

Teaching Pack: *What it Means When a Man Falls from the Sky*

Cambridge IGCSE™ / IGCSE (9–1)
Literature in English 0475 / 0992

Cambridge O Level
Literature in English 2010

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Introduction

This *Teaching Pack* supports teachers and learners when studying Cambridge IGCSE / IGCSE (9–1) / O Level Literature in English set texts.

Set texts regularly rotate on the syllabus and may change from one year of examination to the next. Before you begin teaching, check the set text list for the year in which your candidates will take their examinations.

Teachers may use this teaching pack to engage their learners when introducing a set text, or as a revision tool.

The content of these set text resources will need to be expanded on to cover what candidates are expected to know and be able to comment on in an examination.

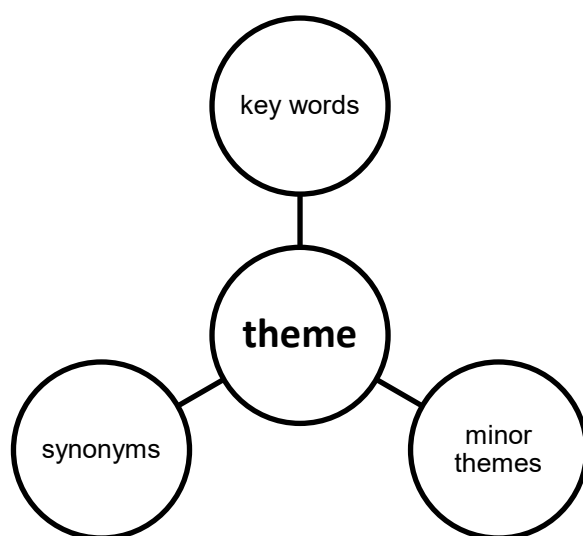
To increase learners' understanding and appreciation of the set text we recommend learners to set up a **reading log**, which could include:

- brief synopses of chapters/acts (in no more than a couple of sentences in their own words)
- a timeline of events (useful when a narrative is arranged non-chronologically)
- a list or diagram of characters and their relationships with each other
- first impressions of main characters
- initial thoughts about the main themes or ideas in the text.

The teaching pack aims to help learners to understand and think about the themes of the text, key quotations and their meanings, the significance of character behaviour, relationships and actions and how characters are depicted in the set text being studied.

The key words we use for the themes in this *Teaching Pack* are not exhaustive.

We suggest teachers discuss synonyms and alternative key words for themes that are identified for a text. Create key major theme mind maps and then from each of those key themes map connected and subsidiary/minor themes.



Tips and advice for teaching themes

- **Debate and discussion:** give learners different views on the same theme and encourage them to debate which view is most valid. They can use evidence from the text to support their view.
- **Theme tracking through the text:** get learners to create a graph for each theme and then track the theme with quotations as the story develops.
- **Role-play and drama:** give learners key scenes from the story where the theme is presented and get them to create a tableau / freeze-frame to represent it. See if other learners can guess it.
- **Game orientated learning:** try using *Kahoot* or *Blooket* online to get learners to answer questions relating to themes. Alternatively write your own series of questions that ask learners to find evidence to illustrate key themes.
- **Thematic posters:** create posters for each theme using mind-maps and diagrams to link evidence from the texts to the key theme ideas.

Lesson resources



Included in this pack are some resources to use with your learners. You may ask your learners to create their own worksheets similar to these, around another text, which they are studying:

Character summaries and quotations – learners create their own character summaries including quotations.

Reflection – after reading the text. learners reflect, consider and explore.

Quiz – a fun quiz to test the learners' knowledge of the text.

1. Summaries and themes

It is important to note that included here are just some of the themes explored by Lesley Nneka Arimah. This is not an exhaustive list of themes for each story and there may be others which are also relevant and appropriate.

Short story title	Some themes	Short story summaries
“The Future Looks Good”	Family Trauma Gender roles The past Cycles of violence	“The Future Looks Good” uses a reverse-chronological structure to demonstrate how women suffer violence at the hands of men and how this violence can pass through generations. The story starts with Enzima at the door of her sister, Bibi’s apartment. Enzima ‘fumbles the keys’ and doesn’t see what comes ‘behind her’. The reader is then taken back two generations to her grandmother, and the start of a generational cycle of violence that will end with Enzima’s death, on the doorstep as she ‘fumbles the keys’ and is mistaken for her sister. The reader understands from seeing the past, that the abrupt and violent end is inevitable as this form of gender related violence exists across time.
“War Stories”	Abuses of power Trauma Impact of war Fathers and daughters Memory	“War Stories” presents a father and daughter relationship to explore how war experiences and trauma can transcend generations. Nwando’s father is a war veteran who struggles to express the depth of his experiences, instead, telling short war stories to his daughter over games of chess. Nwando’s immature curiosity and silly behaviour at school contrasts with her father’s ‘strangeness that had plagued him his whole life’. The difference between the father and daughter illustrates the difference between those who experience war trauma and those who gather their experiences second-hand. It also explores the generational disconnection between the parent and the child and their ability to understand what motivates the other. The war stories become a way to remember the past, but also a tool to create distance between the experience and the pain.
“Wild”	Friendship The past Mothers and daughters Rebellion Cultural displacement	Teenage protagonist Ada is sent by her mother from her home in America to Nigeria, to live with her aunt as a punishment for her ‘wild’ behaviour. Once in Nigeria Ada meets her cousin Chinyere, a seemingly obedient young woman who has also violated societal expectation in a male dominated culture. Like Chinyere, Ada finds that, as in America, she is again caught between her own desires and cultural expectations. Both young women have

