INTRODUCING A MULTIMODAL FRAMEWORK IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Visual Arts, once a distinct discipline on its own, has now been infused in almost all aspects of 21st century culture so that modern society is often described as 'media-saturated' and its citizens commonly termed 'technological natives' (Freedman, 2003). Within this context, two observations may be made concerning the notion of the 'text'. The first is that whereas writing was the dominant mode of communication a few centuries ago, this has now been replaced by the dominance of the image (Kress, 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). In an examination of learning materials in schools such as text-books, web-resources and teacher-produced materials, Kress and Bezemer (2008) note that images have overtaken writing as the primary carriers of meaning. In science and mathematics textbooks for example, illustration and pictures play an important role in clarifying complex concepts described in words. The second observation is that information is no longer conveyed through one single mode but a multiplicity of modes. For example, it is rare to find the front page of a newspaper consisting of only words or only images. In fact, it is often a combination of both words and images. Furthermore, if one were to read the news from the internet, one would probably find that the information is presented through a combination of words, images, sound and video. The paper is therefore premised on the argument that a multimodal framework for English Language assessment is essential in order to make assessment more relevant to the real-world context. The first part of this paper begins with examining the make-up of typical mainstream secondary school English Language comprehension assessment papers. The second part then addresses some of the limitations of the assessment papers by proposing a multimodal framework which includes the types of questions we can raise from the inclusion of multimodal texts in assessment.

KEYWORDS

Multi-modal assessment, Multi-literacy, Assessment for learning

INTRODUCTION

The dominance of the image and the multimodal nature of texts are observable in contemporary youth culture. Osgerby (2004) cites reports that in the United States, youths aged between eight to eighteen spend an average of seven hours a week on electronic media such as television, computers and video games. This is comparable to the time spent on these activities by youths in Britain. The problem, however, is that these new forms of literacies have not been translated at all levels of education, particularly in schools where teaching and assessment continue to center on the printed word. For example, the inclusion of media as well as multimodal texts (texts involving an integration of verbal and linguistic signs) in English Language national examinations is unheard of in Singapore and in Asian countries.

In this paper, particular attention is given to the English Language summative examination because the content of these high stakes assessment often translates into curriculum and pedagogical designs in the classroom. When educators begin to consider the need to include a multimodal framework in assessment, classroom teaching and learning will become more authentic to students who are exposed to a large range of such media-rich texts on a daily basis. In addition, students will acquire critical reading skills so that when they encounter these texts outside school,

they will be able to comprehend the surface meaning of the text and more importantly, the construction of the text, its effects on the intended reader and the contextual factors which have given rise to this text.

ASSESSMENT ISSUE IN THE CURRENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION PAPER

In Singapore, mainstream secondary students between the ages of thirteen to seventeen are constantly exposed to and assessed on reading comprehension, composition and oral communication in their English Language classrooms. An examination of English Language comprehension passages reveal that they are typically based on the expository text type and approximately 90 lines in length. The comprehension passage consists of two short passages (A and B). Passage A focuses on the expository text type while Passage B focuses on narrative-descriptive text type. While Passage A is about 50 lines in length, Passage B is shorter and is approximately 40 lines in length.

The analysis of secondary school reading comprehension passages raises two key concerns which are: the rigidity of assessment based on fixed text-types and the lack of critical reading skills emphasized.

Concern 1: Issues of Rigidity

The expository text in a comprehension passage typically contains the following features. Firstly, the passage consists of features of the explanation and discussion text-types. The main purpose is to assess students' ability to explain and elaborate on 'how' and 'why' things or situations occur and work. Secondly, the passage is often ordered in a `time' sequence or a 'cause and effect' sequence. For example, the opening paragraphs would highlight an issue or phenomena. This is followed by an explanation and discussion on the significance or impact of the issue or phenomenon in question. The later part of the passage provides a description and elaboration of this issue or phenomenon typically focusing on a discussion and explanation of the broad as well as specific concerns which are closely related to the topic. Thirdly, the passage tends to be relatively non-judgmental and presented in a logical or sequential manner. This text type is often written in the present tense, involves a general group of participants, depicts 'cause' and 'effect' connectives, and may sometimes involve technical terms.

