

Literature Socratic Dialogue 2019

Language, Literature and Aesthetics

General Instructions

- There are two parts- Analysis and Synthesis. Analysis gives the required background.
- Interesting wrong answers are valued more than correct answers, at Sciensation!
- You need not confirm to the arguments in the questionnaire. If you disagree with any implicit assumptions in the question, please state it explicitly, you're receive extra marks.
- Some examples maybe provided within brackets, you needn't confine your thought process to these examples. They are stated for your ease of understanding, not for confinement.
- The format for answers to Analysis QFD (Question for Discussion): Concepts Learnt, Tricks observed, Learning (how it has changed the way you think) and your response (within 4-5 sentences or even a small mind-map would do – any comprehensible expression of ideas)
- The Synthesis question shall involve any 2 of the 3 given snippets and shall be explained within 5-8 sentences or a page long mind-map.

Evaluation Criterion

- Examples- Can the student provide intuitive examples to justify the logic?
- Eloquence- Were the arguments explained carefully?
- Rigor- The arguments/assertions need to be justified.
- Robustness- Can the argument break down easily? How general is it?
- Elegance- Were the arguments beautifully constructed?

Sciensation at Hyd Literary Festival

Literature Socratic Dialogue 2018 Champions: Gitanjali Devashray, Secunderabad

Jury: Prof. Susie Tharu (retired EFLU professor), Prof. Usha Raman (Editor, TeacherPlus), Mr. Vijay Marur (popular Theatre personality and AdFilm maker) and Ms. Aparna Thota (writer)

Construe the Constitution 2018 Champions: Vikas the Concept School, Bachupally

Jury: Mr. Marri Adithya Reddy (Secretary, Telangana Pradesh Congress Party), Mr. L.Ravichander (official Legal Counsel, AP and TS State High Court), Dr. Jayashree Subramanian (Faculty, TISS Hyd) , Dr. Lavanya Suresh (Faculty, BITS Hyderabad) and Ms. Kalpana Ramesh (Co-Founder, Kaava the Design Studio)

Analysis1: Understanding

Q1: What is understanding? Do we understand what is understanding? Can you give an example of something which you understand? Do you really understand that something? Why does a ball fall down when you throw it? Gravity? Do you understand it or do you remember it? What is the difference between understanding and remembering? Prof. John Searle, an MIT researcher, says "In many of these discussions one finds a lot of fancy footwork about the word "understanding". Would you agree?

Q2. What is a word? Can you give some examples of words? What is the meaning of a word? Can you think of more than one meaning of a word? How do you then figure out the meaning if it can have more than one meaning? Can you guess the meaning of the word repercussion by reading the following examples? Example1: Students do not ask questions in a class because they are afraid of a possible repercussion. Example2: The government couldn't think of the possible repercussions of demonetisation. Example3: Cloud-seeding is a good technology as it helps in overcoming repercussions of unseasonal rainfall. What meaning did you guess? How do you guess?

Q3. What is the difference between repercussion and consequence? Are students aware of what would happen if they ask a question? Why should one distinguish between unintended and unwelcome consequences and normal consequence? Why do we need a separate word for unintended/unwelcome consequences? Why have one more word called ramification (complex and unintended outcome)? Why have a word called corollary (something which follows naturally)? Why have synonyms, why not have just one word? Do synonyms lead to confusion or clarity? How can one understand synonyms better?

Q4. Telangana Government was recently celebrating the state's paddy produce. An agricultural scientist said that this was not something to be celebrated as Telangana is a water deficit state and paddy requires a lot of water. In response, a person commented that this happens when politics, nature and economics don't go hand in hand. What do you mean by go hand in hand? Does it literally mean that people hold their hands and travel? Are politics, nature and economics people who like each other? What does it mean for politics and nature to go hand in hand or to not go hand in hand? Are they abstractions(a juice or an essence) of an idea? Why do we say that one idea collides with another? Why do people like to hear that lots of rice was produced? Why are politicians scared of speaking something which people do not like? Why are businessmen's and politician's wishes against nature here?

Q5: Are languages vehicles of "meaning"? When was the last time when you realized that the others aren't getting what you were trying to explain? Can try to explain your friend a very complex feeling which you have? Did your friend understand? Why is it difficult to convey complicated feelings? If this is the case, what should we do to improve our communication? Can you think of another example of the phrase "hand in hand"? How does reading help in understanding others' ideas or articulating own ideas?

QFD: What is your understanding of "understanding" after discussing the above questions?

Analysis2: Literary Criticism

Q1. What do you mean by criticism? Why do experts comment about players' performance after a sport? Why do companies want early users to critique their products? Does critical thinking always mean fault-finding? Did you find critical questioning in the above analysis section? Can you think of one example of critical questioning which is not fault-finding? Should we engage in critical thinking while reading Literature? If you were asked to design a method for critically analyzing Literature how would you do it? What details would you pay attention to?

