Grade 11 Literature in English

CBC NOTES | Terms 1, 2 and 3 - notes for 36 topics

IN EVERY TOPIC

- What you will learn and the key words.
- Short, clear notes with worked examples.
- Questions to try and a topic test, with the answers at the back.

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Strand 1.0 Oral literature sources, stanzas, the novel and biography | Term 1

1.1.1 Introduction to Oral Literature

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

- explain the traditional sources of oral literature for information
- analyse the traditional sources of oral literature for comprehension

KEY WORDS

oral literature, oral tradition, source, elder, griot, storytelling session, performance, ceremony, rite of passage, custodian.

1. What oral literature is and where it comes from

Traditional sources of oral literature

Oral literature is literature that is spoken, sung or performed and passed from one generation to the next by word of mouth. A SOURCE is the person, occasion or practice through which it is created, kept and passed on.

Main traditional sources: (1) ORAL TRADITION - the whole body of knowledge (history, beliefs, laws, stories) that a community hands down by speech; (2) ELDERS and GRIOTS - elders are the custodians of wisdom who tell stories, proverbs and history; a griot (a word used in West Africa) is a professional praise-singer, historian and musician who keeps the family histories of a community; (3) STORYTELLING SESSIONS - evening gatherings around the fire where grandparents tell narratives, riddles and tongue twisters; (4) MUSIC, DANCES AND PERFORMANCES - songs and dances at work, harvest and festivals; (5) CEREMONIES - births, initiation, weddings, funerals and rain-making, each with its own songs, chants, blessings and speeches.

Activity: in pairs, search online or offline (books, elders, the school library) for traditional sources of oral literature and list one example of each source from a Kenyan community.

2. Oral tradition, elders and storytelling sessions

Model text: an evening storytelling session (read aloud)

"The fire crackled in Shosho's kitchen. 'Children,' she said, 'are you ready?' 'Ready!' we shouted. 'Long, long ago, when the hills could still talk, there lived a hare who was too clever for his own good...' Every few minutes she stopped to ask, 'And what do you think the hare did?' We laughed, we shouted answers, and when the story ended she said, 'That is why we do not mock the slow tortoise.' Then my little brother asked for a riddle, and the riddles went on until the fire died."

What the session shows: an ELDER (Shosho) is the performer; the AUDIENCE takes part (answering "Ready!", guessing); there is an OPENING formula ("Long, long ago...") and a CLOSING moral; one genre leads to another (story -> riddles). Through such sessions, ORAL TRADITION passes on values (do not mock others), language, humour and history.

Strengths and weaknesses of oral tradition as a source: it is living, shared, adapted to the audience and teaches values; but details change from teller to teller, some material is lost when elders die, and it can be hard to date.

Activity: groups interrogate oral tradition as a source: list two strengths and two weaknesses and share with the class.

3. Music, dance, performances and ceremonies as sources

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Model wedding song (original, call and response)
Soloist: "Who is this bride as bright as the morning?" Chorus: "She is ours, she is ours!" Soloist: "Who is this groom who came with his cattle?" Chorus: "He is ours, he is ours!" Soloist: "Let the two families become one river!" Chorus: "One river, one river, flowing to the sea!"
CEREMONIES as sources: each stage of life has its oral literature - birth (lullabies, naming songs), initiation (circumcision or coming-of-age songs and advice), marriage (wedding songs, negotiation speeches, blessings), death (dirges, eulogies), and community rites (rain-making chants, harvest songs, prayers). MUSIC AND DANCE carry oral poetry: work songs, praise songs, war songs and dance songs.
Link to CULTURE: the songs and speeches carry the community's beliefs (blessings from ancestors), values (unity of families), customs (dowry with cattle) and language. Studying them helps us understand the people who created them.
Activity: groups relate each traditional source to an aspect of culture it reflects and share views with peers.

4. Gallery walk: posters on traditional sources

Practical: gallery walk (groups of four; materials: manila paper, marker pens)
Each group makes a poster on one source (oral tradition; elders and griots; storytelling sessions; music, dance and performances; ceremonies). Each poster has: a title, a definition, two examples from Kenyan communities, a short sample (a riddle, a proverb or two lines of a song), and one reason why the source is important.
Posters are displayed around the room. Groups walk round, read and leave a comment or question on a sticky note. Each group then answers the questions left on its poster.
Why study the sources: they show us where literature begins; they explain the meaning and context of songs, stories and sayings; they preserve culture and identity; they teach values; and they are the raw material for fieldwork, written literature, film and music today.

TRY THESE

1. What is oral literature?
2. What is a griot?
3. Who is the performer in the model text, and how does the audience take part?
4. Give the opening formula used in the story.
5. What custom is reflected in "the groom who came with his cattle"?
6. What does "Let the two families become one river" mean?
7. List four things each poster must include.
8. Give two reasons for studying the sources of oral literature.