In a similar manner, the narrative-descriptive passage (Passage B) also complies with the specific features of this text type. As a result of having to comply with examination regulations regarding the length of this component of the paper, the passage does not fully depict the various stages of the plot development cycle which begins with an orientation/background followed by conflict, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. Instead, the passage highlights the conflict which begins at the end of the raising action stage and then focuses on the describing the climax vividly before concluding with a swift resolution to the story. The passage is often written in the past tense, involves descriptive phases, and multiple forms of verbs.

In summary, one may observe that the secondary school English Language comprehension paper is rigid in that it tends to adhere to specific text types which are often confined to the expository and narrative-descriptive text types (including parts A and B).

Table 1. Description of expository and narrative comprehension passages

Features of an expository text-type	Features of a narrative-descriptive text-type
1. **Overview** – the text is based on the explanation and discussion text-types	1. **Orientation/Background** – this refers to the mental, emotional, and physical environment at the start of the narrative. The setting is established. The characters are identified. Their social economic status, relationships and circumstances are established. The initial complication is subtly weaved in.
2. **Purpose** – to explain and elaborate on 'how' and 'why' things and situations occur and work	2. **Conflict** – this represents the tension and struggle between two opposing forces in the story. There are different types of conflict: human versus human, human versus nature, human versus societal norms, and human versus self.
3. **Sequence** – ordered in terms of 'time' sequence or a 'cause and effect' sequence	3. **Rising Action** – this is part of the complication. It refers to the series of dramatic events or occurrences in the story which progressively develops in its complication and sense of tension.
4. **Opening paragraphs** – to highlight an issue or phenomena.	4. **Climax** – this refers directly to the complication in the plot. In the climax, a critical event pushes the main characters in the story to act or make a decision.
5. **Development** – to provide an explanation and discussion on the significance or impact of the issue or phenomenon in question	5. **Falling Action** – this is part of the resolution. It refers to the events and circumstances that occur after the climax and directs the plot towards the end of the story.
6. **Tone** – relatively non-judgmental	6. **Resolution** – this represents the conclusion of the story. The ending can be positive or negative. It can introduce a twist to the conclusion and can allow the reader to decide his preferred conclusion to the story.
7. **Linguistic structure** – written in the present tense, involves a general group of participants, depicts 'cause' and 'effect' connectives and involves technical terms.	7. **Linguistic structure** – the story is written in the past tense and depicts descriptive phases and words and multiple forms of verbs

In the table above, what may be inferred is that the comprehension passages conform to standardized text-type structures which teachers are expected to train students to be familiar with for the purposes of doing well in the examination. The result is that students gain a narrow perspective to the reading of texts since they are not exposed to 'rich' texts which involve mixed genres and media. For example, advertisements employ a mixture of exposition, persuasive and narrative-descriptive text-types. Often these texts do not cohere to a rigid text structure and the authors may in fact engage in 'poetic license' where grammatical and other language rules are flouted for an intentional reason.

Concern 2: Issues of Critical Reading

A second concern is that the types of questions in most comprehension papers center on the first four stages of Bloom's taxonomy – *Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, and Analysis* with a heavier emphasis on *Comprehension* (stage 2). Bloom's Taxonomy has been used as a reference because of its distinct categories and systematic progression of stages in relation to the development of thinking skills. When students are able to recognize the different types of questions and their associated skill sets, they will be better able to utilize literacy skills learnt in the classroom to tackle the questions.

