

Important *questions and answers* on the course « LITERATURE ANGLOPHONE »

What is African oral tradition ?

African oral tradition refers to the cultural practices and beliefs passed down through spoken word rather than written text. It includes stories, proverbs, songs, and other forms of verbal expression that have been transmitted from generation to generation.

Oral tradition has been a critical aspect of African cultures, serving as a means of preserving history, teaching morals, and passing on cultural values. It has played a significant role in shaping the social, economic, and political systems of African societies.

In African oral tradition, stories and proverbs are often used to convey important lessons and values. They are told and retold in a variety of contexts, from community gatherings to formal ceremonies. Songs and dances are also important forms of oral expression, used to celebrate important events and mark important moments in life.

Overall, African oral tradition is a rich and vibrant aspect of African culture that continues to play an important role in contemporary African societies.

What are the broad types of imaginative or creative literature ?

We have two broad types of imaginative literature, they are **Orature** and **written literature**. However, each include **poetry, prose, and drama**, which are called **genres**.

Poetry is about « **what is sung** ». As examples, we have « love songs, work songs, lullabies, incantations... ».

Prose is about « **what is spoken** ». As examples, we have « dance, rituals, invocation, masquerade ».

Drama is about « **what is acted** ». As examples, we have « dance, rituals, invocation, masquerade ».

What is orature (oral literature) ?

Orature, also known as oral literature, refers to literary works that are passed down orally from generation to generation through storytelling, song, poetry, and other forms of verbal art. It encompasses a wide range of cultural expressions and may include myths, legends, proverbs, riddles,

chants, epics, folktales, and more. Orature is often associated with traditional cultures and is an important part of the cultural heritage of many societies around the world.

Unlike **written literature**, orature is typically composed, performed, and transmitted orally, without the use of writing or other recording technologies. As a result, it is subject to change over time as it is adapted and modified to suit different contexts and audiences. Orature is also closely tied to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it is performed, reflecting the values, beliefs, and experiences of the people who create and perform it.

What is written literature ?

Written literature refers to literary works that are created and transmitted through written language. This can include various genres such as novels, short stories, poetry, plays, essays, and more. Unlike oral literature, which is primarily transmitted through spoken word and memory, written literature is typically recorded and preserved in written form, allowing for wider dissemination and access across time and space. The development of writing and the subsequent creation of written literature has had a significant impact on the development of human civilization and culture, as it allows for the preservation and sharing of knowledge and ideas in a more concrete and lasting way.

What is the difference between orature and written literature ?

Orature refers to traditional literary expressions that are transmitted orally, such as folktales, legends, myths, and proverbs. These literary forms are usually passed down from generation to generation and are an important part of many cultures' oral traditions. Orature can also refer to contemporary oral literature, such as spoken word poetry or storytelling.

Written literature, on the other hand, is composed and transmitted through written language. It includes a wide variety of literary genres such as novels, poetry, plays, essays, and short stories. Written literature allows for the preservation and dissemination of literary works on a larger scale and over longer periods of time than orature.

One of the main differences between **orature** and **written literature** is the mode of transmission. Orature is transmitted orally from one generation to another, whereas written literature is transmitted through written text. Orature is often performed in front of an audience, with the performer adding their own interpretations and variations to the story or poem, while written literature is typically read silently by an individual reader.

Another difference is the level of **standardization**. Orature often evolves over time as it is passed down orally, with different versions of the same story or poem emerging in different regions or among different groups. **Written literature**, on the other hand, is usually standardized through editing and publishing, so that the same text is reproduced consistently over time.

Overall, while both orature and written literature are forms of artistic expression and storytelling, they differ in their modes of transmission, level of standardization, and cultural significance.

Can we talk about the existence of oral tradition today ? Why and why not ?

Yes, we can certainly talk about the existence of oral tradition today. While the rise of literacy and the widespread availability of written texts has certainly diminished the importance of orature in many societies, oral tradition continues to play a significant role in many cultures around the world.

