

Epreuve écrite

Examen de fin d'études secondaires 2012

Section: B, C, D, E, F, G

Branche: anglais

Numéro d'ordre du candidat

'Soap operas with a social plot' by Sarika Bansal

Every Sunday evening, seven million Kenyans sit in front of their television sets to watch 'Makutano Junction', a soap opera set in a fictional village. In one episode, audiences watch as Mama Mboga holds her crying infant. 'I need some money to take Joni to hospital,' she tells her husband, Erasmus, after he wakes up and takes a swig from a bottle. 'I think he has malaria.' Erasmus insists that his son is healthy, that she is overreacting, and that he has no money to give her. (...) When Joni gets sicker, Mama Mboga takes him to hospital, but he dies even before seeing the doctor. (...)

As with traditional soap operas, the above story line is full of emotion, conflict and suspense. (...) The difference with this narrative is that it deals with a crucial social issue. By placing characters in situations not uncommon to the audience, producers hope viewers will think twice before spending money on alcohol rather than on lifesaving medicine.

'Makutano Junction' is not unique. Around the world, from North India to South Africa, there are dozens of television and radio shows that weave social themes into entertaining narratives, a technique often referred to as 'entertainment-education'. Writers develop fictional characters that model positive or negative behaviours, and through their stories and struggles the audiences learn about issues ranging from domestic abuse to personal bankruptcy.

Successful soaps tend to be smartly written, with plot twists and love triangles. In the best-case scenario, the show becomes popular, and viewers begin to incorporate some of the themes into their lives. 'We've used storytelling that combines engagement and learning for thousands of years', said Arvind Singhal, professor of communications at the University of Texas, El Paso. But the intentional placement of educational messages in mass media is relatively recent, he added. (...)

In South Africa, the long-running series 'Soul City' has 12 million viewers who are almost four times as likely to use condoms as others. In Saint Lucia, the radio drama 'Apwé Plézi' ('After the Pleasure') became so popular that producers had to set up a separate helpline for people requesting information on family planning. (...)

Successful socially conscious soaps have a few things in common. One is a good topic. 'The big human issues resonate well,' said Garth Japhet, creator of 'Soul City'. Anything related to sexuality, violence or substance abuse, he says, usually contain the conflict and emotion required for a good soap opera. It's also important to make the educational content a seamless part of the story. 'The drama will always relate around the relationships between characters, never about the issue itself,' said Lindsey Wahlstrom, PCI Media Impact's communications manager. 'You don't think, This [soap opera] is about deforestation. You think, Will Felipe and Elena get together at the end of this?' A safe-sex message, for example, is more powerful if H.I.V. isn't an abstract idea but something that happens to a beloved character.

Successful producers also emphasize the importance of working with local organizations to make sure that the audience can act on the soap's message. Without a window into ground realities, soaps may inadvertently point people to services that do not exist. 'How do you, for example, get persons to say they want to use condoms, but then there are no condoms available?' asked Alleyne Regis, the creator of 'Apwé Plézi.'

On-screen, a good soap requires relatable characters and believable story lines. At the back end, it needs dedicated writers, supportive producers and considerable financial resources. (...) When these elements come together, Japhet said, 'soaps can be a real catalyst for social change.' (599 words)

(abridged and adapted from *The Global Edition of the New York Times*, Friday, February 17, 2012)



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Comprehension (30 marks)

1. Explain the idea of 'entertainment-education'. (8 m.)
2. What are the ingredients of a good socially conscious soap? (10 m.)
3. How effective are some of the soaps the author mentions? (6 m.)
4. Why is a 'window into ground realities' necessary? (6 m.)

Development (30 marks)

Write a well-structured essay of 250-350 words on the following topic:

'Films are great tools for manipulation, brainwashing and propaganda.' Discuss.

Indicate the number of words used.

