

GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Virtual communities

Resource booklet

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Experiences of evaluation

Discussion

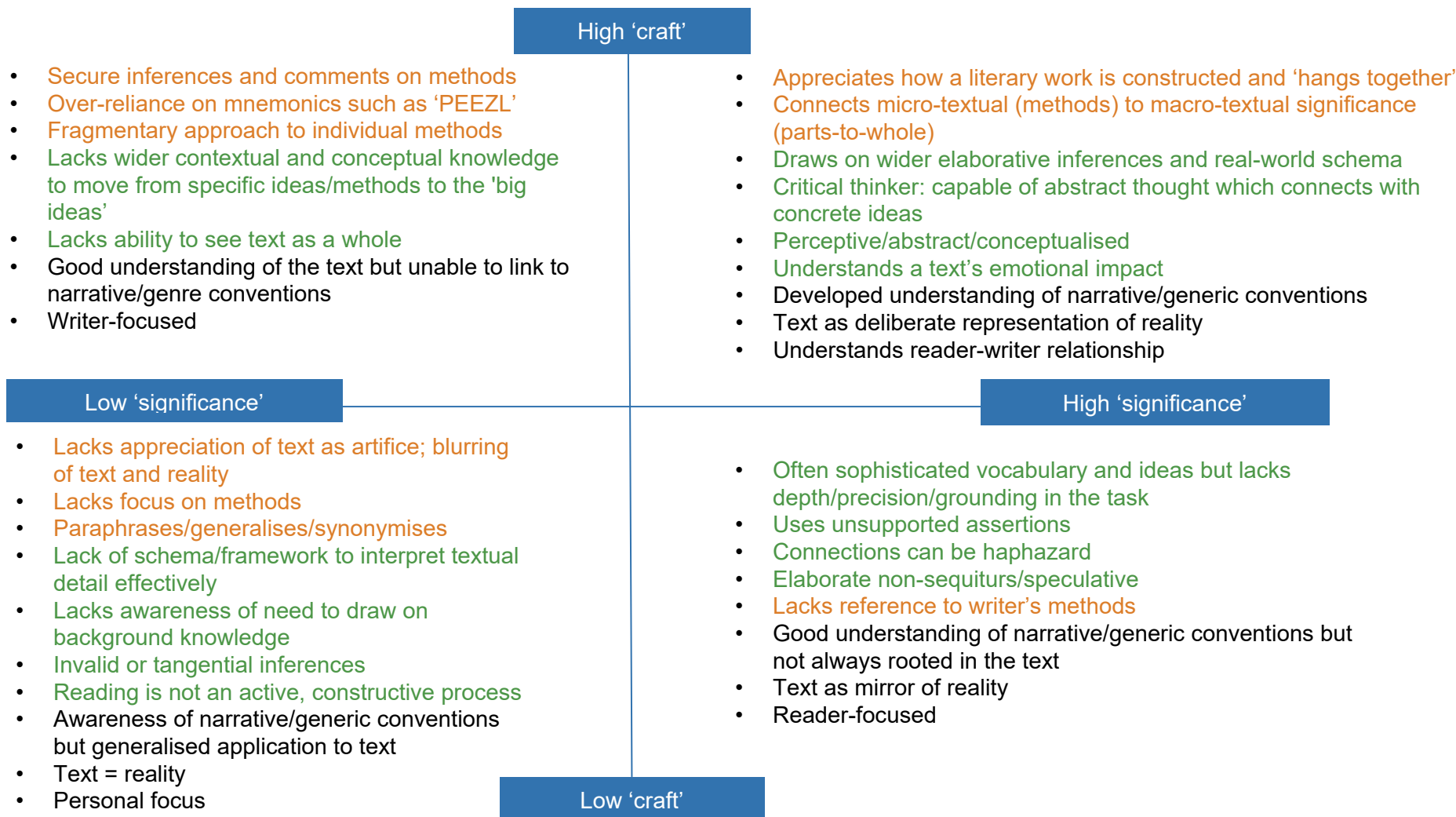
When do you teach the skills of critical evaluation?

How do you teach these skills?

When do your students practise responding to previously unseen literary texts?

How do you use literature exam texts to practise these skills?

Skills map



Extract from Half a Yellow Sun

Q4 Paper 1, November 2021

Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the source, from **line 20 to the end**.

A student said, 'From the moment he arrives at Master's compound, the writer portrays Ugwu's feelings of pure excitement, but by the end it seems that he may be very disappointed.'

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

- consider your own impressions of Ugwu's feelings
- evaluate how the writer describes Ugwu's feelings by the end
- support your response with references to the text.

