

## Unpacking the Question for Paper 2

As Paper 2 presents four unseen questions, you will want to become good at understanding and 'unpacking' exam questions. The term 'to unpack' is used here because it suggests that essay questions, like baggage, can be opened up to reveal more inside. This is a very applicable metaphor to Paper 2. We often select one of the four essay questions based on a gut feeling, but we do not always understand the implications of the question until we have studied it more closely.

This lesson aims to develop a simple but important skill of mind mapping an essay question. Unpacking exam questions is a skill that requires practice. Below, you can see how one question has been unpacked. More exam-style questions have been included as well so that you can practice unpacking in a similar way.

### Spider diagrams

One of the best ways to unpack a question is to draw a spider diagram or mind map. This simple tool is effective because it asks you to attach existing knowledge (about your two literary works) to new concepts (an unseen question).

To start, examine all of the implications of a particular question. For example, if a question reads: "How are characters alienated from society in two of the works that you have read?" you can explore several aspects of alienation. Ask questions about the question:

- "Is the character alienated from his family and friends?"
- "What does it mean to be alienated?"
- "Is a character literally exiled or emotionally shut out?"

In brief, one word can have many implications.

Secondly, apply the implications of the question to the literary works you've read. For example: "How is 'alienation' different for Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* than for Prospero in *The Tempest*?" Actually, diagram it out or draw it out using your two literary works.

**Tip:** One of the most effective ways of drawing a spider diagram is on a large sheet of paper, using a strong marker and a few classmates. This activity lends itself to group work, as some members of the group may see implications to the question that you had not seen before. Rewriting the exam question in a large font also helps you see more aspects of the question.

### Answering the question

Once you have unpacked the question and made a spider diagram, it is time to write two or three sentences that very concisely and succinctly answer all implications of the question. These could form the basis for thesis statements or topic sentences. Here you can see how a student has broken down her answers to a Paper 2 essay question in several parts.

"Analyze how justice is represented and understood in two literary works you've studied."