

AQA

Power and Conflict

Poetry Anthology

GCSE Revision Guide

Contents

Ozymandias	3
by Percy Bysshe Shelley	
London	6
by William Blake	
Extract from The Prelude	9
by William Wordsworth	
My Last Duchess	12
by Robert Browning	
The Charge of the Light Brigade	15
by Alfred Lord Tennyson	
Exposure	18
by Wilfred Owen	
Storm On the Island	21
by Seamus Heaney	
Bayonet Charge	24
by Ted Hughes	
Remains	27
by Simon Armitage	
Poppies	31
by Jane Weir	
War Photographer	34
by Carol Ann Duffy	
Tissue	37
by Imtiaz Dharker	
The Émigrée	40
by Carol Rumens	
Kamikaze	43
by Beatrice Garland	
Checking Out Me History	46
by John Agard	

Welcome to our GCSE Poetry Revision Guide

A booklet that includes notes on every poem in the AQA Power and Conflict cluster for GCSE English Literature along with prompt questions to help you to revise each poem.

We know that learning all of the anthology poems is never an easy task and this booklet is here to help you. This resource should lead you to a better understanding of each poem, its context and the key language and structural elements that might be discussed in an exam.

The poems are in the same order that you'll find in the Power and Conflict part of the anthology published by AQA. The revision notes for each poem include general information, some contextual thoughts, analysis of structure and tone and then an in-depth look at the language and ideas of the poem. The revision questions should help you to explore the poem further and practise writing effective exam answers.

You can use this GCSE Poetry Revision Guide in a number of ways. If you have missed the important analysis lessons on key poems, you can create or supplement your own analysis with these notes. If you find certain poems difficult, you might concentrate on reading the overviews of those poems only for revision. If you want a more comprehensive revision task, you could read all 15 poetry overviews and answer the revision questions as you go. When you first begin practising full exam questions you could use these notes for reference to help to form a good, solid analysis.

We know that studying poetry can seem very daunting, so we hope that you will find this GCSE Poetry Revision Guide a useful and valuable resource for exam preparation.

Ozymandias

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Summary

Ozymandias is a poem in sonnet form by the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. It was written as part of a friendly competition with his friend Horace Smith in 1817. Shelley was a renegade of his times: he left his wife for Mary Godwin (who later wrote *Frankenstein*), believed in revolutionary ideals about the world and had to live outside of Britain for much of his adult life to avoid scandal. **Shelley was a poet of the Romantic movement.** This was a movement of poetry started in the late 1700s by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and their friends. Its poets believed in the importance of the natural world and aimed to show the beauty and supremacy of nature at all times. **Emotion above all else was important.** Even though this poem seems to be about a great ruler and the statue that he left behind, we can still see the importance of the natural world in *Ozymandias*. The desert and the cruel and harsh landscape of Egypt is the last image we are left with in the poem, showing that nature conquers all.



The Title

Ozymandias was the Greek name given to Ramses II, one of the greatest pharaohs of ancient Egypt. In the early 19th century, when Shelley was writing poetry, Europeans became fascinated with Egyptian culture after Napoleon conquered Egypt and began transporting the great treasures of the ancient Egyptians back to Europe. Shelley and a friend learned of the acquisition by the British Museum of a massive statue of Ramses II. They decided to have a competition to see who could write the best poem about this statue. While, to a certain extent, Shelley's poem is about the ravages of time and how no one is remembered forever, the fact that this poem is named *Ozymandias* shows that the pharaoh has not been forgotten entirely.

Structure

The poem is a sonnet, an old-style love poem. The specific style of sonnet used here is the

Petrarchan sonnet. This type of sonnet is written in iambic pentameter (each line having ten syllables with five stressed syllables). This type of poem includes an octave (eight lines) to begin, which sets out a problem. Commonly, this type of poem will have a volta or turn in the ninth line and the end of the poem (the last six lines) are referred to as the sestet and offer a solution. In Shelley's poem, we see some of these regular features played with and changed, perhaps to highlight the breaking down of the pharaoh's control. Perhaps this reflects that the power and human achievements of the pharaoh in the poem have been destroyed by nature.