Short story title	Some themes	Short story summaries
		fought to assert their independence, and both have struggled to do this against cultural expectations of their gender.
“Light”	Fathers and daughters Identity crisis Coming of age Distance and time Gender Inequality	Enebeli is a father raising his daughter alone in Nigeria, while her mother is in America gaining a master’s degree in business administration. He fears what the coming of age will do to his daughter, how it will leave her ‘hollowed out, relieved of her better parts.’. He fears that societal pressure and gender expectation will lessen the girl’s autonomy. The father and daughter have ‘survived’ the mother’s departure and distance and they have grown close, he sees his daughter’s potential as a ‘streak of fire’ that must never go out. At the end of the story this love and hope is contrasted with the inevitability of the girl’s departure for America, when the mother calls for her and the inevitability that eventually, she will have to conform to a prescribed gender role that will ‘wick the dew off her’.
“Second Chances”	Regret Redemption Family Reconciliation The past	Uche’s dead mother returns, offering her, her father and sister a second chance to understand the past, to heal trauma and say goodbye. However, while her father and sister embrace this opportunity, Uche cannot ‘play along’ and resists engaging in her mother’s presence. This suggests that the pain of the past is difficult to overcome, and that trauma can be long lasting. The haunting presence of Uche’s mother is possibly a manifestation of family trauma. Uche’s inability to embrace this suggests that some wounds, especially those caused by family, are almost impossible to overcome. It is not until the presence leaves that Uche is able to ‘utter the words’ that have ‘haunted’ her: ‘I love you’.
“Windfalls”	Motherhood Exploitation Morality Manipulation Economic survival	An unnamed mother trains her young daughter to fake accidents for monetary gain. The first time she ‘fell’ she was six years old, but she learns quickly that it is better to ‘fall’ than ‘to be dropped’. The daughter both loves and resents her mother as she understands her mother’s desperation to survive, but she also recognises the corruption and deceit involved. The mother exploits her daughter, and as the daughter ages she uses her in more dubious ways to garner favour with men. At the end of the story the now pregnant daughter loses her baby yet gains ‘five hundred thousand dollars’. This final sacrifice

Short story title	Some themes	Short story summaries
		demonstrates and is critical of the extent to which victimhood can be commodified.
“Who Will Greet You At Home”	Motherhood Gender roles Expectations Creation Longing	This story is set in a world where a woman must craft her own baby from a material of their choice. The baby must be blessed by the woman’s mother and then cared for over the period of a year before it becomes flesh. Ogechi loses a series of babies made of cotton tufts, paper and then yarn, to her mother’s disapproval before she decides to break the rules and fashions one out of hair. The story of Ogechi and her fragile hair-baby explores the societal pressures placed upon women to be perfect mothers to perfect children. It also explores the impact of motherhood to ‘mute and subdue’ women as they strive to succeed.
“Buchi's Girls”	Sacrifice Class Motherhood Economic survival Loss	Buchi is a widow and a single mother trying to raise two daughters in an exploitative and male dominated economic system. Since the death of her husband, Buchi and her two daughters, Louisa and Damaris, have been forced to live in service to Buchi’s wealthier sister, Precious, and her mean husband Dickson. Through Buchi’s sacrifices and hardships, the reader sees the limitations placed on women. The story ends on a small note of hope when Buchi decides to send her children to live with her good friend Ijeoma and so prioritises their future over the temporary relief of living with her own family, but in a life that is ‘forbidden to them’.
“What it Means When a Man Falls from the Sky”	Colonialism Grief Science vs. spirituality Actions and consequences Emotional burden	This story is set in a dystopian future where mathematics is used to ‘solve’ the problem of grief. Mathematicians use formulas to ‘solve’ and ‘eat’ grief, mostly for the rich, who can pay not to feel human pain. Nneoma is a talented mathematician, yet she carries the grief of the clients whose grief she has eaten. This critiques the burden of pain and trauma carried by colonised societies. The concept of grief being ‘solved’ by a formula is a metaphor for the way in which people try to rationalise suffering rather than addressing it. At the end of the story the formula fails, and Nneoma is consumed by the burden of grief she has ‘tried to shoulder’.
“Glory”	Identity and self-worth Social expectation Failure Parental expectation	Protagonist Glory has spent her life struggling with the concept of her own self-failure and ill luck. Both her disappointed parents and the social world around her reinforce her sense of failure until it turns to a mean bitterness that she projects onto the world. Glory works a low

Short story title	Some themes	Short story summaries
	Resilience	paid job having failed to succeed at high school and law school. She is unlucky in love and has contemplated suicide. And then she meets Thomas, the easy talking, charming and successful Nigerian. Gradually Glory learns to accept that success can be defined in different ways and that she need not always look externally for gratification. The story ends ambiguously with Thomas proposing marriage and Glory undecided whether to 'succeed' in this sense or continue on her own with her new understanding of self-worth. This story critiques the external pressures placed upon young women by societies, cultural expectations and parents.
"What Is a Volcano?"	Pride Myth Revenge Power Actions and consequences	This myth-like tale tells the story of two gods, River (the goddess of rivers) and Ant (the god of ants) locked in a feud, back and forth 'for five human centuries'. Each god seeks to exert dominance over the other and for each act of dominance, revenge is sought. The feud between River and Ant culminates in Ant stealing River's twin baby girls, one of whom is eaten by ants and the other who remains forever hidden. Stricken with grief and enraged by anger, River searches the world for her babies while Ant hides in the human world, giving up his godly powers to remain hidden. At the end of the story the volcano becomes a metaphor for what happens to repressed anger and the destructive consequences of pride. The allegory explores how power struggles most often lead to cycles of destruction.
"Redemption"	Identity Morality Class Disillusionment Privilege	The story's young protagonist and narrator becomes infatuated with the housemaid next door. Mayowa is thirteen and 'an energetic young thing', 'small for her age' but with the promise to 'blossom into something interesting'. The narrator finds excuses to visit Mayowa at the house next door and sometimes invites the girl into her home when her mother is out. The complexity of the relationship between the narrator and Mayowa reflects the class divide between the two girls. This relationship is broken when Mayowa steals church money from the narrator's home and runs off with their housemaid, Grace. When she eventually returns her punishment reveals that economic disadvantage often results in unfair assumption and judgement. The story explores the way in which class privilege often shields individuals from having to see the disadvantage they perpetuate.

