

## ASPECTS IN ORDINARY LEVEL LITERATURE

At ordinary level, the aspects of Literature that are examinable are largely elementary. They focus on the foundational analysis of texts and include:

### The Title

The title is the entry point of a text. We cannot effectively engage and appreciate a text if we have not fully comprehended and understood the title. Understanding a title of a text requires us to interpret it in relation to the text. Titles are generally a summary of the text. In other words, they give us a general overview of the text.

There are four types of titles:

1. **Thematic titles:** these are based on the key themes/theme in the text eg; ‘Things Fall Apart’
2. **Symbolic titles:** these are based on a deeper interpretation of individuals or situations in a text eg; ‘The Heart Soothers’, ‘Grief Child’, ‘The Return of Mgofu’. In other words, they are based on aspects of the text that are symbolic or are seen as symbols.
3. **Character titles:** these are based on the major character/characters in the text eg; ‘Mema’, ‘The Merchant of Venice’
4. **Open-ended titles:** these are titles that are usually a combination of two or all three of the above. ‘Voice of the People’ is one such title. It is both thematic and symbolic.

When asked to discuss the relevance of a title, one should explore the meaning of the text in relation to what happens in the text.

### Setting and Plot

Setting basically refers to ‘time’ (temporal/historical) and ‘place’ (physical) of the action in the text. In other words, we look at ‘where’ and ‘in what circumstances’, is the story unfolding. We can for instance say that the setting of ‘Grief Child’ is Susa and Buama. The historical or time setting of ‘Things Fall Apart’, is pre-colonial era

Plot, on the other hand refers to the chronological sequence of events in a text.

### Character and Characterisation

This has four aspects:

1. **Character traits** – which looks at a character’s appearance and conduct eg; kind, arrogant, proud, patient, determined, etc.
2. **Character role** (*importance, contribution, usefulness, significance*) – which looks at how a writer uses a character to achieve his/her intentions. Characters play the role of: enhancing plot, development of themes, character portrayal, symbolism, moral lessons, a source of humour/comic relief, or a mouthpiece of the author.

3. **Character relationship** – which looks at the rapport between two or more characters; and can be described as being: friendly, intimate, confrontational, suspicious, warm, etc.
4. **Character appeal** – which refers to the quality of dramatization or action. It largely applies to drama. For instance you can be asked to choose a character in a play whom you would love to act in a stage performance. This has nothing to do with moral attributes and one can choose a character who is negative such as Goma,, just for his dramatic qualities.

### **Themes and Ideas**

Themes and ideas are the key message that the author presents in a text. Our understanding of the text cannot be complete if we cannot identify and explain the themes therein. Each text may have themes that exclusive to it, though some may be universal and may cut across text different texts.

### **Relevance**

The relevance of a text refers to the comparison of the events or situations in a text to what happens in contemporary society. Therefore, in explaining relevance, we are required to step outside the text and try to apply what we see in the text to the society we live in. For this aspect to be effectively handled, one must cite relevant local examples or illustrations to match those in the text.

### **Lessons**

Lessons can be defined as: “A collection of wisdom derived from phenomena (situations), character, themes and events in a text, to be applied to related real-life situations.”

In Literature, a lesson is not treated as a piece of advice. It is therefore erroneous to state lesson such as for instance: “I learn to always be careful about the choices I make in life.” This is a resolution, not a lesson. A lesson in Literature is a warning, a piece of wisdom or a factual statement about life.

In analyzing lessons, we should avoid using the phrase ‘I learn’ or ‘we learn’. A lesson remains a lesson, whether one learns it or not. We can express lessons by using metaphorical expressions such as idioms, proverbs or sayings, and relating them to the situations in the text.

### **Textual Appeal**

Textual appeal is strictly stylistic. Here, we may be asked to explain what we like or find interesting about a particular text. This usually applies to drams or plays such as; The Return of Mgofu, The Merchant of Venice, The Heart Soothers or Voice of the People.

### **CONTEXT QUESTIONS**

Context questions normally test our ability to comprehend the plot of a text. We are usually tested on the following aspects:

#### **Context placement**

Here, we may be asked to explain what happens before or after a passage/extract. In explaining what happens before or leads to the passage, we should only take a few steps back and look at what happens

immediately before the start of the passage. Likewise, when explaining what happens after, we should look at what comes immediately after the passage.

### **Character: traits and relationship**

We may also be asked to describe the character of an individual or individuals as revealed in the passage. We should always restrict ourselves to the passage. In other words, only highlight those traits that are evident in the passage, not in the entire text, unless if the question asks us to do so.

### **Themes and Ideas**

Similarly, when asked to identify or explain themes in a passage, we should restrict ourselves to those themes that are evident in the passage. Avoid going beyond the passage except when asked to refer to the rest of the text.

- whether they are hurting their partners by their wild lifestyles.
- Goma is greedy and selfish, and is only accumulating wealth through cheating other people. However, amidst all this injustice and selfishness, there is hope for retribution from the gods:
- People like Kadesa offer hope to the wretched and helpless. They stand by the affected such as those running away from the madness.

## **VOICE OF THE PEOPLE: Okia Omtatah Okoiti**

### **Plot Summary**

#### **First Sequence**

We are introduced to Boss and his right-hand man, Sibuur. Boss speaks on the telephone to one of his handlers in London, concerning his many investments abroad. When Sibuur comes, they discuss Nasirumbi who is leading a campaign against the government. Sibuur reveals his findings about Nasirumbi and assures Boss that she will come to meet him. Nasirumbi comes and argues with Boss about the dangers of destroying Simbi forest in the name of investment. Boss tries to convince her but in vain. He finally donates one hundred thousand to The Mothers' Front, which he intends for a bribe but Nasirumbi acknowledges it as a donation and promises to provide a receipt.

