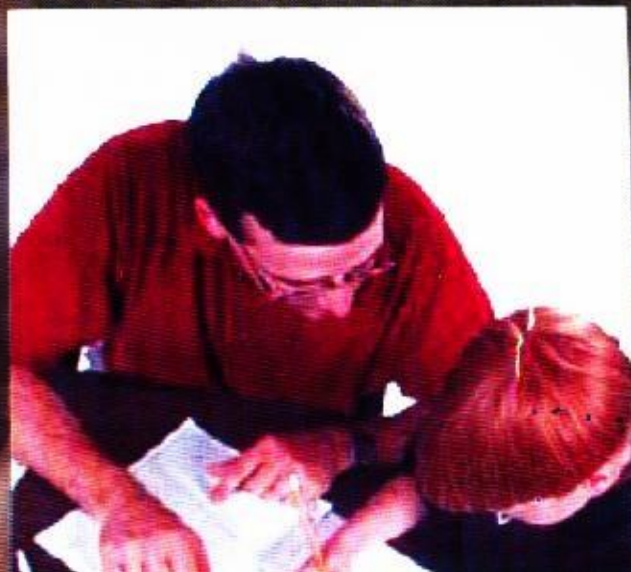


READINGS IN BASIC ENGLISH *for* Higher Education

Edited by:
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7.5.2	Paragraph Structure and Development.....	295
7.5.3	The Qualities of a Paragraph.....	296
7.5.4	Types of Paragraph.....	298
	Exercises.....	301
Chapter 8: Speaking Skills.....		302
8.1	Introduction.....	302
8.2	The English Speech Sounds.....	303
8.3	The Organs of Speech.....	303
8.4	The English Vowels.....	308
8.5	The English Consonants.....	323
8.6	Phonemic Transcription of Words.....	331
8.7	The Supra Segmental Features.....	335
8.7.1	Stress.....	336
8.7.2	Intonation.....	342
	Exercises.....	346
Chapter 9: Literary Appreciation.....		347
9.1	Introduction.....	347
9.2	What is Literature?.....	347
9.3	Genres of Literature.....	348
9.3.1	Poetry.....	349
9.3.1.1	Features of Poetry.....	349
9.3.1.2	Poetic Language.....	350
9.3.2	Prose.....	351
9.3.2.1	Prose Works.....	352
9.3.2.2	Elements of Prose.....	354

Chapter Nine

LITERARY APPRECIATION

By Ngozi Anigbogu

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Literary appreciation is the ability to read, understand and make a critical analysis of the theme, style, use of figurative and non-figurative language as well as other elements of a literary work. We are all critics in one way or the other. Even when we say we cannot really evaluate a literary text, we are making a judgment. So our ability to discuss, judge literature and make a kind of opinion about it is literary appreciation.

9.2 What is Literature?

The term literature is used in a wide sense to refer to written works and printed materials that give information. Examples of these written works are books on different subjects, articles, pamphlets etc. Literature, used in a narrower sense, means fictional and non-fictional works of artistic value and quality.

Therefore, as far as the study of Literature is concerned, Literature is defined as the study of imaginative works that convey certain aspects of human experience. Literature is, thus, peculiar as a discipline because it recreates human life. It is the art of life.

Moody (1978: 3) further asserts:



Literature brings us back to the realities of human situation, problems, feelings and relationships.

So, students who are exposed to Literature are exposed to different aspects of real life situations and this makes them understand certain conditions they would not have been able to comprehend in real life.

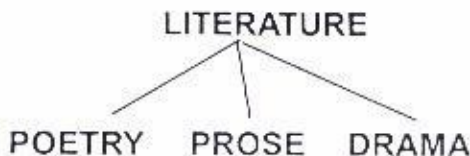
The creative writing studied as Literature gives them insight into a possibility of what happens in real life. Thus, Probst (1984:11) remarks:

Even in scientific and technological era, Literature remains a vital subject of the curriculum. It is indeed our reservoir of insight into the human condition, the pool of perceptions and conceptions from which we draw our visions of what it is to be human.

So, apart from giving pleasure to students, Literature broadens and deepens human knowledge.

9.3 GENRES OF LITERATURE

There are different branches of Literature namely Poetry, Prose and Drama.