2. Characters and quotations

Just one character from each story has been selected for each of the twelve stories. Other characters and quotations should be studied.

"The Future Looks Good"

Enzima

Enzima is the younger sister of Bibi, and the fatal protagonist of the story. She is pretty in a 'manageable way' unlike her sister, who is 'Beautiful'. She is 'paler in tone and personality', but she is sweet and kind. Enzima has grown up in the shadow of Bibi, a 'ghost' who is loathed by her sister and who always seems to come second in her mother's eyes. Enzima's mother's obvious favouritism has forced her daughter to grow up quickly and to be self-sufficient. This has fuelled sibling rivalry and resentment and has shaped the identities of the two sisters. However, despite this, Enzima has remained close and loyal to her sister, who she is visiting at the start of the story. The two sisters have reunited after Bibi has suffered domestic violence at the hands of Godwin.

Enzima is presented as nurturing and kind when she is 'cleaning around her bruises'. She is then presented as self-less and brave when she offers to return to Bibi's flat to gather her sister's belongings.

At the end of the story, whilst standing at the door of her sister's flat, a 'girl who looks so much like her sister' Enzima is killed when Godwin 'fires a gun into her back'.

Quotation	This suggests...
'She is a ghost of Bibi.'	Enzima is like her sister, but a paler and less significant version. The metaphor suggests that Enzima is less seen and less of a person than her sister Bibi is in their mother's view.
'She sits on the toilet lid and begins to clean around her [Bibi's] bruises.'	Enzima nurses her sister after she is assaulted by Godwin. The imagery of her sitting suggests she has lowered herself in the sibling battle and is happy to meet her sister in a truce. The preposition 'around' suggests that Enzima takes great care not to hurt or cause more pain to her sister.
'She doesn't see who comes behind her: Godwin, with a gun he fires into her back.'	This is structured to create maximum tension, as the reader wonders who has been following Enzima. The idea of not seeing, and the preposition 'behind' emphasises Enzima's vulnerability, and so the vulnerability of women to men. The certain revelation created by the proper noun 'Godwin' and the 'gun' shocks the reader and mimics the speed and unpredictability of acts of real-life violence.

“War Stories”

Nwando

Nwando is the young Nigerian protagonist and narrator of “War Stories”. She is youthful and curious and looks up to her father as a resilient and proud veteran of war. Nwando is entranced by her father’s tales and she believes them to be reflective of his heroism and great courage; this explores the idea that children often see their adult figures, especially parents as infallible idols.

Nwando is proud to call herself her ‘father’s daughter’ and so ‘his problem to solve’, which makes her eventual realisation of his flaws more poignant. As Nwando matures she realises that what she first thought was a ‘penchant for exaggeration’ is actually fabrication and it is with this that her childhood image of her father is shattered.

Nwando views her father through the lens of his stories, reminding the reader of the power of storytelling. Her father’s stories shape him to her and she in response seeks to act out in heroic ways as she matures into adulthood. After ripping open Anita’s shirt, an act of rebellion against a more powerful force, Nwando describes how she ‘arrived at school the next day a hero.’ This story Nwando shares with her father, thus shaping her identity to him as ‘heroic’, a girl who can battle, just like her father.

At the end of the story Nwando’s crushing realisation of her father’s flaws requires her mother to tell her ‘a story of her own’ while she strokes her hair and consoles her.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘At such moments I became my father’s daughter...’	Nwando feels proud to be her ‘father’s daughter’, the possessive pronoun suggesting that she is comfortable with the close connection between the two of them. Her moments of rebellion are her own youthful flashes of courage and power.
‘I arrived at school the next day a hero.’	The adjective ‘next’ suggests that Nwando’s status elevation has occurred quickly after her act of aggression, perhaps suggesting the speed with which our perceptions of people can change.
‘My father went silent. He took my bishop.’	Nwando’s relationship with her father develops through stories and games. As the narrative develops his silence grows, as does her disillusionment. The simple sentence ending in the father growing ‘silent’ marks an end to the image of her father as a great war hero.

“Wild”**Ada**

Ada is the protagonist and narrator of “Wild”. She is a teenage girl caught between two very different worlds. Ada has grown up in America with her mother, but at the start of the story is sent back to Nigeria to be disciplined by her Auntie Ugo. Ada’s wild behaviour has seen her taking drugs, insulting teachers and a new low to her GPA. When her mother finally has ‘enough’, Ada is sent away. Ada’s mother thinks that the strict aunt in addition to a greater weight of family and cultural expectation will curb Ada’s behaviour.

Whilst in Nigeria Ada experiences a level of hypocrisy in family and cultural expectations what surprises her. Her mother often uses the behaviour of Chinyere ‘to nudge’ Ada ‘into correct behaviour’, despite Chinyere’s disgrace with the ‘married’ man. Ada is observant and intelligent and she uses this to navigate her relationship with her cousin Chinyere. At the start of her time in Nigeria, Ada tries to find ‘common ground’ with her cousin, but is thwarted by her hostility, typing to her friend Leila ‘my cousin is a bitch.’ As the story progresses and Ada starts to see the dynamics at play between Chinyere and Auntie Ugo she starts to feel sympathy for her cousin and even defends her at ‘the event’ they both attend.

Through Ada, Arimah explores the struggles of individuals raised and torn between two cultures. In America, Ada struggles with her sense of Nigerian culture and expectation, yet in Nigeria, she is too American to fit in. The reader sees Ada experience the same issues as her mother faces. Her mother lives in America with Ada yet expects Ada to conform to traditional Nigerian cultural expectations for a woman. Ada’s mother prefers the superficially obedient behaviour and traditional look of cousin Chinyere.

