

**Lesson  
21**

# Anthology Texts: Introduction

**Aims**

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to:

- analyse any text in the Anthology
- approach an unseen exam text systematically and effectively
- acquire a good grasp of the main features of the texts in Sections A and B of the Anthology

**Context**

Paper 1 of your Edexcel IGCSE exam will contain comprehension and literary appreciation questions on an unseen text. It will also ask you a broader question testing your understanding and appreciation of one of the Anthology texts. This lesson will equip you for both these tasks.



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## How to approach a Text

### Seen or unseen

The reading skills that you have to apply to the unseen text in the exam are the same ones that you will need to appreciate any of the Anthology texts. The difference is just that in the exam you will have only 45 minutes for the questions on the unseen text, whereas you can spend as much time as you like getting to grips with the Anthology texts.

You should probably spend about 10 minutes reading the unseen text, making notes on it in the margins, underlining key phrases, and preparing your answers. There are 4 marks each for Questions 1 and 2, and 12 marks for Question 3, so you should spend more time on planning and writing your answer for Question 3.

To illustrate how you should approach a text, we will look at the first section of a text that is not in the Anthology, although it is similar in some ways. It is by the American novelist Stephen Crane. It was published in 1897, and it bridges the types of text featured in Sections A and B of the Anthology: it is a fictionalised account of a real-life event in which Crane was involved. As you read it, see if you can decide which man is Crane himself.

In addition, as you read, you could bear in mind what we will be investigating in the text:

- What kind of text is it?
- What is it about?
- Themes
- Context
- Characters and how they relate
- Narrative voice
- Style

*The Open Boat: A Tale intended to be after the fact. Being the experience of four men from the sunk steamer Commodore*

None of them knew the colour of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colours of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in

points like rocks. Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea. These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small-boat navigation.

The cook squatted in the bottom and looked with both eyes at the six inches of gunwale which separated him from the ocean. His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat. Often he said: 'Gawd! That was a narrow clip.' As he remarked it he invariably gazed eastward over the broken sea.

The oiler, steering with one of the two oars in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep clear of water that swirled in over the stern. It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap.

The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there.

The injured captain, lying in the bow, was at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy-nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her, though he commanded for a day or a decade, and this captain had on him the stern impression of a scene in the greys of dawn of seven turned faces, and later a stump of a top-mast with a white ball on it that slashed to and fro at the waves, went low and lower, and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. Although steady, it was, deep with mourning, and of a quality beyond oration or tears.

'Keep 'er a little more south, Billie,' said he.

'A little more south, sir,' said the oiler in the stern.

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking bronco, and by the same token, a bronco is not much smaller. The craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high. The manner of her scramble over these walls of water is a mystic thing, and, moreover, at the top of them were ordinarily these problems in white water, the foam racing down from the summit of each wave, requiring a new leap, and a leap from the air. Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats. In a ten-foot dingy one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience which

is never at sea in a dingy. As each slatey wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat, and it was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water. There was a terrible grace in the move of the waves, and they came in silence, save for the snarling of the crests.

In the wan light, the faces of the men must have been grey. Their eyes must have glinted in strange ways as they gazed steadily astern. Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtless have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had no time to see it, and if they had had leisure there were other things to occupy their minds. The sun swung steadily up the sky, and they knew it was broad day because the colour of the sea changed from slate to emerald-green, streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow. The process of the breaking day was unknown to them. They were aware only of this effect upon the colour of the waves that rolled toward them.

In disjointed sentences the cook and the correspondent argued as to the difference between a life-saving station and a house of refuge. The cook had said: "There's a house of refuge just north of the Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us, they'll come off in their boat and pick us up."

'As soon as who see us?' said the correspondent.

'The crew,' said the cook.

'Houses of refuge don't have crews,' said the correspondent. 'As I understand them, they are only places where clothes and grub are stored for the benefit of shipwrecked people. They don't carry crews.'

'Oh, yes, they do,' said the cook.

'No, they don't,' said the correspondent.

'Well, we're not there yet, anyhow,' said the oiler, in the stern.

'Well,' said the cook, 'perhaps it's not a house of refuge that I'm thinking of as being near Mosquito Inlet Light. Perhaps it's a life-saving station.'

'We're not there yet,' said the oiler, in the stern.

## What kind of text is it?

When you're getting to grips with a text, the first question to ask is what kind of text it is. The texts in Section A of the Anthology are non-fiction; those in Section B are fiction or poetry. In Section A, some are autobiographical, such as *Touching the Void*, *Taking on the World* and *Chinese Cinderella*. There are also autobiographical elements in *A Game of Polo with a Headless Goat*, *A Passage to Africa* and *The Explorer's Daughter*: the authors are writing about their own experiences, although the focus is not on themselves.

'Your Guide to Beach Safety' is an advice leaflet, as the title suggests. 'Climate Change: the Facts' is an informative magazine article. 'Explorers, or boys messing about?' is a news feature.

