

CHAPTER 7 The Unseen Prose

Introduction

In Book One of this series, we learnt that prose is one of the genres of literature. Prose usually refers to a work of imagination that is mainly narrative in form. Such prose is called fiction. Examples of fiction are Achebe's **Arrow of God** and Ngugu Wa Thiongo's **A Grain of Wheat**, which are both novels. Kinds of fictional prose include: short story, novella, and novel. However, there are some prose works that are non-fictional, which are based on real-life situations. Examples of such prose are Soyinka's **The Man Died**, and Azikiwe's **My Odyssey**.

The school certificate examination syllabus specifies some literature books to be studied for the examination. These are the recommended texts on which questions are set. Questions are also set on a few unseen prose and poetry passages. The focus of this chapter is on the unseen prose.

The Nature of the Unseen Prose Questions

An unseen prose passage in the school certificate examination is one that is not taken from the list of selected novels. The candidate may not have seen the passage before the examination.

Unseen prose passages are included in the school certificate examinations in order to test candidates' understanding or grasp of literary appreciation. The appreciation of a prose work is quite demanding because it requires the comprehension of the work in its totality. The following are some areas of literary appreciation on which questions are asked: subject matter, theme, setting, characterization, narrative style, language diction, mood, point of view and figurative devices used in the work. Some of these prose elements are discussed in Chapter 5 of Book One. The candidate is expected to have a thorough knowledge of these elements to be able to answer the set questions correctly.

In order to refresh our memories, we need to briefly comment on some of the elements of prose text appreciation.

1. **Setting:** Setting refers to the physical or social environment in which the characters in a prose work operate, as well as the period during which events in the story happened. The work may be set in a rural environment characterized by such things as farmlands, streams, village squares, huts, and so on. In an urban setting, the reader expects such things as crowded streets, high-rise buildings, traffic jams, and so on. A story may be set in the modern times characterized by such things as computers, television, air-travel and so on. On the other hand, a story may be set in the past characterized by such things as illiteracy, scanty social amenities, superstition, and primitive ways of doing things.
2. **Theme:** The theme of a prose work is the central idea in the work. It is the important message that the writer conveys in the work. A text could have more than one theme. The following could be themes in prose works:
 - (a) It pays to be honest.
 - (b) Wickedness has its rewards.
 - (c) Givers never lack.
 - (d) Handwork leads to success.

3. **Subject matter:** In a sense, the subject matter of a prose work is the topic, or what the work is all about – the kernel of the work. For example, Ike’s **Sunset at Dawn** is about war. The subject matter of a prose work could also be seen as a concise story of the work. For example, Achebe’s **Things Fall Apart** is the story of a man who could not adapt to new changes in his society, as a result of which he commits murder, and goes on to hang himself.
4. **Forms of prose:** In terms of form, the prose work may be described as narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative depending on the dominating form.
5. **Language in the prose:** The language of the writer in a prose work consists of his choice of words (diction), and use of figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, irony, hyperbole and so on. The language of the work is also determined by the type of sentence structure (simple or complex).
6. **Point of view:** This is the point from which the narration of the story views the events of the story. There are three view points: omniscient, first person, and third person. The omniscient point of view is that in which the narrator knows everything including thoughts, feelings and actions of the characters. The first person point of view is that in which the story is told in the first person by one of the characters. He or she constantly uses the pronoun “I” in telling the story. The third person point of view is that in which the author chooses a character and tells the story from his or her point of view.

Examples of Unseen Prose Passages

Passage 1

Seconds later, just when Martin started thinking that the girl had gone to sleep, she turned to face him, her eyes glassy. “I knew this kind of thing would happen. I knew it. That was what I meant when I said you were only trying to deceive me and later disengage yourself. Now its happening.”

As she said this, tears streamed down her face though no sound came from her. She was crying silently. There was a lump in Martin’s throat as he gazed back at the girl. He really felt he was in a real mess as he hated himself for it. All along, he knew his conscience could not sustain what he was doing but he just felt that he was in good control. Now, things were no longer at ease with him. The thought of being a father would have been thrilling to him under the appropriate circumstances but as things were it was a joyless occasion.

Objective Questions

1. The setting of the passage is _____.
A. a hospital ward B. a bedroom C. a maternity ward
D. a classroom
2. The mood of the passage is _____.
A. happy B. indifferent C. gloomy D. hilarious
3. “Now things were no longer at ease with him.”
The above statement is an instance of _____.
A. allusion B. simile C. irony D. oxymoron
4. The expression “tears streamed down her face” is an instance of _____.
A. alliteration B. sarcasm C. metaphor D. paradox

5. Why was Martin in the passage feeling ill at ease?
- A. He was about to lose his job.
 - B. His girlfriend was pregnant.
 - C. He had become a father without preparing for it.
 - D. His girlfriend was crying.

Passage 2

Do not minister to the child's self-importance by letting it see that you mind if it does not sleep, eat or exercise as it should. This applies not only to the first year of life, but also to subsequent years. Never let the child think that a necessary normal action, such as eating, which ought to be a pleasure, is something that you desire, and that you want it to eat to please you. If you do, the child very quickly perceives that it has acquired a new source of power and expects to be coaxed into action which it ought to perform spontaneously. Do not imagine that the child does not have the intelligence for such behaviour.

Objective Questions

6. The above is an example of a _____ passage.
- A. narrative B. argumentative C. descriptive
 - D. expository
7. The expression 'minister to' in the first sentence of the passage can be replaced by _____.
- A. preach B. encourage C. attend to D. deny
8. The antonym of the word "coaxed" in the passage is _____.
- A. forced B. persuaded C. begged D. convinced
9. From the passage above, we can conclude that the child has _____.
- A. a low intelligence B. an average intelligence
 - C. a very active intelligence D. a dull intelligence
10. The synonym of the word "spontaneously" is _____.
- A. forcefully B. effortlessly C. carelessly D. carefully

Passage 3

Finally, the girl found it. The house was there dozing off in the brilliant sun. There was no doubting it, she thought, this was the place where she had been held along with nine other youngsters for some weeks. Four of the officers immediately took up positions, while the fifth went back to call those who were waiting in the lorry. Meanwhile, inside the building, the absence of Tumi had caused some stir, and steps were about to be taken to mount a search party to comb the immediate vicinity. It was still regarded as a minor anomaly, not much worth worrying about since nobody had expected such a drastic action from so young a girl.

Objective Questions

11. In the sentence, "The house was there dozing off in the brilliant sun," there are two instances of _____.
- A. personification B. paradox C. sarcasm D. symbolic
12. The subject matter of the passage is _____.
- A. excursion B. discovery of hideout of kidnappers
 - C. the escape of a girl D. police parade

13. Why did the absence of Tumi cause a stir in the house?
- A. She was loved by all.
 - B. She was the cook.
 - C. Nobody thought such a young girl could escape from the captors.
 - D. She was the sister of one of the captors.
14. The word “anomaly” in the passage can be replaced by _____.
A. challenge B. problem C. disturbance D. worry
15. The above passage is mainly _____ in form.
A. argumentative B. expository C. descriptive D. narrative