



A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY GUIDE TO AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD BY KAZUO ISHIGURO

Introduction

ANSWERING QUESTIONS IN OPTIONAL TEXTS: ENGLISH PAPER 3 QZ 3

Essay Based Questions

English paper 3 question 3 a, b and c are essay-based questions which require the learner to write a discursive composition on a given statement or assertion. The learner, in writing such a composition, is expected to expose their points in prose form.

Essay Structure

KCSE essays should have four to five body paragraphs. Each paragraph should start with a topic sentence that introduces the point you want to discuss. Provide relevant evidence from the text and explanation after the topic sentence. Names of characters should be accurate to avoid losing points for textual errors.

Your goal should be to argue and illustrate your point. A common mistake that students make in body paragraphs is to narrate events from the text instead of showing how the events support their point. Such paragraphs are described as “thin” by KCSE examiners, and they do not score full points.

Remember you should be arguing and supporting your topic sentence therefore avoid narrating the text. As you conclude the paragraph make sure you have a clincher sentence- a statement that ties your paragraph to the question. So be sure to have about 9 lines of evidence and explanation in each body paragraph to score full points.

A good essay should have three basic parts:

- i. An Introduction (an introductory paragraph).
- ii. A body.
- iii. A conclusion (a concluding paragraph).

The Introduction

This is usually a short paragraph that begins an essay. The introduction can either be a general or contextualized statement or a combination of both. In the general introduction, the learner should give a general comment drawn from the society. In the contextualized introduction, the learner should give a comment that focuses on the society depicted in the particular text and not the general society. At times, the learner can write an introductory paragraph that combines both a general and a contextualized statement.

The Body

The body is the most important part of an essay. The learner should ensure that they divide the body of their essay into distinct, well-structured and well-developed paragraphs. A single point or idea should be exposed and developed in a single paragraph.

Each paragraph should have at least three parts: a topic sentence/statement (the first sentence of the paragraph which gives a general idea on the subject of the paragraph), an explanation on the idea given in the topic sentence, then an illustration(s) for the idea/point under discussion/exposition from the given text.

Conclusion

A good essay should have a conclusion (a concluding paragraph). This is usually a short paragraph at the end of the essay which could be a statement that shows the justification or validity of what the learner has written or a summary of the main points (points raised in the body).

Other KCSE tips

Remember to use simple language in your essay. Proofread your essay to check for spelling, grammar, and textual errors. We will be posting more sample essays to illustrate the kind of essays that KCSE examiners expect to see.

THE GUIDE

'**Floating world**' is a Japanese word meaning Night life in the pleasure districts. It was, specifically, a world of play and entertainment. pictures of the floating world", refer to the transitory nature of life. Visitors will see delicate prints depicting scenes celebrating everyday life, through themes such as landscape and travel, actors and courtesans, and folk tales.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KAZUO ISHIGURO

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan in 1954. He moved with his parents to Guildford in Southern England in 1960 when his father was recruited to work as a marine biologist for the British National Institute of Oceanography. Ishiguro did not visit Japan again until he was in his thirties. Ishiguro was educated at a boys' school in Surrey, and attended the University of Kent. As a teen, he hoped to become a rock musician. Ishiguro received a masters at the University of East Anglia, where Angela Carter became an early mentor and he studied with Malcolm Bradbury. Ishiguro enjoyed critical acclaim starting early in his career, and won the Whitbread award for his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*. He has been nominated for Great Britain's most prestigious literary prize, the Booker, four times, and won it in 1989 for *The Remains of the Day*. In 2017, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The committee justified the decision to award the prize to Ishiguro by saying: "in novels of great emotional force, [Ishiguro] has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world." Ishiguro is married and has one daughter.

Historical Context of An Artist of the Floating World

Although the destruction and defeat of Japan during World War II give the novel its immediate context, the novel is more broadly concerned with transformations in Japanese society occurring throughout the first fifty years of the twentieth century. In the first two decades of the century, the economy boomed as a result of modernization, industrialization, and the 1868 opening of the country's economy to international trade. In the 1920s, the economy saw a crash, and poverty became a thorny problem, especially among peasants and industrial workers. Nationalist sentiment began to rise, with many in Japan advocating for a Japanese empire in Asia that would rival the empires of Europe. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria in a quest for greater resources. The war there was renewed again in 1937. Following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japan's territorial possession expanded to encompass Hong Kong, the Philippines, and other parts of Asia. Japan then began to lose the war, but refused to surrender until long after it had become clear that the war could not be won. Nationalist propaganda advocated that ordinary Japanese citizens and soldiers make enormous sacrifices in the name of country and emperor. The war ended with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, although these events are never referred to in the novel. After the surrender, many Japanese were eager to move on from the devastation they had suffered. They were extremely interested in the ideas of democracy and capitalism preached by the

Americans, who occupied the country from the war's end until 1952. In the periods during which Ono is writing his narrative, the American occupiers focused intensively on building up the Japanese economy, a historical process reflected in the changing cityscape that Ono records.

