

Some writers shine a light while others criticize explicitly. Compare and contrast these different approaches in two works of literature you've studied.

Writers of literary works use different strategies to convey their messages. Some 'shine a light', meaning they implicitly reveal their ideas in a subtle way. Others 'criticize explicitly', skewering their targets in a more direct way. Both Ismail Kadare in *Broken April* and Kayo Chingonyi in *Kumukanda* shine a light on the way ingrained cultures and traditions impact individuals, affecting their sense of self and reducing their life chances. Both writers also explicitly criticize aspects of their cultures, although the precise targets of their criticisms are not the same: on one hand, Kadare's target is a customary law called the Kanun that dictates how young men who live in Albania's northern mountain villages must engage in a ritual of blood feuds and revenge killings. On the other hand, Chingonyi explicitly criticizes structural racism in Britain, a supposedly post-racial society, through a sequence of poems 'calling a spade a spade' (part of the *Kumukanda* collection) which reveal moments of overt and covert racism he encountered at school, college, and in his early career.

In *Kumukanda* and *Broken April*, both writers shine a light on the way ingrained cultures and traditions impact the lives of individuals in society. In *Kumukanda*, Kayo Chingonyi writes from his own personal experience, creating confessional poems that shine a light on the way his personal and professional development is hindered by institutionalized racism. For example, in the poem *The Cricket Test* he recalls how students would self-select into teams of black and white players. He describes this situation as '*a shrine to apartheid.*' Kayo purposefully uses such a strong and pointed phrase to call attention to the way ingrained mistrust of other races keeps British people apart from each other, hindering opportunities to form a truly multi-cultural community. When he tried to join the other team, he was asked why he didn't want to be '*with his own kind*'. Such racial language points to divisions in British culture that held him back as a minority student. Similarly, Kadare shines a light on how ingrained inequality hinders people in Albanian society. He uses the character of Diana to illustrate how women's identities are suppressed in a patriarchal society. For example, despite being well-educated in her own right, when the news of her marriage to Bessian is reported in a local newspaper, he is referred to as '*the writer Bessian Vorpsi*' while she is called simply '*his new wife*'. Revealing how the media uses names in an unequal way shines a light on the bias towards celebrating male achievement over women's stories. Therefore, while one writer is concerned with race and the other with gender, both writers shine a light on issues of inequality in their respective cultures.

Furthermore, both writers use conflict between characters as a method that exposes issues of inequality in an indirect way, which is the essence of a 'shine the light' approach. Kadare uses the imbalance between Bessian and Diana's dialogue to represent the way she is dominated by her husband. Bessian speaks for lines and lines in an incessant lecturing tone while Diana offers only brief encouragement and affirmation. Indeed, when she disagrees with Bessian he becomes offended so she either self-corrects or simply stays silent. Throughout these passages, Kadare uses the metonymy of Bessian's lips so they become symbolic of his dominating the conversation and dismissing Diana's viewpoint. This is an effective way of indirectly shining a light on how women are silenced and their opinions devalued in the context of a patriarchal society. Equally, Kayo Chingonyi uses conflict between characters to shine a light on institutional racism in education. Just like with Diana, his feelings are marginalized by people in power. For example, in the poem *Colloquy in Black Rock*, Kayo finds reading '*the N word*' an uncomfortable and challenging experience. Seeing the word in print reminds him how celebrated writers who are taught on school curriculums saw black people as inferior. However, his lecturer skirts around this issue and dismisses Kayo's concerns, failing to recognize the power of the N word to diminish Kayo's sense of self-worth. Therefore, through creating conflict between characters, both writers shine a light on the way prejudices are ingrained into cultures, resulting in structural inequalities between men and women, or people of different racial identities.

While both writers are similar in the way they shine a light on ingrained prejudices, they are very different in the way they explicitly criticize. This is largely down to the very different contexts that they are writing in. On one hand, Kayo Chingonyi is writing about racism in education during the 1980s to early 2000s in Britain, a supposedly '*post-race*' society. He explicitly uses this phrase in the poem *Varsity Blues*, in which, while directing his graduating play, he purposefully casts white actors to play black characters. His intention was to call attention to the historical tradition of blackface minstrelsy whereby white performers would play exaggerated and distorted versions of black people as a form of mass entertainment. In another explicit moment, Kayo recalls how his lead actress put on a '*showy minstrel tone*' for this performance. As before, his use of racialized language has the effect of shocking the reader and is a pointed reminder that, while white actors are free to impersonate black people, the same is not true in reverse. In fact, black people are also limited to playing exaggerated and distorted versions of themselves. In the poem *Casting*, Kayo remembers being typecast when he was forced to play '*lean dark men who may have guns*' as these were the only roles available for black actors. Through such direct and explicit moments in his poems, Kayo Chingonyi explicitly criticizes the idea that Britain is a

post-race society, instead revealing how structural racism continues to disadvantage black students in college and in the world of work.

On the other hand, Ismail Kadare writes about the culture of blood feuds and revenge killing in the far north of Albania during the early–mid twentieth century. Unlike Chingonyi, his target is a customary code of law called the Kanun, which is used to administer this far-flung region. His novel is set far from the educational settings of Chingonyi's poems, in Albania's 'cold' and 'desolate' mountain regions. Kadare uses these descriptive words to create pathetic fallacy, revealing how the Kanun dehumanizes the inhabitants of the plateau. He focuses on one such individual, a young man named Gjorg Berisha who is forced to kill his neighbour's son as part of an extended blood feud between the two families. At the moment of ambush, Kadare highlights how wild pomegranates scattered around the scene felt to Gjorg like '*silent witnesses*', a personification that suggests he's being watched and judged by an unforgiving society. While language such as this is less pointed than Chingonyi's, nevertheless, through describing Gjorg as an unwilling participant in the act of killing, Kadare explicitly criticizes a culture that makes murderers out of its young men. To drive this point home, Kadare depicts Gjorg's internal conflict, especially his repetition of '*why?*' Yet each time he questions the Kanun, his mind provides the answer: '*custom*'. Kadare uses this repetition to show how the Kanun restricts Gjorg's options and takes away his free will. Gjorg has no choice except to follow the laws of the code, leading to a cycle of violence that cannot be broken. Therefore, while both writers explicitly criticize, the targets of their criticism differ as a result of two very different contexts. Equally, the characters they draw have different ways of expressing their resistance to the pressures of the settings in which they exist.

In conclusion, both Kayo Chingonyi and Ismail Kadare demonstrate that shining a light or explicitly criticizing are effective ways of exposing underreported issues for readers, whether the structural racism that still exists in modern Britain, or a customary code that traps young men in a cycle of violence in Albania. One final way the works differ is through their outlook on overcoming these difficulties. As a victim of structural racism, Kayo nevertheless rose above this challenge and became a successful writer, DJ, and university lecturer, proving that individuality can be expressed in society. By contrast, Kadare reveals that some oppressive systems rob individuals of free will and can even cost people their lives. At the end of his work, only Diana remains as a symbol that perhaps, one day in the future, change is possible.