How you define the type of text will depend on:

- its purpose – e.g. to inform, warn, explain, entertain
- its target audience – e.g. educated middle-class readers, sports enthusiasts, etc.
- its form – e.g. news feature, webpage, leaflet, autobiography

Note that some of these can overlap. For example, you could find a news feature on a webpage. Also note that a text may have more than one purpose. For example, *Touching the Void* sets out to explain a mountaineering accident, but, serious though it seems, it also attempts to entertain, by absorbing us in the story and using stylistic techniques to make it come to life, rather than just relaying the bare facts as in a police or mountain rescue report.

### Activity One

We already know that *The Open Boat* is based on the author's actual experience, which he decided to write as a story instead of a more straightforward account. What features make it seem more like a story than a more straightforward factual account?

## Suggested Answer to Activity One

The account is written in the third person, with the author describing himself as 'the correspondent'. He also tries to make the experience come alive, to make us aware of what it was like for the men in the boat. There is a lot of description, for example:

These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colours of the sea.

There are also some faintly amusing comparisons between the men's situation and experiences which are mostly very different. For example:

Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea.

The description of the captain and the reasons for his mood are rather grandly philosophical. Crane also uses imagery, for example comparing the boat to a bucking bronco (a wild, untrained horse ridden in a rodeo). Both of these features suggest that Crane wants to entertain us.

## What is it about?

How you approach this question depends partly on what kind of text it is. For 'Your Guide to Beach Safety', you might rephrase the question as 'What is the key message?'

Most of the texts tell some sort of story. So, you could say that the extract from *Touching the Void* is about Joe Simpson's climbing accident and his friend's reaction to it. The extract from *Taking on the World* is about Ellen MacArthur climbing her mast during a round the world solo yacht race, to fit a replacement halyard so that she can raise her sails. Kari Herbert's account of narwhal hunting in *The Explorer's Daughter* is less focused on a story. It describes a narwhal hunt, but without focusing on the usual elements of storytelling, such as suspense and plot development. Rather, it explores the moral and environmental issues around hunting by indigenous peoples. So you could say it is 'about' the issues raised by hunting in the Arctic.

## Themes

A theme in a text is an idea explored by the author, consciously or otherwise. In a sense, this is a deeper level of what the text is 'about'. In some cases, the author is very deliberately exploring a theme – as in the extract from *The Explorer's Daughter*, which looks at the questions surrounding narwhal hunting in the Arctic and concludes that it is necessary to the survival of the inhabitants.

## Context

This subject is dealt with in Module 5, Lesson 18. Essentially it refers to the cultural influences on the author at the time of writing. It should influence our judgement of character. For example, if a woman in a nineteenth-century novel does not have a career, it is likely to have more to do with social context than with her lack of ambition. For *The Open Boat*, part of the context is the lack of modern survival equipment on the boat, and the assumption that the Captain will remain in charge.

## Characters and how they relate

We normally think of fiction having ‘characters’, but non-fiction accounts can also create a sense of character and of the relationships between characters. In the extract from *Touching the Void*, we see that both men are relatively calm about the accident. You may even think that Simon is uncaring:

I watched him quite dispassionately. I couldn’t help him, and it occurred to me that in all likelihood he would fall to his death. I wasn’t disturbed by the thought. In a way I hoped he would fall.

However, you have to bear in mind the **context** of the climbing world’s sub-culture (see Module 5, Lesson 18). Both men would be mentally and emotionally schooled to accept the possibility of death. Climbing is, after all, a high-risk activity.

In a fictional text such as ‘The Necklace’, there is more focus on character and relationship. For example, we find evidence of the vanity of the young wife, and of her husband’s desire to please her. However, here again context is relevant. The society in which Maupassant wrote placed a high value on women looking decorative, and being able to show off their finery. The fact that the main character does not even consider going to her wealthy friend and saying, ‘Sorry, I’ve lost your necklace’, also relates to nineteenth-century French middle-class values.

### Activity Two

Explain in your own words what situation is described in *The Open Boat*, and what in a broader sense the extract is about. Comment on themes, character and relationships.

## Suggested Answer to Activity Two

*The Open Boat* tells the story of four men in a very small boat, trying to find land after their ship, the *Commodore*, has been sunk. They are tossed about so much on the stormy sea that they barely see the sky. They hope to be rescued but have no guarantee that this will happen. The Captain is depressed by the loss of his ship, which is compared to an army being lost or a firm collapsing, but he retains enough presence of mind to give basic orders to the oiler. He tells the oiler, 'Keep 'er a little more south, Billie.' The oiler's respectful response shows that some order is preserved.

The correspondent and cook are seen in disagreement over 'the difference between a life-saving station and a house of refuge'. The oiler seems fatalistic, simply commenting: 'We're not there yet.'