These types are also called Genres of Literature. Thus the term genre means kinds or categories. Each genre of Literature is characterized by a particular style or form.

9.3.1 POETRY

Poetry is that genre of Literature which expresses deep emotions, feelings, thoughts, experiences and ideas in verse form. Hence, the imaginative work in poetry is expressed in an elegant language. The elegance of poetic language is achieved mainly through imagery. Examples of types of poetry are Lyric, Sonnet, Epic, Ode, Elegy, Dirge, Ballad, Epigram, Idyll, Limerick, etc.

9.3.1.1 FEATURES OF POETRY

a) Stanza

This is a group of lines in a poem that has a definite pattern of lengths and which forms a unit.

b) Tone

Tone is a poet's attitude towards his subject or events. Thus the tone of a poem can be that of resignation, sorrow, happiness or anger.

c) Mood

This is the emotional feeling that a poet creates in a literary work.

d) Structure

This refers to the form and arrangement of lines in a poem. Some poems are divided into stanzas while some do not have stanzas.

e) Poetic License

This refers to the freedom poets enjoy when writing poems. Thus they can create or coin their own words.

f) Enjambment

Enjambment refers to the flowing over of one line to the next one.

g) Caesura

This is a break or the presence of a fullstop or comma within a line of a poem.

9.3.1.2 POETIC LANGUAGE

In poetry, a fuller use is made of individual words through imagery, connotation and symbolism. So poetic language is very descriptive. Poets use language that appeals to one or more of the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The imagery used in poetry creates original and colourful description. For example:

My love is like a red red rose.

Robert Burns

*Except that like some fish
Doped out of the deep
I have bobbed up bellywise
From stream of sleep
And no cocks crow*

J.P. Clark

The expressions red, red rose, except like some fish, bobbed up bellywise, stream of sleep, cock crow are very vivid. They give readers much to picture in their minds. Thus, these figures of speech create pictorial effects.

Another language resource peculiar to poetry is connotation: the meanings associated with a word beyond its literal meaning. So poetic language is also very connotative. For example:

Nature and nature's law

Lay he in night

God said Let Newton be

And all was Light.

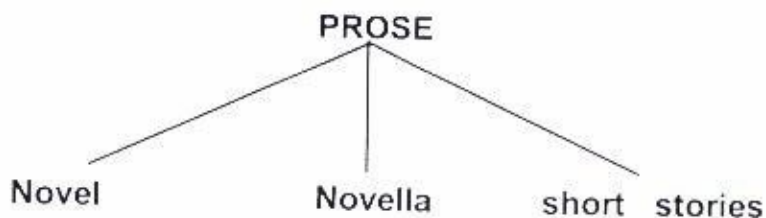
Alexander Pope

In this poem, night connotes obscurity or ignorance while light connotes knowledge or advancement. Poets often rely on this feature of language (connotation) to convey their feelings. Also in poetry, poets use symbols to present or describe ideas. In this case, the poet has a deeper or hidden meaning of the word he is concerned with. The readers are expected to guess or decipher the hidden meaning. For example, the word 'cross' can symbolize suffering. So symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas, experience or feelings.

9.3.2 PROSE

The term 'prose' refers to that kind of Literature written in ordinary form of spoken or written language. Prose works do not have rhythm or rhyme patterns. Prose works

are further subdivided into three namely: Novels, Novella and short stories.



a) Novel: The novel has the largest volume amongst the three prose works. It involves more characters than that of novella and short story and the plot is more complex.

b) Novella: A novella is a fictional narrative which is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel.

c) Short Story: A short story can be read within a brief time lapse because it is shorter than a novella. It has fewer characters and incidents.

9.3.2.1 PROSE WORKS

The prose works, already defined, can be classified into two: Fiction and Non-fiction.

a) Fiction

Fiction is literature which deals with events that are imagined. It is a narrative which tells a story about imagined people in imagined situations. Fiction includes fables, allegory, parable and romance.

b) Fables: These are stories that illustrate moral lessons. They carry deeper meaning apart from the surface story. The characters in most fables are often animals which are made to talk and behave like human beings. Example: Animal Farm by George Orwell.

c) Allegory: An allegory has the characteristics of a fable but the characters represent ideas such as pride, love, meekness, hope, despair, etc. Example: The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born by Ayi Kwei Armah.

d) Parable: This is a simple brief story which illustrates moral truth. The parables of Jesus Christ in the Bible are suitable examples. Example: The Parable of the Sower.

e) Romance: In the middle ages, romance tells the deeds of knights but the modern romance tells a love story.

