Engaging with ethnography

IB DP Social and Cultural Anthropology Engaging with ethnography full package

Sailing for days to give a necklace away

> The kula is not about the objects - it is about the relationships.

- Trobriand Islands: red shell necklaces given, white shell armbands received months later.
- Nobody keeps the objects; each is passed on to the next partner.
- Malinowski, Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922): the kula builds partnerships and fame.

Paper 2 at HL and SL

Paper 2	**HL**	**SL**
time	2 hours 30 minutes	1 hour 30 minutes
weight	45%	40%
areas studied	four	three
Section B	two questions	one question

Nine areas in three groups

Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**
classifying the world	belonging	conflict
health, illness and healing	communication, expression, technology	development
the body	movement, time and space	production, exchange and consumption

Five questions for any ethnography

Ask	**Yan, The Flow of Gifts (1996)**
who?	grew up in China and had lived in the village - partly an insider
where and when?	Xiajia, Heilongjiang; fieldwork in 1989 and 1991
how?	participant observation; interviews; families' gift lists
what does it show?	gifts keep guanxi; many flow up to cadres, unreturned
which concepts?	social relations, power, materiality

Testing Mauss in Xiajia

Mauss - the gift creates rank

Three duties: give, receive, give back.

The giver gains **prestige**; the receiver is in **debt** until he returns it.

Yan - the gift follows rank

Villagers gave to cadres, who did not give back.

The receivers lost no status: gifts followed **hierarchy** instead of creating it.

Two exchanges compared

Compare	**Kula (Malinowski)**	**Xiajia (Yan)**
what is given	shell necklaces and armbands	money and goods at weddings, births, funerals
who gives	partners on different islands	relatives, neighbours; villagers to cadres
what it does	lasting partnerships and fame	keeps guanxi; shows and builds rank
concept	symbolism	social relations and power

Mothers who did not weep

1. **Observed** Many babies died; some mothers did not **grieve** openly.
2. **Easy reading** They did not love their children - an ethnocentric judgement.
3. **Her explanation** Poverty and hunger: holding back was a way of surviving.

Decision

Read the practice in its context - understanding is not the same as approving.

Section A and Section B

Section A

Connect a concept, an **area of inquiry** and a real-world issue.

e.g. how materiality helps you understand inequality.

Section B

Questions on your other areas - SL one, HL two.

e.g. how the body is constructed through symbolism.

Worked plan: materiality and inequality

1. **Real-world example** Rising wedding-gift costs in rural China, a burden for many families.
2. **Ethnography** Yan's gift lists: poorer families must still give to keep their place.
3. **Comparison** The kula builds equal partners; Xiajia can widen inequality.
4. **Evaluation** Yan was partly an insider: trust and access, but habits may seem normal.

Check yourself

Your turn

Without notes,

A. Name the three groups of areas and how many you study.
B. Ask the five questions of Yan's ethnography.
C. Say how Xiajia's gifts challenge Mauss.
D. Plan a Section A answer on materiality and inequality.