[20 marks]

Insert – Source A

This extract is taken from the opening of Chimamanda Adichie's novel Half of a Yellow Sun, set in Nigeria in 1960. Ugwu, a thirteen-year-old boy, is starting work as a cleaner for a university professor in the city.

Master was a little crazy; he had spent too many years reading books overseas, talked to himself in his office, did not always return greetings, and had too much hair. Ugwu's aunty said this in a low voice as they walked on the path. 'But he is a good man,' she added. 'And as long as you work well, you will eat well. You will even eat meat every day.'

Ugwu did not believe that anybody, not even this master he was going to live with, ate meat every day. He did not disagree with his aunty, though, because he was too choked with expectation, too busy imagining his new life away from the village. They had been walking for a while now, since they got off the lorry at the motor park, and the afternoon sun burned the back of his neck. But he did not mind. He was prepared to walk hours more in even hotter sun. He had never seen anything like the streets that appeared after they went past the university gates, streets so smooth and tarred that he itched to lay his cheek down on them. He would never be able to describe to his sister Anulika how the bungalows here were painted the colour of the sky and sat side by side like polite well-dressed men, how the hedges separating them were trimmed so flat on top that they looked like tables wrapped with leaves.

His aunty walked faster, her slippers making slap-slap sounds that echoed in the silent street. Ugwu wondered if she, too, could feel the coal tar getting hotter underneath, through her thin soles. They went past a sign, ODIM STREET, and Ugwu mouthed street, as he did whenever he saw an English word that was not too long.

He smelt something sweet, heady, as they walked into a compound, and was sure it came from the white flowers clustered on the bushes at the entrance. The bushes were shaped like slender hills. The lawn glistened. Butterflies hovered overhead.

‘I told Master you will learn everything very fast’ his aunty said. Ugwu nodded attentively although she had already told him the story of how his good fortune came about: while she was sweeping the corridor in the Mathematics Department a week ago, she heard Master say that he needed a houseboy to do his cleaning, and she immediately said she could help, speaking before his typist or office messenger could offer to bring someone.

‘I will learn fast, Aunty,’ Ugwu said. He was staring at the car in the garage; a strip of metal ran around its blue body like a necklace.

‘Remember, what you will answer whenever he calls you is *Yes, sah!*’

‘Yes, sah!’ Ugwu repeated.

They were standing before the glass door. Ugwu held back from reaching out to touch the cement wall, to see how different it would feel from the mud walls of his mother’s hut that still bore the faint patterns of moulding fingers. For a brief moment, he wished he were back there now, in his mother’s hut, under the dim coolness of the thatch roof; or in his aunty’s hut, the only one in the village with a corrugated-iron roof.

His aunty tapped on the glass. Ugwu could see the white curtains behind the door. A voice said, in English, ‘Yes? Come in.’

They took off their slippers before walking in. Ugwu had never seen a room so wide. Despite the brown sofas arranged in a semi-circle, the side tables between them, the shelves crammed with books, and the centre table with a vase of red and white plastic flowers, the room still seemed to have too much space. Master sat in an armchair, wearing a vest and a pair of shorts. He was not sitting upright but slanted, a book covering his face, as though oblivious that he had just asked people in.

‘Good afternoon, sah! This is the child,’ Ugwu’s aunty said.

Master looked up. He pulled off his glasses. ‘The child?’