#### **Second Sequence**

Sibuur confronts Indondo, the editor of The Voice of the People newspaper, about allowing the Nasirumbi using the newspaper to malign the government. Indondo stands his ground and produces a secret dossier in the government plans to give away Simbi forest to investors. Sibuur is shocked as to how Indondo gets the secret document. In retaliation, Sibuur produces pictures of Indondo engaged in sexual acts with his secretary. Indondo is left in shock.

### **Third Sequence**

Sibuor reports to Boss about the secret document in Indondo's possession. They wonder how Indondo could have got it. Boss instructs Sibuor to act fast. Sibuor brags about his capabilities and showers praises on Boss, calling him a 'son of the plague'.

### **Fourth Sequence**

Nasirumbi visits the offices of The Voice of the People newspaper and finds Indondo has been compromised. He tells her his boss, Mr. Dalangi, has ordered him to tone down for fear the newspaper will be shut down. The two act out the exchange between Indondo and Mr. Dalangi. They discuss the way forward and things appear very difficult.

### **Fifth Sequence**

Boss, Sibuor and Indondo are in a secret room at a hotel. Boss and Sibuor are dressed as women. Indondo promises them that an official from the World Bank is due to meet them to negotiate how to make a favourable report on Simbi forest. They discuss how to handle Nasirumbi, and Indondo assures them she can be tamed. Indondo brags about he has sexually subdued the World Bank woman and Sibuor promises to do the same to Nasirumbi. They plan how to handle the impending demonstrations and Indondo assures them that all will be well.

### **Sixth Sequence**

Sibuor comes to Nasirumbi's house and tries to give her a bribe. She plays along and seems to accept the two million. Then she suddenly turns around and attempts to burn it. Sibuor threatens her and promises her she will regret her action.

### **Seventh Sequence**

Indondo visits Nasirumbi, whose house has been vandalized. She reveals that there is an industrialist who wants to help her fight Boss. Indondo cautions her that the industrialist may be simply using her. He instead urges her to contest for a political position. Boss comes and Indondo hides in one of the rooms. Boss tries to patronize Nasirumbi and makes sexual advances. Nasirumbi reacts violently, forcing Boss to flee.

### **Eighth Sequence**

The crowning ceremony of Boss is to be held at the National Stadium. There is fanfare and pomp in the evening. Indondo and Sibuor, in their speeches shower praises on Boss. Boss makes an acceptance speech in which he underscores his efforts to develop the country. Lights are switched off and Boss is asked to kneel as he receives the crown. Instead of a crown, he receives a dead child. Nasirumbi accuses him of being responsible for the death of the child and many others due to his negligence and irresponsible leadership.

### **Character Analysis**

#### **Boss**

Boss is the head of state and a strong man. He is portrayed as being:

- Ruthless/merciless
- Authoritative
- Corrupt
- Irresponsible
- Uncompromising
- Gullible
- Immoral
- Callous/sadistic
- Patronising

### **Sibuor**

He is Boss's right-hand man. He is portrayed as being:

- A sycophant
- Malicious
- Callous/sadistic
- Corrupt
- Loyal to Boss
- Cunning
- Immoral

### **Nasirumbi**

She is an activist and leader of the Mothers' Front. She is revealed as being:

- Determined
- Honest
- Confident
- Hard working
- Intelligent
- Patriotic
- Caring
- Strategic/calculative
- Resilient

### **Indondo**

He is the editor of The Voice of the People newspaper. He is portrayed as being:

- Patriotic
- Strategic/calculative
- Determined
- Cunning/Intelligent
- Immoral
- Confident

## **Themes and Ideas**

The play explores such issues as:

- Dictatorship and Bad governance
- Patriotism
- Corruption
- Women's emancipation and role
- Nation building and development
- Freedom and human rights abuse
- Environmental protection and resources

## **Relevance of the play to contemporary society**

The play is relevant to the present situation in a number of ways:

- The fight for Simbi forest is similar to many incidents we have witnessed eg, Mabira forest give away.
- Nasirumbi is clearly reflected in people like Ho. Beatrice Anywar who spearheaded the fight against the giveaway of Mabira forest.
- The threats to shut down The Voice of the People newspaper are seen in the closures of media houses such as: Monitor, NTV, CBS, etc.
- Many activists have used the media to run campaigns in Uganda, just as Nasirumbi uses The Voice of the People newspaper.
- Many opposition figures in Uganda have been harassed just as Nasirumbi is harassed.
- The government has many henchmen who operate like Siboor.
- It is very common for secret government documents to leak to the press, just Indondo gets the secret document.
- The government often tries to bribe opponents into submission just as Boss and Siboor try with Nasirumbi.
- Many times, government officials have been duped by fake agents just like Indondo fools Boss and Siboor about the World Bank woman.
- The Mothers' Front is clearly reflected in the many NGOs operating in Uganda and leading different causes.

## **VOICE OF THE PEOPLE**

1. Discuss the significance of Simbi forest in the play.
2. How is corruption seen in the play Voice of the People?
3. Explain the contribution of Nasirumbi in the play.
4. Who is the voice of the people in the play?
5. What contribution does Indondo make in the play?
6. Describe the relationship between Boss and Siboor.
7. Discuss Boss's and Nasirumbi's views about Simbi forest. Who of the two do you agree with and why?

8. Do you think Simbi forest should be destroyed to pave way for development? Give reasons for your answer.
9. How relevant is the title 'Voice of the People' to the play?
10. Describe the ending of the play and explain why you find it satisfactory.

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