

Suggested Responses

to Individual Work questions in the Study Guide for the
2021 National English Olympiad,
based upon the anthology

This is My Story...

**People and Personas:
a collection of first-person narratives.**

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for the
South African Council for English Education

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Note

The questions and tasks in the Study Guide should encourage closer reading and clearer understanding of the texts in the anthology. Some of the questions in the Study Guide are therefore intentionally open ended and do not have definitive answers. The suggested responses herein should therefore not be viewed as ‘model answers’.

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On the Blue Train by Kathy-Geraldine Aron

1. What do the first five sentences suggest about Kathy’s relationship with her husband?

These lines suggest that Kathy and her husband do not communicate well with each other. The fact that her husband hasn’t ‘caught on’ suggests that she has not told him directly that she does not like orchids. Kathy says that her husband buys her ‘things what he likes’, which could mean that he is selfish or self-involved. Mark buys Kathy a set of yellow kitchen utensils for her blue and white kitchen, which could mean that he is thoughtless or insensitive to her preferences.

2. Why, according to you, did the incident of the out-of-stock marmalade set Kathy off?

Kathy likes Roses Lime marmalade, which is a British staple food. This marmalade is a comfort food for Kathy because it reminds her of her previous life in England. When she is unable to get any she becomes deeply upset because she is reminded of her disconnection from her birth country and its culture.

3. Make a list of reasons why Kathy says or implies that she is unhappy.

Kathy and her husband have a strained relationship in which there is not much communication. She misses England and reminisces about how people there behave. She believes that ‘if you started crying your eyes out in a London supermarket you could be sure some older dear would rally around with tea and sympathy.’

4. How has Kathy tried to keep herself busy in South Africa?

She has signed up for a flower-arranging course and has worked as a volunteer at a hospital.

5. Do you find the way Kathy tells of her mishaps to be funny? If so, why do you find her vignettes (short accounts or stories) amusing?

Her account of how she started “moooo[ing]” to imitate the foghorn is amusing because that is such a strange and silly thing to do. The flower-arranging teacher becomes angry over Kathy’s use of a piece of blue oasis without permission, and her overreaction over something relatively small is amusing. Kathy’s rude retaliation can also be seen as funny because it is somewhat unexpected. Also, Kathy’s description of how she lost control of her trolley is amusing because she tells it in such a way that we cringe for her. She is embarrassed that she lost control of her trolley, with such disastrous results. We laugh at her loss of dignity and are relieved that we are not in that situation.

6. Compile a character sketch for Kathy.

Name or nickname	Names are often carefully chosen by authors to show ethnicity, gender, social class. If a name is mentioned, try to decide why it was chosen, what it means and what it indicates.	Kathy, probably the diminutive of Katherine.
Back story/ history	Characters/ people do not just suddenly become who they are. Their personalities develop over years. Back stories might only be hinted at, especially in shorter texts, which are limited by word counts.	She is an English immigrant who married a South African. They have been married for four years, but their communication and honesty with each other seems to be lacking. Her husband really does not understand her or what she needs emotionally. They are well off and able to afford a domestic worker, flower-arranging classes and a trip on the Blue Train.
Personality	<p>The personality of a character is often conveyed in what they say and do. When defining a character’s personality, you may want to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emotional state(s) ➤ View(s) on life ➤ Relationships with others ➤ Tendencies ➤ Likes/dislikes ➤ Physical appearance ➤ Level of education ➤ What does the character want? ➤ Religious beliefs 	<p>In the first paragraph Kathy seems agitated and irritable. She has had a nervous breakdown and is quite dramatic in everything she does.</p> <p>She misses her homeland and ‘loses it’ when she cannot find a British marmalade that she likes.</p> <p>She has a strained relationship with her husband and does not seem to have friends with whom she can do things.</p> <p>She dislikes purple orchids ‘entombed’ in cellophane boxes.</p> <p>Kathy wants to ‘go home’ and find happiness.</p> <p>She tends to overreact emotionally, tries to avoid conflict and run away from difficult situations. She has distinctive likes and dislikes – eg she does not like purple orchids and likes her kitchen décor to be matching.</p> <p>She finds her relationship with her husband stifling, and she feels alienated in South Africa.</p>

The way the character/s talk	This can give away information like a character's social class, age, level of education and country/region of origin.	Kathy talks with a lower middle-class accent and uses phrases like 'I couldn't stop meself' and 'bob's your uncle', which are British colloquialisms. She is from England, probably from London, and is twenty-five years old.
How the character changes	Does the character show growth or regression? What leads to the change?	Kathy's sanity takes a dip, but she tries to take control of her life and to find a way back to happiness, by going back home to London.