Table 2. Types of comprehension questions

	Bloom's taxonomy of skills	Some key terms exemplified in the question type (they are by no means exhaustive)	Questions
(i)	**Knowledge** – refers to the process of remembering; memorizing; recognizing; recalling and identifying; recalling information and describing differing situations and contexts.	Who, what, when, where, how, describe, identify, define, list, give an example of, give an account of, name, label, etc.	Very few stage 1 type of questions
(ii)	**Comprehension** – refers to the process of interpreting; translating information from one form to another; describing in one's own words; retelling information in another mode; organizing and selecting ideas and information.	Explain, cite, quote, write down, give examples of, paraphrase/ restate in your own words, summarize, trace, give reasons why, etc.	A majority of comprehension questions are stage 2 type of questions
(iii)	**Application** – refers to the process of solving problems; applying information to achieve a certain outcome; utilizing rules, statistics and principles.	How is 'X' an example of 'Y'?; how is 'X' related to 'Y'?; why is 'X' significant?; illustrate, demonstrate, show, etc.	Very few stage 3 type of questions
(iv)	**Analysis** – refers to the process of identifying motives; surfacing underlying ideas and intentions; separating/breaking down an issue/concern to exemplify how it is related to the large picture.	What are the parts or features of; what evidence can you list to show, classify… according to …, examine, infer, why do you think, compare and contrast etc.	Very few stage 4 type of questions
(v)	**Synthesis** – refers to the process of forming/creating an innovative and unique 'product' or a combination of ideas and thoughts which may materialize in verbal or physical form.	What would you predict/ infer from…; what ideas can you add to…; how would you create a new…; what could possibly happen if you combine…; what are the possible solutions to… etc.	Hardly any stage 5 type of questions
(vi)	**Evaluation** – refers to the process of making value decision on issues of concern or duty; solving contradictions and controversies; developing perspective, opinions, judgments and making decisions.	Do you agree…; what are your thoughts on…; what is the most important…; place the following in order of priority…; how would you decide…; what criteria would you enact to assess… etc.	Hardly any stage 6 type of questions

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In summary, an examination of the different types of questions found in most comprehension passages reveals that the questions posed do not require higher order levels of critical thinking skills and tend to focus mainly on students' ability to surface facts, to summarize, to select information and details, to explain in their own words, and to rephrase or retell. To enhance students' mastery of the English Language, this paper proposes an alternative taxonomy of questions related to the assessment of multimodal texts which addresses higher-order thinking skills according to Bloom's taxonomy (analysis, synthesis and evaluation).

The next part of the paper will provide a framework for multimodal assessment by first exploring how such an approach to assessment has been infused in other countries and how such a framework may address the two key concerns raised regarding issues of rigidity and emphasis on lower-order thinking questions in the assessment of reading comprehension.

A MULTIMODAL FRAMEWORK FOR READING COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT

The importance of including media text analysis in school assessment has, over the years, become even more pertinent to educators as this is seen as validating the importance of including real-world texts in classrooms thereby making teaching and learning more relevant. In the United Kingdom (UK), Media Studies flourished as a distinct subject in the GCSE examinations in the early 1990s (Hart and Hicks, 2002). An examination of two UK examination boards which administers the GCSE Media Studies curriculum reveals that both include the analysis and interpretation of media texts as a component for assessment.

The AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) which is the largest of three examination boards outline the assessment objectives in its 2009 Media Studies Specification. Specifically, the document states that students are to "analyze and evaluate a range of media texts, their distinctive forms and conventions, including their own media productions" (AQA, 2009, p. 10). The analysis of generic media codes is also included in the assessment objectives of the current OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations) Media Studies Specification. One difference however, is the emphasis on the "analysis and interpretation of how the languages of media texts create meaning" (OCR, 2005, p. 16). In addition, both the AQA and OCR specifications consider the importance of context in the analysis of media texts. The AQA specification, for example, requires students to consider issues of representation and the relationship between the production of media texts and its consumption. The OCR specification adopts a slightly different angle by requiring students to not only consider how the texts are presented and the processes of its construction but to do this through a comparative analysis with media texts of similar or differing forms.

Unlike the UK where Media Studies is positioned as a distinct subject in the curriculum, Canada adopts a different stance. Media Studies is not assessed as a separate subject. Rather, it is incorporated within the Language Arts curriculum. From 1989, following a Media Education Think Tank at Trent University, Media Education was mandated as a basic component of the Language Arts curricula in all provincial and territorial departments across Canada (Media Awareness Network, 2008, p. 1).

