

2015 - 2022 A/L Essay Type Questions

Drama *Othello*

It has been asserted that “rightly played, Iago must emerge as the true centre of the tragedy.” Discuss this comment on Shakespeare’s **Othello** through an analysis of Iago’s character and function in the play.

Even though the romantic focus of Shakespeare’s **Othello** has made the play popular, some critics have found its plot to be strained, its characters improbable, and its tale of marital jealousy too trivial. Do you agree?

The character Othello in Shakespeare’s **Othello** has been described as “by his very nature being caught within a mix of power and utter simplicity without which Othello cannot be made plausible either as a role or as a play.” Do you agree?

“The sharp contrast in the development of the characters of Desdemona and Emilia in Shakespeare’s **Othello**, which culminates in their last scene alone together, provides important insights into the different options available to wives and women at the time.” Respond to this statement by contrasting the changes that take place in Desdemona’s and Emilia’s behaviour and understanding during the course of the play.

“Shakespeare plays with us throughout *Othello*, exploiting stereotypes, arousing expectations, alternatively fulfilling and frustrating our preconceptions. . . . I think this play is racist, and I think it is not.” Do you agree with this description of Shakespeare’s *Othello*?

“Ultimately it is evil, hatred, and deception that triumph over virtue, love and honesty in Shakespeare’s play, *Othello*”. Do you agree?

“Othello is as heroic and Desdemona as pure as Iago is villainous in Shakespeare’s play *Othello*”. Do you agree?

Othello “forces us to confront the difference between love and attraction. It explores different relationships between couples, friends and family who think they understand each other, but do not.” How insightful is this analysis of Shakespeare’s play?

The Glass Menagerie

"Reality is often disappointing, but it is sometimes difficult to accept. It is also often impossible to escape from reality." In light of this statement, discuss the depiction of reality and its hold on the characters in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*.

"Memory and past are always intertwined. Memories inhibit freedom and impede one's desire to change and start afresh." Examine the relevance of the above statement, making detailed reference to Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie*.

Write a critical introduction to Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie*, paying special attention to the fact that "Whatever he put on paper, superb or superfluous, glorious or gaudy, could not fail to be electrifyingly actable."

"The gentle progress of Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie* is framed by the limits of hope and disappointment as served by an unreliable memory." How does this statement help you understand Williams' play?

Novel

Nectar in a Sieve

"Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* attempts to critique industrialization in India but does not provide a convincing account of the systematic exploitation of rural communities." Do you agree?

"The women portrayed by Markandaya in *Nectar in a Sieve* are weak and helpless pawns in the hands of men." Critically examine the novel in light of this statement.

"Markandaya suggests that it is through modernization – industrialization, migration and westernization – that Indians could come out of the dark morass of poverty and ignorance." Comment critically on this statement on *Nectar in a Sieve*.

“Markandaya’s novel *Nectar in a Sieve* offers an easy resolution to the ravages of colonial rule and its aftermath, through graceful acceptance of the changes, both social and individual.” Critically examine the novel on the basis of this statement.

July’s people

“In **July’s People**, Gordimer juxtaposes white families against black families in order to show racial and gender inequalities in South Africa during Apartheid.” Do you agree?

July’s People carries on its first page the following quotation by Antonio Gramsci: “The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.” How useful is this description in understanding Gordimer’s novel?

In **July’s People**, Gordimer presents the stark reality of the gulf between ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ in South Africa, going beyond racism and inequality to focus on the irreconcilable differences in their understanding of the world. Do you agree?

In 2001, a panel of teachers (all white) appointed by the education department of South Africa’s most highly populated and important province, called for a ban on **July’s People** on the grounds that it was “deeply racist, sexist, patronising, one-sided and outdated.” Do you agree with this assessment of the novel?

“What happens to the Smaleses and to July – the shifts in character and relationships – gives us an unforgettable look into the terrifying misunderstandings between blacks and whites in South Africa in the 1970s.” Is this an accurate analysis of Gordimer’s *July’s People*?

“Gordimer does not fully condone or condemn any of the main characters in *July’s People*. and, most importantly, she does not show the best way forward for South Africa.” Comment.

