Year 12 English Standard Module A Language, Identity and Culture

Lesson 2 Writing About Theme

MATRIX = DUCATION

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.				

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 Ingish 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 thin	k this book is about? In the space below make a note of your first
impressions of th	ne narrator. Your teacher will give you a few minutes to do this.
As we did in the p	previous lesson, let's begin by summarising the plot.
Foous Oues	tion
Focus Ques	tion
Summarise the p	lot so far.
Let us now move	on to analyse the passage in order to identify the themes which it contains
relating to identit	ry 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.

Class Discussion

What themes can you identify in the opening extract from <i>Ur</i>	npolished Gem? Make a note
below of what you discuss.	

The first sentence stands out because it forms a whole paragraph on its own. This is unusual, since most paragraphs contain multiple sentences. It's also unusual to begin a story by telling us something that isn't true rather than something that is: "This story does not begin on a boat."

Stories which traditionally begin on boats include travel stories and stories about migration. By opening her memoir with this sentence, Pung puts her readers in mind of these genres even as she's telling us that her story will not fit this description.

Pung is an Asian-Australian writer. Her identity and culture have been shaped by her family background and the multiple influences of her Chinese and Cambodian relatives. She writes from a multicultural perspective. This is a commonly used term which refers to someone who belongs to several overlapping cultural groups. Although her ancestors come from foreign nations, Pung herself was born in Australia.

Perhaps Pung's point is to challenge common assumptions about the Asian-Australian experience. In terms of theme, perhaps her book will challenge common assumptions or misconceptions made about her based on what she looks like – which, as we discussed in Lesson One, is just one aspect of her identity.



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	tnere particular
words and phrases you can use to do this?	

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