

*Discoveries can be tangible and emotional, personal and introspective... and very often totally unexpected. To what extent do the texts you have studied reflect this idea? In your answer, refer to your prescribed text and ONE other related text.*

Throughout time, the innate curiosity of man present in the human psyche has led to ample discoveries that have shaped the modern world in which society lives today. The catalyst for these discoveries, whether autonomous or viewed from a macro perspective affect individuals in either a positive or negative way; however, the consequences experienced by an individual is completely subjective. Discoveries can be tangible and emotional, personal and introspective, and very often totally unexpected; and such texts, as A Short History of Nearly Everything (ASHONE) and Gulliver's Travels (GT) demonstrate the statement above. Such investigations made in ASHONE and GT are explored through antithetical perspectives, but synthesise together to cohere with the standard characteristics present in "discovery", whether shifting one's perceptions of self and their world, or transforming the extent of the entire universe. Furthermore, each author has used a variety of literary techniques and devices such as surrealism, facetious language and existentialist views to enhance the extent of each discovery as a whole. *"A discovery is said to be an accident meeting with a prepared mind"* (Albert Szent-Gyorgyi), meaning that although discoveries can be unexpected, they indeed can lead to a variety of effects that influence the micro and macro worlds. Nevertheless, the effects of discovery can be explored in ASHONE and GT, in an attempt to understand how the curiosity of man has influenced generations before now, and how they will continue to subjectively mould societies to come.

The discoveries provided by Bill Bryson in ASHONE explore tangible evidence the human race has collected over the course of existence, in relation to how the world's existence even began in the first place. The non-fiction novel, although facetious and at times colloquial, has a main principle of exploring the chronological events that have been scientifically discovered over a prolonged amount of time, as a result of the intrinsic trait of curiosity that human beings have. This, of course, as Bryson explains, has been catalysed over time due to the growing frustrations felt by man against an inability to understand specific areas of the world; whereby individuals discover as they unable to accept anything the idea of the unknown. *"As a student, frustrated by the limitations of conventional mathematics, he invented an entirely new form, the calculus, but then told no-one about it for twenty-seven years"*. Thus, throughout ASHONE, scientists, historians and everyday civilians alike are described, along with their attempt to gain physical evidence about the discovery of man; whereby an audience is also invited to experience the discoveries established, leading to the

stimulation of new ideas and transformative introspections felt by various personalities. Academic author Barbara Stanners explores this idea in her "[Discovery Workshop: 2016](#)", as she states, "A key discovery skill is understanding how discovery is a transformational process", and Bryson's investigations into tangible and scientific discoveries proves that concept that they are able to transform individuals and nations alike. Furthermore, the extent of this statement is also supported by the emotional aspects felt by individuals in their quest to understand the unknown, fear and frustration acting as a motive to discover the ultimate existential question- "*What is the meaning of life?*" Therefore, without the emotional elements felt by man in terms of galvanising individuals into the next chapter of discoveries in the macro world, the tangible evidence that has encompassed positive change of the accepted understanding of the Modern world may have never come to exist.

Furthermore, [ASHONE](#)'s sequential display of discoveries made by now categorised *famous* individuals studies the often debated definition of what it truly means to discover, on both a personal and broader society. Throughout the novel, Bryson explores discoveries made by an array of individuals, either emerging from a process of deliberate and careful planning, or provoked by chance and was completely unexpected. However, the novel also explores how discovery has become somewhat of a socially constructed idea, as some of the discoveries within the text rely on introspection to gain its significance in the macro world. "*There are three stages in scientific discovery. First, people deny that it is true, then they deny that it is important; finally they credit the wrong person.*" For example, within Chapter 6, Page 109, Bryson explains the discovery of what is now known as a hadrosaur, duckbilled dinosaur, which of course in the larger perspective has given evidence to the theory of evolution and extinction. However, at the time of its discovery, "*dinosaurs were unknown*". The use of this factual example enables and audience to grasp onto a physical piece of evidence, thus, are able to gauge an acknowledgement of subjectivity, whereby discoveries depend on the perspective of those viewing them to be classified as a definitive discovery. Barbara Stanners acknowledges this element of understanding the subjectivity of discovery, "*Discovery can be conveyed as being open to reassessment over time and from different perspectives and contexts*". Collectively, discoveries have been affected by social construction, and therefore have resulted in investigations, as described in [ASHONE](#), becoming reliant on the introspections of various individuals who view the tangible or theoretical evidence from opposing points of view.

