

SECTION

8

LITERATURE

LITERATURE OF THE GHANAIAN LANGUAGE

Oral Literature and Written Literature

INTRODUCTION

This section discusses concepts under oral and written literature of a Ghanaian language. You will be introduced to the idea of libation under oral literature. You will be introduced to their significance and how they are performed. Discussions also focus on the importance of prayer, and why we make prayers. You will be encouraged to contribute to finding out why libation prayer is important among your people. This section is essential for you in the context of Ghanaian language studies and to establish links with related subjects such as Religious Studies. The section will equip you with the requisite skills to appreciate your culture and the cultures of other groups. The section also introduces you to the concept of funeral dirge among the Ghanaian community. You will be taken through a discussion on the funeral dirges among your people. You will look at some texts on some funeral dirges. Discussions will focus on the functions of the dirge. In addition, this section introduces you to the concept and elements of prose. Your teacher will facilitate discussions on the different elements of prose, which will include characters, themes, plot, setting, point of view and others.

At the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explore the structure of libation in the respective Ghanaian Languages (invocation, message, and conclusion)
- Discuss dirges (functions and significance)
- Discuss the elements of prose (e.g., characters, theme, plot, setting, point of view, etc.).
- Appreciate prose texts (title, theme, diction, literary devices, etc.)

Key Ideas

- Libation is a traditional prayer
- There are three main stages in the performance of libation, namely: Invocation, Message and Conclusion
- The theme is the general idea of a story
- The plot is the sequence of events in a story
- The setting is information about where the story occurs and the time of the story
- The point of view is the perspective from which a story is written
- Dirges serve as rites of passage, admittance of loss, purgatory, medium of request, vehicle for the conveyance of feelings, etc.

Libation

The discussions will focus on the three main parts constituting the structure of libation. It takes into consideration the invocation, the message and the conclusion.

What is Libation?

Libation is an act of pouring liquid as a sacrifice to a deity. It is a form of prayer performed by people in a traditional religion. Ayim-Aboagye (1993: 165 as cited in 1996:9) states that it is an activity whereby water, alcohol or any beverage, such as wine is poured on the ground with the intention of invoking the spirits and requesting their assistance. In some areas, grains such as rice are used to perform libation. Libation performances play an important role in African societies. Through the libation, ancestors who are seen as an integral part of society are invited to all public functions. Libation in Ghana can be performed by family heads and traditional leaders at traditional occasions such as child naming, marriage, festivals, enskinment or enstoolment, and other similar occasions.

Activity 8.1

Watch the following videos of libations in different communities. Note down what you notice about the structure of a libation then check your understanding with the information below.

Ga Libation video : <https://youtu.be/X9wBlgwzHn4>

Akan Libation video : <https://youtu.be/ZNJ6Fw2-flk>

The Structure of a Libation

The structure of libation comprises **invocation**, **message** and **conclusion**.

The invocation

Invocation is the stage where the deities are recognised and called upon. The person performing the libation starts by calling the Supreme Being first, followed by the gods of the land, the lesser gods, and then the ancestors. Invocation in the libation text serves as the call or knocking at the door of the Supreme Being or spirit to create awareness. For example, find below an invocation of a traditional prayer among Dagbamba.

*Kpɛɛɛlana Naawuni, A kom m-bɛɛɛ!
Daboli ɛɛɛ lana, a kom m-bɛɛɛ!
M ba Sibiri, yiɛɛɛ deegi a kom.
A yi neei nyin neei a ba Danaa.
Ka o gba neei ti yaba Bidira.
Yi saa kom m-bɛɛɛ.*

Almighty God, this is your water!
Owner of the land, this is your water!
Father Sibiri, wake up and take your water.
If you wake up, wake your father Danaa.
And he will wake up our grandfather Bidira.
This is your rainwater.

The Message

The message in a libation presents the purpose of performing that libation. This may be a request or an appreciation. At this stage, the person performing the libation tells the deities the reason for calling on them and seeks their presence for the duration of the occasion. This is where the performer seeks their protection.

The Conclusion

This part of the libation is meant to thank the ancestors or make a promise to offer something to the ancestors or gods after granting their request. The performers also ask the deities to throw curses at those who have any bad intentions for the occasion. The performer also asks for blessings from the deities to be bestowed on those doing good for society. In some situations, such as purification, a sacrifice is offered at this stage. The pictures below are examples of libation sessions among a particular group of people in Ghana.



Fig. 8.1: The message in a libation



Fig. 8.2: The invocation

Items used in performing libation

The items used differ from culture to culture but some include Calabash, water, wine, rice, palm wine or hard liquor and glass cups.



Fig. 8.3: Items used in performing libation

Activity 8.2

State the title of the person who performs libation in your community and share your answer with a colleague from a different community.

