

Model Timed Essay:

a 75 minute midterm responding to a prompt comparing fiction texts

This is an open-book essay exam. Compose an essay with separated paragraphs: an introduction that contains a thesis (your answer with your opinion to the prompt), body paragraphs with evidence from the text and your own analysis, and a sense of closure at the end. Be sure to answer all parts of the prompt in your response. You will have 75 minutes:

Compare the two plays *Tennis in Nablus* by Ismail Khalidi and *Handala* by Abdelfattah Abusroar. *Tennis in Nablus* takes place in 1939 and *Handala* takes place in 1988. Examine what you think the playwrights are trying to convey about the Palestinian experience before and after the 1948 establishment of Israel. Also, compare some of the main characters to help illustrate what has changed and/or what remained the same. Finally, what do you think the playwrights Khalidi and Abusrouar are trying to convey about the Palestinian experience through these plays and how did it affect your views on this part of the world?

This part was not given on the exam—this is helpful advice on breaking down prompts:

TO BEGIN: Before writing the essay, quickly break down the prompt so you stay focused and you can generate a quick outline using the prompt that ensures you will directly respond to what was asked. The rhetoric gives simple steps to do this quickly:

(1) **Read the prompt carefully and several times:** do not “rush in” and start writing as this puts you in danger of writing off topic or missing important parts of the prompt. Take a moment and read the prompt through several times.

(2) **Sum up the topic in a few words:** What is the focus of the prompt? Narrow down the focus of the prompt in a word or two to help you mentally focus as well.

Palestinian experience before and after Israel

(3) **Circle and/or underline the key words:** Circle or underline the command verbs or question words that are telling you do something or asking you about something.

(4) **Identify and count the required steps in the writing task:** this is a crucial step in timed writing. You don't want to overlook any parts of the question and get little to no credit for your work as a result. Number the parts of the prompt you need to address in your essay and oftentimes you can even use this as an informal outline for the essay.

(1) **Using the two plays *Tennis in Nablus* and *Handala*, examine what you think the playwrights are trying to convey about the Palestinian experience before and after the 1948 establishment of Israel.**

(2) **Compare some of the main characters to help illustrate what has changed and/or what remained the same.**

(3) **Finally, what do you think the playwrights Khalidi and Abusrouar are trying to convey about the Palestinian experience through these plays and**

(4) **how did it affect your views on this part of the world?**

The Pen Is Indeed Mightier Than the Sword

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a bloody holy war which has taken the lives and freedoms of countless people. In the plays *Tennis in Nablus* by Ismail Khalidi and *Handala* by Abdelfattah Abusrour the playwrights are conveying the importance of activism against British and Israeli occupation in Palestine. However, interestingly, both plays have Palestinian characters who have very different views on the occupation. On one side you have the activist nationalist in either play: Yusef in *Tennis in Nablus* and Abu Saber in *Handala*. On the other side, you have Palestinian characters like Tariq in *Tennis in Nablus* and Hamdoul in *Handala*, who only see what they personally have to gain from the influx of Jewish residents. The playwrights Khalidi and Abusrour use these contrasting characters to show the flaws and harms of this thinking. Ultimately both playwrights show that occupation in this region, from the British to the Jewish people, has caused incredible suffering for the Palestinians. They offer the view that with the aid of other countries like the U.S., Palestinians have been unjustly become prisoners in their own land and treated as terrorists for standing up for themselves or fighting back. However, neither promotes violence as a solution. Although each play takes place 50 years apart, both show the power of alternative, peaceful activism through art and the written word. How these plays affected my views is that I didn't realize that because the U.S. is ally to Israel, that in much of the mainstream news, the Palestinian viewpoint and experience is omitted. I appreciated that these plays shed new light and a very different perspective on this conflict and made me wonder how much more of our news is one-sided.