There are several reasons why oral tradition persists today. For one, it is often a key part of a community's cultural heritage and identity, and many people value the continuation of traditional storytelling and other forms of orature. Additionally, oral tradition can be a powerful way of transmitting knowledge and wisdom from one generation to the next, particularly in cultures where written texts are not widely available or accessible.

Moreover, oral tradition is not limited to traditional folktales and legends. In many contemporary contexts, oral tradition takes on new forms such as spoken word poetry, rap, and storytelling events. These forms of orature can be a way for marginalized communities to express themselves and share their experiences with others.

On the other hand, there are also factors that have contributed to the decline of oral tradition in some societies. For example, the increasing influence of mass media such as television and the internet has led to a shift away from traditional forms of storytelling and towards more modern forms of entertainment. Additionally, many indigenous cultures have been impacted by colonialism and globalization, which have disrupted traditional ways of life and eroded the importance of orature in those communities.

In some words, while the role of oral tradition may have changed over time, it continues to be an important part of many cultures and communities around the world. Its persistence highlights the enduring power of storytelling and the human desire for connection and community through shared narratives.

How worthwhile is to study literature ?

Studying literature can be highly worthwhile for a number of reasons. **First and foremost**, literature can provide us with insight into the human experience, allowing us to explore a wide range of perspectives and emotions that are not necessarily easily accessible in our everyday lives. By engaging with literature, we can develop greater empathy and understanding for others, which can enhance our personal relationships and our ability to navigate complex social situations.

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Additionally, studying literature can improve our critical thinking skills and our ability to analyze complex ideas and arguments. Through reading and discussing literary texts, we can learn to identify themes, motifs, and symbols, and to interpret these elements in a thoughtful and nuanced way. This type of analysis can be valuable not only in the study of literature itself but also in other areas of our lives, such as in our professional careers.

Moreover, studying literature can broaden our cultural horizons and expose us to new perspectives and ideas. By reading literature from a variety of cultures and time periods, we can gain a deeper understanding of the world around us and of the historical and cultural context in which we live.

Finally, studying literature can simply be an enjoyable and enriching experience in its own right. Literature has the power to transport us to other worlds and to help us see the world through new eyes, and this can be a deeply rewarding and fulfilling experience.

Overall, the study of literature can be highly worthwhile for a wide range of personal, intellectual, and cultural reasons, and is a valuable pursuit for anyone interested in exploring the complexities of the human experience.

What are the oral literary forms in Africa ?

Africa has a rich and diverse oral literary tradition, encompassing a wide range of genres and styles. Some of the most prominent oral literary forms in Africa include :

Folktales : These are traditional stories that have been passed down through generations and are often used to teach moral lessons. They typically feature anthropomorphic animals and are often characterized by a humorous and playful tone.

Myths and Legends : These are stories that explain the origins of the world, natural phenomena, or cultural traditions. They often involve supernatural beings and are steeped in symbolism and metaphor.

Proverbs : These are pithy sayings that offer wisdom and advice, often drawing on the experiences of previous generations.

Epic Poetry : These are long narrative poems that recount the adventures of legendary heroes, such as Sundiata Keita or Shaka Zulu.

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Griot Traditions : These are oral histories that are passed down through generations by specialized storytellers known as griots. Griots serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and are responsible for preserving and disseminating the stories, traditions, and genealogies of their communities.

Spoken Word Poetry : This is a contemporary form of orature that is characterized by its performative nature and its emphasis on the spoken word. Spoken word poetry often addresses social and political issues and can be a powerful tool for social change.

These are just a few examples of the rich and diverse oral literary forms that exist in Africa, and they reflect the continent's deep cultural heritage and its ongoing commitment to preserving and celebrating its oral traditions.

Literary forms classification Oral

literary forms :

Epic poetry : long, narrative poems recounting the deeds of a legendary or historical hero.

Proverbs : brief, pithy sayings expressing a basic truth or practical wisdom.

Riddles : short, clever questions or statements that require thought to answer or understand.

Folktales : fictional stories passed down through generations, often with a moral lesson or cultural significance.

Myths : stories that explain the origins of the world, natural phenomena, or cultural traditions.

Legends : semi-historical stories about heroes, gods, or other supernatural beings.