Mommy by Mangaliso Koposani

1. Refer to lines 1 and 2. Describe the speaker's frame of mind.

She is in shock and feels helpless over something that has just happened.

2. Lines 3 and 4, 'Her heart still beating/ Lungs still breathing' are in contrast to lines 6 and 7, 'eyes closed/ body still'. What is the effect of this contrast?

Her mother is still alive in lines 3 and 4. In lines 6 and 7 she has passed away.

3. Find examples of:

3.1 oxymoron – 'calm panic'

3.2 onomatopoeia – 'shuffle', 'rustle'

4. Lines 13 and 15 contain anaphora. Look up 'anaphora' and discuss the effectiveness of using this device in these lines.

Anaphora is repetition of the same (or similar) phrases, used for emphasis in, for example, Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech. In this poem, 'never to be ... again' is repeated in lines 13 and 15. The repetition emphasises the speaker's sense of loss.

The Call by Gabeba Baderoon

1. Explain the effectiveness of the use of 'catches' in line 2.

The word 'catches' is effective because the phone ringing 'grabs' her attention and 'catches' her unaware. Physically, the act of catching immediately halts further progress, as in catching a ball, but in another sense the speaker has been caught in the act of leaving as though she has been doing something wrong or underhand. In this instance she is leaving without telling her mother that she is going, and the ringing telephone has physically halted her departure, and the speaker feels guilty.

2. Who makes the initial call?

The speaker's mother.

3. How is the word 'impetus' (line 6) usually used?

Impetus means the driving force or energy with which a body moves. It is usually used as a synonym for catalyst, impulse, force, drive or stimulus.

4. Explain what happens in the first stanza.

The speaker has packed up her belongings and is leaving, carrying a suitcase. Her mother phones as she is halfway down the stairs. She stops and uses her thigh to stop her swinging suitcase. She takes her phone from a box filled with things that she is giving away, plugs in the phone in the passage and takes a seat on a stack of phonebooks against the wall. She tells her mother that she is moving to a place that is in a different time zone. She fears that she will never see her mother again and wants to say that she is losing 'a centre to which [she] can return' (supposedly her mother).

5. Quote a line that suggests that the speaker has been living away from home for a while.

'each further from where I started'

6. Re-read lines 17 – 20. The speaker is so certain that she will never return home or see her mother again. What is your opinion on this?

State your own opinion, with substantiation.

7.1 What information does the speaker give to her mother?

She tells her mother that she is moving to a new place.

7.2 What does she not tell her mother?

She does not tell her mother of her fear that she will never see her again or how important her mother is to her as the 'centre to which [she] can return'.

8. Why would the mother speak in 'a way flattened by what is not said'?

This is the first time her daughter informs her of the move. Her daughter is moving very far away, which could make their relationship even more remote. The mother is shocked and unhappy about the news.

9. The mother tells her daughter to 'leave safely'. How is this different to 'travel safely'?

'Travel safely' means to have a safe journey and return home. 'Leave safely' emphasises the daughter's departure (and move) and could imply that she will not return.

10. Do you sympathise with the mother or with the speaker? Give a reason for your answer.

The mother: She is shocked by the unexpected news and saddened that her daughter is leaving for a distant land, which would mean that she will probably not see her (face to face) for a long while.

The daughter: She feels unable to communicate her emotions freely with her mother. She seems to have a strained relationship with her mother.

Autobiography by Nazim Hikmet

1. This poem details some of Hikmet's achievements, but they are not in chronological order. Make a timeline of these achievements.