Significance of Libation

Libation like any other religious prayer is significant to the performers as follows:

1. It gives homage to the Supreme Being
2. It gives homage to the lesser gods and the ancestors
3. It binds members of the audience by emphasizing their common roots
4. It is a performance of oratorical skills
5. It serves as a demonstration of cultural and historical knowledge
6. It shows reverence to a relative or friend who has passed on
7. It serves as a ground for learning new vocabulary
8. It makes people effective communicators

Activity 8.3

1. Explain the significance of libation in your own words and read your answer to the class
2. Identify any 2 occasions on which libation is performed in your community. Share your response with your colleagues.

Activity 8.4

1. Watch a YouTube video on a libation performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9wBlgwzHn4&t=19s>
2. Describe the costumes of the person who was performing the libation.
3. Mention 3 items that were used to perform the libation.

Activity 8.5

Form a group with 4-5 of your colleagues in class. role-play the performance of a libation. One person should lead the libation and the others should assist. Write your script/ stage actions as a group before performing. Make sure that the invocation, message and conclusion are clearly defined. Be ready to perform in the class!

Extended Reading

Dzata, E. (2022). Theological and Philosophical Significance of Libation (Traditional Prayer) Among Indigenous Mafi-Ewe People of Ghana. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(9), 57-63. [https://indianapublications.com/articles/IJHSS_3\(9\)_57-63_63355503c7fa44.50663845.pdf](https://indianapublications.com/articles/IJHSS_3(9)_57-63_63355503c7fa44.50663845.pdf)

Dirges

Thinking question:

What does it feel like when you lose a relative?

What is a Dirge?

The term is derived from the Latin word, 'Dirige.' It is a song or hymn of grief and lamentation, especially, one intended to accompany funeral or memorial rites. It is also defined as a slow, solemn, and mournful piece of music. Dirge as a song is classified as poetry. In other words, a dirge is a poem that can be used to praise the dead person. Dirges serve as a rite of passage for the departed as they leave one state of existence for another.

Functions of dirges

In African culture, dirges have many functions. Some of these functions include;

1. Used to mourn the dead.
2. Used to bid farewell to the deceased.
3. Used to communicate an important message.

4. Used as a medium of request on behalf of the dead (in purgatory).
5. Used as a vehicle for conveying emotions.

Significance of dirges

Below are some of the significances of a dirge;

1. It serves as a praise and honour for the dead
2. It serves as a link between the past and the present, the living and the dead
3. It serves as an admission of loss
4. It shows an unbroken family relationship
5. It serves as a purgatory for the dead