At the end of the story, Ada realises and then asserts her own identity. She realises that she doesn’t need to conform to her mother’s standards, and that those standards are essentially flawed as illustrated by cousin Chinyere and Auntie Ugo.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘Everybody. They said that since you were being raised without a father and in America of all places, if I didn’t beat you, you would go wild.’	Ada’s mother is bringing her up in America, yet the weight of Nigerian gender and cultural expectation weighs heavily on their mother / daughter relationship. The plural pronoun ‘they’ gives weight to the expectation that Ada will go ‘wild’ if she’s ‘raised without a father’ ‘in America’ and not beaten back into line.
‘My mother loved invoking Chinyere to nudge me into correct behaviour.’	This again hints at the tension in Ada’s relationship with her mother. The adjective ‘correct’ demonstrates that Ada has failed to be the daughter that her mother wants. The verb ‘nudge’ suggests that her mother is trying to change her and that she would be happier if Ada was like her cousin ‘Chinyere’.
‘I curled my arm around her. When I felt her tears on my neck, I tightened my grip.’	At the end of the story Ada matures into her own identity and takes a role of responsibility in caring for her cousin Chinyere. The repetition of the first person ‘I’, shows Ada being dominant and taking a caring role. The verbs ‘curled’ and ‘tightened’ demonstrate her nurturing and soft, yet strong sense of responsibility towards another woman who is suffering.

“Light”

Enebeli

Enebeli is a Nigerian father who is bringing up his daughter alone in Nigeria while his wife studies for her master’s degree in business in America. Whilst the distance means that the daughter’s relationship with her mother becomes strained, her relationship with her father is close and natural. Enebeli’s role as a father is central in the story and it explores the changing dynamic between fathers and daughters as time progresses. As much as Enebeli wants to hold on to his daughter’s youth he is forced to accept the inevitability of the passing of time and her independence.

At the start of the story Enebeli and his daughter are close. They have fun together and have ‘survived’ a number of milestones on the way to the girl’s womanhood. Enebeli loves his daughter’s uniqueness and secretly enjoys that the distance from her mother brings her closer to him. Enebeli’s love is deep, but it is also overprotective; he sees her as ‘his girl’ and fears her going out into the world independently and learning that ‘the world requires something other than what she is’.

Enebeli is representative of traditional Nigerian ideals about fatherhood and masculinity. In the first instance, Enebeli has had to assume the role of primary caregiver due to his wife’s absence, meaning that he has to confront issues of female adolescence up front. Additionally, he wants his daughter to be a good girl who observes his control, yet he is conflicted by her uniqueness and ‘fire’, which he loves. Through Enebeli’s discomfort with his changing daughter, Arimah also explores the clash between cultures that can exist when a child is being influenced by parents with both Nigerian and Western values.

At the end of “Light”, Enebeli is representative of many parents who have to accept the inevitability that you bring up your child knowing that one day you will have to let them go: a universal struggle of parenthood.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘When Enebeli Okwara sent his girl out in the world, he did not know what the world did to daughters’	The possessive pronoun ‘his’ suggests that Enebeli feels that his daughter is in his possession while she is young. It suggests his close love and affection for the child but also reveals his overprotectiveness and his need to control her behaviour. The noun ‘daughters’ also emphasises the importance of the role of the daughter and the gender expectations that come with this.
‘Enebeli would shrivel like a parched plant.’	The simile suggests that Enebeli’s relationship with his daughter is everything to him. She is his lifeline. The verb ‘shrivel’ suggests the loss of her would leave him small and hollow as his own identity has been formed around being a father to a daughter who needs him.
‘He will fight her. He will use vicious words he didn’t know he had in him...’	The simple declarative ‘He will fight her’ demonstrates the fight in Enebeli to protect his daughter from ‘the world’ and her mother’s expectations. Enebeli is a gentle man, yet the adjective ‘vicious’ shows the lengths he will go to in order to keep his daughter close.

“Second Chances”

Uche

Uche is a young woman struggling with deep emotional trauma and regret around the death of her mother. In the story, Uche struggles to leave behind the trauma of the past to face the harsh reality of the present.

At the start of the story Uche returns home to find that an unexpected and somewhat supernatural event has occurred; her dead mother has ‘stepped out of’ a ‘photo’ from 1982. She is wearing clothing that Uche recognises from the past, but she is missing her red sunglasses. The mother’s arrival seems natural to Uche’s father and sister who hold her ‘so tight’, but Uche recoils from her mother’s presence. Early in the story Uche expresses her confusion at her father and sister’s blind acceptance stating that ‘like my dad’ Udoma ‘has simply accepted my mother’s presence like it is nothing’. Uche finds herself ‘sitting off to the side’, isolated from this family unit as they reconnect.

The presence of Uche’s mother forces her to think back through her childhood and her behaviour as a child. She was ‘prone to hysterics’ and over the years developed into a child that ‘was exhausting’ and exhibited ‘off-putting self-centeredness’. It is then revealed that this was the topic of the last conversation that Uche had with her mother, 8 years ago, just before she died. Her mother told her, with a ‘sadness’ that she was ‘so disappointing’. Following this Uche spiralled into depression, hospitalisation and a suicide attempt. She reveals that to heal from this experience she had to learn to ‘be a person again’, a process of self-discovery that has been long and painful. The reappearance of Uche’s mother is both painful and intimidating as it forces Uche to return to a place of trauma and unhappiness where she felt worthless and disappointing.

