

# Engelsk STX A

## Assignment 4 – Analytical essay

Choose either assignment 4A or assignment 4B

## Assignment 4A – Fiction

Write an analytical essay (900-1200 words) in which you analyse and interpret Ben Okri's short story "A Wrinkle in the Realm".

Part of your essay must focus on the effect of narrator and point of view. In addition, your essay must include an analysis of the style of writing from lines 31 to 53. You should use the results of your analysis in your general treatment of the short story.

Your essay must include references to the short story.

### **Text**

Ben Okri. "A Wrinkle in the Realm", 2021.

*Tekstens ortografi og tegnsætning følger forlægget. Trykfejl er dog rettet. Opsætningen følger ikke nødvendigvis forlægget.*

Ben Okri (b. 1959) moved from Nigeria to London with his parents as a young child. His best known work is the novel *The Famished Road*, for which he won the Man Booker Prize in 1991. Okri's work often deals with issues of displacement and identity. He is considered an important post-colonial African writer. The short story "A Wrinkle in the Realm" was first published in the literary magazine *The New Yorker* on 8 February 2021.

Ben Okri

## A Wrinkle in the Realm

---

The first time he realized that there was something not quite right about him was when a woman crossed the street as she saw him coming. He thought it was a coincidence. Then it happened again.

He began to watch those around him. One day, on the Underground, a woman three empty seats away moved her handbag to her other side when she saw him. He wasn't sure why.

5 After the fourth or fifth time something like that happened, he looked at himself in the mirror. He thought he was normal, like everyone else. But when he looked at himself through the eyes of those who clutched their handbags when they saw him he understood that his face was not as normal as he'd thought.

He couldn't see what was wrong with it, but the longer he looked the more certain he became.

10 Something was wrong with him that he couldn't see. The mirror revealed aspects of his face that he hadn't noticed before. Which aspect made people cross the street to avoid him?

This troubled him so much that he was unable to sleep most nights. He wanted to talk to someone about it, but he couldn't think of anyone. When it was daylight, on his way to work, he looked nervously at people. He wondered when they would see him, and act on that seeing. But people  
15 hurried past without noticing him at all. This was as baffling as when they crossed the street. Why didn't they see him? He was purposefully looking at them, to see if they reacted to something strange in his face. But the more he looked the less they seemed to see him. The experience of being fled from at dusk, and not seen in daylight, struck him as a paradox.

20 After a while, he decided to test whether it was really him they were fleeing, and what it was about him that caused this reaction. He reasoned that, from a distance, at dusk, it is difficult to see the details of a person. Therefore, it had to be something about his shape, the way he moved through space, that made people want to avoid him. He concluded that it had to be the way he walked.

He experimented with different kinds of walks. He walked in a bandy-legged way. He made himself shorter and less threatening. He walked sideways, to be less conspicuous. All this only made people  
25 avoid him more. They crossed the street even sooner. One evening, he was going home from the small advertising firm where he worked. He made his way down his street, with its double row of plane trees. The trees took up part of the pavement, obliging people to go around them one at a time. He liked the trees on his street. Each one grew at a unique angle. They were the only things in the world that were good to him. They never judged him. When he went past, he always touched  
30 them.

The trees were big and silent now. He walked slowly. He saw the form of a woman far up the street and he made himself smaller. Then a man came in from a side street. The man, tall and a little bowlegged, walked toward the woman. What would the woman do? Would she cross the road at the sight of the man? Was it maleness that caused the fear? The man walked past the woman, who hadn't crossed the road. It wasn't maleness, then.

He wondered when the woman would notice him. What would she do when she did? At that moment, she looked up and saw him. Her body recoiled noticeably, and she hurried across the road.

He was hurt by this. He stopped and couldn't move, rooted in a nameless fury and shame. His mind was full of things he wanted to say to the woman. He wanted to say, "There's nothing wrong with me, you know," or "I'm not going to mug you," or "Do you think I am remotely interested in your body?" or "Why did you cross when you saw me and not when you saw the man in front of me, who looked much more dangerous?"

