

Handout 2: Appreciating Style and Structure

Having experienced the poem in choral reading, you will now learn about three key stylistic elements of the poem: the unusual use of footnotes to structure the poem, the use of anaphora, and the use of situational irony.

Activity 2A: Thematic Framing (Optional)

Before we interpret the style and structure of the poem, let us **consider two significant themes** of the poem and **questions** to help us **think about how they relate to the poem**.

Theme 1: Belonging

Singapore is a nation of migrants. This poem is about first-generation migrants to Singapore pre-independence. Despite moving to Singapore when he was only five years old in 1951, Mustaq was only recognised as a Singapore citizen in 1991, and PM Lee even described him as “the right kind of foreigner” in 2006.

Think about it

- At what point can a migrant officially claim to belong to Singapore?
- For a young child migrant, what is the difference between being a foreigner and a local in the country they have settled in?

Theme 2: Displacement

The displacement of people happens when they are being involuntarily moved from their homes because of war, government policies, or other major circumstances beyond their control. This creates significant disruption to people’s lives and can have emotional and financial consequences.

In the poem, Mustaq is displaced at least three times: first, as a child from his home after his mother’s death. Twice his business was displaced due to government policies in 1971 and 2017.

Think about it

- How do displaced people respond to these forces beyond their control?
- What are your views on people being displaced due to government policies?

Activity 2B: Appreciating Use of Structure & Footnotes

In this poem, the poet has used the practice of footnotes to structure the poem, a practice more commonly associated with academic essay writing than poetry.

Footnotes are notes indicated in your text with numbers and placed at the bottom of the page. They are used to provide additional information that would otherwise disrupt the flow of the text if inserted directly.

Footnotes and endnotes are used in printed documents to explain, comment on, or provide references for text in a document. Many people use footnotes for detailed comments and endnotes for citation of sources.

- a. What is unusual about the poet's use of footnotes?

Where possible, **compare** the original version of the poem with the version of the poem on the microsite, where the **original footnotes of the poem are presented as the main text, and vice versa.**

Activity 2C: Appreciating Use of Anaphora

Anaphora (pronounced “uh-naf-er-uh”) is a figure of speech in which **words repeat at the beginning of successive clauses, phrases, or sentences.**

For example, Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech contains anaphora: "So **let freedom ring** from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. **Let freedom ring** from the mighty mountains of New York. **Let freedom ring** from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania..."

Why Do Writers Use Anaphora?

At the simplest level, writers use anaphora to emphasise a series of repeated words. More broadly, anaphora can produce a variety of stylistic effects. It can:

- i. Express a strong feeling.
 - ii. Create rhythm in text, whether that rhythm is pleasing, rousing, or relentless.
 - iii. Clearly connect two or more ideas through repeated phrasing.
 - iv. Make a phrase more memorable for the reader/listener.
 - v. Give structure to a lengthy list.
- b. Extending from these effects, what is **one thematic significance** of the poet's use of anaphora in the footnotes of this poem? You can consider the theme of who gets to feel a sense of belonging as a Singaporean.

Start of analysis	Adapt from the list of stylistic effects (i–iv)	Thematic Significance
In the footnotes of the poem, the poet uses anaphora “This is a poem about” to...		

Activity 2D: Appreciating Use of Situational Irony

Writers use irony to show the **contrast** or incongruity between **how things appear** and **how they are in reality**.

Irony can be categorized into different types, including **verbal** irony, **dramatic** irony, and **situational** irony.

For this poem, we will focus on **situational irony**:

It is important to note that **irony is not coincidence**: If you buy a new camera and then accidentally damage it while filming a YouTube vlog, that is coincidental and unlucky, but not ironic. However, if a professional content creator known for their skilled camera handling damages their brand new camera, that is situationally ironic.

Situational irony is when the opposite of what is expected happens.

In literature, situational irony is a literary or plot device occurring when there is a discrepancy between what is expected to happen and what actually happens.

Well-known author Margaret Atwood briefly explains **how writers employ situational irony** as a literary device for various effects, such as:

i. Creating a surprise twist.

An example is in the film *The Incredibles*. Mr. Incredible helps a mysterious sponsor (Mirage) destroy the violent robot Omnidroid v8.0, only to discover that this actually helped the evil Syndrome develop the ultimate killing machine in Omnidroid v9.0.

ii. Communicate a message or moral.

For instance, in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, all the characters turn out to already possess the traits they seek—courage, love, and so on. It suggests that sometimes all we need to overcome our failings is a shift in perspective.

By steering readers to an unexpected destination, writers can remind readers that an expected outcome is not always guaranteed. This creates a contrast between appearances and underlying truths. However, it requires a reader to read between the lines to understand its intentions. A reader who does not notice the irony will take the poem or story at face value.

c. How does the poet use situational irony to communicate a message about who gets to feel a sense of belonging as a Singaporean?

A large empty rectangular box provided for the student to write their answer to the question.

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