

The Great Depression Exam Essay Questions

STUDY DESIGN DOT POINTS:

1. The Great Depression and the ways in which Australians responded to that crisis
2. The extent to which the Great Depression shook old certainties and provided opportunities for people to argue for change
3. The extent to which the cohesion of Australian society was maintained or redefined by the experience of the Great Depression

ESSAY SECTION

Students are assessed according to argument, relevance, evidence and knowledge gained from a variety of sources. The very best essays are those which consider the contention from a range of perspectives and contain a wealth of specific evidence. Assessors reward responses that present a coherent argument, provide evidence to support the contention and remain relevant to the question asked.

2005 Question:

37% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 12.8/20

'Despite short-term upheavals, Australian society did not change significantly as a result of the Great Depression.' To what extent do you agree?

Examiners comments

This question suggested that although the Great Depression caused short-term changes, it did not have a significant impact on Australian society. Better responses examined a range of short-term consequences such as business failure; unemployment and its consequences, such as family break-up and homelessness; emergence of the *susso* and assistance from private charities; political instability; and the emergence of extremist groups. The very best responses then argued that the fundamentals of Australian society - the family, the welfare state, the role of churches and the rural lifestyle as the backbone of the economy - barely changed and in some ways became stronger. Strong responses made much of the term 'significantly' in their arguments.

A number of students argued that for some there was little change at all, even in the short term. They cited examples of those who remained in work (such as government employees and teachers), those who owned businesses unaffected by the downturn (such as cinema owners and large retailers) and referred to the fact that although wages fell, prices for most commodities fell even more.

Middle-range and weaker answers simply listed a range of changes that occurred because of the Great Depression with little attempt to comment on the significance of the change.

2006 Question:

41% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 13/20

'The Great Depression saw the cohesion of Australian society severely tested and redefined.' To what extent do you agree?

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Examiners comments

This question presented a pessimistic view of the Great Depression by suggesting that the crisis challenged the cohesiveness of Australian society and caused it to alter.

The majority of students agreed with this statement and middle range answers cited poverty, equality of sacrifice (or lack of) and uncertainty about how to deal with the crisis on a local/state/federal level as evidence of the breakdown of society. Weaker answers simply listed these changes but did little to engage in any debate concerning their longevity. These students tended to generalise about 'upper class', 'working class', etc. which often detracted from their central argument.

The very best students offered a balanced response to the question. In these instances, there was often reference to the idea that the cohesiveness of society was strengthened (with people providing assistance to others), the part played by private charities and the increased role of the government in providing aid and support.

2007 Question:

30% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 12.9/20

'The response of Australians to the crisis of the Great Depression depended on many factors; however there is no doubt that everyone suffered.' To what extent do you agree?

Examiners comments

This question asked students to consider the response of Australians to the Great Depression and whether everyone suffered during the Great Depression. Better students acknowledged the two parts of the question and argued the extent to which they agreed. Students argued that many factors determined responses to the Great Depression, such as class, location, occupation, gender, age, employment status and urban and rural situations; these factors determined the degree of suffering for each group. Weaker response did not challenge the concept that 'everyone suffered'.

2008 Question:

28% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 11.5/20

'The effects of the Great Depression fell unequally on Australians, straining the cohesion of Australian society.' To what extent do you agree?

Examiners comments

This essay required examination of the evidence. Better student responses argued both sides of the question before making their stance on the question clear. Due to the unequal effects of the Great Depression, there was a lot of debate about whether cohesion was strained. Was there cohesion before? There were some signs of lack of political cohesion but these were not major. There was also evidence that the Great Depression increased cohesion, for example, people helping each other in difficult times.

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2009 Question:

24% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 12.1/20

'Divisions in society virtually disappeared during the crisis of the Great Depression.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Examiners comments

This question asked students to what extent they agreed with statement 'Divisions in society virtually disappeared during the crisis of the Great Depression.' Many students both agreed and disagreed with this statement. Some students argued that divisions were there, due to the unequal effects of the Great Depression, but many students wrote about neighbours helping each other, charity work, and other acts of kindness. There was some focus on political divisions and on whether these disappeared.

2010 Question:

26% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 12.4/20

'The crisis of the Depression negatively affected all Australians.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Examiners comments

Students needed to argue to what extent they agreed with the statement 'The crisis of the Depression negatively affected all Australians'. The more successful students argued that there was a diversity of experience of this crisis; they were able to get past generalities such as 'the working class were badly affected and the rich were not adversely affected at all'. Some students considered the psychological impact of unemployment and the political stresses that surely impacted on all. Others argued that there were some positives in this negative situation, such as families and communities working together.

2011 Question:

26% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 12/20

'Australian governments and society failed to respond adequately to the economic hardship of The Depression.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Examiners comments

This question asked students to what extent Australian governments and society failed to respond adequately to the economic hardship of the Depression. The extent of economic hardship needed to be established and the question of what could be considered an adequate response by government and society was discussed in the most successful essays. Most answers focused on the varied impact of the Depression.

Discussion of the various aspects of government response included reference to state and federal governments; for example, Jack Lang. Relevant issues included plans (Niemeyer, Lang and government relief schemes), public works (the Shrine and the Great Ocean Road) and susso.

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The response of society was varied. Some wealthy people helped those affected by the Depression, while others such as Sydney Myer barely acknowledged the Depression. There was some discussion of exploitation at this time; for example, landlords, and also discussion about people supporting each other and responding to others' physical and emotional needs.

Many students mentioned the ongoing legacy of the Depression in society over time; for example, greater government involvement in economic affairs and social welfare.

The most successful responses addressed separately the issues of the response by governments and the response by society.

2012 Question:

24% of students answered the Great Depression question - the average result was 12.6/20

'Unemployment threatened the cohesion of Australian society during the Depression.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Examiners comments

Students needed to argue to what extent they agreed with the statement, 'Unemployment threatened the cohesion of Australian during the Depression'. The most successful answers were those that recognised that unemployment threatened the cohesion of society but that it wasn't the only factor affecting social cohesion. Students noted that unemployment challenged the government and that there was a further class divide between the rich and poor, family breakdown and many people relying on various charities. However, there was the alternative view that many went on as usual, and, although wages were lower, people could buy more, and that families and friends helped each other. Therefore, the extent to which unemployment threatened cohesion could contain a range of views.

Some useful sources for the Depression of the 1930s included Wendy Lowenstein and David Potts.