



ATAR course examination, 2024

LITERATURE

TEXT BOOKLET

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Text A Drama

This is an extract from the play *Brainstorm* by Ned Glasier and Emily Lim. It was published in 2016.

A note on the play

The play is performed on a simple white stage, surrounded by plain wooden furniture: drawers, cabinets, bedside tables, a large wardrobe and a bed with a white duvet cover and pillows. Cables from the theatre hang from above, linked to white four-way plug adaptors that seem to connect to the back of the set. Music plays from a mobile phone connected to a portable speaker on one of the cabinets ...

... As the cast arrive onstage they use their mobile phones to communicate with each other using WhatsApp. At various points in the play they project their phones on to the wardrobe, revealing their screens to the audience. During the play the cast talk openly to the audience and stage manager.

Introduction

Gracia walks on stage. She speaks to the audience.

Gracia Hello. So.

Jack enters. He sits down and takes out his phone. Throughout the scene, whenever someone enters, they take out their phone and sit sending messages to each other via a central WhatsApp group, commenting on how they're feeling, what's happening in the show, and the audience.

That's Jack. *(To the audience.)* Look at him. What do you think of him? Do you like him? What do you think is going on in his head, right now? Jack's thirteen. He's the youngest one here. He hates that. Don't you, Jack? Jack used to live in Singapore, but now he lives in Finsbury Park. When we first did this play in January he had quite a high voice, but now it's getting really deep. Say something, Jack.

Jack doesn't say anything.

Say something.

Jack says whatever pops into his head.

Gracia Say something longer.

Jack No.

Gracia Look at his little face.

Serafina enters.

That's Serafina. Serafina's fourteen. Serafina once locked herself in her room for a whole week and only spoke to her mum by text message. She's got this type of epilepsy – so she might like have a seizure for a few seconds or something during the show ... so, yeah. Oh, and she is totally in love with Benedict Cumberbatch.

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Serafina He has this eye thing, like one eye is a different colour to the other eye.

Noah enters.

Gracia This is Noah. He's fifteen.

Noah Hi. Hello.

Gracia Noah hates sitting still. Last year he broke into a construction site and hung off the scaffolding on the third floor – cos he's an idiot.

Michael enters.

That's Michael. He's fifteen too. Whenever Michael does anything stupid, his mum tells him she's going to send him back to Nigeria to live in a village with no shoes.

Michael *(To an audience member.)* She never does though.

Gracia This is a play about us. It's about our brains. And it's about you. Twenty years ago scientists thought that teenage brains were the same as adult brains, but like really rubbish versions of them. Scientists thought teenagers were just crap adults. Most people thought teenagers were just crap adults. In fact, most people still do.

Tyrel enters.

This is Tyrel. He's sixteen. So then scientists started using these machines called MRI machines to scan people's brains and they learned loads more about them. And they found out that teenagers aren't actually crap adults. They found out that our brains are different to adult brains and that that's okay, that's a good thing, they're meant to be like that.

Beat.

Tyrel does this wicked impression of a caterpillar. Do it, Tyrel.

Tyrel Shut up.

Michael Do it.

Tyrel I'm not doing it.

Gracia And so scientists now know that teenage brains are different for a reason, but if you go and ask people in the street or teachers or bus drivers or politicians or parents or the security guards that follow us around in shops, I bet they don't know that. We know. And we think you should know.

Sama and Doyin enter.

That's Sama. And that's Doyin. They're both sixteen. Doyin's like really clever, she won this speech competition and she's Head Girl and she's Nigerian, like Michael, and she's a really good singer. Sama has thousands of followers on Twitter, but they're all One Direction fans so they don't count. She's really good at doing her make-up. She hasn't left the house without make-up on since she was eleven. In Sama's brain there are eighty-six billion neurons. A neuron is a cell that sends information. In your brain, and your brain, and your brain right now, there are eighty-six billion neurons. Everyone has eighty-six billion neurons. Even Michael does. In Serafina's brain, right now, there are neurons sending loads of information about Benedict Cumberbatch's eyes. Whenever you think of something, or do something, or look at your phone, or dance to some sick tune, or think about someone really fit –

Serafina Like Benedict Cumberbatch.

Gracia Whenever you do *anything* your neurons get connected up. They get connected up by these things called synapses.

Yaamin enters.

That's Yaamin. Yaamin's sixteen. He's trying to grow facial hair but it's not really working out for him. He once had a massive fight with his mum because he bought the wrong kind of chicken from the supermarket.

Yaamin *(To an audience member.)* It was just a ... chicken.

Gracia And what scientists know now is that by the time you start puberty –

Noah Like Jack.

Jack looks up.

Gracia By the time you're like Jack – There are some parts of your brain that have way too many connections – loads and loads and loads of synapses. You've grown all these connections – it's called sprouting – and your brain is like really messy. When you become a teenager you've got more connections in some parts of your brain than you'll ever have again.

Segen enters.

This is Segen. Segen's going to be seventeen next week. She met her dad for the first time like a year ago. She's genuinely worried she might be addicted to her mobile phone. I'm Gracia. I'm eighteen. I'm the oldest one here.

They are all still on their phones.

Look at us. What do you think of us? What do you think we're thinking about right now?

Beat.

Do you want to see?

Pause. Clicks and notifications. Gracia is on her phone for a moment.

This is WhatsApp.

Her phone screen appears on the wardrobe behind her.

It's a messaging app. It's like texting, but it's free. And our parents aren't on it so it's better. Since the play started we've sent all these messages to each other.

She scrolls back through the messages the cast have sent one another since the beginning of the show. As we read them, the cast continue to send messages to the group. Gracia puts her phone away.

Look at us.

Text B Poetry

This poem was written by Sarah Holland-Batt. It was published in the anthology *The Jaguar* in 2022.