Example: Mills and Boons series etc.

Non Fiction

This is factual writing about real people, events, ideas and real life situations. Non-fiction includes autobiography and biography.

a) Autobiography: This is an account of a person's life written by that person. Most autobiographies use the first person's point of view with the pronoun 'I'. Example:

African Child by Camara Laye.

b) Biography: A biography presents the story of a person's life recounted by another person. The biographer gives the account of the true life story as he uncovers them.

Example: Ake: The Days of childhood by Wole Soyinka.

9.3.2.2 ELEMENTS OF PROSE

a) Theme

It is the central message about life or human nature expressed in a literary work. In a stated theme, the writer expresses the theme directly into words. The readers on the other hand must determine on their own an unstated or implied theme by interpreting story elements.

b) Plot

A plot is a sequence of related events that take place within a definite period in a literary work. Plots develop in five stages: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. The exposition gives the setting, introduces the characters and conflicts. The rising action develops the conflicts and complications. The climax or the turning point is the highest point of interest. The falling action shows the events that take place after the climax. Resolution or denouement describes how the conflicts are resolved.

c) Setting

This refers to the place and period in which the action of a literary work takes place. The setting can also include ideas, customs, values and beliefs.

d) Character

In all literary works, writers describe actions and ideas. The characters are the persons or objects affected by these actions and ideas. Thus, a character plays a role in the action of a literary work.

e) Characterization

This refers to the techniques writers use in presenting and developing characters.

In the direct characterization, the author states the traits simply by saying that a character is proud or kind. With indirect characterization, the author reveals the character's traits through the character's action or words or from what other characters in the literary work say about the person.

f) Conflict

This is the struggle between two opposing forces in a literary work. The external conflict is the struggle between a character and another character or between a character and an outside force such as society, destiny or nature. The internal conflict is the struggle that takes place within a character. This may be opposing feeling, indecision, etc.

g) Style

This is the technique a writer employs to present his work. This may be choice of words, sentence patterns, figurative language and tone.

h) Point of View

This refers to the perspective from which a story is narrated. The person telling the story is called the narrator. There are two main types of point of view: first person and third person. In the first person's point of view, the writer tells a story using the pronoun I. Thus the narrator is a character in the story. In the third person's point of view, the writer uses the third person pronoun 'he or she'. In this type, the narrator is an outside observer. So he stands apart from the characters.

The third person narrative point of view can be classified into two: the third person limited point of view and the third person omniscient point of view. In the third person limited point of view, events are described as a single character may see them. In the third person omniscient point of view the narrator reports the thoughts, actions and feelings of all the characters in a literary work.

9.3.3 DRAMA

A drama is defined as a literary composition that tells a story in form of a dialogue and action. Sometimes it is also performed on stage before an audience. A drama is also called a play.

9.3.3.1 Types of Drama

There are five major kinds of play or drama namely: Comedy, Tragicomedy, Tragedy, Melodrama and Farce.

a) Comedy: A comedy is a type of drama which aims at amusing or entertaining the readers and audience. It may start with some complications but at the end the conflicts are resolved and everything ends happily. Example: *The Rivals* by Richard B. Sheridan.

b) Tragicomedy: A tragi-comedy has all the features of a tragedy but ends happily. It has both tragic and comic elements. Example: *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare.

c) Tragedy: A tragedy recounts series of events, which lead to the catastrophic end of the protagonist. Thus, it a serious drama which has an unhappy ending. Example: *The Gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi.

d) Melodrama: A melodrama is very sensational and unrealistic but appeals to one's emotions. The situation and actions found in a melodrama are not convincing. Example: *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd.

e) Farce: A farce makes use of simple characters and action to create laughter and amusement. The characters are normally projected as clowns. Example: *Wizard of Law* by Zulu Sofola.