Similar to the assessment outcomes outlined in the UK Media Studies syllabus, the Canadian syllabus specifies the analysis of media texts including its language, forms and conventions. One key difference is that these skills are specifically categorized according to English Language skill discourse markers. For example, the British

Columbia's English Language Arts curricular outcomes for grades 11 and 12 provide descriptors for four progressive reading skill sets: Comprehension, Critical Analysis, Engagement, and Response (BC MOE, 2007, p. 1). Interestingly, these seem to correspond with the progression of skills in Bloom's taxonomy. For example, the first level deals with knowledge and comprehension of knowledge. With regards to the curriculum, students are asked to demonstrate an understanding of the main ideas, events and themes of the print or media text, as well as to interpret the subtleties and ambiguities in these texts. The second level progresses to a critical analysis of the text. In grade 11, students are asked to analyze the arguments in media texts as well as to compare and contrast how these ideas are presented in different texts. In grade 12, higher critical thinking skills are demanded and students are required to examine the arguments for its bias and evaluate its effectiveness. The third level, dealing with synthesis and evaluation, requires students to consolidate ideas from their analysis of these texts in order to provide an informed response through relating the issues raised in these texts to their own political and cultural contexts. The intention is for students to expand on the arguments by examining them from different perspectives.

Several interesting observations may be inferred from the inclusion of media analysis in the curricular assessment objectives in the United Kingdom and Canada. Essentially, there are three key outcomes that students must demonstrate:

1. Text analysis
2. Author analysis
3. Context analysis

These components may be illustrated in the following diagram.

Text analysis (Analysis of the content of the text)

Author analysis (Analysis of the construction of the text)

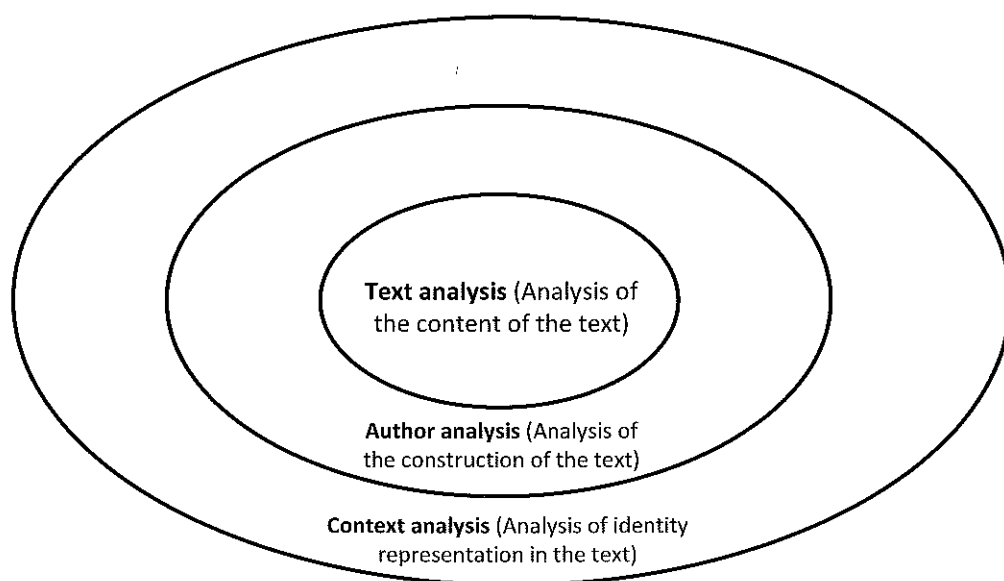**Context analysis** (Analysis of identity representation in the text)

Figure 1. Media analysis assessment outcomes

Figure 1 provides a framework for assessment outcomes as well as the types of reading skills students need to demonstrate in their analysis of media texts. These components reflect a recognition of the ways in which young peoples' engagements with multimodal texts have influenced their reading practices, particularly in two significant ways:

From Reading the Text to Reading the Construction of Text

Jewitt (2005) employs the term 'reconfiguration' to describe how the inclusion of image within print texts changes the dynamics of its reading so that design and compositional aspects of the text are surfaced. The result, according to Kress (2003), is that language and literacy have become partial barriers of meaning:

> The theoretical change is from linguistics to semiotics – from a theory that accounted for language alone to a theory that can account equally well for gesture, speech, image, writing, 3D objects, color, music and no doubt others. Within that theory, the language-modes – speech and writing – will also have to be dealt with semiotically, they are now part of the whole landscape of the many modes available for representation. (p. 36)

Semiotics, or the "science that studies the life of signs" (Saussure, 1974, p. 962), implicitly involves not just an analysis of the linguistic text, but the design or construction of the text as well. In other words, a reading of a multimodal text involves not just an understanding of the content (what the individual words or images mean) but also how they have been deliberately arranged by the author. Van Leeuwen (2005) terms this the concept of framing in which meaning is surfaced through the connection or disconnection of elements within the text. A critical reading of the text which may begin with the reader's analysis of the content of the text therefore progresses to an analysis of authorial intention in which the reader begins to interrogate the author regarding his/her decisions of textual design.