The poem is written directly to the reader. The poet speaks second-hand about the experience: it is actually a traveller he has met who has seen the statue for himself. The image of the statue is described and built up in sections until we can imagine the entire thing

and the poem ends, not with the discussion of the greatness of the pharaoh, but with the image of the lonely desert where nature has reclaimed her place.

Ideas and Language

Ozymandias is a poem written in the first person. While Shelley often wrote about the beauty of nature, here he chooses to write about the ferocious forces of nature. 'Ozymandias' or Ramses II was one of the greatest leaders of the ancient Egyptian world. The people of his time would have thought of him as a 'god on Earth'. Many massive statues were created in his honour and it is probable that the Egyptians themselves imagined that they would last forever. In the poem, however, we see the destructive forces of time and nature. The once-great civilisation is in ruins and the great statues to Ramses are in pieces. **The poem is a warning about arrogance and pride in the face of unstoppable natural forces.**

The poet speaks directly to the reader about a 'traveller' he has met. The traveller has told him about a great, ruined statue in the desert. We get impressions of the statue and the man who built it. Phrases such as 'whose frown and wrinkled lip' and 'sneer of cold command' show us that Shelley disapproves of the pharaoh. **He seeks to paint him as an arrogant and cruel character who cared little for his subjects.** He pronounced himself 'king of kings' showing his arrogance, power and pride. **His pride is shown to be pointless.** He says, on the sculpture, 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!' in an effort to put fear into the hearts of his enemies because of his great power and ability. Since the statues are now destroyed, his life's work ruined by the passage of time, people will more likely 'despair' at the transitory nature of such power. **This power that he wielded was fleeting and unimportant in the vast scheme of time.** The

short phrase 'Nothing beside remains' finishes off this idea, stating in a simple way the finality of the destruction. The caesura here adds to this sense of finality.

Shelley uses language throughout the poem that impresses us with the ruined state of the statue. When he describes the statue, he uses the technique of personification (the comparing of something that is not human with human characteristics), as though the statue has been alive at some point but is now dead and decaying: 'trunkless legs', 'shatter'd visage' and 'wrinkled lip'. The final lines of the poem revert to speaking of the desert itself, using the alliterative phrases 'boundless and bare' and 'lone and level' to enhance the sense of the emptiness, the constant sameness of the desert in which the statue stands. **Ultimately, it is the desert that has vast power and survives the centuries.**



Ozymandias - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who is a modern-day Ozymandias, and why? **AO1**
2. Pick three words which describe the place where the statue is found. **AO1**
3. What is a metaphor? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What is the poet trying to tell the audience about power? **AO1**
6. Look at lines 5 and 13. Which words or phrases convey a sense of Ozymandias' power? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology (such as alliteration, hyperbole or metaphor) when explaining your answer. **AO2**
8. Why does the poet use the sonnet form to tell the story of Ozymandias? **AO2**
9. How do you think an audience of the time would have received Shelley's poem? Would audiences today have a different reaction? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the effects of power in *Ozymandias* and either *The Prelude: Stealing the Boat* or *Storm on the Island* in the Power and Conflict cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

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AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

London

by William Blake

Context

London was written by William Blake and published in 1794 in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. This collection was also illustrated by Blake, and aimed to show the 'two contrary states of the human soul'. The songs of innocence are generally positive and celebratory, while the songs of experience cast an unforgiving eye on contemporary developments and living conditions. *London* belongs to the latter category.

Blake is regarded as a key member of the Romantics, an artistic and literary movement which was interested in human emotions and spirituality. Romantics were opposed to the Establishment and felt that many people, particularly the poor, were oppressed and exploited by both the wealthy classes and recent scientific and industrial advances. Romantics believed in the power of the imagination and the idea that people could only be truly free if they were ruled by their creative and emotional impulses.