He had many things he wanted to say. The street was empty. It was getting dark. Then he did something that surprised him. He began to cross the street.

The woman saw him crossing. A look of alarm appeared on her face. She started to cross back. He followed. She didn't want it to be obvious that she was avoiding him, but she made one last effort not to meet him in the middle of the street. As he drew nearer, she opened her mouth in the beginnings of a scream. Just before he brushed past her, he said, "There's nothing wrong with me. I'm not going to eat you."

As he spoke he was aware of how it sounded. I shouldn't have said that, he thought.

Once he'd passed her, the woman, released from her terror, ran away at such a speed it was as if there were a demon chasing her. She made a strange noise as she ran. He watched her flee. His experiment had been inconclusive. He had learned nothing about why people avoided him.

That evening, his face looked different in the mirror. He had a regular face, with a bit of a beard, a prominent forehead, good strong lips. His jaw was a little pointy, his ears didn't stick out, and he had been told that he had nice eyes. His teeth were white. He had never smoked in his life.

But after his encounter with the woman something had changed. Something about his coloring and the general shape of his face had gone slightly awry.

The next day, he asked his mates at work if there was anything different about him. They looked at him and weren't sure. There was something different, they said, but they couldn't put their finger on what it was. He became obsessed with the idea that something about him had changed, and that the people who avoided him were responsible for that change. He was not sure how.

He went out of his way to avoid the gaze of others. Afraid that when people saw him they would take extraordinary pains to avoid him, he made sure not to encounter anyone in the street. When he saw people from far away, he would hide or turn his back to them and remain like that until they had passed.

At work, his behavior became so odd that people began to think him unhinged in some way. Those who had known him for a long time found it hard to believe. But his constant ducking when anyone

70 looked at him, his reluctance to meet people's eyes, his frequent scurrying out of the way in corridors, which at first seemed comic, soon gave him a reputation for evasion that, with time, became a source of suspicion. Folks were puzzled by the way he'd suddenly disappear when looked at, by how he made himself as invisible as possible during meetings. They didn't understand why he never attended the parties to which he was invited, or why he never lingered for a drink after work.

75 Often, people would catch him in the men's room scrutinizing himself in the mirror. Sometimes he could be seen contemplating his shadow. When he spoke to people, he always seemed to be hiding his face. Soon, people began remarking on how odd he looked, though no one had really got a good look at him for some time.

80 He never appeared in photographs anymore. If anyone turned a camera on him, he rushed off. Then he began to avoid mirrors. He was sure that the more he feared what he looked like the more he would become what he feared.

85 But what was he to do about people crossing the street to avoid him? How was he to carry on with the stress of being avoided, the negation of being shunned? The anxiety crippled his daily journey home. When he got to his street, with its double line of plane trees, fear would grip him, a fear of the eyes of others. He sometimes wished that he could become invisible, so that he wouldn't have to endure the shame of seeing people flee from him.

90 Then, one day, it occurred to him that if he wore a mask he would be freed from these anxieties. It seemed an elegant solution. There was a stall that sold masks in the local market on Sunday mornings. He looked at many different masks. Most of them, too outlandish, he rejected out of hand. What he needed was a mask that was as much like a normal human face as possible.

He bought seven and tried them out at home. He took care to put them on before looking in the mirror. Of the masks, five seemed useful. He felt that the best way to choose the most normal-looking one would be to try it out in the office and on the walk home.

95 At work, no one seemed to recognize him. He was stopped at the reception desk, but when he gave proof of his identity he was allowed upstairs. His colleagues balked at his appearance. When he sat at his desk, they asked if it was him. When he replied that it was, they stared. Then they began to whisper. He was summoned to his boss's office.

"What are you playing at?"

"Nothing, sir."

100 "Why are you wearing a mask?"

"It's done out of consideration for others. My face troubles people, sir."

The boss studied him.

"You call this consideration?"

"Yes, sir. At least people know better who I am."

