelling.

## The Great Western Revival

B1

- 1 [1] A glance at the offerings at most cinemas today reveals a lot of the same thing. For years, it's been nothing but one superhero flick after another, and moviegoers are getting tired of it. It's time to look through the catalogue of film genres and pick out something different. It's time for a revival of the Western.
- [2] The Western genre, with its rich and important history in Hollywood, is the perfect candidate for a revival.
- 5 [3] Many of the movie industry's earliest movies were all about gun-toting cowboys roaming around America's Wild West, where lawlessness was the order of the day. Early moviegoers were drawn to these stories of good and bad, right and wrong. They loved to cheer for the tough, but honourable cowboys and watch the fearsome outlaws finally brought to justice.
- [3] The genre's popularity diminished over the latter half of the twentieth century, but it never disappeared
- 10 entirely. Every so often, a great new Western excites critics and audiences alike. In the 1990s, we got legendary films like *Tombstone* and *Unforgiven*. In the early 2000s, there was *All the Pretty Horses* and *3:10 to Yuma*. The fact that the Western has never completely died out speaks to the resilience of the genre. It has an endless ability to capture an audience's attention. In the past decade, there's been a small, but noticeable surge in the number of Westerns to hit theatres, which suggests a revival might already be underway. Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful*
- 15 *Eight* was a box-office boom! And the Coen Brothers' *True Grit* even notched up a few Oscar nominations.
- [4] One of the enduring strengths of the genre is, of course, the Western landscape. Any good Western contains breathtaking footage of the untamed prairies. It is a landscape that is vast and frightening, but also beautiful. Many of today's popular action movies are set in modern, urban centres, in high-tech environments, and make heavy use of computer-generated images. In contrast, the Western immerses the audience in a stunning natural
- 20 landscape, allowing nature itself to serve as the main visual effect. How refreshing!
- [5] A revival does not have to be a simple recycling of Western stories. Rather, a modern take might blend contemporary ideas with classic elements of the genre to create something truly fresh. This is already happening with hit TV shows like *Westworld*, which places futuristic technologies, such as robots and androids, in a classically Western setting. It is a brand new twist on an old genre.
- 25 [6] By blending old and new, the possibilities for exciting modern Westerns are endless. One day soon, we might see those fearless cowboys roaming all across our movie screens once more.

END OF READING PASSAGES

Read the Texts 3–4 and answer questions 22–40 in the Question-Answer Book for Part B1.

## Text 3

## Six Reasons to Watch Anime

- 1 For decades now, anime has been a hugely popular type of entertainment. Although anime originated in Japan in the early 20th century, it was not until the 1970s that it entered mainstream Japanese culture. An explosive surge in popularity during the 1990s saw anime sweep all across the globe. Today, millions of people, both young and old, enjoy anime, finding it to be a stimulating, thought-provoking, and moving art form. But not everyone understands its massive appeal. If you've never tried watching an anime series, and do not understand what all the fuss is about, here are a few reasons to help explain what makes it so great.

## 1 Amazing artwork

- 10 Anime is a true art form. The creation of each individual anime cell requires an extraordinary amount of artistic skill and talent. Take a close look at an anime image! The attention to detail, even in the background, can be absolutely remarkable, to say nothing of the creative use of colour. The art is constantly evolving as anime artists develop new techniques and styles to advance the form. Many Western cartoonists and graphic novelists have acknowledged how much they have been influenced by anime art.

## 2 Complex storytelling

- 15 The stories driving many anime series are not morally or emotionally simple. Many people have the mistaken understanding that these are cartoons designed solely for children. But the storylines you will find in anime series are complicated and full of moral uncertainty. Protagonists often grapple with difficult choices and circumstances. Popular series such as *Kino's Journey* and *Monster* tackle weighty philosophical topics.

## 3 Wide range of worlds

- 20 There are thousands and thousands of different anime series, each with its own unique and imaginative world. You can find worlds full of magicians and sorcerers, or worlds populated by vampires and aliens. But there are also historical worlds, which are set in a variety of different time periods. Anime allows the creation of any and every possible world—it is limited only by the creator's imagination. And if you prefer watching stories that take place in more realistic settings, there are plenty of options that offer this too. There is always something for everyone in the anime universe.

## 25 4 Interesting characters

- 30 Anime is full of realistic characters. Like humans, they cry and suffer pain, they fight against fate, and they celebrate life. They are totally relatable. They have personalities like humans and they have dreams and goals. You'll never get bored by their stories. It is said that the most favourite anime character is Son Goku in *Dragon Ball* manga series. Son Goku resembles the Monkey King from the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West* and Superman, one of the most famous American fictional superheroes.

## 5 Memorable music

- 35 Catchy music is a defining characteristic of anime. If you've heard the theme song from *Sailor Moon*, you know just how fun and memorable anime music can be. The songs featured throughout an anime episode are a critical element of the series, adding to the overall mood. Anime music has been hugely influenced by Japanese pop music. In fact, many anime theme songs are sung by famous Japanese pop bands.

## 6 Fun, fun, fun!

Perhaps the best reason to watch anime is because it's just plain fun. Animated worlds are the perfect place to indulge in a little escapism. They offer a quick break from the troubles and tedium of our everyday lives. And that, after all, is one of the main functions of great entertainment.

Text 4

1 I. \_\_\_\_\_

[1] **Julie:** Hi everyone! I've been thinking a lot about why anime has become so popular, especially in the West. I'm not sure I can explain it. Anyone got any theories?

II. \_\_\_\_\_

5 [2] **Annie:** Hey Julie. I think people are starting to realize that there are many different kinds of anime, with all sorts of characters and stories. When I used to talk to people, particularly westerners, about anime, I got the sense that they thought of anime as a single cartoon genre. And now they're starting to realize that there's so much more depth to anime than they thought. They're discovering amazing and profound stories.