“*July’s People* takes place during a future revolution in South Africa. Amid such chaos, traditional roles are overturned and new ones must be forged. In this sense, the novel exists in between the explosion of the old but before the birth of the new.” What are the traditional roles that are overturned and what are the new ones that emerge in Gordimer’s novel? English Literature Sri Lanka

“What happens to the Smaleses and to July – the shifts in character and relationship – gives us an unforgettable look into the terrifying understandings and misunderstandings between Blacks and Whites.” How accurate is this description of Nadine Gordimer’s novel *July’s People*?

Short Story

Write a critical appreciation of your favourite short story of the six stories in your syllabus, explaining why it is especially relevant to the present Sri Lankan context.

What insights do the short stories you have studied offer about ageing, death and bereavement?

Using detailed examples from **at least three** short stories in your syllabus, describe how spoken language is used to enhance the authenticity of key characters.

Write a critical appreciation of **one** short story from the six short stories in your syllabus, choosing the one that you consider to be the most sensitive in portraying the complex relationship between men and women in society.

What insights do the short stories you have studied offer about the tensions between local cultural norms and universal values?

Using detailed examples from **at least three** short stories in your syllabus, describe how narrative structure enhances the impact of these stories.

Of the six short stories in your syllabus, which do you consider to be the most effective in demonstrating the conflicts that exist among different socio-economic classes in society? Write a critical appreciation of this story explaining your views.

What insights do the short stories you have studied offer about the tensions between individual choices and socio-cultural norms?

Using detailed examples from **at least three** short stories in your selection, describe how gender roles and stereotypes shape the lives of the men and women portrayed in these stories.

Of the six short stories in your syllabus, which one do you consider to be the most insightful in criticising hypocrisy in society? Write a critical appreciation of this story justifying your choice.

In the short stories you have studied, what positions and perspectives are taken on the nature of the family and its role in shaping individual values?

Using detailed examples from at least **three** short stories in your selection, describe how key metaphors and symbols help to reinforce the overall impact of these stories.

Examine the use of 'choice' in determining character development, plot advancement and/or individual emancipation with reference to **at least three** short stories prescribed in your syllabus.

OR

Evaluate how the female characters in the prescribed short stories determine the course of their actions, making reference to their gendered reactions and relationships. Make detailed references to **at least two** stories from your collection.

OR

Of the six short stories in your syllabus, which one do you consider to be the most effective in describing social injustice? Write a critical appreciation of this story justifying your choice in comparison with the other stories.

Discuss the importance of conversations in **three** short stories in your syllabus, focusing specifically on how they move the plot forward and how they are used as a narrative technique.

OR

Explore how love is used as a theme in **two short stories** by **male writers**. Discuss the importance of this theme to the development of the plot and the characters in the selected short stories.

OR

Identify the short story that in your view provides the best analysis of **resistance to oppression**, and write a short introduction to the story highlighting this aspect. Note that you first need to justify your selection through a brief comparison with the other stories in your syllabus.

Discuss the importance of cultural diversity in **three** short stories in your syllabus, focussing specifically on how it moves the plot forward and delineates character in these stories.

OR

Explore how men are portrayed in **two short stories** by **female writers**. Discuss whether this portrayal is sufficiently nuanced and credible in comparison to the female characters in the selected short stories.

OR

Identify the short story that, in your view, provides the best critical analysis of **dominant values**, and write a short introduction to the story highlighting this aspect. Note that you first need to justify your selection through a brief comparison with the other stories in your syllabus.

- (a) Discuss the importance of **individuanity and individual choice** in three short stories in your syllabus, focusing specifically on how these themes move the plot forward and add value to the characters in these stories.

OR

- (b) Explore how **gender and sexuality** are represented in two short stories in your syllabus, choosing one story written by a woman and another by a man. Identify and analyse differences, if any, between the approaches taken in these texts, and assess the extent to which the author's gender does not influence this difference.

OR

- (c) Identify the short story in your syllabus that, in your view, provides the **most effective** portrayal of **failed relationships**, and write a short introduction to the story highlighting this aspect. Note that you first need to justify your selection through a brief comparison with the other stories in your syllabus.

Poetry

Identify a shared theme in **three** poems from your syllabus, and write a brief introduction to them.