Contrastingly, GT, written by Jonathon Swift in 1726, although the total antithesis of ASHONE in relation to the content and structure, the novel, specifically "The Land of the Houyhnhnms" explores rather personal discoveries rooted in emotional understanding. The facetious satire, whilst revolving around verisimilitude and hyperbolic farce, has underlying contextual meaning in terms of human behaviour, and what it means to be "human". Dr. Gulliver, whose discovery of "The Land of the Houyhnhnms" is in fact unexpected (as he was merely travelling to acquire more funds to support his growing family) is presented with characters known as "Houyhnhnms", which are intended to represent the most perfect and utopic form of human life; whereby their behaviour and cultural normalities are a clear division of how poorly humans truly behaved in reality. For example, the juxtaposition between the "Houyhnhnms" and human existence is recognised when Dr. Gulliver is explaining how horses are used in his world; *"That if any of them proved intolerably vicious, they were employed for carriages; that they were severely beaten, while they were young, for any mischievous tricks."* (Chapter 31, Pg 2). As he continues, he realises the extent of his negative personal differences, as an audience gains an understanding of what human actuality is truly like, *"It put me to the pains of many circumlocutions, to give my master a right idea of what I spoke; for their language does not abound in variety of words, because their wants and passions are fewer than among us."* (Chapter 31, Pg 2). The emotional discovery, which comes in the form of the distinction of perfection acts as a mirror to which Dr. Gulliver can see the reflection of his own flaws causes a shift in his perception of self and the world in which he returns to. *"Discovery can affirm or challenge widely held assumptions or beliefs of human experience"* (Barbara Stanners). This shift, thus, changes his personal feelings towards the world, feeling as if he needs to act with a sense of benevolence in similitude to the standard presented by the Houyhnhnms. *"Of mankind we may say in general they are fickle, hypocritical, and greedy of gain."* (Niccolo Machiavelli). Therefore, Swift's novel's depictions of the disturbing world of reality, by creating a world which is the epitome of excellence, allows for the protagonist to discover emotional and personal differences in which affect him as an individual.

In comparison to perfection, the discovery of the "Yahoo" characters located in the "Land of the Houyhnhnms" gives context to the existentialism felt by Dr. Gulliver; however the implications are perceived according to the introspections felt by various characters. The unanticipated discovery of these "Yahoos" were intended to be interpreted as the lowest practice of human behaviour, whereby Swift has since been labelled as misanthropic;

however his true intentions were merely to explain how their way of living is a façade to how humans conduct themselves in reality. For example, the extent of emotional disgust felt by Gulliver can be explored as he describes how he is unable to adjust to “normal” civilisation without comparing mankind’s actions to that of a Yahoo, ” *This is all according to the due course of things: but, when I behold a lump of deformity, and diseases both in body and mind, smitten with pride, it immediately breaks all the measures of my patience; neither shall I ever be able to comprehend how such an animal and such a vice could tally together.*” Swift’s satirical account of Gulliver witnessing the similarities between his race and the Yahoos distresses Gulliver at a personal level, as he is no longer able to conform to reality, due to the fact that he understands the extent of the Yahoo’s behaviour; which is considered “normal” in society. Of course, the subjectivity of this discovery is evident, considering the arguments between Dr. Gulliver and the magistrates questioning in the hospital to determine if he is in fact insane demonstrates realities inability to accept what is out of the normality. “*Discovery can be confronting, challenging or provocative*” (Barbara Stanners). Dr. Gulliver, who has witnessed humanities truest form in the behaviour of the Yahoo is placed against the magistrates who are unable to grasp the concepts that the way they act is indeed negative. This is evident in the discourse between the four men, when Dr. Gulliver questions the way reality acts towards horses, “*And what is so wrong with that?*” Referencing the way in which people kill horses for no significant reason proves the idea that the extent of some discoveries depend on an individual’s perspective. The ramifications of this discovery, therefore, is questioned and challenged by a higher level of society, however, it is felt on a personal and emotional level by an individual, even if others are unable to consider their own introspections and accept them as possible fact.

In conclusion, ASHONE and GT both give extensive example of discoveries that are a combination of tangible and emotional, personal and introspective; and are often totally unexpected. Bryson’s non-fiction novel discusses deliberate journeys towards a tangible result using facetious language to entice the reader to continue. Whereas Swift’s narrative has a protagonist who is forced to face the “truth” of discovery that changes his perception of self through ample literary techniques and introspections. “*Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.*”(Michelangelo). Discoveries indeed are a significant part of human existence, and it is up to the individual themselves to decipher what the unknown truly means to them.