- He was born in 1902.
- At the age of three years he was a pasha's grandson in Aleppo.
- He has been writing poetry since the age of 14.
- He was a student at Moscow Communist University at the age of 19. Since then (1921) he has not 'gone to the places most people visit.'
- When he was 22, he didn't see Lenin's body, but he stood watch at Lenin's coffin.
- At 36 he 'covered four square meters of concrete in half a year'. (Note: In 1938, Hikmet was sentenced to 28 years of imprisonment for planning a revolt in the armed forces.)
- He was awarded the Soviet Union Peace Prize at the age of 48.
- At the age of 49 Hikmet went back to Moscow as a guest of the Tcheka Party.
- At the age of 50 Hikmet had to spend time resting because of health problems.
- At 59, Hikmet studied Lenin's writing and flew from Prague to Havana in 18 hours.
- At almost 60 he fell in love (again).

2. The poem consists of contrasts. Make a list of these contrasts.

Hikmet saw and did many things that conventional people would not attempt. He slept in prisons and grand hotels, went on a hunger strike and claimed to have eaten almost every kind of food. He was sent to prison for being a terrorist, but was awarded a Peace Prize. He was an intrepid traveller,

but also spent years in prison. Hikmet was jealous over the women that he loved, yet he deceived them. He was honest about lying and although he was Turkish, his works were banned there.

3. How would you describe Nazim Hikmet?

Nazim Hikmet was unconventional, fearless, creative, intrepid, clever, staunch in his beliefs, and down-to-earth.

When He Spoke to Me of Love by MA Mokhomo

1. Look at the first four lines. How would you explain the speaker's emotions?

She is elated, starry-eyed and in a state of bliss.

2. Explain the imagery in line 5 - 6.

She wants to say thing to her lover but cannot. She describes this in terms of a fire in her throat that has burnt away her words.

3. Write down the oxymoron found in line 8.

'happy tears'

4. MA Mokhomo was a Sotho poet. In her poem, she speaks of a Sesotho marriage custom. Find out what you can about the custom of mahadi (also known as lobola in isiZulu, Swazi, isiXhosa, Lozi and Ndebele).

Mahadi, sometimes referred to as 'bride wealth', is property in livestock or kind, which a prospective husband or head of his family undertakes to give to the head of a prospective wife's family in gratitude for letting the man marry their daughter.

A key requirement for a customary marriage to be recognised as a valid marriage is that the marriage must be negotiated, entered into or celebrated in accordance with customary law. Furthermore, the prospective spouses must be over the age of 18, and both prospective spouses must consent to the marriage.

The process of mahadi/ lobola negotiations can be culturally varied, long and complex, and involve many members from both the bride's and the groom's extended families. Normally, this would just be the uncles of the marrying parties, as well as the fathers, where custom allows. The groom is not allowed to participate directly in the actual negotiations. In some cultures, women may be present in the negotiations, while some households hold onto a tradition of not allowing women to take part actively in the negotiations. *Ivulamlo* is a key process to the negotiations as these cannot begin until this traditional act has been observed. Often, to dispel any tensions between the families, in modern times a bottle of brandy is placed on the table; however, this is not required nor is the *vulamlo* limited to brandy; it can be traditional sorghum beer or cash. This is usually not drunk; it is simply a gesture to welcome the guest family and make everyone feel more relaxed, and it is known as *ivulamlo*, which, literally translated, is isiXhosa for *mouth opener* (Sotho *pulamolomo*), i.e. a price for opening your mouth (to speak) to express the purpose of your visit. It is up to the potential wife's delegation to decide whether to make use of the alcohol or to keep it closed. Lobola cannot be paid in full at once. The groom's delegation will need to come again after the first negotiations to finish paying for their bride-to-be. Once the lobola has been paid in full, the next step follows, which is called *Izibizo*, which can happen on the day when lobola negotiations are concluded. This step involves the groom's delegation giving presents to the bride's family, according to the list that was issued, which may include blankets, pinafores, doeks, shawls and three-legged pots or grass mats for women, and coats, walking sticks, hats and beer pots for men. Then there is a celebration to mark the occasion.