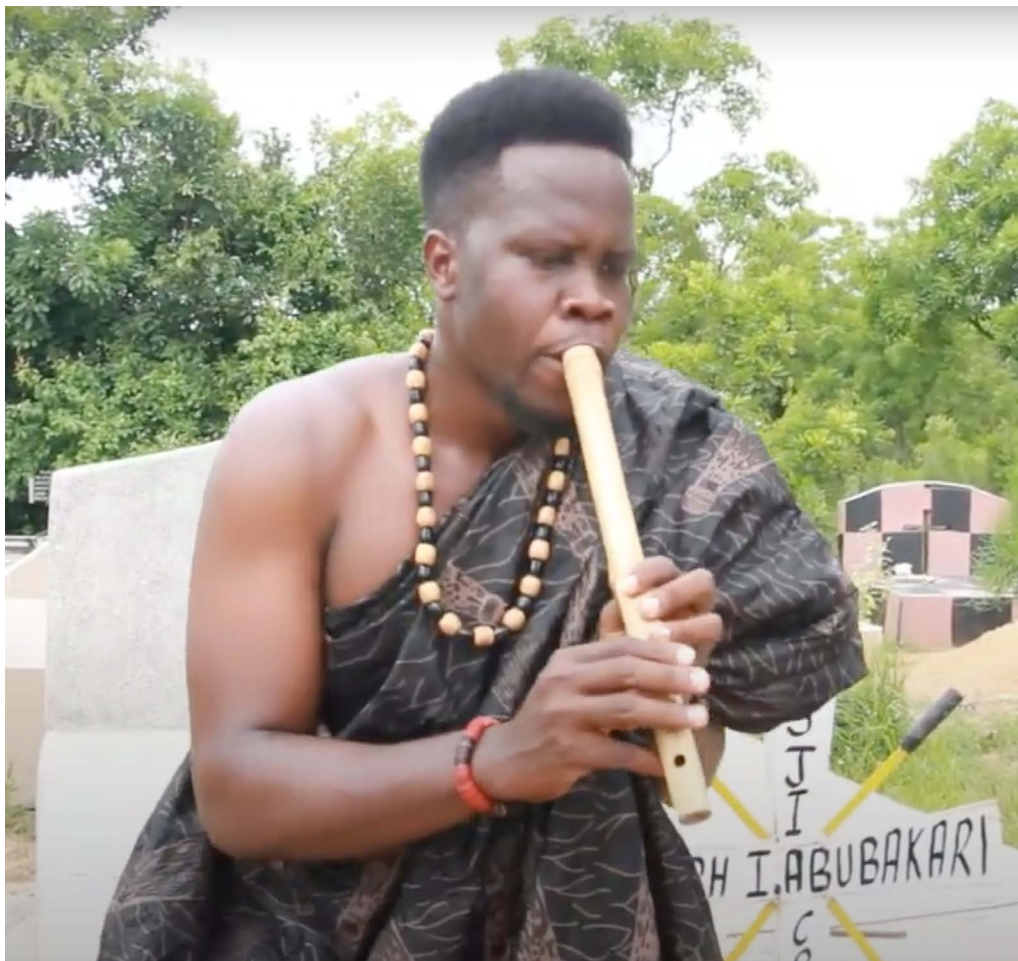


Fig. 8.4: Performing a dirge

Activity 8.6

Pair with a friend and discuss the costume of the performer in Figure 8.4 above.

Activity 8.7

Ask your teacher to provide you with a written example of a dirge. With a colleague analyse the text provided by your teacher.

Activity 8.8

Watch the video below and share your observations with the whole class.

Video of dirge singer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3_r-09Mf4E

Activity 8.9

Form a group with two a three colleagues and discuss, how this might, or might not this performance help you cope with loss.

Activity 8.10

Discuss how dirges are performed in your locality. Share your response with your peers.

Extended Reading

Click on the link to read more on dirges: <https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/dirge/>.

The Elements of Prose**Prose**

Prose is a common genre of written literature. It is derived from the Latin word *prosa* which means ‘straight-forward’. It refers to any writing that follows the conventions of speech and language. The prose is grammatically and syntactically correct and flows like speech. It does not follow a structure of rhyming or meter. It is used to directly communicate concepts, ideas, and stories to a reader.

Activity 8.11

Explain the meaning of a prose text in your understanding and compare your answer with that of your classmate.

Elements of prose

Characters: Any person, animal, or figure represented in a literary work. The story depends on the interaction and relationships between various characters. Characters are essential to a good story, and it is the main characters that have the greatest effect on the plot or are most affected by the events of the story. The protagonist is the main character of the story while the antagonist opposes the protagonist and causes a lot of problems in the story. Flat characters do not change their mind in the story and the round characters change according to new events in the story.

Theme: This is the central idea or message of a story such as patience, obedience or happiness. A story can have sub-themes that aid the development of the central idea.

Setting: This is the background of the story. It includes information about the place and time of the story, and the context (social, historical, cultural or geographical). Setting includes time, location, weather conditions, social conditions, etc. within which a story takes place.

Plot: This is the sequence of events in a story. It depicts the flow of ideas and actions in a story. It works on the points of conflict, human rivalries, and difficulties. It can be plausible and linear or completely bizarre with unexpected twists and turns.

Point of view or Perspective: This is the angle of looking at the subject and the entire story. The point of view reveals the perspective from which the story is written. It can be in first-person (the narrator being part of the story) or in the third-person (the story is written about the characters rather than by them). The first-person pronouns include I, me, and my and third-person pronouns include he, she, they, them, his, and hers.

Mood: The mood refers to the overall feeling the author intends to create for the audience. It is the creation of an atmosphere of emotions by adding imagery, situations, things, ideas or events and other details (sensory and extra-sensory) to the setting. It can be sad, triumphant, ecstatic, hopeful or tragic.

Activity 8.12

Pair with a classmate and briefly describe any four of the elements of a prose text. Present your findings to the whole class.

Activity 8.13

Ask your teacher to provide you with a prose text. With a partner, read the text and analyse the efficacy of the elements in it. Cite evidence from the text to support your points. Discuss your analysis with a classmate.

Extended Reading

Agyekum, K. (2013). *Introduction to literature (3rd ed.)*. Adwinsa Publication.

Appreciating a Prose

Activity 8.14

You have previously learnt about the elements that make up a prose text. How many can you remember? There are six in total.

Why is each element important?