Uche is unable to face the trauma of the past and her own guilt until the mother leaves. Only then is she able to ‘utter the words that have haunted’ her: ‘I’m sorry. I love you. Please forgive me.’ The return and presence of the mother figure brings with it ‘second chances’ to resolve relationships, yet Uche’s inability to embrace this demonstrates the impact of past trauma and grief and the hold it can have over the present.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘As the silence grows, I leave.’	Uche is unable to accept the presence of the returned mother. The personification of ‘silence’ creates a feeling of expectation and tension around Uche and her reaction. The simple main clause ‘I leave’ has a detached urgency suggesting that Uche cannot face the past trauma that seeing her mother has reawakened.
‘What you are is disappointing. You are so disappointing. You are disappointing.’	The presence of her mother forces Uche to recall their last conversation. The triplet repetition of ‘disappointing’ in short accusatory sentences has clearly defined Uche’s identity and shaped her last 8 years of grief and regret.
‘I utter the words that have haunted me.’	Uche is only able to face her grief on her own terms. Only when the mother leaves is Uche able to say what she wants to say. The reference to the words having ‘haunted’ her suggests that trauma in our past can be long lasting and difficult to overcome.

“Windfalls”

Narrator

The unnamed protagonist and narrator of the story is a young woman who has been shaped by exploitation and instability. From a very young age her mother has taught her to lie, deceive and fake accidents for monetary compensation to ‘survive’. She has been taught that survival comes before morality. The story is narrated in the second person suggesting that the narrator has become distanced from herself and has grown up without forming a personal identity. Narrating her story and looking at herself from the outside allows her to look at the past without emotionally engaging with it, suggesting that abusive childhoods cause great emotional damage.

The narrator’s voice is detached and pragmatic as she describes her young life, yet there is a sense that she desires some stability and a normal life, telling her mother that they need to stop and ‘can’t keep doing this’. The narrator knows that what they are doing is immoral, yet she participates due to the ‘tether’ she feels to her mother. This demonstrates the strength of the bond that forms between mothers and daughters.

The narrator is also presented as intelligent and highly perceptive. Not only does she understand the immoral nature of the tasks she is asked to participate in, but she also sees the relationship dynamics of the people around her, being able to comment on her mother’s deceptive errors and on how others perceive them. This intelligence and perceptiveness perhaps suggests that there is some hope for the narrator to escape this life. After losing her baby she comments that her mother only appears to be a ‘concerned caretaker’, demonstrating that she realises that her mother’s affection for her does not extend further than it would for any other commodity.

At the end of the story the narrator makes a small gesture to pull her ‘head out from under’ her mother’s hand; symbolically she is emancipating herself from her mother’s rule and control.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘The first time you fell, you were six... you have been living off these falls for years...’	From a young age the protagonist has been exploited by her mother. Use of the number ‘six’ reveals the vulnerability of the young child that has been used to fund a lifestyle by an unscrupulous mother. The fricative alliteration of ‘first’ and ‘fell’ mimics the harshness and violence of the situations the child is placed in. The plural ‘years’ suggests that this situation has become a cycle of exploitation that is unending.
‘You never considered another lifestyle, tethered to your mother by familiarity and a notion of loyalty.’	Family ‘loyalty’ runs deep for the protagonist and the verb ‘tethered’ suggests that the child is forever linked to the mother via gender and cultural expectation. Reminiscent of an umbilical cord, ‘tethered’ suggests that the ties of family are hard to escape.
‘You lost the baby.’	The starkness of the statement suggests that the protagonist struggles to engage emotionally with the situations her mother puts her in. Referring to herself in the second person ‘you’ adds to the sense that the protagonist finds it hard to claim an identity and that the identity she has is formed from the outside: she is a commodity, used to provide material wealth, not a loved and cherished daughter.

“Who Will Greet You at Home”

Ogechi

Ogechi lives in a world where a woman must craft her child from the materials she has around her. The material of choice will dictate the future character and circumstances of the child. If the mother loves, cares for and protects the child for a year it will live to become flesh. Ogechi is desperate for a child to love and care for, yet because she is poor, her craft choices have so far been unsuccessful, and each child has failed. In a society where success is measured by a woman's ability to raise a successful child, Ogechi has already experienced multiple failures. Ogechi's mother sees her daughter as a failure and Ogechi has come to view herself in this way too.

After Ogechi loses her third baby, she desperately fashions a child out of stolen hair; forbidden in her society. The hair baby, although silky and beautiful is relentlessly hungry and is only satisfied by sucking on Ogechi's nape. Over a few days Ogechi allows the baby to suck her skin raw and its powerful desire to feed becomes a 'relentless ache' that draws on Ogechi until she can bear it no longer. Ogechi's sacrifice to the hair baby demonstrates how desperate she is to prove herself worthy to those around her and her mother, through motherhood.

Ogechi's life is overshadowed by exploitation and power imbalances. Her mother sees her as a disappointment and her employer is cruel and exploitative. When Ogechi creates a baby out of hair she is directly pushing against the codes and conventions of her society where this action is forbidden. This rebellion shows the lengths Ogechi's desperation will push her to. She doesn't rebel because he is rebellious, but because she is desperate.

Ogechi is presented as a hopeful character. Despite her failures she believes that if she just tries harder and pours even more love into the child she will be rewarded. Unfortunately, Ogechi has underestimated the power of society and the expectations it places upon women. She has also underestimated the punishments for breaking its codes and conventions.

Quotation	This suggests...
'If she was to mother a child, to mute and subdue and fold-away parts of herself, the child had to be perfect.'	The triplet of verbs 'mute and subdue and fold-away' suggests that Ogechi sees motherhood as a process that diminishes the identity of the women in the process of becoming a mother. The adjective 'perfect' also hints at the pressures upon women to be perfect mothers to perfect children.
'Ogechi was grateful for the child's silence, even though the suction on her neck built up over the day to become an unrelenting ache... as if the child were drawing energy from her.'	Ogechi realises the toll of motherhood. The verb 'suction' suggests that children draw on parents' energy, leaving them tired and empty. The 'unrelenting ache' perhaps also references the length of the child's need and expectation to be cared for.
'Ogechi sobbed into the callused skin...'	The verb 'sobbed' reveals the immensity of emotional pain and anguish, fear and labour that goes into parenting. The adjective 'callused' suggests that the pain isn't only emotional, but that it manifests in physical scars as a result of labour lost. Ogechi is both emotionally and physically scarred by her experiences as a mother.