Contrast the treatment of love in poems from **any two** literary periods in your syllabus.

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) Common issues contained in the three Sri Lankan poems in your syllabus.
- (ii) Winter imagery in Bronte's "Remembrance" and Eliot's "Preludes".
- (iii) Similarities and differences in the treatment of nature by Keats in his "Ode to a Nightingale" and Shelley in his "Ode to a Skylark".

Write a brief introduction to a selection of **three** poems from your syllabus which discuss the themes of violence and suffering.

Contrast the treatment of memory in poems from any **two** literary periods in your syllabus.

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) Common issues contained in the **three** poems in your syllabus written by women.
- (ii) Social injustice in Owen's "Disabled" and Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa".
- (iii) Similarities and differences in the treatment of illness and death in any **two** poems in your syllabus.

Write a brief introduction to a selection of **three** poems in your syllabus, which discusses the themes of political and social justice.

Contrast the treatment of human values in the poems of any **two** literary periods in your syllabus.

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) Shared issues contained in three poems in your syllabus, which are written by non-western men.
- (ii) Human psychology in Blake's "Tyger", Hopkins' "Felix Randal" and Plath's "Mirror".
- (iii) Similarities and differences in the treatment of the urban-rural distinction in any **two** poems in your syllabus.

Write a brief introduction to a selection of **three** poems in your syllabus which discuss the themes of ageing and illness.

Contrast the treatment of patriotism in the poems of any **two** literary periods in your syllabus.

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) Shared issues contained in three poems written by women, that are in your syllabus.
- (ii) Humour and irony in William Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, Robert Frost's "Mending Wall", and Angela de Silva's "Birds, Beasts, and Relatives".
- (iii) Similarities and differences in the treatment of religious belief in any **two** poems in your syllabus.

Write a brief critical analysis of any **three** poems in your syllabus, paying special attention to the shared thematic concerns explored by the poets.

OR

Examine how poets use their craft to shed light on the socio-political concerns of their time, providing detailed examples from at least **three** poems written by male poets.

OR

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" and Kamala Das's "An Introduction" in terms of their portrayal of the role of women in a patriarchal society.
- (ii) Wordsworth's "To a Snowdrop", Hopkins's "Spring and Fall" and Frost's "Design" in relation to their depiction of nature.
- (iii) The relationship between poetry and politics as demonstrated in at least **three** prescribed poems.

Write a brief critical analysis of **any three poems** in your syllabus paying special attention to the theme of **duty and/or responsibility** as explored by the poets.

OR

Examine how poets use **death** as a theme to explore social and political issues, providing detailed examples from **at least three poems**.

OR

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) The issues and concerns of childhood and youth in **at least three** prescribed poems.
- (ii) A comparison of **two poems**, one written by a woman and the other by a man, on the theme of marriage and family, so as to demonstrate the difference in their perspectives.
- (iii) **Any three poems from three literary periods**, which examine the nature and consequences of exploitation and greed.

Write a brief critical analysis of **any three poems** in your syllabus that present different dimensions of love and loss from a woman's perspective.

OR

Examine how poets rely on **religious belief and values** to explain political and social injustice, providing detailed examples from **at least three poems**.

OR

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) The use of irony and sarcasm to criticise dominant public values in **at least three** prescribed poems.
- (ii) **Two poems**, one written in the "first world" and one in the "third world", on the theme of suffering and violence, comparing them to demonstrate the difference in their perspectives.
- (iii) **Any three poems from three different literary periods**, which examine the consequences of going against accepted norms, beliefs and practices. English Literature Sri Lanka

Examine how poets use **nature as a guide** to explore social and political issues, providing detailed examples from at least **three** poems in your syllabus.

OR

Critically examine the representation of **different types of connect** in at least **three** poems from your syllabus, paying special attention to how the theme is brought out in these poems.

OR

Critically analyse **one** of the following:

- (i) The use of **gender stereotypes to question dominant social values** in at least **three** prescribed poems.
- (ii) **Two poems**, one written in the 'first world' and the other in the 'third world', which take **overtly political positions**. Compare them to demonstrate the difference in their perspectives.
- (iii) Any **three poems** from **three different literary periods**, which focus on **death and remembrance**.