Title and its relevance

- ☞ The "floating world" of the title is the Japanese term for night life in the pleasure districts.
- ☞ An aspiring artist, young Ono began as a hack artist, then became the star pupil in a school of bohemian artists who enjoyed and celebrated bars and sake, hostesses and lantern light. Led by a member of the Okada-Shingen (New Life) Society, Ono's eyes were opened to social needs, and so he broke with the school and became an influential artist and propagandist for Japanese imperialism and the war effort. Now the war is lost. It is October 1948. Americans have occupied Japan and popular attitudes have changed radically. The young think of those who led Japan to its disaster as traitors. Some former leaders have killed themselves to expiate their guilt.
- ☞ The title also refers to an artistic genre. Ono's master is especially interested in depicting scenes from the pleasure district adjacent to the villa in which he and his students live. Ono mentions the ephemeral nature of the floating world that could be experienced during each night. His master experiments with innovative softer Western-style painting techniques, rejecting the hard black outlining that was considered more traditional. Under the influence of right-wing political ideas about tradition, Ono becomes estranged from his master and forges his own career. He feels gleeful when his master's paintings fell into disfavour during a return to the use of more traditional bold lines in the paintings used for nationalistic posters.

Summary of An Artist of The Floating World

The novel begins in an unnamed city in Japan in October 1948. The narrator is Masuji Ono, a retired artist who lost both his son and wife during the war which also caused serious damage to his beautiful house. Ono recalls the previous month's visit of his older daughter Setsuko and her son Ichiro who live in a different town. The whole family is concerned about the marriage prospects of Ono's younger daughter Noriko, because, a year before, Noriko had been in marriage talks with a man named Jiro Miyake when his family withdrew from negotiations under mysterious circumstances.

Noriko is currently at the start of new marriage talks with a man named Taro Saito, but at nearly twenty-six, she is considered old to be unmarried. Ono is annoyed because he feels his daughters believe he knows the real reason why the marriage negotiations broke off and is hiding it from them.

Ichiro is fascinated by a poster for a monster movie that he saw at the train station. Ono decides to take Ichiro to the movie the next day, but his daughter Noriko says she has made plans. Setsuko says that she will stay with her father the next day, and Ono and Ichiro can go see the monster movie the following day. The next day, Setsuko says to her father that it may be wise to take precautions to prevent certain facts about his past from coming into the hands of the Saito family when they investigate the Ono family background. The day after that, Ichiro and Ono go to the monster movie. On the way there, they run into Taro Saito's father, who tells Ono that he has discovered they have a mutual acquaintance: Mr. Kuroda.

Ono intersperses reflections about the past and present into his account of Setsuko's visit. He describes the time he spends at Mrs. Kawakami's place, the last bar standing in an area that had been a pleasure district with a number of bars and restaurants in the years before the war. There, he and his former pupil Shintaro reminisce with Mrs. Kawakami about the old days. Ono also recounts his role in bringing the pleasure district into existence. As a prominent artist, he had written to the authorities and gotten them to place their support behind a bar. The bar, called the Migi-Hidari, became a place where Ono and his students often drank and talked about the role of their art in building a great new future for Japan. Ono also recalls an incident from his own childhood when his father told him he would disgrace the family if he became an artist and then burned Ono's paintings. Ono also recollects several run-ins with the younger generation. He remembers running into Jiro Miyake and hearing from him that he is glad that the president of his company committed suicide to atone for the company's behavior during the war. He also recalls a conversation with Setsuko's husband Suichi at the reception after his son Kenji's funeral, where Suichi expresses anger over the many members of his generation that were killed during the war and the many leaders who have been too cowardly to take responsibility for their role during the war. Finally, Ono describes his first visit to an old colleague to make sure nothing from his past gets in the way of Noriko's marriage. He visits his old colleague Matsuda, who has been ill, in the Arakawa district. Matsuda tells him that he will be

sure to say only kind things about Ono, but advises that he seek out his former pupil Kuroda, if he is concerned about the investigation.

The second set of recollections are recorded in April 1949 and center around Noriko's miai, a formal meeting between two families who are considering marrying their children. Ono first describes how he has a falling-out with Shintaro, who asks him to write to a potential employer and tell them that Shintaro disagreed with Ono about work they did together during the war. Ono says that it may seem that he was harsh with Shintaro, but explains that Shintaro's visit occurred only a few days after the miai.

Ono describes Noriko's bad mood and incivility to him in the weeks leading up to the miai, and says that Noriko does not know all that he is doing to make sure her wedding goes ahead. For instance, Ono goes to visit Kuroda. He is let into Kuroda's apartment by Kuroda's protégé, Enchi, who mistakes Ono for someone else. When Enchi realizes Ono's true identity, he asks Ono to leave, saying that he is sure Kuroda would not want to see the man who is responsible for his having been beaten and injured in prison and labeled a traitor.