Appreciating a Prose Text

An appreciation of a prose text refers to reading, understanding and making a critical judgement of the theme, style, use of figurative and non-figurative language as well as other elements of a literary work. When appreciating a prose text, the following steps need to be followed:

STEPS	DESCRIPTION	GUIDING POINTS
1	Content/subject matter (What)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the selection about? • What are the main ideas? • Make a short summary.
2	Theme or focus (Why)	What is the primary purpose of the writer?
3	Point of view or Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is speaking? • Who is the audience? • Is the speaker the 'voice' of the writer or one of the characters?
4	Setting (Where and When)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What clues are there to the place and time of the writing? Find specific examples to support them. • How does the setting impact the theme?
5	Style (How)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the structure and tone. • What word families does the writer use? Is the language formal or informal? • Look for the way the writer uses punctuation and sentence patterns. • Is there a dialogue? Is it distinctive? • What kind of imagery is used? • What is the tone or mood of the piece? How is it demonstrated? How does the tone relate to the theme or focus?

6	Literary Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify some literary devices in the prose text such as metaphor, simile, personification, symbolism, hyperbole, euphemism, etc.
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Activity 8.15

1. Ask your teacher to provide you with a prose text. In pairs, read the given prose text and identify the following:
 - a. characters
 - b. setting
 - c. theme
 - d. content/subject matter
2. Make a presentation of your findings for class discussion.

Activity 8.16

In groups read a book of prose (The prose text should be from the selected prose given in the Ghanaian language). Summarise the work you have read and identify and discuss in your groups at least three literary devices that you have identified and how they impact the mood or theme.

Extended Reading

For further reading on literary devices, click the links below.

<https://youtu.be/JaYPoeMJEcG>.

[Understanding Prose in Literature: A Comprehensive Guide \(daisie.com\)](https://daisie.com)

[Prose - Examples and Definition of Prose as a Literary Device \(literarydevices.net\)](https://literarydevices.net)

Review Questions 8.1: Libation

1. What is libation?
2. What is the purpose of invocation in a libation performance?
3. State what the 'message' in a libation refers to.
4. Describe what is meant by the conclusion in a libation performance.
5. Mention items used to perform libation.
6. List any three people who may perform libation in your community.
7. Identify one reason why a libation may be performed to curse.

Review Questions 8.2: Dirges

1. What is a dirge? Define in your own words.
2. Who sings a dirge?
3. State three functions of dirge.
4. When are dirges sang?
5. State five significances of a dirge. Choose any three to explain in your own words in detail.

Review Questions 8.3: Elements of Prose

1. What are the elements of a story/novel?
2. Identify the main types of characters in a story.
3. What is the theme of a story?
4. Identify some common themes that can be found in a story.
5. What is the difference between round and flat characters?
6. What is meant by 'the point of view' of a prose text?

Review Questions 8.4: Appreciating a Prose Text

1. State the things that should be considered when appreciating a prose text.
2. Briefly describe any three of the things mentioned in (1) above.
3. Explain in your own words the following literary devices.
 - a. alliteration
 - b. metaphor
 - c. euphemism
4. Read the prose text below and answer the questions that follow it.

THE WOLF AND THE KID

There was once a little Kid whose growing horns made him think he was a grown-up Billy Goat and able to take care of himself. So, one evening when the flock started home from the pasture and his mother called, the Kid paid no heed and kept right on nibbling the tender grass. A little later when he lifted his head, the flock was gone.

He was all alone. The sun was sinking. Long shadows came creeping over the ground. A chilly little wind came creeping with them making scary noises in the grass. The Kid shivered as he thought of the terrible Wolf. Then he started wildly over the field, bleating for his mother. But not halfway, near a clump of trees, there was the Wolf!

The Kid knew there was little hope for him.

“Please, Mr. Wolf,” he said trembling, “I know you are going to eat me. But first please pipe me a tune, for I want to dance and be merry as long as I can.”

The Wolf liked the idea of a little music before eating, so he struck up a merry tune and the Kid leapt and frisked gaily.

Meanwhile, the flock was moving slowly homeward. In the still evening air, the Wolf’s piping carried far. The Shepherd Dogs pricked up their ears. They recognized the song the Wolf sings before a feast, and in a moment, they were racing back to the pasture. The Wolf’s song ended suddenly, and as he ran, with the Dogs at his heels, he called himself a fool for turning piper to please a Kid, when he should have stuck to his butcher’s trade.

Do not let anything turn you from your purpose.

Questions

- a. Identify three characters in the prose text read
- b. Identify the setting in the prose text.
- c. What is the theme in the prose text?

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Glossary

- **Prose** is extended writing using sentences and paragraphs to present a narrative.
- A **character** is a human, animal or object in a story.
- **Dirges** are songs sung during funeral ceremonies.

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List of Contributors

Name	Institution
Prof. Kwasi Adomako	UEW, Ajumako
Dr. Yvonne Akweley Amankwaa Ollennu	UEW, Ajumako
Abdul-Rahman Fushieni	UEW, Ajumako
Josephine Yaw Darku	Akome SHTS, Ho