Historical accounts : tales of real events or people, often embellished with fictional elements.

Written literary forms :

Fiction : novels, short stories, and plays that are entirely the creation of the author's imagination.

Non-fiction : works of history, biography, memoir, and other genres that deal with real people, events, or topics.

Poetry : written works that use language to evoke emotions or convey ideas, often with a focus on rhythm, sound, and imagery.

Drama : plays or scripts written to be performed on stage or screen.

Essays : short, non-fiction works that express the author's views on a particular topic.

What is the difference between Fiction and Non-fiction ?

Fiction and **nonfiction** are two broad categories of literature that are distinguished by their content and purpose.

Fiction is a type of literature that is based on imaginary or invented characters, events, and places. It is created for the purpose of entertainment, to tell a story or convey a message through the use of literary devices such as plot, characterization, and symbolism. **Examples of fiction include novels, short stories, poetry, and drama.**

Nonfiction, on the other hand, is a type of literature that is based on factual information and real events. It is created for the purpose of informing, educating, or persuading the reader about a particular subject. **Examples of nonfiction include textbooks, biographies, memoirs, essays, and journalism.**

In summary, the main difference between fiction and nonfiction is that fiction is based on imaginary or invented content, while nonfiction is based on factual information and real events.

How to interpret and analyse a literary work ?

Interpreting and analyzing a literary work involves a deep reading and examination of the text, as well as consideration of the historical and cultural context in which the work was created. Here are some steps you can follow to interpret and analyze a literary work :

Read the text carefully : Begin by reading the text closely and paying attention to details such as language, imagery, symbols, and themes. Take notes as you read to keep track of important elements of the text.

Consider the author and historical context : Research the author and the historical period in which the work was written. This can help you understand the influences and cultural factors that may have shaped the work.

Identify the genre : Determine the genre of the work, such as poetry, fiction, drama, or non-fiction. Each genre has its own unique features and techniques, so understanding the genre can help you interpret the work more effectively.

Analyze the structure and form : Consider the structure and form of the work, such as the use of narrative techniques, point of view, and literary devices. These elements can contribute to the meaning and themes of the work.

Identify themes and motifs : Look for recurring themes and motifs in the text, such as love, death, or social injustice. These themes can provide insight into the author's message or commentary on a particular topic.

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Consider the audience and purpose : Think about the intended audience for the work and what the author's purpose may have been. This can help you understand why the author made certain choices in terms of language, structure, and themes.

Draw connections and make interpretations : Use your analysis of the text to draw connections and make interpretations about the meaning and significance of the work. Consider how the themes and motifs relate to the historical and cultural context, as well as how they may relate to contemporary issues or universal human experiences.

Support your analysis with evidence : Use evidence from the text, as well as outside research if necessary, to support your interpretations and analysis.

Overall, interpreting and analyzing a literary work requires close reading, careful consideration of context, and an ability to draw connections and make interpretations based on evidence from the text.

What are the narrative methods and devices in prose works ?

Prose works can employ a variety of narrative methods and devices to convey meaning and create a compelling story. Some common narrative methods and devices in prose works include :

Point of View : This refers to the perspective from which the story is being told. It can be first person (narrator is a character in the story), second person (narrator addresses the reader directly), or third person (narrator is an outside observer).

Dialogue : This is the spoken exchanges between characters, which can reveal their personalities, motivations, and relationships.

Plot : This refers to the sequence of events that make up the story. The plot can be linear or nonlinear, and may include flashbacks or other non-chronological elements.

Foreshadowing : This is a technique where the author hints at future events in the story, creating suspense and anticipation in the reader.

Imagery : This refers to the use of vivid and descriptive language to create mental pictures and sensory experiences for the reader.

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Symbolism : This is the use of objects, characters, or events to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Irony : This is the use of language or situations that are the opposite of what is expected, creating a sense of tension or humor.

Metaphor : This is a comparison between two things that are not alike, used to make a point or highlight a theme.

Analyzing a literary work involves examining these narrative methods and devices and how they contribute to the overall meaning of the text. This can involve identifying themes, analyzing characters and their motivations, and examining the author's use of language and symbolism.

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