From De-constructing Text to Re-constructing Identity

A semiotic analysis of text cannot exist independently of the social and institutional structures. The construction of a multimodal text as well as the interpretation and use of it is shaped by cultural practices. Buckingham (2007) describes how the democratization of family relationships in England has influenced a media-rich 'bed-room culture' among youths who engage in chatroom conversations, social networking via online sites such as Facebook, video games etc. in the privacy of their rooms. Conversely, the way in which youths engage in visual and media texts also affect social practices and constructions of their identities. Vasudevan (2006) for example, has explored how for youths, "digital and visual modalities make it possible to perform and author new selves that are not only resistant to dominant images but that offer new sites of inquiry and exploration" (p. 8). A framework for critical reading therefore also needs to address concepts of representation, particularly how the identities of specific communities or groups are presented in texts and the validity of the interpretation of these groups.

In summary then, a framework for critical reading of multimodal texts would take into account the underlying notion that even though students begin with an analysis of a text, the text is never seen in isolation. Rather, at higher levels of analysis, the text is examined in the light of the author and the social and political context through which it has been constructed. The following section attempts to apply the three components of text analysis, author analysis and context analysis in a sample multimodal assessment paper and provide suggestions for the types of questions students may be assessed on.

1. Text analysis

The first stage begins with students demonstrating knowledge of the given text. Questions in this category may be placed in progressive levels of difficulty determined by two factors. The first refers to the degree to which the information required is implicit, hence requiring a higher level of inference. Questions related to subject matter and the identification of obvious information regarding the character or situation in the text belong to the lower, more literal category whereas questions requiring students to identify a particular word or idea and say what this connotes about the character or situation are more difficult since they require a higher degree of inference. The second factor refers to the degree of difficulty in selecting the information required. Less challenging questions may require students to identify a word or phrase that provides evidence to support a point whereas more challenging questions may require students to select relevant evidence from different parts of the text. As may be observed, the most difficult questions in this category would therefore be questions requiring students to both select information from parts of the text and then infer the implications on the character or situation in the text based on the patterns observed from the different evidence obtained.

Based on the media analysis assessment given in Appendix A, the progression of question types in the category of content analysis would be as follows (Note: these questions have been arranged according to progressive levels of difficulty):

i. **Theme/Subject** – This question deals with students' understanding of the main subject matter. The answer is usually most obvious.

> Example: What is the main product advertised? *Ans. Chiclets - chewing gum.*

ii. **Obvious content** – This question goes beyond a general understanding of the text and requires students to look for evidence by reading the text closely. However, such questions are still considered low-order because students are only required to identify one or two keywords.

> Example: According to the text, how is this product different from other types of chewing-gum? *Ans. It is "candy-coated".*

iii. **Inferred content** – This question requires students to think about the connotative meaning of particular words or phrases in the text. In addition, such questions may also require students to infer the reasons or intention behind a particular statement made by a character in the text or by the author himself.

> Example: Why does the writer associate the product to the fairy-world? *Ans. To appeal to children.*

iv. **Connected content** – In order to answer these questions, students must be able to locate information from different parts of the text. Sometimes, students will be required to find more than one evidence to support a point that is made. In this case, students must not only understand what is being asked but must also be able to locate ideas associated with the question keyword from various parts of the text. This question may be even more difficult with lengthier texts.

> Example: The author claims that the product provides 'joy' to children. Give three other words that are associated with this idea. *Ans. 'pleasing', 'delight', 'delightful'.*

v. Connected-inferred content – The difference between this question and the previous one is that students will be required to not only find the evidence but more importantly, interpret the evidence by suggesting the reasons or intention implied behind the different evidence observed. George Hillocks (1980) describes such questions as dealing with "Complex Implied Relationships". Such questions are more complex, he adds, because they involve "a large number of details which may simultaneously imply various patterns or sets of relationships" (p.57).