London is a poem which takes a bleak view of the capital city. Seen through Romantic eyes, it is a depressing, dangerous and cruel place.

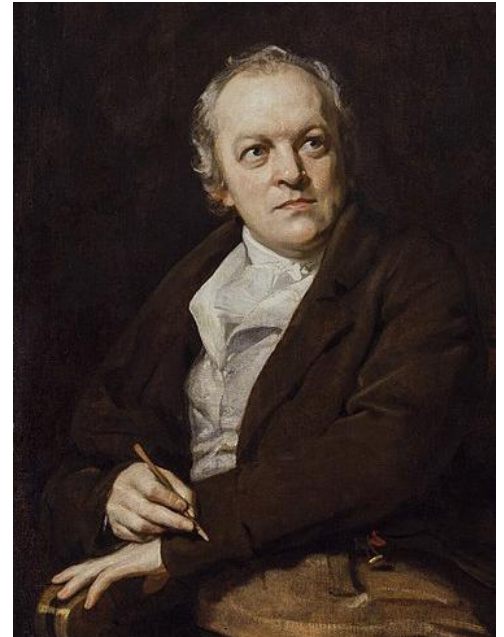
Structure and Form

London is divided into four stanzas (known as quatrains) with an ABAB rhyming scheme. This gives it a very simple rhythm, which reflects its place as a song in Blake's collection.

The poem is structured so that the reader is touring the city with Blake, taking in the sights and sounds that he sees and hears as he wanders through the streets. In the first stanza he mentions that he is close to the Thames, and there is a sense that he is meandering with the river as he makes his observations.

In the first quatrain, Blake is concerned with what he can see, but in the second quatrain he starts to describe what he can hear, and it is the addition of this sensory element which gives the poem its impact as it progresses.

The poem builds to the third quatrain, where



Blake makes clear his **contempt for the various institutions of power which have combined to create this city of corruption:** 'Church,' 'Soldier' and 'Palace' represent religion, the army and the monarchy, which have all oppressed the 'Chimney-Sweeper' – the common man.

The poem ends with the juxtaposition of the 'Marriage hearse', which is not only a comment on marriage but also a comment on the city itself. **Blake's choice of last word – a vehicle used for transporting the dead – summarises his views on the blighted city.**

Language

Blake's language throughout *London* is bleak and negative, reflecting his attitude to the city. **The poem has a polemic feel – it is attacking the**

nation's capital and exposing its corruption and poverty.

Repetition is used frequently by Blake to hammer home his feelings. The repetition of 'charter'd' shows how he feels about the laws which have been imposed on London (to give something a charter is to impose legal restrictions and ownership upon it). There is a sense of irony here that the Thames, a natural body of water, has been made official and subjected to laws; this type of bureaucracy was something the Romantics disliked intensely.

Blake then goes on to repeat 'marks', playing with the meaning of the word. As a verb, he uses it to mean observe, but as a noun it is an impression or disfigurement. **This conveys the impression that the oppression of the city has physically impacted on its inhabitants; their misery is etched into their faces.**

The repetition of 'every' in the second and third stanza shows how widespread the city's corruption has become, while the word 'cry' is also repeated across these quatrains, creating an auditory landscape for the reader. This word is accompanied by many other descriptions of the sounds that can be heard: 'sigh', 'curse' and 'blasts' all add to the negative impression of the city. **The combined effect is that the city is a type of hell, filled with cries of misery.**

Blake's artistic side can be seen in the strong imagery within the poem. The alliterative 'mind-forg'd manacles' are a vivid metaphor for the hopelessness and feeling of captivity experienced by inhabitants who are too poor to escape, while the sinisterly sibilant 'hapless Soldier's sigh' which 'Runs in blood down palace walls' is a disturbing metaphor. **This reminds the reader of the French Revolution, so recent in Blake's history, when ordinary people rose up against an oppressive state.** Perhaps Blake is suggesting here that a similar event could

happen in London if the inequality and misery continues.