The two plays take place in very different times yet share a similar message about the persecution the Palestinians have suffered both then and now. In *Tennis in Nablus*, which takes place in 1939, the troubles faced by the Palestinians has only started. Although they are under British occupation, Zionism has just begun and the true war for Palestine has yet to begin. The lead characters

Yusef and Anabara do everything they can to fight the British occupation but see their homeland being sold to newly arriving Jewish people left and right. In *Handala*, which takes place in 1988, the Israelis have taken over. The characters Abu Saber and Naji- Ali, based on the real life artist and activist who was assassinated, have experienced displacement, refugee camps, and being separated from their loved ones and their homeland. Although the Palestinians in either play are fighting different oppressors the stories are the same. In *Tennis in Nablus*, through Yusef, Khalidi foretells what will happen to the Palestinians, "I dream of my unborn children and they do not know my language. And because the wind has told me secrets: we will soon be the new Jews- wandering, hated, nostalgic nomads with anger and sadness in our prayers"(47). Yusef's fears are realized and we see Palestinians as refugees in their own land in *Handala* which takes place after the establishment of Israel. In *Handala*, the Palestinians have been removed from their homes and forced into refugee camps. The only way they have to communicate to their now dispersed family is through the radio, "I am from Yarmouk refugee camp; I send my greeting to my mother and father in Hebron. I am from the south and I send my greetings to my beloved mother in Acre and to my sister Fatima in Aida refugee camp..."(208). The Palestinians in both plays are left with little options or hope.

Both playwrights include Palestinian characters who fight occupation and also those who profit from it, showing how in this conflict part of the problem faced by Palestinians is a lack of unity. In *Tennis in Nablus* we meet Tariq, Yusef's nephew, a man who, up until the end of the play, values money and western ideals more than his country and people. He uses his position as a real estate broker to sell large pieces of land to Jewish buyers who believe that Palestine is truly their land. In *Handala*, we see these similar ideals and motives held by the character Hamdoul, whose character represents the, Arab and Palestinian leadership who have completely given into western demands and have told the people of Palestine to do the same. Hamdoul at one point says, "The best fighting position is laying

down”(217). Tariq, even though friend to the Jewish people, finds himself imprisoned with his uncle and it is here that he realizes he is on the wrong side of the fight. Hamdoul is a character who is more caricature and joke. The message is clear that unrepentant sell-outs are not to be respected and deeply jeopardize the Palestinian movement.

Both plays also pair characters who present opposing approaches to activism asking the readers to decide what type of rebellion is most effective: direct and violent or indirect and nonviolent. In *Tennis in Nablus*, the Palestinian couple Anabara and Yusef will both do anything to save their country from the hostile takeover by the Jewish elite but their methods are very different. Anabara, Yusef’s wife, secretly publishes incendiary criticism under a male pseudonym while her husband Yusef takes more direct action by fighting in the streets and supplying guns to the rebels. In *Handala*, we also have two characters that show different approaches to activism. Naji-Ali like Anbara uses nonviolent means to spread awareness of the plight of Palestinian refugees. Naji-Ali is based on the real-life man who published the comic “Handala” featuring a refugee child witnessing the suffering of the Palestinians. While Naji-Ali uses art to spread awareness, Abu Saber is a more traditional activist who demonstrated and revolted until he was put in an Israeli prison. Many of the characters end up in prison or dead including the real-life Naji-Ali who was assassinated for his political cartoons criticizing Israel and the U.S. However, it is the protest through art that endures as Anbara’s publications rally the most support towards rebellion seen in the play and “Handala” is a symbol Palestinians continue to rally around. The plays themselves are artful protests that will live on and carry their messages to future generations. In a region beset with daily violence, suicide bombers, tanks and missiles, these methods will only continue to stir up the never ending cycle of hatred and vengeance. The pen versus the sword metaphor may be overused, but it captures a truth that does not change—language and art are more profound and lasting agents of change than violence. Peace can only really come when we lay down our weapons and see

the humanity in others. These plays that feature the Palestinian viewpoint provide a fuller view of that humanity.