TOPIC TEST

T1. Is a radio station that plays traditional songs a traditional source? Explain.
T2. How can a community protect its oral tradition today?
T3. Why do you think so much oral literature is attached to ceremonies?
T4. How might a modern writer use a traditional source in a novel or play?

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Strand 1.0 Oral literature sources, stanzas, the novel and biography | Term 1

1.2.1 Oral literature sources, stanzas, the novel and biography: Types of Poetry: Form and Structure

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

- explain the elements of poetry for information
- distinguish between a couplet, a tercet and a quatrain for comprehension
- write a couplet, a tercet and a quatrain for literary analysis
- acknowledge the importance of elements of poetry for literary appreciation

KEY WORDS

poem, line, stanza, couplet, tercet, quatrain, rhyme, rhythm, persona, imagery.

1. Elements of poetry

Model poem: "Market Day" (original)

"The sun climbs up the market wall, / Mama calls her prices to all; / Tomatoes red as a sunset sky, / Sukuma green for passers-by. // A boy runs past with mangoes sweet, / Dust is dancing at his feet."

Elements of poetry: LINES (poems are written in lines, not paragraphs); STANZAS (groups of lines, like paragraphs in prose - this poem has two); RHYME (matching end sounds: wall/all, sky/by, sweet/feet); RHYTHM (the beat of the words when read aloud); PERSONA (the speaker in the poem - here an observer at the market); IMAGERY (word pictures: "red as a sunset sky", "dust is dancing"); SUBJECT MATTER (what the poem is about - a busy market morning); TONE (the poet's attitude - cheerful).

Activity: groups collect simple poems from Africa (from books, the internet or elders) for a class portfolio and label at least three elements in one poem.

2. Couplets, tercets and quatrains

Stanza forms

COUPLET - a stanza of TWO lines, often rhyming (aa): "The rain came down on the dusty land, / And seeds woke up at its gentle hand."

TERCET - a stanza of THREE lines; may rhyme aaa, aba, or not at all: "The drum speaks first, / then the flute replies, / and the dancers rise."

QUATRAIN - a stanza of FOUR lines, the most common stanza; common rhyme schemes abab, abcb, aabb: "My mother's hands are rough and wide (a) / From years of digging in the sun; (b) / But when she holds me at her side, (a) / I know her work is never done. (b)"

Structural analysis: count the lines in each stanza, mark the rhyme with letters (a, b, c), and say what each stanza adds to the meaning. A couplet is short and memorable (good for a strong ending or a saying); a tercet feels quick and unfinished; a quatrain gives room to develop one idea.

3. Charting and analysing stanza forms

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Model poem for analysis: "Harvest" (original)
"The maize stands tall in rows of gold, (a) / A story that the rains have told. (a) // The women bend, / the baskets fill, / the songs ascend the hill. // The granary is full tonight, (a) / The children's faces shining bright; (a) / Grandfather counts the bags with care, (b) / And thanks the sky for every share. (b)"
Analysis: stanza 1 is a COUPLET (aa) introducing the harvest; stanza 2 is a TERCET (no regular rhyme; short lines show quick, busy work); stanza 3 is a QUATRAIN (aabb) describing the happy result. Moving from 2 to 3 to 4 lines, the poem grows like the harvest itself.
Activity: groups prepare a chart with the definition, rhyme pattern and an example of each stanza form and display it in class. Studying elements helps us read poems closely, understand how form supports meaning, and enjoy and write poetry.

4. Writing and performing couplets, tercets and quatrains

Writing steps: choose a subject (school, a season, a person, a place); brainstorm images (what you see, hear, smell, feel); decide the form and rhyme pattern; write, then read aloud and revise for rhythm.
Model set on "School": Couplet - "The bell rings out across the yard, / We run to class, we're working hard." Tercet - "Chalk dust drifts / in morning light; / pens begin their flight." Quatrain - "Our teacher writes upon the board (a) / The secrets of the land and sea; (b) / Each word a seed, each line a road (c) / That leads us where we want to be. (b)"
Activity: in pairs, write one couplet, one tercet and one quatrain on a theme of choice, share with peers for comment, revise, and perform them for the class. Collect the best in the class portfolio.

TRY THESE

1. How many stanzas does "Market Day" have?
2. Give one pair of rhyming words from the poem.
3. How many lines are in a tercet?
4. What is the rhyme scheme of the model quatrain?
5. Name the stanza form of each stanza of "Harvest".
6. What is the rhyme scheme of the quatrain in "Harvest"?
7. What is the rhyme scheme of the model quatrain on "School"?
8. Write a couplet about rain.

TOPIC TEST

T1. Why do poets arrange words in lines instead of paragraphs?
T2. Write the rhyme scheme of a quatrain rhyming only lines 2 and 4.
T3. Suggest why the poet saved the longest stanza for the end.
T4. Rewrite your couplet without rhyme. Which version do you prefer and why?

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