But perhaps the most disturbing imagery is that of the 'youthful Harlot' in the final stanza. The young prostitute's 'curse' only metaphorically 'blasts' her new-born child, but this is violent language which illustrates the harsh society in which she lives and the bleak future for children born into that way of life. The juxtaposition of 'Marriage hearse' shows that even apparently sacred and religious unions can be blighted by 'plagues' – in this case sexually transmitted diseases. **Blake appears to be suggesting that this is a city where religion is no longer sacred – it has descended into hell.**



London - Essential Exam Prep

Read *London* by William Blake, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. How does Blake feel about London in this poem? **AO1**
2. Which sense does Blake refer to the most in this poem? **AO1**
3. What is alliteration? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What does Blake want his audience to think about when reading this poem? **AO1**
6. Look at stanzas three and four. Pick three words or phrases Blake uses to describe people in the city. **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology (such as **sibilance**, **emotive language** or **metaphor**) when explaining your answer. **AO2**
8. How does the poem's structure show that the poet is walking through the streets of London? **AO2**
9. How do you think an audience of the time would have received Blake's poem? Would audiences today have a different reaction? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets create a sense of place in *London* and either *Ozymandias* or *Storm on the Island* from the Power and Conflict cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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Extract from *The Prelude*

by William Wordsworth

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

William Wordsworth was a key player in the Romantic literary movement, which occurred in the late 1700s and early 1800s. **Romantic writers rebelled against the strict, more formal requirements of poetry which had preceded them.** They were interested in the power of nature, humanity and emotion, and they were opposed to the industrialisation and scientific progress which was sweeping through Europe at the time. They were also concerned about the rights of the poor, feeling that they were often exploited by the Establishment.

As well as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Keats, Byron and Shelley are all considered to be Romantic poets.

The Prelude is an epic poem of 14 sections. Autobiographical in nature, Wordsworth intended it to chart his progression as a poet. He worked on it throughout his life; it was published posthumously in 1850. He planned to publish the poem as a prologue to a longer epic poem he was going to write with Coleridge, titled *The Recluse*. This project was never finished.

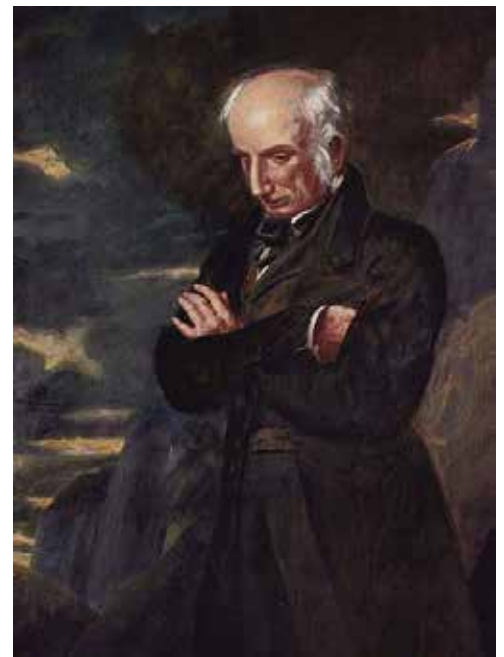
In this extract from *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes how, led by nature to the banks of a lake one summer's evening, he steals a boat and rows out. As he looks back at the shore, a black peak comes into view, terrifying him. He rows back and returns home troubled, thinking about the power and unpredictability of nature.

Structure and Form

The extract is part of a much larger, epic work charting formative moments from throughout Wordsworth's life. The tone of this piece, though, is not epic but personal and anecdotal.

The events of the poem are narrated in chronological order, starting with the act of stealing the boat and leading through to its consequences.