## Narrative Voice

A narrative can be in the first person, as in *Touching the Void*, or in the third person, as in *Charlotte Gray*. Even in third person there is a narrative voice. For example in *The Open Boat* the voice is slightly detached and faintly humorous. Where there is a single narrator, as in Ellen MacArthur's *Taking on the World*, we can observe the character of the narrator both from the narrator's self-revelations and from the tone of the text. For example, MacArthur's climbing of the mast tells us that she is brave and determined. We also know that she plans carefully: 'I had worked through the night preparing for it'. And we know that she pushes herself on, despite her understandable fears: 'I had my heart in my mouth — no time for complacency now, I thought, not till you reach the deck, kiddo, it's far from over...'. She seems in a sense to become her own parent, managing herself with 'tough love' in order to survive.

An example of tone revealing a narrator's character is *A Game of Polo with a Headless Goat*. Notice the author's language:

The two lads ... (*The affectionate informality of 'lads'*)

We waited for eternity (*Exaggeration*)

I was beginning to feel rather silly when the only action was a villager on a wobbly bicycle, who nearly fell off as he cycled past and gazed around at us. (*Comedy*)

It was survival of the fittest, and depended upon the ability to cut in front of a vehicle with a sharp flick of the steering wheel (no lane discipline here); quick reflexes to spot a gap in the traffic for a couple of seconds; nerves of steel, and an effective horn. (*Exaggeration, a mildly comic reference to more orthodox driving, a light-hearted summing up of requirements*)

The author, Emma Levine, sounds like someone with a sense of humour and a rather jaunty attitude towards new experiences. We sense from the

tone that the episode is unlikely to end in tragedy. Compare this with the serious tone of Alagiah's 'A Passage to Africa'. Of course he may also have a sense of humour, but it is not obvious in this serious passage about human suffering.

## Style

One thing that marks out more able students is an ability to analyse style. This requires you to focus on the author's word choice – not just on subject matter, story or characters. Look out for the following features:

- **Descriptive language**, including details appealing to the senses (as in the smell of disease in *A Passage to Africa*)
- **Vocabulary**, for example technical terms (as in sailing terms in *Taking on the World*)
- **Imagery**: similes and metaphors, and their effect (as in Crane comparing the boat to a bucking bronco)
- **Rhetorical techniques**, such as personification (which can also be seen as a kind of metaphor), and lists (especially of things in threes)
- **Types of sentence** – such as very short ones for dramatic effect: 'In a way I hoped he would fall' (*Touching the Void*) or 'She was looking to remember, for ever' (*Charlotte Gray*)
- **Repetition**, such as the three negatives in 'She had no fine dresses, no jewellery, nothing' ('The Necklace')

### Activity Three

Describe the narrative tone and style of the extract from *The Open Boat*, and how they reveal the author's intentions and his attitude towards the experience.

## Suggested Answer to Activity Three

The situation described in *The Open Boat* is a perilous one: four men in a tiny rowing boat on high seas, with no obvious means of navigating to safety. Yet the narrative tone and style do not suggest that the author's main concern is to keep us on the edge of our seats fearing for the lives of the four men. He describes the roughness of the sea: 'jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks', then immediately undercuts the sense of threat with a homely and slightly comical comparison: 'Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea.' Similarly, the description of the cook is faintly comical rather than that of a man battling nobly to survive: 'His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat.'

While Crane describes himself enigmatically ('The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there'), the Captain is described at such length as to detract from the sense of danger and drama. The author in effect distances himself from his subject, pausing in a surprisingly leisurely way to comment generally on men in the captain's position, and on how the 'mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her'. There is even a hint of comic anticlimax when, after this description, he says only, 'Keep 'er a little more south, Billie.'

We see a similarly detached tone in the description of the leaping boat:

The craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high.

There is something almost comically fanciful in these similes, suggesting that the author feels detached when looking back on the incident, and that he wants to entertain us rather than simply gripping us by creating a sense of urgency.

Crane uses personification in a similar way, creating a hint of humour rather than tension:

Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

Here the boat is described as 'scornful', as if it dismissive of the 'menace' of the sea. This also hints at the men's survival. Personification is used to the same effect when the waves are described as being, 'nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats'. On the one hand, 'swamping' could sink the boat; on the other hand, if the waves are 'nervously anxious' they seem less threatening.

## Summary

- Paper 1 contains questions on an unseen text, and a longer question on a text from the Anthology
- When analysing a text, you should look at what kind of text it is, what it's about, themes, context, characters and how they relate, narrative voice, and style
- Type of text depends on purpose, target audience and form
- What a text is 'about' can relate to what happens, its message, or its themes
- Context refers to the cultural influences on the author
- Fiction usually focuses on characters, but non-fiction can also create a sense of character
- Narrative can be first person or third person. Either will be in a particular narrative voice, which may relate to tone
- Style includes descriptive language, vocabulary, imagery, rhetorical techniques, sentence length and repetition