“Buchi’s Girls”

Buchi

Buchi is the female protagonist of the story. She is a devoted and single mother who is struggling to provide for her two daughters after the sudden death of her husband in an accident. Forced to live with her sister, Buchi experiences shame and humiliation as she realises the disadvantages she will suffer because she is a woman and a single mother in a patriarchal society.

Buchi is a resourceful and resilient woman. After the death of her husband, she is left financially vulnerable and unable to support her daughters. However, to ensure the safety of her two girls she endures shame and humiliation and violent attacks at the hands of her sister, Precious, and Precious’ husband Dickson when he gives her a ‘quick, hot slap’.

Motherhood is key to Buchi’s identity, yet the story does not glorify motherhood. Buchi loves her daughters dearly and strives to protect them, yet caring for them is presented as a struggle and at times they are a burden to her. Protecting them forces Buchi to suffer indignities ‘and extreme conditions’; they are symbolic of the weight of responsibility that rests upon parents.

At the end of the story Buchi finally has enough of Dickson’s ‘insult[s]’ to her and she chooses a better future for her children with ‘Auntie Ijeoma’. This is clearly presented as a difficult choice for Buchi, but also as a necessity to secure the future for her children; this action underscores the self-sacrifice that motherhood often requires, particularly in a society and culture where there is little opportunity for a woman on her own.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘Buchi always imagined herself as a quiet woman whose well ran deep. That when faced with extreme conditions she would meet them with an inner fount of strength, a will long dormant electrified to life.’	This suggests the great lengths of sacrifice a woman will go through to protect her children. Buchi’s former view of herself is described using the verb ‘imagined’ suggesting that she cannot remember the time when this woman existed, such are her current circumstances and how they are shaping her.
‘Buchi was being summoned.’	Despite living with family, Buchi is treated like a prisoner or servant. The verb ‘summoned’ suggests that she is in servitude and that she has committed an inappropriate act that she is about to be chastised for.
‘You like Auntie Ijeoma don’t you?’	Buchi poses this question to one of her daughters and it signals a point of change and hope at the story’s end. Fed up with being treated unfairly by her sister and her husband, the reader realises that Buchi has chosen a better life for her daughters.

“What it Means When a Man Falls From the Sky”

Neoma is the female protagonist of the story. She is a talented mathematician who is ‘specialized in calculating grief’ and so has the ability to eat and absorb the grief of those around her. In the dystopian society she inhabits she is a sought-after and she has years of experience in easing human suffering.

Nneoma’s skill and genius becomes apparent at only ‘fourteen’ meaning that she has grown up with an increased sense and weight of responsibility for others’ suffering. This responsibility has shaped her and even as a relatively young woman, she has absorbed the grief of thousands. Nneoma calculates and absorbs grief easily and it comes to her as ‘simple as the alphabet’. This suggests that Nneoma has perhaps never fully grasped the weight of the suffering she eases and how heavily that weight may weigh on her.

Nneoma’s work as a mathematician requires her to reduce emotion, specifically grief, to an equation, and to use logic to solve it. She starts the story detached from emotion, seeing it from a logical perspective as something to be solved, rather than as a human emotion to be experienced. This distance and detachment makes her naïve to the true nature and weight of what she is doing. Ironically, her drive to eradicate suffering for others suggests she can be empathetic, but unfortunately her confidence in her mathematical ability means that she doesn’t see the consequences of taking the suffering of others onto herself.

Nneoma remains logically detached from grief until ‘her mother died’. This grief is personal and so cannot simply be erased. The downfall of the protagonist comes when only too late Nneoma realises that not all emotion can be controlled; the depth of human suffering is not always within our control.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘It started when she was fourteen, in math class... to Nneoma it was as simple as the alphabet.’	The number ‘fourteen’ signals that Nneoma’s gift starts at a point in her life when she is starting to mature through adolescence. This coming of age suggests that with age comes greater responsibility. The simile ‘as simple as the alphabet’ suggests that Nneoma’s gift comes easily to her, maybe suggesting that she does not fully appreciate the gravity and importance of what she is doing. This becomes apparent at the end of Nneoma’s story.
‘She’d been doing it for so long she could exorcise the deepest of traumas for even the most resistant of patients.’	The verb ‘exorcise’ has biblical undertones and suggests that Nneoma’s powers are aligned to that of a deity. This is in line with how the society around her views her gift; she is a saviour figure that is able to cleanse others of their suffering. The time reference ‘so long’ shows the years and years of experience that Nneoma has in swallowing grief; it has been so long that no depth of grief is beyond her. This suggests that Nneoma herself has perhaps become numb to grief and human emotion.
‘The breadth of it was so vast. Too vast. The last clear thought she would ever have was of her father, how crimson his burden had been when she’d tried to shoulder it, and how very pale it all seemed now.’	The intensifiers ‘so’ and ‘too’ combined with ‘vast’ present the overwhelming grief that Nneoma experiences at the end of the story. The verb ‘tried’ suggests that Nneoma fails in her attempt to rationalise this depth of grief and so succumbs to it. This perhaps suggests the inability of science to apply logic to grief, a complex human emotion that runs deep and long.

“Glory”

Glory

Glory is the female protagonist of the story “Glory”. She is a complex woman who is trying to navigate crippling self-doubt in a society and family that constantly seeks to undermine and devalue her.