Q2: Italy went through Renaissance period (rebirth) wherein period were rediscovering old Roman ideas. Why do you think people studied old monuments? How do you think books and print press would have helped Renaissance? Would you expect Literary Criticism to emerge during Renaissance? Why would people write commentaries on old works like Aristotle's Poetics? The Enlightenment period (1700-1800), when Literary criticism and basic literacy levels were high, how would you expect people to critique books? What would happen if reviews are published in newspapers?

Q3: Would you expect Industrial revolution to lead a movement around emotions and individualism? Why? What changes would you expect in art and literature fields, in the backdrop of this Romanticism (18th century)? Why do you think people were interested in aesthetics? Would you agree with Shakespeare view that art can "hold a mirror up to nature"? Would you rather consider art to be a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"? Does Art or Literature have to deal with reality? Can you guess meaning of Romantic Criticism? Can you guess Feminist Criticism and Marxist Criticism? Why would one analyze the gender roles within a body of work? Why would one analyze if women were in power in a literary work? Can Literature lead to subtle brainwashing that men are superior? Why would one look at representation of classes (aristocrats, middle-class and lower sections) in literary works?

Q4: The above Criticism paradigms were antecedents to "New Criticism". Why would one study them if they are old ideas? What would you expect in New Criticism? Why do you think New Criticism tries to analyze Literature as an independent body of work, without the historical context? Why would New Criticism bring in Structuralism and Formalism? What is the difference between "formal" schooling and home schooling? Can you guess the meaning of Formalism? Why would we want to organize ideas of Literary Criticism? Why would New Criticism focus on the writing than on the reader? Would you agree with Brooks- "to put meaning and valuation of a literary work at the mercy of any and every individual [reader] would reduce the study of literature to reader psychology and to the history of taste"? Is New Criticism scientific? Why do you think study of aesthetics can't match objectivity of sciences?

Q5: Did this Socratic Dialogue questionnaire brainwash you? Does this questionnaire have a lot of subtle and implicit assumptions? How can you overcome such subtle brainwashing? Can people be moved by Literature? Is it positive or negative? So how should people study Literature?

QFD: How would you critique this Socratic Dialogue Questionnaire using the above ideas?

Analysis3: Extrapolation

Q1: How do we learn meanings of words? How did you learn the meaning of the word repercussion? How are able to move from three situations into a fourth situation? Does the word have tangibility? Does the word "chair" have a tangible form or is it an abstract idea? What would be the advantage of an abstract idea over a tangible form? Is abstract form more fluidic than a tangible one? Is the word "fluidic" abstract over here or does it literally mean that abstract words are liquids? How do we have this ability to take the core and leave the details aside? How do we extrapolate out of three situations into a new situation? Is this learning subconscious and implicit?

Q2: If you are given two to three different options of books to read, how would you decide? What is the difference between the decision making of a five year and a teenager, a teenager and an adult? Would you be interested in the applications or uses of the book? What would be the use of reading a book on robotics? What would be the use of reading a novel? Do we read or study topics only because they're useful? Is Literature useful? Is Philosophy useful? (Disclaimer: Philosophers and Poets were usually at loggerheads with each other) Why do little kids like to play? Is it because playing is useful and helps with future life? How would you distinguish between utilitarian and aesthetic perspectives of learning?

Q3: Are the aesthetic perspectives useless? If they are useful why not call them utilitarian, why have a separate word? If they are useless, why study them? Are we wasting time by studying beauty? Why do successful professionals have a notion of aesthetics? Why do programmers have a notion of beautiful code? Why do engineers have a notion of beautiful structure? Why do lawyers have a notion of beautiful argument? Do aesthetics encode values? Would you agree with Wittgenstein: "aesthetics and ethics are one"? How can judgements of beauty and morals be the same? So do aesthetics help in the long term? Why do cricket coaches obsess over elegance of the straight drive? Why are grammar nazis so concerned? How many mistakes did you spot in this questionnaire? Why such ruthless aesthetics?

Q4: If aesthetics are important, how do we develop a sense of aesthetics? If Literature has a sense of Aesthetics, if Literature has ideas of criticism, can they be extrapolated? How do you transport these ideas to other fields? Can we develop Literature in other fields and then bring in ideas of Literary Criticism? What does it mean to develop Literature in other fields? What would Literature mean in sports or business? Would Steve Jobs perspectives be Literature? What is the role of profound ideas in shaping business strategies? Why do businessmen today look at "low cost experiments before rapid scaling"? Did Jim Collins influence such aesthetics through this 10Xer mindset Literature?

Q5: How do we change our mindset from so-called practical learning? Did this questionnaire involve practical learning or theoretical learning? Does one need activities or pictures or movies to imagine? Do questions seed more imagination or videos? Is this brainwashing? How do we experience the aesthetics of a subject? How do we meditate with the minds of stalwarts? Why read the literary works of people?

QFD: Can you pick a discipline and define Aesthetics for it, basis the above ideas?