9.3.3.2 FEATURES OF DRAMA

a) Protagonist

The main character in a play who champions one cause or the other as the action in the drama unfolds.

b) Antagonist

This is the chief opponent of the protagonist who works against the interest of the protagonist.

c) Prologue

A prologue is an introduction to a play which comes before the commencement of a dramatic performance.

d) Epilogue

An epilogue is a speech at the end of a play or a final address at the end of a dramatic performance.

e) Interlude

It is a short performance between the acts of a play that provides some relief for the audience especially in a serious drama.

f) Flashback

Flashback is a scene or action in a drama that goes back in time to show what happened earlier in the story.

g) Act

This is a major unit or section of a drama or play.

h) Scene

This is also a subdivision of an act in a play or drama.

i) Conflict

It is a clash of interests between the protagonist and the antagonist in a drama.

j) Soliloquy

A dramatic technique which gives the audience access to the thoughts of a character when he talks to himself.

k) Tragic flaw

This is the natural weakness which a tragic hero possesses. The tragic flaw normally leads to the death or serious misfortune of a tragic hero.

l) Prompter

A prompter is a person who stays out of sight during a dramatic performance to remind actors of lines which may escape their memory.

m) Catharsis

This is the release of powerful emotion through a work of art. Catharsis purges the mind of any unwanted emotion especially the effect of the emotion which a great tragedy produces in the reader.

EXERCISES

POETRY

The Fountain

*Into the sunshine, full of light,
Leaping and flashing from morn till night!
Into the moonlight, whiter than snow,
Waving so flower-like the winds blow
Into the starlight, rushing in spray,
Happy at midnight, happy by day!
Ever in motion, blithesome and cherry,
Still climbing heavenward, never aweary,
Glad of all weathers, still seeming best,
Upward or downward motion thy rest.
Full of nature nothing can tame,
Changed every moment, ever the same.
Ceaseless aspiring, ceaseless content,
Darkness or sunshine thy element.
Glorious fountain! Let my heart be
Fresh, changeful, constant, upward like thee!*

James Russell Lowell

QUESTIONS

- (1) What is the theme of this poem?
- (2) Point out examples of alliteration in this poem.
- (3) Give any five characteristics of the fountain mentioned in the poem.
- (4) The tone of the poem is that of
A) Disappointment b) Happiness
c) Anger d) Resignation.

- (5) Point out the imagery in the last line.

DRAMA

A: Listen Child

B: I cant stay here in this place
To be like unwanted maize plant
That has been pulled out and flung in the bare
path.

To be trodden beneath men's feet,
And left to wither and dry up in the sun.

A: You must not go away.

B: Can't go back to a house of shame and humiliation
To be laughed at, to be flouted,
To be driven out, and by him, my husband,
When I'd wanted to give him my body, my heart to
keep

A: He may change his mind.

B: I could not go back to him even if called me back,
(Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: The Black Hermit)

QUESTIONS

- (1) What does A want B to do?
- (2) Comment on the language of the extract.
- (3) Why has B refused to go back to the house?
- (4) "To be like an unwanted maize plant that has been pulled out and flung on the bare path"
What are the imageries contained in these lines?

- (5) What does this statement mean?
"To be trodden beneath men's feet
And left to wither and dry up in the sun".

PROSE

Olume watched himself in the show mirror as Professor Rile had directed. He could see himself all right but not as he used to know he looked before the bulldozer pulled down his shop. It seemed that he had grown larger but more careful. If he had not, he could have beaten Professor Rile the way he battered that town council clerk that gave that directive; the instruction that the only source of livelihood should be demolished. It was ingenuous of Olume to have come behind him gently, purposefully and decisively while he was giving the dastardly instruction. He gave him the first, second and the third kick, then finally he cleared his legs and "the destroyer" came down in a heap. If all government agents were vandals, would their mothers have been able to sell salt and pepper, the proceeds from which they were trained.

(Dan Chima Amadi: The Barber's Shop).

QUESTIONS

- (1) What directive did the town council clerk give?
- (2) "If all government agents were vandals, would their mothers have been able to sell salt and pepper, the proceed from which they were trained"
What figure of speech is this?
- (3) What is the narrative technique of the author and how effective is it?
- (4) The 'destroyer' according to the passage refers to
- (5) From this passage, give Olume's character traits.



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