**SUBJECT: Literature-In-English**

**CLASS: SS1** **WEEKS 5&6**

**AFRICAN DRAMA**: **“The Marriage of Anansewa**” by Efua T. sutherland

**PLOT**

The marriage of Anansewa tells the story of Ananse, a poor but ambitious widower, who makes a round-the-country trip to present his only child, Anansewa, in photographs to four different affluent chiefs, with each of whom he enters into a “photograph engagement”, unknown to his daughter, who is about to finish her secretarial studies course.

He is acting in this manner with two conflicting goals in mind:

* To find his daughter a genuinely loving spouse who would ensure her happiness and comfort in her matrimonial home; and
* To take advantage of the opportunity presented by his daughter’s marriage to better his social and economic position.

So, we have a situation where there are four suitors and one bride, but each suitor believes that he is the only one who may be the bride’s husband. Only a few of the characters and the audience are aware of this scheme. Anansewa is later informed about it and coaxed into cooperating after initially objecting to the plan.

Chief-who-is-chief is clearly the most preferred suitor out of the four chiefs involved: Chief of Sapaase, Chief of Akate, Chief of the mines, and Chief-who-is-chief.

At first, the plan appears to be successful as each of the four chiefs periodically seeds monetary gifts to Ananse in anticipation of the actual marriage ceremony, which involves only one of them placing the head-drink on the table to be recognised as the husband.

Ananse gains a fortune as a result. There is a transformation in his residence, his appearance, and his social standing. He dons the newest suit and visits the church to give lavish offerings.

However, the plan starts to go away when Ananse receives separate telegrams from each of the four chiefs indicating their plans to attend and conduct the head-drink ceremony within a week or two.

Ananse immediately devises a plan to unwind the knot as things get truly complicated. To ensure that his plan goes off without a hitch, he first lures Aya, his mother, and Ekuwa, his aunt, to their hometown, nanka, where they live.

Anansewa must act as if she has passed away. This way, Ananse will be able to closely monitor how each candidate responds in order to ascertain who loves his daughter the most.

The risky plot succeeds as one by one, the Messengers of the many suitors arrive with their various condolence messages and funeral gifts.

The Messengers of Chief-Who-Is-Chief arrive last. They arrive with a lot of heavy gifts and a note saying that, despite the fact that the marriage procedures have not yet been completed, their leader assumes full responsibility for Anansewa’s funeral.

By doing this, Chief-Who-Is-Chief demonstrates that he is the most devoted of the potential husbands, and Ananse joyfully calls Anansewa back to life in preparation for an upcoming grand wedding party.

Ananse therefore succeeds in his two goals of finding the ideal mate for his daughter while also generating money from her marriage. This paints Ananse as a very cunning and intelligent schemer.

**CHARACTERS**

The following are the major characters and their roles in “The Marriage of Anansewa”by Efua T. Sutherland:

* **George Kweku Ananse**

George Kweku Ananse is the protagonist of the play, “The Marriage of Anansewa”. He is a poor, struggling ageing widower. He has a daughter, Anansewa, an aged mother, Aya, and an elderly aunt, Ekuwa. These characters are his immediate family members.

Ananse is a very cunning character. It is least surprising that he is admired by the **storyteller** who wishes he “had a little of his cunning.” At the beginning of the text, Ananse is portrayed as a pauper but as the play progresses, he goes from someone “wearing a shabby coat” to one “dressed in a suit fit for a business executive.” His change wanting to better his lot from his ripe-for-marriage daughter, Ananse schemes a fool proof plan that will make him benefit immensely financially from his daughter’s marriage. He takes the pictures of his daughter, Anansewa, which he takes to four selected chiefs from different parts of the country. He does this with the impression that he wants to give the damsel in marriage to any of them without giving any hint of his double-dealing.

Each chief is hooked to the idea that Anansewa is reserved for them and begins to send monetary gifts to Ananse to commence the marriage rites. Ananse’s financial status suddenly changes for good largely because of the fortune he makes from the four chiefs cum suitors. Thus, by appeasing four children with a rabbit, Ananse becomes rich.

As customary of traditional marriages, the prospective husband will come for the head-drink ceremony. This is where Ananse runs into trouble. The four suitors decide to come for the head-drink ceremony at almost the same time.

In order to avoid the embarrassment that may come from any of the four suitors meeting the other, Ananse has to scheme yet another plan which serves apart from its initial design the purpose of sieving the suitors. His daughter is to feign death. Ananse announces this to the suitors. Of all the suitors, Ananse finds Chief-Who-Is- Who worthy for his daughter. He pretends to invoke Anansewa back to life.

That Ananse uses his daughter to improve his financial status does not however make him a bad and irresponsible father. He does not fail to pick for her a good husband in the process.