> Example: By analyzing the verbal and visual signs in the text, give two reasons why the author says that the product reflects "childhood joy". *Ans. Firstly, the image of the Chiclets candy falling into the mind of a happily contented child implies that because Chiclets is both candy and chewing gum, it therefore embodies the type of snack most children dream of. Secondly, the word 'vision' extends the idea of not just a dream-world but an ideal world, one in which the child has the freedom to choose the type of candy he enjoys, in this case, the Chiclets candy.*

2. Author analysis

While text analysis questions center on the text and the explicit or implicit information which may be derived from it, author analysis moves a step out of the domain of the text to consider the influence of the author. The main attitude of the reader, in this case, is a critical one, in which he views the text not as something which has evolved naturally but one that has been constructed by an author with a specific intention. Thus, key questions would deal with authorial intention followed by questions concerning stylistic techniques used by the author to achieve that intention. Once again, questions in this component may be seen in a progression according to increasing levels of difficulty:

i. Identification of explicit claim – This question deals with students' ability to identify the explicit claim that the author is making through the text. Here, the answer is usually obvious. Through answering these questions, students become more conscious of the author's intentions.

> Example: What is the advertisement claiming about the product? *Ans. Chiclets is a candy that "children dream of".*

ii. Identification of implicit claim – Sometimes a claim may be obvious, for example, in a slogan or statement in the text. At other times, the claim may be manifested in more subtle ways such as through the layout, visuals, colour, setting, and word associations in the text.

> Example: By analyzing the language and design of the text, say what the advertisement is suggesting about the product. *Ans. The image of the candy falling down on the sleeping child resembles thought-bubbles. It suggests that the product is not simply a candy but it presents an alternative world, an escape. This sense of magic is also conveyed in the concept of the fairy-world. The effect is to emphasize that the candy is different from the mundane, ordinary candies in real-life.*

iii. Analysis of arguments – The analysis of claims made by the author may occur at four levels:

a) Assumptions and speculation – this occurs when the points are made with insufficient supporting evidence.

b) Generalizations – this occurs when people or situations are classified or stereotyped into general categories without any in-depth exploration into the specificity of their circumstances and make-up.

c) Logical fallacy – this occurs when there is an absence of a logical link between the evidence given and the point made.

> Example: Give two reasons why you may find the claim in the advertisement problematic. *Ans. Firstly, the author makes a generalization in the statement that "Every child has a dream-world made of goodies". Here, he assumes that because many children love candies, it therefore represents their ideal-world. In fact, in many fairy tales, children are depicted as desiring more significant things such as love, power and significance. Secondly, there is a gap in the statement "In that dream-world Chiclets hold the throne of glory!" because the advertisement does not provide reasons why this is so. Although the author mentions that the candy is "dainty, piquantly, pleasing", these deal more with its visual description than with its taste.*

iv. Analysis of style – A more difficult question in this category requires students to identify the stylistic techniques used to convey an intended effect to the target group. In order to answer such questions, students must be familiar with linguistic and visual signs and codes. Questions concerning style can occur at two levels:

a) Language - students are expected to discuss the use of figurative language, word choice, word order, and other literary and linguistic techniques employed in the text.

b) Design – students are expected to discuss the overall layout, the development of the ideas as well as the link between image and words in the text.

> Example: Discuss how the author attempts to make the product appealing to the target group through the use of language and design. *Ans. The author employs metaphors through the notions of 'throne' and 'crowning' which convey the product's leadership in the candy market as well as ideals of elegance and sophistication. The falling of the candy which trails the outline of the curtains surrounding the text creates a circular effect. The circular design is effective in conveying the fluidity and vibrancy of this dream world which is ironically juxtaposed against the sleeping child.*

3. Context analysis

The final component of the multimodal framework for assessment moves one step further, beyond the text and its author, to viewing both in the larger context of its historical influence, the present society, and the larger world. There is, of course, the danger that questions in this category may be too broad. For example, concerns may be raised regarding how wide this context should be as well as how far back in time we should go in order to examine the factors which have influenced the text. A better way of tackling this component is not to consider the historical background of the text and the political or economic factors which influence the creation of such a text since this information may not be easily accessible to students nor would they have the sufficient knowledge to tackle such questions during test conditions. Instead, students could be encouraged to propose alternative perspectives to the text. These perspectives would deal with issues of audience representation (who is present and who is absent), and issues of thematic representation (who is presenting this information, the agenda behind it, and what alternative perspectives to this theme may be absent).