10 [3] **Julie:** Thanks Annie! That makes a lot of sense.

III. \_\_\_\_\_

15 [4] **Andrew:** Hey guys. Great discussion. I just wanted to chime in with another thought. Personally, I think anime has exploded because it's become so widely available. Think about it. Today there are so many anime shows that you can access for free online. There are loads of free streaming and downloading options. This has really opened up the doors to people.

[5] **Julie:** Good point, Andrew! I've also noticed that a lot of popular anime programmes have been turned into live-action Hollywood movies. That must have introduced brand new audiences to anime.

[6] **Andrew:** Couldn't agree more! The big remakes have definitely encouraged more interest.

**END OF READING PASSAGES**

Read Text 5–6 and answer questions 41–59 in the Question-Answer Book for Part B2.

## Text 5

### What *Black Mirror*, *Her* and the near-future genre tell us about tomorrow

*Taking after George Orwell and JG Ballard, some of the most prophetic and disturbing fiction about the near future continues to be made on TV and film.*

by Noah Berlatsky

- 1 [1] *1984* [by George Orwell] is an example of near-future science fiction—narratives that extrapolate from current technology and society to think about what life could be like in 10 years, or a year, or an hour. Television shows including *Black Mirror*, *Orphan Black* and *Humans* and films such as *Her*, *Ex Machina* and *High Rise* (which was adapted from near-future master JG Ballard) don't take warp-speed flights to distant stars. They just
- 5 take a step or two into the screen we're already looking at.
- [2] Part of the reason that the near future is enjoying such a boom at the moment is that the present looks more like the future than ever, according to Gerd Leonhard, futurist and author of *Technology vs Humanity*. 'Basically what's happening is that science fiction has caught up with us, so what seems like science fiction is now possible,' he told me.
- 10 [3] He said the central conceit of *Her*, in which a man falls in love with a computer operating system, 'depicts what's pretty much already here, in that we can consider the computer a friend'. The *Black Mirror* episode 'San Junipero', in which people live inside a simulation, Leonhard says, is also quite close to fruition. 'That is in a way already happening. We use mobile devices as a kind of second external brain, which we're using to escape from our own reality. But it's still outside our bodies. So I think we're five or seven years away till we get to the
- 15 point where we can create a fake reality using augmented and virtual reality and holograms.'
- [4] The director of 'San Junipero', Owen Harris, was a little more skeptical than Leonhard. The episode imagines a future in which people can upload their consciousnesses into a computer-simulated reality, either temporarily while they're still alive, or permanently after death. 'In terms of how much I believe this can happen,' Harris told me, 'I think it's impossible to know. It's quite difficult to make that leap into trying to imagine how this could
- 20 work. But then, that's not to say that it couldn't. Because things that we struggle to perceive at one point in time, they can come to pass.'
- [5] For Harris, the fun of *Black Mirror* isn't predicting the future so much as the tantalizing possibility of what might be. 'I like that sense of tipping point that that creates, which is sort of that you could quite literally wake up tomorrow, and you wouldn't be completely blown away if you were to read about this piece of technology being
- 25 trialed or used for the first time.'
- [6] 'San Junipero', in particular, is a love story, just like *Her*. For Harris, the near future provides a perfect place for romance. 'When you're dealing with relationship tales, there's still a familiarity about them and a truth to them even though the technology that they're dealing with is largely science fiction.'
- [7] Near-future fiction can be a way to forecast possibilities, and it can be an enjoyable narrative device. But it's
- 30 also a commentary on what's happening now, according to Carl Freedman, author of *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*. 'I think science fiction is rarely in any important way about the future, in the sense of trying to predict the future,' Freedman said. 'Its record in trying to do so is very mixed at best.' Instead, Freedman says, the interesting thing about *Black Mirror* is the way that it examines the present, echoing JG Ballard's maxim that 'the future in my science fiction has never been more than five minutes away'.

35 [8] One common theme in the majority of episodes, he notes, is 'spectatorship, how we like to watch things'.  
Spectatorship and life have become inseparable—not in the future, but now. 'An awful lot of our life is devoted  
to looking at electronic screens,' Freedman points out. 'That's a very recent thing; go back 30 years and except  
for television, we didn't spend a lot of time looking at electronics, we didn't live through electronic screens.  
Generally, the television was at home in your living room or bedroom, but now of course we have screens with  
40 us wherever we go.'

[9] Near-future sci-fi is a way of gaining perspective, not on what might be soon, but on what is, right now.  
Orwell wasn't (just) writing about a future Britain, but about the contemporary Stalinist Soviet Union—and for  
that matter about authoritarian tendencies in Britain and the West, which he experienced first-hand while fighting  
in the Spanish civil war.

45 [10] More even than most science fiction, near-future sci-fi offers a kind of dialectic between what is right now  
and what might be. Shows such as *Black Mirror* look at the present to imagine the future, and then examine  
the future to think about what's happening now. Near-future is a reminder that the present is teetering on the  
precipice of tomorrow.

### Text 6

1 Check out our latest trending movies and TV shows:

[1] *Black Mirror* is a British sci-fi anthology TV series produced by Charlie Brooker. The TV series is set  
in the near future that looks into the modern world with regard to man's relationship with new technologies.  
5 With a dark and satirical tone, each episode is a stand-alone production with new stories, settings and  
characters.

[2] *Her* is an American sci-fi romantic drama film released in 2013. Written, directed and produced by  
Spike Jonze, the film depicts the lonely and depressed Theodore who develops an intimate relationship  
with Samantha, an artificially intelligent virtual assistant he purchased. As the story develops, the bond  
between Theodore and Samantha grows and enriches each other.

END OF READING PASSAGES