105 "Do they?"

“I think so. And, what’s more, I can let them look at me. I don’t mind being looked at with the mask on.”

“But it’s frightening. How do we know it’s you? If everyone came to work with a mask on, life would be impossible.”

110 “Let’s try it for a week, sir, and see.”

Each day, he wore a different mask. Each day, the response was the same. The manager called him into his office. By the end of the week, the manager had had enough.

“You might need to see someone,” the manager suggested.

“It will all be resolved next week,” he said.

115 “Either you see someone or we’ll have to fire you.”

“But why, sir?”

“You are scaring everyone. You make it hard for people to do their work.”

“It will be sorted out next week,” he promised.

120 Every day that week, his walk home had confirmed the efficacy of the masks. On the first day, women who normally would have fled across the street when they saw him now only stared at him as he went past. On the second day, a woman began to cross but changed her mind and stayed on the same side of the street, perhaps out of curiosity. By the fifth day, none of them noticed him.

This surprised him. He was certain that the masks made him look unnatural. Why were those who normally fled from him bothered by his face but not by the mask?

125 He took the question to the man who sold masks at the local market on Sunday mornings.

“You never told me what you were buying them for,” the man said. As if to advertise the power of the masks he sold, the man wore a mask himself. On this day, he was in an Aztec mask that delighted the children as they went past. Many people stopped to buy his impressive disguises.

130 “Now that you’ve told me the problem, I believe I have the best mask for you. There is one condition, though.”

“What’s that?”

“For the first week that you wear it, you must believe that the mask is your face.”

“Is that all?”

“That’s all. It’s simple.”

135 The man took him to the back of the stall, where he stored the vast quantity of masks he had acquired from all over the world. The man asked him to shut his eyes. Then the man put a mask on him and told him not to look in the mirror for a while. The man refused to charge him.

“You did me a favor. Because of you, all these people stopped at my stall. They must have been drawn here by your face, eh?” the man said, laughing.

140 When he got home he was curious, but he did not look in the mirror. By morning, the mask had fused with his face. He touched his cheek and felt no mask on it. He had no need to look in the mirror.

At work, everyone stared at him in wonder. The manager called him into his office and gazed at him for a long time, then sent him back to his desk without uttering a word. On the walk home, he  
145 was so preoccupied with the unusual reaction of his co-workers that he forgot to notice whether people crossed the road to avoid him. Near his house, a pretty young woman stopped him to ask for directions. She was lost. He gave her clear instructions and wished her well.

At the end of the week, one of the women in the office, a beautiful woman with long legs and fierce lipstick, who worked in the digital department, asked him what he was doing for lunch, but he  
150 didn't get the hint.

He no longer noticed his own mask, but he began to see the masks of others. When he walked home in the evenings, he wondered why he had never noticed them before. Now that he did, he saw that it was necessary to avoid them and he crossed the street before it was too late.

## Assignment 4B – Non-Fiction

Write an analytical essay (900-1200 words) in which you analyse and comment on Neil Gaiman's speech "Make Good Art".

Part of your essay must focus on the style of the writer's language from lines 128 to 145 and the use of humour as a way to engage with the audience. You should use the results of your analysis in your general treatment of themes and appeal of the text.

Text

Neil Gaiman, "Make Good Art" (Commencement Address at The University of the Arts, 2012)

Neil Gaiman, delivery of "Make Good Art" (Commencement Address at the University of Arts, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plWexCID-kA>

*Tekstens ortografi og tegnsætning følger forlægget. Trykfejl er dog rettet. Opsætningen følger ikke nødvendigvis forlægget.*



Neil Gaiman (b. 1960) is a British writer of children's fiction, mainly in the fantasy genre. He has won numerous awards. His novel, *Ocean at the End of the Lane* was voted book of the year in the British National Book Awards in 2013. His Novella *Coraline* has been made into a stop-motion film. The speech, "Make Good Art" was delivered as the keynote address for the May 17, 2012 commencement ceremony at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Neil Gaiman

## Make Good Art

---

5 I never really expected to find myself giving advice to people graduating from an establishment of higher education. I never graduated from any such establishment. I never even started at one. I escaped from school as soon as I could, when the prospect of four more years of enforced learning before I'd become the writer I wanted to be was stifling.