In summation, Ananse is portrayed as a crafty and cunning character with the mind for risky exploits. He personifies the proverbial spider of the

Ghanaian folktale. In the manner of the spider. Ananse spins web of schemes which he lures unsuspecting victims into.

* **Anansewa**

Anansewa is the twenty year old daughter of Ananse. She is an eponymous character. She is considered the heroine in the text although her role is passive, determined by her father. However, Ananse’s scheme will not have materialised if Anansewa had not agreed to play along. While Ananse is the hero of the play, Anansewa is the heroine.

Anansewa is a hall orphan, having lost her mother the shoes of her mother are however filled by both her grandmother, Aya, and her grandaunt, Ekuwa. She turns to the two for emotional support.

She is educated. She had her secretarial studies at the E.P’s Secretarial School and she is later enrolled at the Institute for Prospective Bridge in preparation for marriage. According to Aya, Anansewa’s outdooring ceremony comes five years late.

She is very submissive and obedient. This is evident in how she submits to her father’s authority and obeys her father’s instructions. Without her cooperation, it wouldn’t have been possible for Ananse to initiate or execute any of his schemes. Anansewa however understands the state of their finance to object to being manipulated by her father for financial gains.

Anansewa’s pictures are used to ensnare the chiefs into Ananse’s trap. In line with the request of her father, she fakes her death and plays the role of a corpse convincingly. This distinguishes her as a good actress.

By the end of the play, Anansewa marries Chief-Who-Is-Who whom she has developed fondness for. Her marriage illustrates the idea of matchmaking in the traditional marriage setting.

* **Aya**

Aya is the mother of Ananse and the grandmother of Anansewa. She is a central figure of the Ananse family. She is a strong pillar behind Ananse and the go-to person for Anansewa for emotional support.

Ananse tricks her and Ekuwa to Nanka, their hometown, so he can carry out his schemes. Aya plays an important role in the outdooring ceremony of Anansewa, her granddaughter. As the elder of the family, her role in the rituals of the event is significant. She prays for Anansewa in the process of the ritual.

Aya does not hide her dislike for Christie. An overprotective mother that she is. Aya is suspicious of Christie’s relationship with Ananse. She is uncomfortable with the intimacy Christie is initiating with Ananse with her over activeness in the household. Aya thinks she’s “senselessly extravagant”.

* **Ekuwa**

Ekuwa is Aya’s sister and Ananse’s aunt. She is also the grandaunt of Anansewa. Like Aya, she is tricked by Ananse to Nanka so he can execute his plan.

Ekuwa is accommodating. This is evident in her relations with Christie and Ananse in the play. She also plays a significant roles in the outdooring ceremony of her grandniece whom she passes the egg of blessing during the ritual ceremony.

* **Christie**

Miss Christiana Yamoah is the stylish woman in charge of Institute for Prospective Brides. Introduced in Act Three of the play, she is contracted by Ananse to prepare Anansewa for marriage.

Christie is very crucial in the staging of the fake funeral of Anansewa. Ananse takes her into his confidence about his plan she helps Ananse realise this. She functions as Anansewa’s mother during the fake burial ceremony and she is in charge of the reception of the chiefs’ entourages.

Christie has a soft spot for Ananse and she fantasises being referred to as “Mrs Ananse”. She refers to Ananse by his first name, “Geroge”, which is improper given the kind of relationship between them. This only confirms further that Christie is in love with Ananse.

* **The storyteller**

The storyteller hints the audience with the events in Ananse’s household. He is more like a narrator telling a story, the story of the Ananses. In his narration, he alternates between speech and song.

* **The property man** and **the players** contribute to the play. Their roles in the play serve as reminder that the story is not real but just a dramatic presentation.

**Themes of the marriage of Anansewa**

The marriage of Anansewa is a play that is dominated by several themes. These themes include:

1. Poverty and ambition: The whole play is about Ananse’s ambition to improve his lot in life.
2. Wit and cunning: The themes are justifiably sustained by the actions and the antics of the trickster in Ananse, the protagonist of the play.
3. Love and materialism: The play explores the relationship between love and materialism.
4. Matchmaking: The play also explores the theme of matchmaking which means choosing whom a person should get married to.
5. African marital traditions: The play is set in an African context and explores African marital

traditions.

**Setting**

The setting is a studio in Ghana which portrays a contemporary Ghanaian society.

**HOME WORK**

1. Give a brief account of the plot in “The marriage of Anansewa by Efua T. Sutherland
2. Summarise the roles played by these characters:
3. Ananse
4. Anansewa
5. Aya
6. List four (4) notable themes in “The marriage of Anansewa” by Efua T. Sutherland