The Jaguar

It shone like an insect in the driveway:
iridescent emerald, out-of-season Christmas beetle.
Metallic flecks in the paint like riverbed tailings,
squeaking doeskin seats. *Bottle green*, my father called it,
or else *forest*. A folly he bought without test-driving,
vintage 1980 XJ¹, a rebellion against his tremor.
The sole bidder, he won the auction without trying
the day after the doctor told him to draw a line
under his driving years. My mother didn't speak
for weeks. It gleamed on the terracotta drive,
wildcat forever lunging on the hood²,
predatory chrome snagging in the sun,
ornament of my father's madness,
miraculous and sleek, until he started to tinker,
painted the leather seats with acrylic
so they peeled and cracked, jacked the gearstick,
hacked a hole into the dash with a Stanley knife,
jury-rigged³ the driver's seat so it sat so low
you couldn't see over the dash. For months
he drove it even though my mother begged,
he drove it as though he was punishing her,
dangerously fast on the back roads, then
opened up the engine on the highway, full
throttle, even though he was going blind in one eye,
even though my mother and I refused to get in,
and for the first time in years my father
was happy—he was happy to be driving,
he was happy my mother and I
were miserable. Finally his modifications
killed it, the car he always wanted and waited
so long to buy, and it sat like a carcass
in the garage, like a headstone, like a coffin—
but it's no symbol or metaphor. I can't make anything of it.

¹ A desirable but not particularly valuable model of Jaguar (a car).

² Jaguar cars are known for their hood ornament depicting a leaping, chrome jaguar.

³ Thrown together quickly or poorly with materials available. Sometimes written as 'jerry-rigged'.

Text C Prose Fiction

This is an extract from the novel *The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See. It was published in 2019.

An old woman sits on the beach, a cushion strapped to her bottom, sorting algae that's washed ashore. She's used to spending time in the water, but even on land she's vigilant to the environment around her. Jeju is her home, an island known for Three Abundances: wind, stones, and women. Today the most capricious of these – the wind – is but a gentle breeze. Not a single cloud smudges the sky. The sun warms her head, neck, and back through her bonnet and other clothing. So soothing. Her house perches on the rocky shoreline overlooking the sea. It doesn't look like much – just two small structures made from native stone, but the location ... Her children and grandchildren have suggested she allow them to convert the buildings into a restaurant and bar. "Oh Granny, you'll be rich. You'll never have to work again." One of her neighbors did as the younger generation asked. Now that woman's home is a guesthouse and an Italian restaurant. On Young-sook's beach. In her village. She will never let that happen to her house. "There isn't enough money in all the pockets in all Korea to make me leave," Young-sook has said many times. How could she? Her house is the nest where she hides the joy, laughter, sorrows, and regrets of her life.

She is not alone in her work on the beach. Other women around her age – in their eighties and nineties – also pick through the algae that has come to rest on the sand, putting what's saleable in small bags and leaving the rest. Up on the walkway that separates this cove from the road, young couples – honeymooners, probably – walk hand in hand, heads together, sometimes even kissing, in front of everyone, in broad daylight. She sees a tourist family, clearly from the mainland. The children and husband are so obvious in their matching polka-dot T-shirts and lime-green shorts. The wife wears the same polka-dot T-shirt, but otherwise every bit of her skin is protected from the sun by long pants, sleeve guards, gloves, hat, and a cloth mask. Children from the village climb over the rocks that spill across the sand and into the sea. Soon they're playing in the shallow depths, giggling, and challenging each other to be the first to reach the deepest rock, locate a piece of sea glass, or find a sea urchin, if they're lucky enough to spot one. She smiles to herself. How differently life will unfurl for these young ones ...

She also observes other people – some not even trying to hide their curiosity – who stare at her before shifting their gazes to some of the other old women on the shore today. Which granny looks the nicest? The most accessible? What those people don't understand is that Young-sook and her friends are appraising them too. Are they scholars, journalists, or documentarians? Will they pay? Will they be knowledgeable about the haenyeo⁴ – sea women? They'll want to take her photo. They'll shove a microphone in her face and ask the same predictable questions: "Do you consider yourself a granny of the sea? Or do you think of yourself more like a mermaid?" "The government labels the haenyeo a cultural heritage treasure – something dying out that must be preserved, if only in memory. How does it feel to be the last of the last?" If they're academics, they'll want to talk about Jeju's matrifocal culture, explaining, "It's not a matriarchy. Rather, it's a society *focused* on women." Then they'll begin to probe: "Were you really in charge in your household? Did you give your husband an allowance?" Often she'll get a young woman who'll ask the question Young-sook's heard discussed her entire life. "Is it better to be a man or a woman?" No matter what the inquiry, she always answers the same way: "I was the best haenyeo!" She prefers to leave it at that. When a visitor persists, Young-sook will say gruffly, "If you want to know about me, go to the Haenyeo Museum. You can see my photo. You can watch the video about me!" If they *still* won't go ... Well, then, she becomes even more direct. "Leave me alone! I have work to do!"

⁴ Haenyeo: the 'women of the sea' are a culture of the island of Jeju, South Korea. Since the 17th century when men were conscripted to the army, the women of the island have been responsible for diving for seafood such as molluscs and kelp. Today, most haenyo are over 50 years old and are known for their ability to dive to depths of 30 metres and hold their breath for minutes at a time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Text A Drama** Glasier, N., Lim, E., & Company Three. (2016). *Brainstorm* [Playscript]. Retrieved April, 2024, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781784604103.00000004>
- Text B Poetry** Holland-Batt, S. (2022). *The Jaguar* [Poem]. University of Queensland Press, p. 42.
- Text C Prose** See, L. (2019). *The Island of Sea Women*. Scribner, pp. 3–4.

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