It is generally accepted that cows, at a minimum, are required in a lobolo within the Xhosa and Zulu cultures. While differing customs within regions contribute to determining the cash value of each cow, it also depends on the negotiation prowess of the representatives, or *oonozakuzaku*. In modern times there has been growing controversy around the amount demanded in certain families and deemed by spectators to be unreasonably excessive. Today negotiations involve setting a price for a single cow and then multiplying the agreed price by the number of cows the new bride is deemed to be worth. The amount due is affected by many different factors including the educational level of the prospective bride, the financial means of the prospective spouses, and whether the prospective bride (or groom) already has children. There are claims that even high-profile figures such as Nelson Mandela practised the custom. (Adapted from Wikipedia.com)

5. Quote words which suggest that the speaker sees her fiancé as a demi-god.

‘stooped down in a prayer of love’
 ‘my great one’
 ‘confessed to him’

6. Reread lines 12 – 17. Would you say the speaker’s actions are desperate or in keeping with her culture?

The speaker comes across as somewhat insecure. Her actions seem to be as a result of her fear that her fiancé might change his mind about marrying her.

New Horizons by Miriam Tlali

1. Using the template, compile a character sketch of the narrator.

Name or nickname	Names are often carefully chosen by authors to show ethnicity, gender, social class. If a name is mentioned, try to decide why it was chosen, what it means and what it indicates.	Miriam Tlali
Back story/ history	Characters/ people do not just suddenly become who they are. Their personalities develop over years. Back stories might only be hinted at, especially in shorter texts, which are limited by word counts.	She attended Madibane High School in Soweto, was a writer for <i>Staffrider</i> and is married. She is on her journey as she was awarded a writing scholarship by the University of Iowa.
Personality	The personality of a character is often conveyed in what they say and do. When defining a character’s personality, you may want to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emotional state(s) ➤ View(s) on life ➤ Relationships with others ➤ Tendencies ➤ Likes/dislikes ➤ Physical appearance ➤ Level of education ➤ What does the character want? ➤ Religious beliefs 	Tlali has a positive outlook and an attitude of gratitude. Throughout the essay she states things like: ‘I was happy and thankful for this opportunity’, ‘I was delighted’ and ‘I felt humbled, grateful and safe’. She gets along easily with strangers. We see this in her descriptions of her interactions with her fellow passengers. Tlali comes across as intelligent and very well read. In hospital she reads <i>Time Magazine</i> and recognises an Iowa poet, Paul Engle, and his wife, Chinese novelist Hualing Nieh Engle. Her knowledge of geography is commendable and she has a good memory. Tlali has a close relationship with God and uses sentences like: ‘I was lost in wonder at God’s unfailing mercy’.
The way character/s talk.	This can give away information like a character’s social class, age, level of education and country/region of origin.	Tlali uses her words poetically and seems well educated.

How the character changes.	Does the character show growth or regression? What leads to the change?	From the essay, we can assume that Tlali grows as she has so many new experiences and is about to embark on a four-month scholarship programme at a prestigious university.
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2. Make a list of places Tlali had to stop at before she reached her final destination.

Rio de Janeiro, Miami, Chicago (and finally, Cedar Rapids).

3. Name the people with whom Tlali converses on her flights. Briefly describe her interaction with each.

On her flight to Rio de Janeiro, she sits next to Gumede, a young student on his way to Oregon University for post-graduate degree studies. The two are first-time fliers and marvel at how a ‘lump of metal’ can fly. She also encounters a lecturer from Cape Town on his way to New York. The lecturer is familiar with Tlali’s writing. On her way to Miami she sits in the same row as a businessman and listens as he rambles on about business ventures, finance and his children to the lecturer, who sits next to her. Both laugh when the businessman makes a comment on how quickly corn grows in Iowa. Miriam gets on easily with these strangers and seems to be an extrovert.

4. Tlali’s writing style can be seen as both poetic and honest.

Draw a table and write down quotations that support each aspect of her writing.