Glory’s identity is shaped very early in her life. As a baby her own grandfather describes her as ‘rotten’ and ill-fated and this is then the image that she grows up in. She feels that she isn’t good enough, but this comes from a lifetime of being told that she isn’t good enough. Even when seemingly good things happen to Glory, she feels that she is unworthy of them and so sabotages them to confirm this outcome. Glory feels like an imposter in her own life when she meets Thomas and longs to ask him ‘what he saw in her’ as she cannot see it herself. She fears his answers would be ‘qualities she knew to be illusions.’ This warped self-perception makes Glory hesitant in decision making around Thomas as she has never ‘imagined’ a good ‘future’ for herself. Instead, Glory is passive and simply allows things to happen around her rather than asserting any autonomy in positive choices.

Over the course of the story, Glory begins to become self-aware and realises that she can make choices based upon her own desires and passions. She chooses to tell Thomas’ mother that she works ‘the floor’ and at the end of the story, she grapples with the choice of whether to accept ‘the ring’. Although the reader is left not knowing what Glory has chosen, there is certainly the feeling that her increased agency will lead her to making a choice that allows her to claim her future rather than allowing external forces, like her family or his mother, to do it for her.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘That girl has something rotten in her, her chi is not well.’	Glory is fated to be unlucky. Her ‘chi’ is associated with her future and fate and destiny, so in saying that it’s ‘not well’ the suggestion is made that her cultural and spiritual future is bleak and ‘rotten’. The use of ‘that girl’ rather than her name signals that Glory is inherently defective and unworthy in the eyes of family.
‘Thomas still didn’t know she was unlucky.’	The phrase ‘she was unlucky’ suggests that Glory believes that ill luck and misfortune follows her, that she is doomed to failure. It is not made clear whether this misfortune is just Glory’s perception or whether she really has been unlucky. There is a tension revealed here between what Glory knows and what ‘Thomas’ sees in her, revealing the gap between self-perception and the perception of others.
‘Looking at the ring, resentment and elation warred till one overcame the other and Glory made another decision.’	The end of the story is a turning point in Glory’s life and in her perception of herself. The contrast between ‘resentment and elation’ suggests her internal conflict as she considers the perceived success in marrying Thomas or the alternative. The abstract noun ‘resentment’ suggests Glory is angry that to achieve success and validation she has to marry a worthy man meaning that she is not truly valuable on her own. Yet ‘elation’ suggests that there is some value in what the ‘ring’ symbolises; she has successfully achieved a proposal from a worthy man.

“What is a Volcano?”

River

In the story River is a powerful force of nature, but she is also a Goddess with great power who commands respect and fear. Ant recognises that River is ‘so respected and loved and worshipped’ by all around her and that he is small and weak by comparison.

At the start of the story River destroys one of Ant’s ‘small anthill[s]’ when she divides one of her streams. River does not act out of malice; she simply does not consider the consequences of her actions to those around her. This is perhaps symbolic of the force and power of nature to indiscriminately destroy. This action starts a chain of petty actions that see River and Ant sparring for millennia in a battle of will and power.

The battle between the Goddess and God continues until Ant steals River’s twin girls, one of whom dies and the other who is hidden forever. River searches the world for ‘her girls’ demonstrating the strength of the bond between mothers and daughters. River’s ‘grief was so deep’ it literally consumes her. She is described to be ‘bursting with grief but also hollow’, presenting her emotional trauma on a human level. River’s emotional response demonstrates the link between action and consequence. When she is angry she floods and destroys great areas and when she is woe begone she puts areas into drought by forgetting to supply water to them. Through these actions and consequences, we can see a complex depiction of the maternal role. The mother is both loving but then vengeful when challenged.

At the end of the story River is ‘catatonic with heartache’ This is perhaps a warning about the power of unresolved trauma.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘River had divided one of her streams, and the new current has washed away a small anthill of no real consequence,’	The simplicity of the verb ‘divided’ presents the awesome power of nature to shape the world, yet also its indiscriminate indifference. River has little concern for the ‘small anthill’ that gets washed away. The adjective ‘small’ symbolically reinforcing the weakness of man in the face of nature’s power. River has not acted with the intention to harm, she has simply acted without thought for the consequences of her actions.
‘So mighty was River, so respected and loved and worshipped’	In the story, River is not just a body of water, she is a powerful deity. The repetition of the intensifier ‘so’ emphasises her power and importance. The triplet of adjectives ‘respected and loved and worshipped’ shows the great respect River commands from the gods and people alike.
‘River searched the world for her girls.’	The idea of a distraught River searching ‘for her girls’ humanises the Goddess and brings her pain into the human realm. The present participle ‘searching’ suggests a continual longing and a deep emotional loss. The possessive pronoun ‘her’ suggests that River feels ownership of the girls, symbolic of the strong bond between mothers and daughters.

“Redemption”

Mayowa

Mayowa is the young housemaid who is the focus of the narrator’s love and attention in “Redemption”. She is introduced as a rebellious character throwing a ‘missile’ of faeces at the narrator’s house. She is ‘thirteen going on whatever age it is that women find themselves’ which presents Mayowa as a symbol of forced maturity. She hasn’t matured gradually or over an adolescent period, she has entered the text young, but with the forced responsibilities of adulthood. Arimah is exploring the idea that maturity does not come with age, but with the social and cultural expectations of the world we live in.

When Mayowa is invited into the narrator’s home she sees the church money in ‘the offering bag’ and her ‘eyes bulged at the roll of money’. This is a pivotal point in Mayowa’s story as it is the point that she connects money with opportunity. The imagery of the eyes bulging suggests surprise, but also greed and opportunity; this is a temptation to a poor girl with little autonomy. It may also be the moment that Mayowa starts to understand the power of money in the economic world.