Questions concerning context analysis are more challenging questions since students will be required to utilize knowledge from earlier components regarding what the text is implying, its claims, the assumptions made, the ambiguities in its arguments and use these to consider the gaps which have not been addressed. In addition, students must be familiar with the genre or form of the text and will therefore require a good degree of maturity in order to consider the different perspectives

they may take in reading the text. In essence, while tackling these questions, students are, in actual fact, considering the ways particular groups and communities have been represented in the text and what values are surfaced as a result.

i. Analysis of audience representation – Students must first identify who the text is targeted at. Note that the target group of a text may be different from the target group of a product. For example, cereals are targeted at children but often, cereal advertisements are targeted at parents. The different target audiences may be categorized according to:

a) Age group e.g. teenagers, the elderly
b) Gender
c) Race
d) Political associations e.g. potential neutral voters before an election
e) Shared interests e.g. single housewives who enjoy watching soap operas
f) Membership to a particular community or society e.g. animal lovers community

Analysis of audience representation is based on the important principle that there is no such thing as a neutral text. This means that all texts are written by someone, from one angle, for a specific purpose. Students could examine audience representation in the light of three areas:

a) **Focus** – what or who is our attention directed to?

b) **Exclusion** – what or who has been excluded from the text?

c) **Voice** – who has written the text and what are the key values implicit in it?

> Example: What ideals do the author associate with the target audience in the text and which group has been excluded from participation in these ideals? *Ans. The text, produced in 1919 in Britain, was probably targeted at children from white, upper middle class families. This can be observed in the elegant Victorian design of the advertisement and the image of the child asleep on what appears to be a bed typically found in more well-to-do homes. In the text, the ideal world of these children are represented by ideas of power (magic - 'fairy), peace ('delightful', 'joy'), civility ('dainty') and self-pleasure ('piquantly', 'pleasing'). These values seem to support the stable hegemony of elite classes rather than working class groups which may value other ideals such as hard work, filial piety and justice.*

ii. Analysis of thematic representation – Aside from analyzing who is represented, the value system associated with this particular group, and who is excluded from the world presented in the text, students can also explore the themes depicted in the text. In emphasizing visual and linguistic appreciation of texts, students may sometimes become de-sensitized and unaware that texts are constructed to create a desired effect on the reader. For example, advertisements are typically written to persuade the target consumer to purchase the product. Often, the product is portrayed in a positive and even seemingly innocent light. In recent years, some organizations however, have taken action against the perceived neutrality of texts through events such as the Ad-buster campaign. Here, the design or language of the text is slightly altered to give an ironic perspective to the issues presented. The aim is to make consumers aware of possible dangers of the product. For example, a soft drink advertisement which shows a person enjoying a refreshing drink with the slogan, "A cool drink for anyone with thirst!" could be presented differently. Perhaps the persona could be presented with a bulging tummy and the slogan would now read, "A fool's drink for anyone with thirst!" Students could examine thematic representation in the light of these questions:

a) **Product association** — what value, habit, skill or lifestyle is this product associated with?

b) **Possible effects of the product** — what are some of the positive as well as harmful effects this product may have on consumers who over-use it?

c) **Alternative perspective** — how can this text be given a more balanced perspective, providing both the pros and the cons of the product? What other information has been excluded and what information should therefore be included?

> Example: Imagine that you are designing an advertisement for a new type of candy that is sugar-free and helps children fight against obesity. Invent a brand name for this candy and design an advertisement that will persuade parents to buy this alternative candy. Your advertisement must include:
>
> i) A slogan
> ii) A brief persuasive description of the product
> iii) A sketch of the layout and visual design
> iv) The product logo and brand name
>
> Write a one paragraph reflection on your advertisement, the techniques you employed, and the effectiveness of these techniques.

