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Social and cultural anthropology
Standard level
Paper 1

8 May 2026

Zone A afternoon | **Zone B** afternoon | **Zone C** afternoon

1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions to students

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage and answer questions 1 and 2. Choose either question 3 or 4. Answer question 5.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[30 marks]**.

Read the passage.

Passage adapted from Selmer, B., 2023. Concerns, Considerations and Conceptions of Kinship: Inheritance in Modern Danish Blended Families. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* (2023), 31(3), pp.18–32.

Danish inheritance law attempts to reflect the diverse ways people experience kinship, balancing marital bond with generational ties. This reflects a classic anthropological debate between descent and alliance. In blended families, the main site of conflict lies between the surviving spouse and the children from earlier relationships, who form distinct family lines. This is a structural conflict.

5 Divorce, remarriage, and new partnerships create blended families. These may include children from previous relationships, shared children, or both. Kinning, the process of recognizing kinship, involves three aspects: kinning by nature, by nurture, and by law. Blended families are kinned in different ways, some only by nurture.

10 Inheritance becomes a site where kinship is actively negotiated: a process of kinning and de-kinning, filled with emotions, expectations, and disappointments. Here questions emerge: Who are kin? Who counts as family? The experience of kinship is not fixed but fluid and contested.

After an interview with Peter, I felt unsettled. He was an exception: he refused all his deceased mother's belongings and spent his inheritance on an expensive vacation. "I just got rid of it as fast as possible; I didn't get along with my parents," he told me. His refusal contradicted most people's
15 feelings about inheritance. But this rejection confirmed its significance. Declining his inheritance was part of a de-kinning process.

In this ethnographic project in Denmark, I explore how people in blended families navigate kinship recognition and continuity through inheritance. I conducted ethnographic interviews in 2012–2013, focusing on the meaning of inheritance in relation to economy, identity, and belonging.

20 Like gift exchange, inherited objects sustain relationships with deceased relatives. But what should be sold, kept, or discarded? People devise homemade rules to decide, drawing lots or invoking primogeniture (firstborn) and gender, for example giving a gold watch to the eldest son.

When someone dies, families must decide what to do with their belongings, revealing a delicate balance between affection, memory, and value. Heirlooms (inherited objects) are often placed in
25 attics, in a kind of liminal space, neither used nor disposed of. "It's not worth anything," people say, downplaying the object's market value. But as Hanne admitted, after googling her mother's silverware, "I'm a bit embarrassed that I did, but it was valuable. I could have used the money." Still, she gave it to her sister.

30 Two ways in which people understand what it means to be family coexist in Denmark. One emphasizes mutuality and shared life, kinning by nurture. The other relies on normative understandings of kinship, kinning by law or by nature. These views have conflicting implications in inheritance.

Torben was hurt when his step-grandfather left him nothing: "I have known him since childhood, I regarded him as my grandfather. I thought we were close." In contrast, Morten justified his
35 inheritance from his father resentfully: "He was never there for me when he was alive. His new family was more important. Now he has to compensate."

After Christina’s mother died, her father kept the family home undivided. When he planned to remarry, Christina objected: “I think it’s only fair that I receive my inheritance from my mother if he marries again. That’s what the rules say.” Though legally correct, this position created family tensions.

Louise grew up in a happy blended family. But when her maternal grandfather died, her mother gave many of his “funny male things” to Louise’s stepbrother. “He has his grandfathers,” Louise said. “There might be boys in our branch of the family in the future. It would have been cool for them to have these old family things.” Her mother seemed to assign inheritance based on gender, seeing her stepson as the only male child in the household. Louise, however, thought in terms of lineage.

Objects—silverware, gold watches—materialize relationships, preserve memories, and shape perceptions of fairness and belonging. While legal frameworks attempt clarity, it is in attics, dining rooms, and conversations that family ties are ultimately redefined.

Kinning captures the different ways members of blended families are connected. When kinship is based on nature or law, passing on an inheritance may feel like a moral or legal obligation. But ties between step-relatives remain ambiguous. Kinning and de-kinning involve deciding who is included and who is not.

Answer question 1 **and** question 2.

1. Define the term **agency** and describe how it is understood and applied in the context of the passage. [4]
2. Analyse the ethnographic data presented in the passage using the concept of **symbolism**. [6]

Answer **either** question 3 **or** question 4.

3. Compare and contrast the ways in which the key concept of **belief and knowledge** or **social relations** is evident in this passage with how it is evident in **one** other ethnographic example you have studied. [10]

OR

4. Compare and contrast the approaches to research adopted by the anthropologist in this passage to the approaches to research used by **one** other anthropologist you have studied. Make reference to concepts and ethnographic material in your answer. [10]

Answer question 5.

5. Why does anthropology matter? Discuss with reference to **at least two** sources of ethnographic material and examples from the passage. [10]

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References:

Selmer, B. 2023. Concerns, Considerations and Conceptions of Kinship: Inheritance in Modern Danish Blended Families. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* (2023), 31(3), [e-journal] pp. 18–32. <https://doi.org/10.3167/saas.2023.310303>. [Accessed 22 May 2026]. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Deed license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Source adapted.