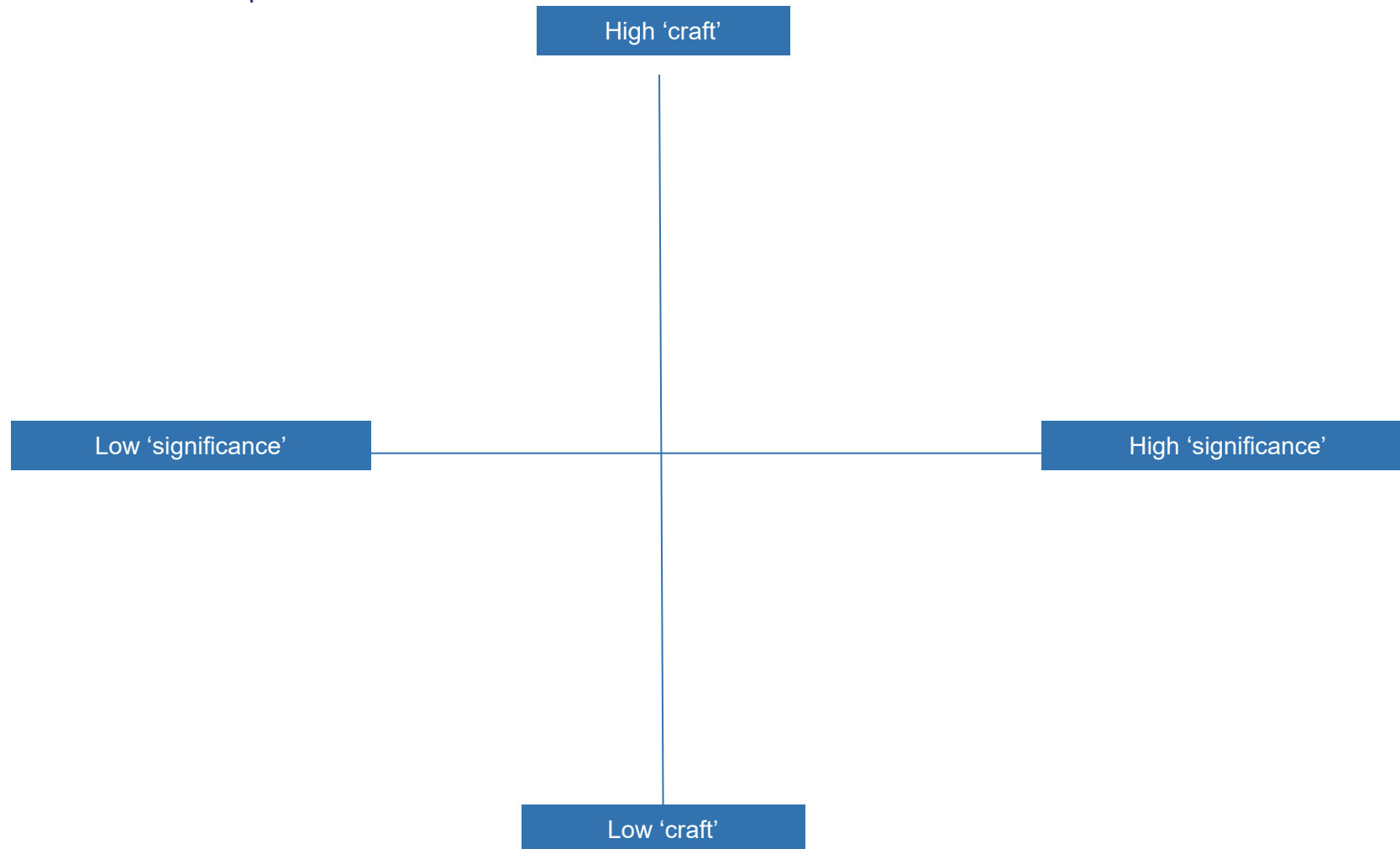
‘The houseboy, sah. He will work hard,’ his aunty said. ‘He is a very good boy. Thank, sah!’

Master grunted in response, watching Ugwu and his aunty with a faintly distracted expression, as if their presence made it difficult for him to remember something important. Ugwu’s aunty patted Ugwu’s shoulder, whispered that he should do well, and turned to the door.

Ugwu stood by the door, waiting.

Credit: Half of a Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Adichie. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd © Chimamanda Adichie, 2006

Blank skills map



Extracts from student responses

Place the following student responses on the blank skills map.

Student A

One reason that I agree with the statement is due to how Adichie uses language. Using a semantic field that displays Ugwu's excitement for example when he notices "Butterflies hovered overhead" a peaceful semantic field is used with the use of the past participle 'hovered' which connotes ideas of being calm, showing that Ugwu is not stressed. Later, when he notices 'a strip of metal ran around [the car's] blue body like a necklace' the simile is used to show that Ugwu is impressed by the car, implying that he is excited to be in this area.

However, I do not agree that Ugwu felt pure excitement. When he "held back from reaching out to touch the cement wall" he shows clearly that he is nervous, as the use of the phrase 'held back' suggests that he wanted to but forced himself not to. This allows the reader to realise that he is on edge. Later in the same paragraph, he thinks that he "wished he were back in his mother's hut again". This description conveys that he is reconsidering taking the job at all as the use of the past participle "wished" implies that he would rather be with his mother. Through this, the reader can tell that he is excited.

I do agree though that Ugwu feels disappointed by the end of the extract. Adichie uses the phrase "as though oblivious that he had just asked people in to imply Ugwu's disapproval of the master. The word 'oblivious' connotes thoughtlessness and a lack of care. The final paragraph of the extract, 'Ugwu stood by the door waiting' is only one sentence long and lacks the description of the rest of the extract. This clearly shows to the reader that Ugwu no longer feels excited about the job as he is no longer looking around and admiring things.