At the miai, Ono drinks quickly and is made uncomfortable by the stilted conversation. Eventually, he interrupts the flow of conversation to make a declaration that he can admit that he made mistakes with some of the work he did and may have been a bad influence in the country. He thinks that Taro's father, an art expert named Dr. Saito, approves of his statement. After that, the conversation loosens up and it seems clear that Noriko and Taro like one another.

The third set of Ono's recollections is recorded in November 1949 and centers around another visit Setsuko and Ichiro pay to the family some months after Noriko is married to Taro Saito. During a walk in Kawabe Park, Setsuko says to Ono that she was concerned to hear that he has compared himself to a composer who wrote highly influential nationalist songs during the war and recently committed suicide to atone for his role encouraging the bloodshed. Ono tries to reassure his daughter that he is not considering suicide, but she says other things that he finds upsetting. Setsuko says that he did beautiful work, but it was not at all responsible for influencing anything during the war. Ono points out that, the previous year, she had seemed to think his career a great liability in Noriko's marriage negotiations. Setsuko says she does not remember any such conversation. Ono is shocked and points out that he

made a statement during the miai as a result of her comment. Setsuko says that Noriko and the Saitos all found his declaration very puzzling. Ono defends his statement as appropriate, explaining that Dr. Saito was familiar with his wartime work and seemed to appreciate hearing that his position had changed. Setsuko says that she believes that Dr. Saito was not even aware that Ono was an artist. Later that day, Ono takes his grandson Ichiro on an outing and promises that he will get Ichiro a taste of sake that night at dinner. That night at the home of newlyweds Noriko and Taro, Ono tries to convince Setsuko to allow Ichiro to taste some sake, but Setsuko refuses. During the dinner, the younger generation discusses how happy they are with the new American-style leadership at the corporations where they work. After Ichiro goes to bed, Ono says to Taro that it is a shame that Dr. Saito and he were not better acquainted sooner, since they both worked in the art world and knew one another's reputations. Taro agrees with this and Ono looks to see how Setsuko is responding, but she does not seem to register this at all. Ono intersperses a variety of reflections about his past in his account of this conversation with Setsuko and his reactions to it. He recalls the moment sixteen years before when he moved into his home and, he says, Dr. Saito approached him and said how glad he was to have an artist of his stature in the neighborhood.

He also looks back further into his past, recalling his relationship with a fellow artist nicknamed the Tortoise, who worked with him at Master Takeda's firm in 1913 or 1914, producing Japanese paintings for export to foreigners. When Ono gets an offer to go to live and study at the villa of the prestigious artist Mori-san, the Tortoise comes with him. Over the next seven years, Ono adopts Mori-san's style of painting and becomes Mori-san's prize pupil. But in the early 1920s, Ono gets to know Matsuda, a nationalist art appreciator, who convinces him to take a different direction in his art. The Tortoise is horrified at Ono's disloyalty to Mori-san's methods, and Mori-san tells Ono that he must leave the villa. Ono reflects how gratifying it was that, in later years, his own career took off, and Mori-san's declined.

The final set of recollections is set in June 1950. Ono reveals that he has learned of Matsuda's death and recounts the visit he paid to Matsuda the month before. On this visit, he tells Matsuda that both Noriko and Setsuko are now pregnant and that it will soon be five years since his wife Michiko's death. Matsuda says that they were two ordinary men who made a marginal contribution, but Ono says that he believes

Matsuda actually feels proud of his life's work. Ono compares himself and Matsuda to the Tortoise to Shintaro, saying that he and Matsuda can be proud to have boldly tried to do something ambitious that they believed in, while the Tortoise and Shintaro have never tried to rise above mediocrity.

Ono also describes how the area that used to be the pleasure district is now full of office buildings. He sits in a bench outside one of these buildings and looks at the enthusiastic young office workers, whom he wishes well.

OCTOBER 1948

Summary

The narrator, Masuji Ono, describes his home and how he acquired it. Ono is not, nor has he ever been, rich, and he acquires his large and elegant house in an unusual way. Akira Sugimura, a respected and influential man in the city, built it. After his death, his family decides to sell his home to a buyer whom they feel will do the home justice. Ono is approached by Sugimura's two middle-aged daughters, who present him with a low price for the house and tell him they will investigate his background to see if he is worthy of it. The sisters add that their father was an art appreciator and knew Ono's work as an artist.

ALSO AVAILABLE GUIDES/ QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ARE

- 1. FATHERS OF NATION**
- 2. SILENT SONG AND OTHER STORIES**
- 3. THE SAMARITAN**
- 4. PARLIAMENT OF OWLS**
- 5. DOLLS HOUSE**
- 6. BLOSSOMS OF THE SAVANNAH**
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