10 I got out into the world, I wrote, and I became a better writer the more I wrote, and I wrote some more, and nobody ever seemed to mind that I was making it up as I went along, they just read what I wrote and they paid for it, or they didn't, and often they commissioned me to write something else for them.

Which has left me with a healthy respect and fondness for higher education that those of my friends and family, who attended Universities, were cured of long ago.

15 Looking back, I've had a remarkable ride. I'm not sure I can call it a career, because a career implies that I had some kind of career plan, and I never did. The nearest thing I had was a list I made when I was 15 of everything I wanted to do: to write an adult novel, a children's book, a comic, a movie, record an audiobook, write an episode of *Doctor Who*... and so on. I didn't have a career. I just did the next thing on the list.

20 So I thought I'd tell you everything I wish I'd known starting out, and a few things that, looking back on it, I suppose that I did know. And that I would also give you the best piece of advice I'd ever got, which I completely failed to follow.

**First of all:** When you start out on a career in the arts you have no idea what you are doing.

25 This is great. People who know what they are doing know the rules, and know what is possible and impossible. You do not. And you should not. The rules on what is possible and impossible in the arts were made by people who had not tested the bounds of the possible by going beyond them. And you can.

If you don't know it's impossible it's easier to do. And because nobody's done it before, they haven't made up rules to stop anyone doing that again, yet.

30 **Secondly:** If you have an idea of what you want to make, what you were put here to do, then just go and do that.

And that's much harder than it sounds and, sometimes in the end, so much easier than you might imagine. Because normally, there are things you have to do before you can get to the place you want to be. I wanted to write comics and novels and stories and films, so I became a journalist, because journalists are allowed to ask questions, and to simply go and find out how the world works, and besides, to do those things I needed to write and to write well, and I was being paid to learn how to write economically, crisply, sometimes under adverse conditions, and on time.

Sometimes the way to do what you hope to do will be clear cut, and sometimes it will be almost impossible to decide whether or not you are doing the correct thing, because you'll have to balance your goals and hopes with feeding yourself, paying debts, finding work, settling for what you can get.

Something that worked for me was imagining that where I wanted to be – an author, primarily of fiction, making good books, making good comics and supporting myself through my words – was a mountain. A distant mountain. My goal.

And I knew that as long as I kept walking towards the mountain I would be all right. And when I truly was not sure what to do, I could stop, and think about whether it was taking me towards or away from the mountain. I said no to editorial jobs on magazines, proper jobs that would have paid proper money because I knew that, attractive though they were, for me they would have been walking away from the mountain. And if those job offers had come along earlier I might have taken them, because they still would have been closer to the mountain than I was at the time.

I learned to write by writing. I tended to do anything as long as it felt like an adventure, and to stop when it felt like work, which meant that life did not feel like work.

**Thirdly:** When you start off, you have to deal with the problems of failure. You need to be thick skinned, to learn that not every project will survive. A freelance life, a life in the arts, is sometimes like putting messages in bottles, on a desert island, and hoping that someone will find one of your bottles and open it and read it, and put something in a bottle that will wash its way back to you: appreciation, or a commission, or money, or love. And you have to accept that you may put out a hundred things for every bottle that winds up coming back.

The problems of failure are problems of discouragement, of hopelessness, of hunger. You want everything to happen and you want it now, and things go wrong. My first book – a piece of journalism I had done for the money, and which had already bought me an electric typewriter from the advance – should have been a bestseller. It should have paid me a lot of money. If the publisher hadn't gone into involuntary liquidation between the first print run selling out and the second printing, and before any royalties could be paid, it would have done.