After Mayowa steals the money and then returns disgraced and ‘just as powerless’ the reader understands that this is symbolic of the cycle of female oppression at the hands of men. Mayowa is not an isolated case, she is one in a line of women past and future who fail because they do not meet the required standards of the culture and society they are a part of.

Quotation	This suggests...
‘Mayowa was thirteen going on whatever age it is that women find themselves.’	The phrase ‘going on whatever...’ and no actual definitive age suggests that girls reach maturity based on circumstance and the influence of the society and culture they live in, rather than an actual age. It also suggests that in some cultures and societies girls like Mayowa are forced to mature too early.
‘Her eyes bulged at the roll of money inside.’	The imagery that is created by the verb ‘bulged’ suggests that Mayowa is both surprised and somewhat shocked by the sight of the money. This perhaps also hints at the power money has to create an emotional response in individuals, especially those from poorer backgrounds like Mayowa.
‘She was just as powerless, another daughter being sent back to her mother in disgrace.’	The adjective ‘another’ suggests that Mayowa is not an isolated case; women being treated in this way is a reoccurring issue. Women are sent away when they are considered to be disappointments who do not meet or live up to social and cultural expectations. The reference to Mayowa being ‘powerless’ presents the cycle of female oppression at the hands of men.

[illegible]

Quotation	This suggests...

3. Reflection and activities



Now you have read the text, reflect on your thoughts:

Explore passages/extracts and relate them to the story.

Select a passage of key importance from one of the stories.

Explain where the extract appears in the text and what happens immediately before and after the extract.

Consider the significant links between the content of the extract and the rest of the story.

Provide a brief overview of the content and organisation of the extract.

Explore the way the writer uses language to achieve certain effects. Highlight key words on a copy of the extract and annotate them, saying what you find striking, vivid, memorable, disturbing, etc.

Create practice questions around the passage, for example:

- How does [author] make this such a memorable / significant moment in the story?
- Explore the ways in which [author] portrays [character's] attitude towards [character] at this moment in the story.
- Explore the ways in which [author] makes this moment in the story so [moving / exciting / sad, etc].

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Explore the themes of a story

Create practice questions around a theme, for example:

- How does [author] portray [theme] in the story?
- In what ways does [author] convey [theme] in the story?
- How does [author] present his ideas about [theme] in the story?

Choose **one** of your questions and complete the following activities:

- Compile a QUOTATION + COMMENT table to record your ideas about specific characters.
- Add notes to each quotation about what it reveals about the character and their relevant contexts.
- Learn some key quotations.
- Answer the question. Peer-evaluate each other's answers.

Note examples of:

- irrelevant points (which perhaps narrate or describe)
- repeated points (where no more credit can be given)
- unsupported assertions (which do not constitute analysis)
- long quotations (which indicate a lack of clear focus).

Tick:

- ✓ points that are valid and thoughtful
- ✓ quotations that are concise and relevant
- ✓ critical comments on key words or aspects of structure and form.

4. Quiz



1. In “The Future Looks Good” as Ezinma fumbles with the key at the lock, who is she mistaken for?

- A) Her neighbour
- B) Her mother
- C) Her grandmother
- D) Her sister

2. In “War Stories” what does Nwando’s father struggle to explain to her?

- A) The reason she needs to behave at school.
- B) The depth and trauma of his war experiences.
- C) The reason she must apologise.
- D) The reason her mother is angry.

3. In “Wild”, why is Ada sent from America to Nigeria?

- A) To understand Nigerian cultural expectations.
- B) To care for her aunt.
- C) To punish her wild behaviour.
- D) To pursue better educational opportunities.

4. In “Light” what does Enebeli fear his daughter will lose as she matures?

- A) Her independence and autonomy.
- B) Her relationship with him.
- C) Her relationship with her mother.
- D) Her youth and beauty.

5. In “Second Chances” how does Uche feel about her mother’s supernatural return?

- A) She is happy but suspicious of the mother.
- B) She embraces the opportunity to say goodbye.
- C) She cannot ‘play along’ with her family.
- D) She is angry it has taken her mother this long to return.

6. In “Windfalls” what does what does the protagonist’s mother train her daughter to do to get money?

- A) Steal from homes they visit
- B) Pretend she is ill
- C) Work the streets as a prostitute
- D) Fake accidents

7. In “Who Will Greet you at Home”, what does Ogechi make her first baby out of?

- A) Cotton tufts
- B) Wrapping paper
- C) Hair
- D) Yarn

8. At the end of “Buchi’s Girls” what does Buchi decide to do?

- A) Confront Precious and Dickson about their behaviour.
- B) Run away with Lawrence.
- C) Send her daughters to Auntie Ijeoma.
- D) Ask Precious and Dickson for help.

9. In “What Happens When a Man Falls from the Sky”, what do mathematicians like Nneoma do?

- A) Use a formula to eat grief.
- B) Use a formula to create flight.
- C) Use a formula to reverse grief.
- D) Use a formula to solve problems.

10. In “Glory” what assumption does Thomas’ mother make about Glory’s future?

- A) She will marry Thomas.
- B) She will get a better job.
- C) She will move to Nigeria.
- D) She will not have children.

11. In “What is a Volcano?”, what does the volcano symbolise?

- A) Hidden guilt
- B) Repressed anger
- C) Woeful sadness
- D) Shameful greed

12. What is stolen by Mayowa in “Redemption”?

- A) Money Mrs Ajayi has been paid
- B) Money Grace has saved
- C) Money from Benni
- D) Money from the church

Quiz answers

1. In “The Future Looks Good” as Ezinma fumbles with the key at the lock, who is she mistaken for?

D) Her sister

2. In “War Stories” what does Nwando’s father struggle to explain to her?

B) The depth and trauma of his war experiences.

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D) Money from the church

Cambridge International Education
The Triangle Building, Shaftsbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
t: +44 1223 553554
e: info@cambridgeinternational.org www.cambridgeinternational.org

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