
Year 12

English Standard

Module A Language,
Identity and Culture

Lesson 2

Writing About Theme

1. Marking Rubrics for Module A

In the last lesson we covered the meaning of the technical terms 'language', 'identity' and 'culture'. We also discussed the difference between plot summary and analysis. In this lesson we're going to add in a new key word: 'theme'.

Quick Questions

Before we start a new topic it is always important to revise and reinforce what we've covered already. In your own words, enter a definition for each of these key words below:

Language

Identity

Culture

Plot Summary

Analysis

Marking Criteria

Let's take a quick look at the criteria which examiners work from when grading responses to Module A questions.

In order to score a mark in the top band, you'll need to satisfy each of these three criteria:

- Demonstrate understanding of how ideas about language, identity and culture are expressed through texts;
- Demonstrate understanding of how language is used to shape meaning about individuals and / or cultural groups;
- Organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form.

These can be broken down as follows: point one requires you to show that you understand how your prescribed text presents, discusses and / or describes ideas about language, identity and culture. Point two requires you to move beyond plot summary into analysis and analyse how your text creates meaning. Point three is about how well you write: are you using technical terms? If so, are you using them accurately? Is your argument clear?

For the purposes of this lesson, we're just going to concentrate on points one and two.

Example: Unpolished Gem

We're going to start with the opening passage from Alice Pung's non-fiction **memoir** *Unpolished Gem*. Because the genre is 'non-fiction', we know that the book will be based on real events. A 'memoir' is a book which deals with a particular period in the writer's life, and so we can expect this to be quite a personal book. The title, *Unpolished Gem* is an idiom. An 'unpolished gem' literally means a gemstone which has been dug out of the earth but not yet polished so that its brightness and beauty are not yet apparent. What might this title suggest about how the writer of this memoir, Alice Pung, wants to present herself to her readers?

Idiom	An idiom is a turn of phrase often used by fluent English speakers which might be unfamiliar to people who do not speak the language routinely. For example, the question "how're you going?" is meaningless outside a culture in which it is routinely used as a greeting.
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Let's have a look at how the book begins:

Pung, A. 2006. *Unpolished Gem*

This story does not begin on a boat.

We begin our story in a suburb of Melbourne, Australia, in a market swarming with fat pigs and thin people. The fat pigs are hanging from hooks, waiting to be hacked into segments, and the thin people are waiting to buy these segments wrapped in newspaper over a glass counter. When they haggle over the price of trotters, there is much hand-gesticulating and furrowing of brow because the parties do not spick da Inglish velly good. 'Like a chicken trying to talk to a duck,' my mother calls these conversations. But she is not here today to quack over quality pigs' paws because she is lying in a white hospital room waiting for me to arrive.

Personal Reflection

What do you think this book is about? In the space below make a note of your first impressions of the narrator. Your teacher will give you a few minutes to do this.

As we did in the previous lesson, let's begin by summarising the plot.

Focus Question

Summarise the plot so far.

Let us now move on to analyse the passage in order to identify the themes which it contains relating to identity and culture.

Theme	The word 'theme' (or 'topic') refers to the philosophical ideas which a text explores. You can work out the theme by asking yourself 'what is this text about?' Note that texts often have more than one theme. For the purposes of Module A you need to be especially alert to themes which have to do with language, identity and culture.
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Creative Response

In the space below, write a plan for the first chapter of a memoir about your childhood. It's up to you whether you write the plan in dot points or continuous sentences. You should consider the following points before you start writing:

- What do you want the memoir to say about you, as a person? What theme or themes do you want to explore in writing it?
- How will you choose what incidents from your childhood to focus on? Will you concentrate on one particular episode which 'shaped' your identity?
- What do you want this text to say about your identity? What language techniques can you use to ensure the reader understands this?
- What do you want to say about your culture in this memoir? Are there particular words and phrases you can use to do this?

¹ Image of Alice Pung. Alice Pung. Source: <https://www.alicepung.net/about-1/>