Unlike the other types of questions asked, this question requires students to apply the knowledge learnt about the text, the author, audience representation, and then to synthesize this knowledge in the creation of their own text. Students will then be required to evaluate their work and even make comparisons between their text and the original text. Students may be assessed on the content of their text, the creativity of their presentation, and the depth of analytical thought involved in conceptualizing their original text.

In summary, this chapter began with an examination of typical English Language comprehension paper assessed in Singapore and surfaced two concerns. Firstly, the passages tended to be predictable and limited to specific text structures. Secondly, although questions reached the analytical stage of Bloom's taxonomy, there was much greater emphasis on the lower-order knowledge and comprehension questions (stages 1 and 2 of Bloom's Taxonomy). The higher-order questions which require students to synthesize and evaluate the text were excluded. The paper then proposed a framework that could be applied to multimodal texts as a new form of assessment that would be relevant to contemporary visual youth culture. The aim would be to train students in critical literacy skills rather than to train them to handle familiar text-types. Hence, the type of passages selected would include a range of texts from information reports to print advertisements, billboards, fashion magazines, music covers, movie posters etc. which do not conform to any particular text-type structure. This framework was then translated into a progression of question types dealing with the content of the text, the stylistic techniques employed by the author in constructing the text, and the issues of audience representation and perspective that could be raised from the text. In answering these different questions, students would have to utilize their knowledge of both verbal and visual signs and codes. Discussions at this level also tended to deal with the higher-order synthesis and evaluative skills in Bloom's taxonomy.

In conclusion, the inclusion of such a framework in the classroom would allow students to grasp the meta-language of texts and to think about the effects of language and visual signs on particular readers. The result is that students may become more informed readers and gain a deeper understanding of the text's meaning, style, structure, and effects. The key challenge is that such a framework for assessment involves a paradigm shift in the mindset of educators who may be comfortable in the teaching of 'templates' revolving around rigid text forms and may

be accustomed to designing questions which adhere to conventional questions in the knowledge and comprehension domains. However, when educators become more open to multimodal forms of assessment, they may find that their students will be better able to connect and utilize reading skills learnt and assessed in the classroom to critically read other forms of texts in the real world.

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APPENDIX A

MULTIMODAL SAMPLE ASSESSMENT PAPER FOR THE
READING COMPREHENSION PAPER

Critical Reading activity
Instructions to students: Answer all the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper and submit this at the end of the test. Duration: 45mins.

(1919 Chiclets advertisement)

Questions　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**[TOTAL SCORE: 50 marks]**

1) What is the main product advertised? [1 mark]

2) According to the text, how is this product different from other types of [1 mark] chewing-gum?

3) Why does the writer associate the product to the fairy-world? [1 mark]

4) The author claims that the product provides 'joy' to children. Give three other [2 marks] words that are associated with this idea.

5) By analyzing the verbal and visual signs, give two reasons why the author says [2 marks] that the product reflects "childhood joy".

6) What is the advertisement claiming about the product? [1 mark]

7) By analyzing the language and design of the text, say what the advertisement [2 marks] is suggesting about the product.

8) Give two reasons why you may find the claim in the advertisement [4 marks] problematic.

9) Discuss how the author attempts to make the product appealing to the target [5 marks] group through the use of language and design.

10) What ideals do the author associate with the target audience in the text and [6 marks] which group has been excluded from participation in these ideals?

11) Vocabulary [5 marks]
Give the meaning of the following words:
i) Particularly　　　ii) Confections　　　iii) Dainty
iv) Piquantly　　　v) Delightful

12) Creative writing [20 marks]
Imagine that you are designing an advertisement for a new type of candy that is sugar-free and helps children fight against obesity. Invent a brand name for this candy and design an advertisement that will persuade parents to buy this alternative candy. Your advertisement must include:
　　i) A slogan
　　ii) A brief persuasive description of the product
　　iii) A sketch of the layout and visual design
　　iv) The product logo and brand name
Write a one paragraph reflection on your advertisement, the techniques you employed and the effectiveness of these techniques.