In conclusion, Ugwu is certainly excited for the majority of the extract, but his feelings are significantly more complicated than that. He is also clearly shown to be disappointed through the way that the tone shifts towards the end. Due to this, I mostly agree with the statement.

Student B

The writer portrays Ugwu's excitement through the personification of the 'white flowers clustered on the bushes of the entrance'. The verb 'clustered' gives connotations of crowding implying over-excitement. This may mirror Ugwu's feelings as he becomes excited to see his master. The flowers are described as 'white' which is often associated with freshness and new beginnings which echoes Ugwu as he starts this new journey with a new master. Furthermore, the flowers being 'clustered' at the entrances provides the reader with the idea that the flowers are almost welcoming Ugwu into the compound.

This contrasts with the ending of the source. "Master grunted in response". The verb 'grunted' implies a negative emotion almost as if the master is irritated by Ugwu's presence. As the reader, I can infer that the master seemed bothered and annoyed with the fact that Ugwu's a child. Henceforth, I agree with the statement as you can tell Ugwu is feeling disappointed since he becomes speechless. The lack of words from Ugwu support the idea he is disappointed.

Moreover, towards the end of the source, Ugwu seems disappointed. "Ugwu stood by the door, waiting". The verb 'stood' may imply that Ugwu isn't planning on staying long. The fact that he's 'stood by the door' further supports the idea that he's disappointed as he cannot wait to leave. This juxtaposes the beginning when he first arrived, as he was welcomed by flowers at the entrance. Now he cannot wait to go out therefore he's stood by the door to exit. The verb 'waiting' may imply feelings of hope that Ugwu may have. Despite the fact that he's disappointed, he's still waiting. 'Waiting' also suggests patience which implies Ugwu may be waiting to see if his master's mood and tone shifts.

I also agree with the statement as when Ugwu entered the master's compound he showed feelings of eagerness and excitement. "Ugwu nodded attentively". The adverb 'attentively' demonstrates the action of excitedness within Ugwu as he concentrated and listened to his aunty's words. Furthermore, Ugwu's excitedness show when he says "I will learn fast". The verb 'learn' suggests Ugwu is eager and keen to work for master as he shows he cannot wait. These feelings of excitement disperse when Ugwu notices master's "faintly distracted expression". From the reader's perspective, it's almost as if the master does not want Ugwu around. This makes Ugwu feel unwanted.

Student C

Ugwu's journey from the village and the familiarity of home could also represent a journey from innocence to experience. His earlier physical response to seeing the tarmac is to touch it with his cheek, and this is similar to when he sees the cement wall. He has to hold back from touching it "to see how different it would feel from the mud walls of his mother's hut". In both cases, it is as if he needs to feel it to prove it is actually real. Furthermore, the idea of the city as new and strange is reinforced by the fact that everything seems fresh and alive: there are butterflies and "white flowers clustered on the bushes at the entrance", the verb 'clustered' implies that nature is welcoming him to his new home, like a crowd welcoming a new arrival. The writer also makes the setting seem precious: "the lawn glistened" suggesting that the grass itself is like a jewel, just like the car has a strip of metal "like a necklace" running across it. Finally, when Ugwu stands before the "white curtains behind the door" this could also be a symbol of a new beginning and the fact that the curtains are white suggest that it is a blank page for Ugwu's future.

Student D

I strongly agree with the student's opinion. I agree because when Ugwu came to Nigeria from the village he was excited and intrigued about what was awaiting him. Ugwu "smelt something sweet" which shows me that he's liking the aroma that is glistening through the air.

Ugwu was happy he was going to start a fresh life, it says "too busy imagining his new life away from the village". This quotation suggest that he's already dreaming about how he's going to live.

Ugwu has started to see the differences between the village and the centre of Nigeria. "For a brief moment, he wished he were back there now in his mother's hut" suggesting to me that is starting to realise that he is not happy there and wants to return to his home. I think that Ugwu prefers to stay in his natural home rather than Nigeria. As he enters the Master's home everything looks extremely expensive. "The Master grunted in response". This is extremely rude for the master to grunt almost to seem as if he is not bothered about them. I think that Ugwu is feeling unwanted, disappointed and neglected as the master is putting no attention towards them.

In conclusion, I completely agree with this statement. Ugwu was excited at the beginning of the journey then later he started to realise that he'd have to change and come out of his comfort zone.

Notes

Contact us

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