70 And I shrugged, and I still had my electric typewriter and enough money to pay the rent for a couple of months, and I decided that I would do my best in future not to write books just for the money. If you didn't get the money, then you didn't have anything. If I did work I was proud of, and I didn't get the money, at least I'd have the work.

75 Every now and again, I forget that rule, and whenever I do, the universe kicks me hard and reminds me. I don't know that it's an issue for anybody but me, but it's true that nothing I did where the only reason for doing it was the money was ever worth it, except as bitter experience. Usually I didn't wind up getting the money, either. The things I did because I was excited, and wanted to see them exist in reality  
80 have never let me down, and I've never regretted the time I spent on any of them.

The problems of failure are hard.

The problems of success can be harder, because nobody warns you about them.

The first problem of any kind of even limited success is the unshakable conviction that you are getting away with something, and that any moment now they will  
85 discover you. It's Imposter Syndrome, something my wife Amanda christened the Fraud Police.

In my case, I was convinced that there would be a knock on the door, and a man with a clipboard (I don't know why he carried a clipboard, in my head, but he did) would be there, to tell me it was all over, and they had caught up with me, and now I would  
90 have to go and get a real job, one that didn't consist of making things up and writing them down, and reading books I wanted to read. And then I would go away quietly and get the kind of job where you don't have to make things up any more.

The problems of success. They're real, and with luck you'll experience them. The point where you stop saying yes to everything, because now the bottles you threw in  
95 the ocean are all coming back, and have to learn to say no.

I watched my peers, and my friends, and the ones who were older than me and watch how miserable some of them were: I'd listen to them telling me that they couldn't envisage a world where they did what they had always wanted to do anymore, because now they had to earn a certain amount every month just to keep where they  
100 were. They couldn't go and do the things that mattered, and that they had really wanted to do; and that seemed as a big a tragedy as any problem of failure.

And after that, the biggest problem of success is that the world conspires to stop you doing the thing that you do, because you are successful. There was a day when I looked up and realised that I had become someone who professionally replied to email, and who wrote as a hobby. I started answering fewer emails, and was relieved  
105 to find I was writing much more.

**Fourthly:** I hope you'll make mistakes. If you're making mistakes, it means you're out there doing something. And the mistakes in themselves can be useful. I once misspelled Caroline, in a letter, transposing the A and the O, and I thought,  
110 “*Coraline* looks like a real name...”

And remember that whatever discipline you are in, whether you are a musician or a photographer, a fine artist or a cartoonist, a writer, a dancer, a designer, whatever you do you have one thing that's unique. You have the ability to make art.

115 And for me, and for so many of the people I have known, that's been a lifesaver. The ultimate lifesaver. It gets you through good times and it gets you through the other ones.

Life is sometimes hard. Things go wrong, in life and in love and in business and in friendship and in health and in all the other ways that life can go wrong. And when things get tough, this is what you should do.

120 Make good art.

I'm serious. Husband runs off with a politician? Make good art. Leg crushed and then eaten by mutated boa constrictor? Make good art. IRS on your trail? Make good art. Cat exploded? Make good art. Somebody on the Internet thinks what you do is stupid or evil or it's all been done before? Make good art. Probably things will work out  
125 somehow, and eventually time will take the sting away, but that doesn't matter. Do what only you do best. Make good art.

Make it on the good days too.

And **Fifthly**, while you are at it, make *your* art. Do the stuff that only you can do.

130 The urge, starting out, is to copy. And that's not a bad thing. Most of us only find our own voices after we've sounded like a lot of other people. But the one thing that you have that nobody else has is *you*. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can.

135 The moment that you feel that, just possibly, you're walking down the street naked, exposing too much of your heart and your mind and what exists on the inside, showing too much of yourself. That's the moment you may be starting to get it right.

140 The things I've done that worked the best were the things I was the least certain about, the stories where I was sure they would either work, or more likely be the kinds of embarrassing failures people would gather together and talk about until the end of time. They always had that in common: looking back at them, people explain why they were inevitable successes. While I was doing them, I had no idea.