Examples of Tlali’s poetic approach	Examples of Tlali’s honest/candid approach
• ‘crusty convolutions’	• ‘I felt immensely grateful’
• ‘masses upon masses of what looked like cotton-wool’	• ‘my ears started playing tricks on me’
• ‘gesticulating, lip-moving, voiceless mutes’	• ‘I could not wait to get into the plane and rather sympathised with this man’
• ‘free to walk, run, swim, or fly; to break all illusionary man-made fetters’	• ‘I read with great interest and admiration of the great work this indomitable couple had done’
• ‘glittering rays over the striated silver clouds’	• ‘I would have like to actually see it’
• ‘tall, vivacious, smiling’	• ‘I should at least have thanked him’
• ‘a “sea” of tall green trees’	• ‘and I held my breath, spell-bound’
	• ‘fame had not corrupted her’

5. Tlali mentions a few serendipitous events. What are they?

She has been offered a scholarship at an American university and has the opportunity to meet writers from around the world. The lecturer she meets on the plane is familiar with her writing, her two male companions help her with her luggage, her tickets and many plane flights are all in order, while her companion struggles to get a direct flight to New York. She also makes a miraculous recovery from a condition that had concerned her surgeons.

Legal Alien by Crystal Butungi Rutangye

1.1 The narrator mentions things that are not present in her Ugandan classroom. What does this imply about her classrooms in Australia?

The classroom in Australia has many luxuries like a sleeping corner and a carpet for reading.

1.2 Divide your page in half to make two columns. Label one column *Ugandan classroom* and the other *Australian classroom*. For each column, write a short description of the two classrooms.

Ugandan classroom	Australian classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ big ✓ dirty ✓ chipped blue paint ✓ benches ✓ cement floor ✓ old blackboard ✓ not enough hooks for students' bags 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ cupboards ✓ teacher's desk ✓ carpet for story time ✓ sleeping area ✓ tiles ✓ fridge for break time snacks ✓ microwave ✓ tables ✓ painting corner ✓ an 'imaginary' corner ✓ building blocks for algebra

2. What are the Ugandan students able to do better than their Australian counterparts?

Ugandan students can do maths sums without the use of building blocks.

3. Describe the narrator's dilemma or angst eighteen years after her first day in her new Ugandan school.

She is unable to speak the dialect of her area. The receptionist at the doctor's office waives the doctor's consultation fee because they are both from the same area. The receptionist speaks to the narrator in their dialect, which she cannot understand. If the narrator is caught out for not being able to speak the dialect, it would be very embarrassing to her.

4. Briefly describe the unrest on the day that the narrator gets all her documentation together.

Every Monday the members of the opposition party have 'walk to work' demonstrations. The police roam around on these days and spray tear gas and pink water on the protesters so that they can be identified and arrested. Shops close for a few hours during the protests to avoid looting. After the arrests take place, businessmen protest for loss in profit because of the 'walk to workers'. University students strike because lecturers use the opportunity to lengthen their weekends. Because of all the upheaval most professions end up striking at some point.

5. Why did the narrator's father decide to return to Uganda?

President Amin was no longer president and H.E. Museveni had restored peace. He also felt that when death came his way, it should find him in his own country.

6. How does the narrator start to make friends at school?

The children sitting around her felt sorry that she had received a beating from her new English teacher. They offered her sweets and sympathy.

7. Do you think the narrator benefitted from not spending her entire childhood in Australia? Give reasons for your answer.

She probably benefitted. She got to experience a different kind of schooling, she played games outside with other children instead of watching one of the many television channels in Australia. She learnt to cope at school and bargain at the market. She and her friends taught each other a lot about different cultures and stereotypes. It possibly made her a more interesting person as an adult.

8. Quote from the last page of the story to show to which country the narrator feels most connected.

'I've been approved for a visa to fly out of my country to do my masters in Australia.'

Tune In Again Next Week by Carla Lever

1. Look at the first six paragraphs. What does the speaker believe about himself?

The speaker believes he has a fairly good memory and he is competitive. Aside from his memory, he believes himself to be 'unexceptional' and average.

2. Explain 'Store-All Stan's' radio call-in slot.

Viewers call in and give him random words. At the end of the show he recites all the words

3. Do you think Stan has a healthy relationship with his mother? Give reasons for your answer.

It seems so. His mother boasts that her son is the 'elephant man from the Midwest', but he believe this 'label' does not improve his (or her) chances of getting dates.

4. What does Stan first notice about Sandy from Pleasant Springs?

She phones the show with really random words.

5. Do you think that Stan goes too far with his interpretation of Sandy's words? Explain why and quote to support your answer.