Synthesis

We have three snippets from reviews around works of authors visiting the Hyderabad Literary Festival.

- 1- Pick any two snippets which interest you.
- 2- Use ideas of Literary Criticism to analyze them.
- 3- Extrapolate these ideas to a new field and develop a sense of Aesthetics.

KK Muhammed

"It was they who connived with the extremist Muslim groups to derail all attempts to find an amicable solution to the Masjid issue. Some of them even took part in several government-level meetings and supported the Babri Masjid Action Committee," he said.

Muhammed endorses in his book that a temple existed at the site of the Babri Masjid based on the unearthing of temple pillars during the excavation under Professor Lal in 1978. In the chapter "Whatever I learned and said are nothing but historical truth", Muhammed says that he got a chance to be part of an excavation team led by Lal in 1978. He was a student at the School of Archaeology in New Delhi at that time. "We found not one but 14 pillars of a temple at the Babri Masjid site. All these pillars had domes carved on them. The domes resembled those found in temples belonging to 11th and 12th century. In the temple architecture domes are one of the nine symbols of prosperity. It was quite evident that the Masjid was erected on the debris of a temple. I went on writing to several English dailies in those days about the finding. Only one news paper published my view and that too in the letters to Editor column," says the book.

According to Muhammed that the Left historians even tried to mislead the Allahabad High Court on the issue. Even after the court had pronounced its verdict Irfan and his team were not ready to accept the truth. They simply questioned the logicity of the verdict. He said he knew Proffesor Irfan Habib from his Aligarh University days. "He always went to the extent of stifling the voices of those who disagreed with him. After all historians are mere historians, it is we the archaeologists who provide them the data," he said adding that even Qutub Minar and Taj Mahal were built on the debris of Hindu temples

Source: <https://www.firstpost.com/india/left-historians-connived-with-extremists-mislead-muslims-on-babri-issue-says-archaeologist-in-new-book-2592188.html>

Shubhashree Sangameswaran

In her book, '[Let's Talk Trash](#)', she pieces together text and simple illustrations and takes one through the trajectory of highlighting zero-waste lifestyles of the olden days to the extensive amount of trashing resulting from our disposable way of living to finally how one can consciously participate in cutting their wastage down through simple steps.

“Having grown up in Bengaluru in the eighties, I have personally seen my parents and grandparents producing little or no waste from their households, who quite literally believed in frugal lifestyles. Collecting milk in steel cans from milk-vending booths was something I used to do and old Horlicks or Bournvita bottles were used as containers, of which some still line up our parents’ kitchen shelves and are as old as 40 years. However, today, given the lifestyles we have become accustomed to,, it would take considerable effort on our part to change our habits for the better good of our environment,” says Shubhashree to The Better India.

Starting with three habits that one can begin with, i.e., avoiding bottled water, refusing plastic straws and plastic bags, the book then details areas in one’s house like bathrooms, kitchens and wardrobes where one can make changes to and replace plastic components with eco-friendly alternatives. It then moves on to one’s workplace and travel habits where similar initiatives can be taken up. Shubhashree even illustrates how bringing up one’s babies can be done in a green manner by opting out of disposable diapers and plastic toys. As for future plans, she intends to take Let’s Talk Trash to schools and educational institutions as with kids, it is never too early to start and helping them become sensitive to the environmental mess at an early age will motivate kids and through them, their parents to shift to wastage-free lifestyles.

www.thebetterindia.com/147428/news-lets-talk-trash-shubhashree-sangameswaran-hyderabad/

Kingshuk Nag

As Nag writes: “His lifestyle was his addiction. Although his airline sank, he continued to live the good life.” This built up public opinion against the loan defaulter. In his defence, Mallya argues his bad debts are much smaller than many other notables in India Inc – and he’s right. But instead of lying low as the Kingfisher story exploded, Mallya gave the opposite impression – people thought he was funding his other lifestyle businesses, from Formula One racing to football, from the loans meant for Kingfisher. That put pressure on the banks to go after him.

Nag tries to shed light on Mallya’s personality and the role it played in his decline. This is where the book adds value. The only son of a workaholic father, Mallya was no doubt a pampered child. Unlike his father, he became a spendthrift. But the irony is that he is a deeply religious man, and “also moderately conservative”. Apart from planning his life by astronomy, Mallya is heavily influenced by godman Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. The problem, Nag argues, is that the public looked down on people in the liquor business – his diversifications then were an attempt to “gain respectability” in society. The book argues that Mallya lost all sense of proportion while justifying these actions for the sake of his business.

And what of the future? Legal experts agree that it is going to be tough to get Mallya back into India in a hurry. At the same time, Mallya is a fugitive in the UK and has lost most of his businesses. Pressure is going to build up on his remaining Indian beer business. In that sense, it’s going to be a long walk home.

Source: <https://thewire.in/books/vijay-mallya-kingfizzer-book-review-kingshuk-nag>