 PETAL scaffold on Benang

Focus on writing – Essay

P.E.T.A.L. scaffold on Benang by Kim Scott

Benang ISBN 9782742738137

Benang is a novel by indigenous writer Kim Scott. The novel explores the problem of self-identity faced by light-skinned Aboriginal people; how language can contribute to empowerment and the process of growing up.

Write an informative PETAL paragraph explaining the significance of setting in shaping individual identity. Choose one of the following focus questions to guide your response.

Focus questions

* How does language give you a frame of reference for who you are?
* How does language construct identity and culture?
* How does Scott use language to express the emotions of the character?

Structure

* Point – What point are you trying to make in your essay? This should be related to the question. It is your overall thesis statement.
* Example – Provide a brief one sentence or less example from the text that represents your point.
* Technique – Explain the technique evident in the example you have provided.
* Analyse – Provide a brief analysis of the technique, explaining how it impacts the responder and creates meaning.
* Link – Link your ideas back to your main point, sum up your argument in the paragraph.

Sentence starters

Related to question 1

How does language give you a frame of reference for who you are?

* Point – A frame of reference is… Language gives you a frame of reference for who you are because…
* Example – The idea that language guides your existence is illustrated in the extract Benang… (insert quote)
* Technique – Through his use of [insert technique], Scott draws our attention to the character’s experience of…
* Analyse – In using a [insert technique], Scott enables the audience to question their perspective about…
* Link – Through the character’s experience of… it is highlighted that (restate your main point)

See over page for a sample PETAL paragraph response

Model response

Related to question 2 – how does language construct identity and culture?

Sample response

The way that one uses language is significant in constructing one’s identity and culture. Language is linked to views of individuality and place in the world and it is how tradition is passed down through generations. Scott’s novel Benang demonstrates that language contributes to the heritage of indigenous people through the process of elders sharing memories of the past. As the protagonist sits around the campfire listening to his Uncle Will tell childhood stories, he marvels that ‘we assumed the story had been handed to him and not that he was possessed of a most remarkable memory’. The inclusive use of ‘we’ creates a sense of unity among the persona and other young people listening to the story of Uncle Will. It also conveys their scepticism at the ability of their elder to ‘possess a remarkable memory’. While indigenous culture has a strong tradition of oral storytelling, Uncle Will is an unlikely medium for storytelling as a hapless, seemingly ill-educated character. Yet as Uncle Will conveys his experience as a young child through a flashback, the persona comes to understand how their identity is linked with the land and inherently tied to culture. This challenges the audience to contemplate the way that language has been passed down across generations to share stories about culture and ultimately shape one’s individual identity.

Sample annotated response

| Structure | Annotated response |
| --- | --- |
| Point | The way that one uses language is significant in constructing one’s identity and culture. Language is linked to views of individuality and place in the world and it is how tradition is passed down through generations. |
| Example | Scott’s novel Benang demonstrates that language contributes to the heritage of indigenous people through the process of elders sharing memories of the past. As the protagonist sits around the campfire listening to his Uncle Will tell childhood stories, he marvels that ‘we assumed the story had been handed to him and not that he was possessed of a most remarkable memory.’ |
| * Technique | Within the analysis the techniques are evident:   * inclusive use of ‘we’ * scepticism * flashback |
| Analyse | The inclusive use of ‘we’ creates a sense of unity among the persona and other young people listening to the story of Uncle Will. It also conveys their scepticism at the ability of their elder to ‘possess a remarkable memory’. While indigenous culture has a strong tradition of oral storytelling, Uncle Will is an unlikely medium for storytelling as a hapless, seemingly ill-educated character. Yet as Uncle Will conveys his experience as a young child through a flashback, the persona comes to understand how their identity is linked with the land and inherently tied to culture. |
| Link | This challenges the audience to contemplate the way that language has been passed down across generations to share stories about culture and ultimately shape one’s individual identity. |

Student centred activities

1. Order the following sentences chronologically. Identify the structure and label them with P.E.T.A.L.
2. Identify areas for improvement. What parts of the writing could be further explained? Are the techniques analysed in enough detail?
3. Re-write this paragraph with your adjustments, strengthening the structure and content of the P.E.T.A.L.

Note – PETAL is not intended as a rigid structure but rather a framework for students to work with when organising their academic writing. Rather than PETAL, they could follow the structure PET/A T/A L or mix around the sentences.