Yes, he finds things in real life that he believes to be connected to Sandy's words and they are not a coincidence. For example: she calls in with the word 'crystals' and when he goes shopping at Walgreens, the checkout girl is wearing a name badge that reads 'Krystal'. He believes that this meant that 'Sandy sent [him] a wave from Pleasant Springs.'

6. What positive effects came out of Stan's 'interaction' with Sandy?

Stan became more assertive and less 'maybe'.

7. Explain the connection between 'garland' and the St Louis Subway.

Actress Judy Garland played a role in the musical drama *Meet Me in St. Louis*; thus Stan makes a connection between the two.

8. Do you think that Sandy will walk through the doors of the 'grimy St Louis Subway'?

No, Stan seems to be a bit deluded. (But please feel free to argue the opposite).

Rejection by Mariama Bâ

1. Why is Binetou compelled to get married?

She comes from a very poor family that wishes to improve its standard of living.

2. Why would it be disadvantageous for Binetou to drop out of high school?

She is so close to finishing high school that it would a waste to drop out. With no high school qualification, she would be limited to the kind of opportunities available to her in the work environment. Should her marriage change (for example, her husband passes away) she has nothing to 'fall back on'.

3. Compare the first visit of the three men with their second visit.

Tamsir, Mawdo and their local Imam visit the speaker unexpectedly. The three are dressed up and jovial. She worries about whether something has happened to her husband. Tamsir, her brother-in-law, tells her that Modou has taken a second wife. She is completely shocked by this unexpected news. The men are rather flippant, haughty and also dominate the situation.

In the second visit, Tamsir announces that when the speaker comes out of mourning he will marry her and that he will continue to live in his brother's home. This time, the narrator speaks out and chides Tamsir and refuses his 'proposal'. Tamsir (and the other men) leave, feeling defeated.

4. How are women treated in the society depicted in the story?

Women are treated badly. They have little say over their futures and marriages. They are treated like possessions and are forced to accept it if their husbands decide to take another wife (or two). They are brought up to be subservient.

5. How does the speaker regain some self-pride at the end of the story?

She speaks up for herself after thirty years of silence and harassment. She reprimands Tamsir pointing out his faults and tells him, 'I shall never be your wife.'

6. Compile a character sketch of the speaker.

Name or nickname	Names are often carefully chosen by authors to show ethnicity, gender, social class. If a name is mentioned, try to decide why it was chosen, what it means and what it indicates.	The narrator's name is never given explicitly in these extracts from the novel <i>So Long a Letter</i> , but it is Mariama Bâ.
Back story/ history	Characters/ people do not just suddenly become who they are. Their personalities develop over years. Back stories might only be hinted at, especially in shorter texts, which are limited by word counts.	She has been married to Modou for twenty-five years at the beginning of the story and has had twelve children with him. She takes pride in her children and home. Her mother thought Modou to be 'too perfect' and warned her about him.
Personality	The personality of a character is often conveyed in what they say and do. When defining a character's personality, you may want to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emotional state(s) ➤ View(s) on life ➤ Relationships with others ➤ Tendencies ➤ Likes/dislikes ➤ Physical appearance ➤ Level of education ➤ What does the character want? ➤ Religious beliefs 	The speaker is greeted with the news that her husband has married her daughter's best friend. She feels angry, betrayed and used. Thinking back, she identifies when the courtship of Binetou must have started and is horrified that in helping her husband by tidying up after him she 'help[ed] him in his effort to be elegant in his seduction of another woman.' She is humiliated when spiteful people visit her and give her details of Modou's wedding. She considers her marriage and the role she played. She resolves not to divorce or separate from her husband because 'despite everything, [she] remain[s] faithful to the love of [her] youth.' She calls herself 'soft-hearted' and is servile towards Modou. She want to continue living a comfortable life despite her husband's actions. She is a Muslim woman.
The way the character/s talk.	This can give away information like a character's social class, age, level of education and country/region of origin.	She is well spoken and from Senegal.
How the character changes.	Does the character show growth or regression? What leads to the change?	The narrator grows through her conflict. She, at Modou's funeral, is able to stand up for herself and speak out against the conceited Tamsir. After thirty years of silence and subservience, she is no longer afraid to speak up.