I still don't. And where would be the fun in making something you knew was going to work?

And sometimes the things I did really didn't work. There are stories of mine that have never been reprinted. Some of them never even left the house. But I learned as much  
145 from them as I did from the things that worked.

**Sixthly.** I will pass on some secret freelancer knowledge. Secret knowledge is always good. And it is useful for anyone who ever plans to create art for other people, to enter a freelance world of any kind. I learned it in comics, but it applies to other fields too. And it's this:

150 People get hired because, somehow, they get hired. In my case I did something which these days would be easy to check, and would get me into trouble, and when I started out, in those pre-internet days, seemed like a sensible career strategy: when I was asked by editors who I'd worked for, I lied. I listed a handful of magazines that sounded likely, and I sounded confident, and I got jobs. I then made it a point of  
155 honour to have written something for each of the magazines I'd listed to get that first job, so that I hadn't actually lied, I'd just been chronologically challenged... You get work however you get work.

160 People keep working, in a freelance world, and more and more of today's world is freelance, because their work is good, and because they are easy to get along with, and because they deliver the work on time. And you don't even need all three. Two out of three is fine. People will tolerate how unpleasant you are if your work is good and you deliver it on time. They'll forgive the lateness of the work if it's good, and if they like you. And you don't have to be as good as the others if you're on time and it's always a pleasure to hear from you.

165 When I agreed to give this address, I started trying to think what the best advice I'd been given over the years was.

And it came from Stephen King twenty years ago, at the height of the success of Sandman. I was writing a comic that people loved and were taking seriously. King had liked *Sandman* and my novel with Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*, and he saw the  
170 madness, the long signing lines, all that, and his advice was this:

*"This is really great. You should enjoy it."*

175 And I didn't. Best advice I got that I ignored. Instead I worried about it. I worried about the next deadline, the next idea, the next story. There wasn't a moment for the next fourteen or fifteen years that I wasn't writing something in my head, or wondering about it. And I didn't stop and look around and go, *this is really fun*. I wish I'd enjoyed it more. It's been an amazing ride. But there were parts of the ride I missed, because I was too worried about things going wrong, about what came next, to enjoy the bit I was on.

180 That was the hardest lesson for me, I think: to let go and enjoy the ride, because the ride takes you to some remarkable and unexpected places.

And here, on this platform, today, is one of those places. (I am enjoying myself immensely.)

185 To all today's graduates: I wish you luck. Luck is useful. Often you will discover that the harder you work, and the more wisely you work, the luckier you get. But there is luck, and it helps.

190 We're in a transitional world right now, if you're in any kind of artistic field, because the nature of distribution is changing, the models by which creators got their work out into the world, and got to keep a roof over their heads and buy sandwiches while they did that, are all changing. I've talked to people at the top of the food chain in publishing, in bookselling, in all those areas, and nobody knows what the landscape will look like two years from now, let alone a decade away. The distribution channels that people had built over the last century or so are in flux for print, for visual artists, for musicians, for creative people of all kinds.

195 Which is, on the one hand, intimidating, and on the other, immensely liberating. The rules, the assumptions, the now-we're supposed to's of how you get your work seen, and what you do then, are breaking down. The gatekeepers are leaving their gates. You can be as creative as you need to be to get your work seen. YouTube and the web (and whatever comes after YouTube and the web) can give you more people watching than television ever did. The old rules are crumbling and nobody knows  
200 what the new rules are.

So make up your own rules.

205 Someone asked me recently how to do something she thought was going to be difficult, in this case recording an audio book, and I suggested she pretend that she was someone who could do it. Not pretend to do it, but pretend she was someone who could. She put up a notice to this effect on the studio wall, and she said it helped.

So be wise, because the world needs more wisdom, and if you cannot be wise, pretend to be someone who is wise, and then just behave like they would.

210 And now go, and make interesting mistakes, make amazing mistakes, make glorious and fantastic mistakes. Break rules. Leave the world more interesting for your being here. Make good art.