**The following is an example of medium-scoring(5-6) student response.-VCAA Assessor’s Report-2006.**

Girl with a Pearl Earring

**“‘Thank you for reminding me of how helpless I am,’…” Does the text show Griet to be helpless?**

In 17th century Delft women were restricted and were considered low members of society. Chevalier’s Girl With A Pearl Earring traces Griet a young women with a weak social class who had little choice over her life which made her helpless and vulnerable.

In a time when women had no say in occupation, had little education and were forced to obey their fathers Griet a young woman was born into a protestant household which was a low social class. Protestant women in 17th century were expected to fulfil duties within the home whilst the father was expected to support the family economically. Griets life wasn’t ruled by riches or fashions and she was helpless to choosing a pathway in her life. She was a respectable woman who had a secret desire to move up in the world however due to her weak social class in society and her obligations toward her family her low beginnings made her helpless and vulnerable to choice. She was of working class background. Whether it be ‘chopping vegetables for her mother so the colours don’t fight’ or helping fulfil expectations for her family, she had little choice in life to decide her occupation or her education. Due to the unfortunate situation of her father being blinded in a kiln explosion ‘taking his eyes and his trade’ Griet is left helpless and vulnerable and she is forced with little control out of ‘the familiarity of home’. She has ‘no choice’ and is helpless.

As she walks past ‘every red brick house and green waterway’ she is made to work for the painter, Vermeer. She is defenceless and she is considered weak due to her social class. She is considered weak to her social class. She is an outsider in Vermeer household. As she gains confidence however she is absorbed into the artistic world of her master. She has little control over the tasks he makes her do. She becomes helpless and forced to assist him even though this is against her faith. He forces her to part her lips which she thought was suggestive and seductive but she had no say as a woman with her station. She confesses ‘I begged him not to ruin me’ and she recognises she has little control over her situation.

She is forced to uncover her hair ‘I was not the type of woman who uncovered her hair.’ When Pieter reminds her ‘theirs is not your world, you have little control over what happens to you surely you can see that’, she could see how helpless she was but she was weak and insignificant and this made her trapped.

Van Ruijven takes advantage of ‘the new maid’ he ogles and gropes her because he holds power. She was unable to act without help or guidance ‘don’t fight me girl, you’ll enjoy it more if you don’t fight’.

Due to Griet’s weak station in society she was helpless to the choices in life. She was forced to do tasks she was uncomfortable doing the obstacles that were in her life and she became absorbed into the world of artistic Vermeer knowing she couldn’t escape.

Assessor comments

• In a very limited and superficial manner, the student initially tries to touch upon the topic.

• Some sense of the text and its context is shown, but the student is unable to control this or demonstrate the depth of analysis required.

• While this is quite a lengthy response, there is a serious lack of knowledge about the text or control of ideas, which renders it most uneven.

• Needless and irrelevant detail and information cloud the ideas and the development of a sustained or connected response.

• Although the student continually seeks to return to the notion of ‘helplessness’, he/she is unconvincing in developing a really sustained or unified essay