Wordsworth uses a loose iambic pentameter throughout, which lends a measured, conversational rhythm to the poem without allowing the form to restrict his expression. There are no stanzas to arrange the writing more consciously. This lack of overly formal structure contributes to the personal feeling – almost as



if Wordsworth is simply narrating ideas as they occur to him.

He builds tension throughout the first half of the extract, describing taking the boat as an 'act of stealth / And troubled pleasure', which hints at events to come. The pace of the first half of the poem echoes the calm confidence he feels as he rows in an 'unswerving line'.

However, the introduction of the 'huge peak' in the middle of the extract indicates a change of tone and pace. As he describes how he 'struck and struck again' to escape the sight, his lines become more hurried in pace, with frequent enjambment to indicate his panic.

Language

There is a dreamlike quality to the language used in this extract, helping to convey the sense of a memory, viewed hazily across the years. The 'small circles glittering idly in the moon', the 'sparkling light' and the 'elfin pinnacle' in the first section of the poem have an ethereal tone. There is a lot of sibilance here, too, adding to the feeling that it is a hushed experience. Wordsworth uses a simile to describe the grace of his boat: it is 'like a swan', and this image is one of peace and natural beauty.

However, this pleasant, dream-like quality changes with the sight of the 'huge peak' – as if the experience turns into a nightmare which is almost gothic in tone. The repetition of 'huge' here emphasises how overwhelming the sight is for Wordsworth, and the repetition in 'I struck and struck again' indicates a rising panic as he tries to escape. **The poet personifies the mountain, adding to its nightmarish quality.** It 'upreared its head' and seems to move towards him 'like a living thing'; it becomes the poet's antagonist.

The terror of the poet is conveyed in his 'trembling oars'. There is an echo from the beginning of the poem and his 'act of stealth' when he describes how he 'stole' his way back – only this time he is scared and shamefaced, rather than full of adventure.

The tone of the poem once more changes, this time from terror to introspection, as he describes his return home and the days after his experience. The 'dim and determined sense / Of unknown modes of being' is reflective but again dreamlike – as though the poet cannot quite define the nature of what he has experienced. The final image of 'huge and mighty forms, that do not live / Like living men' has a menacing quality – **Wordsworth has realised the power and awe of nature and is aware of how much he does not know about the landscape around him.**

Although undoubtedly narrating an actual experience, this extract is highly symbolic and reflects Wordsworth's development as a poet. His voyage out on the boat, fixing his eyes on the 'horizon's utmost boundary' could be read as a metaphor for his eagerness and enthusiasm for life and nature. The appearance of the 'grim shape' which 'Towered up between me and the stars' is both physical but also symbolic: Wordsworth's light has been blocked, and the subsequent 'darkness' which hangs over him is metaphorical – he is battling with a bleak and terrifying prospect as he tries to understand the power and awe of the natural world. However, at the end of the extract we have a feeling of resolution; Wordsworth has come to an uneasy understanding of the nature around him, and realises that it is alive in 'huge and mighty forms'. **This experience has been a rite of passage for him, as he passes from the naivety of childhood to adulthood.**



Extract from *The Prelude* - Essential Exam Prep

Read the extract from *The Prelude* by William Wordsworth, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who is the 'her' mentioned by Wordsworth in the first line? **AO1**
2. Look at lines five and six. Find two words which describe how Wordsworth felt about stealing the boat. **AO1**
3. What is a metaphor? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What is the message of the poem? **AO1**
6. Look at the last twelve lines of the extract. Pick three words or phrases Wordsworth uses to describe his reaction to what happened that night. **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology (such as metaphor, repetition and enjambment) when explaining your answer. **AO2**
8. How do the poet's thoughts and feelings change over the course of the extract? **AO2**
9. How do you think an audience of the time would have received Wordsworth's poem? Would audiences today have a different reaction? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets create a sense of awe and wonder in the extract from *The Prelude* and either *Tissue* or *Ozymandias* from the Power and Conflict cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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My Last Duchess

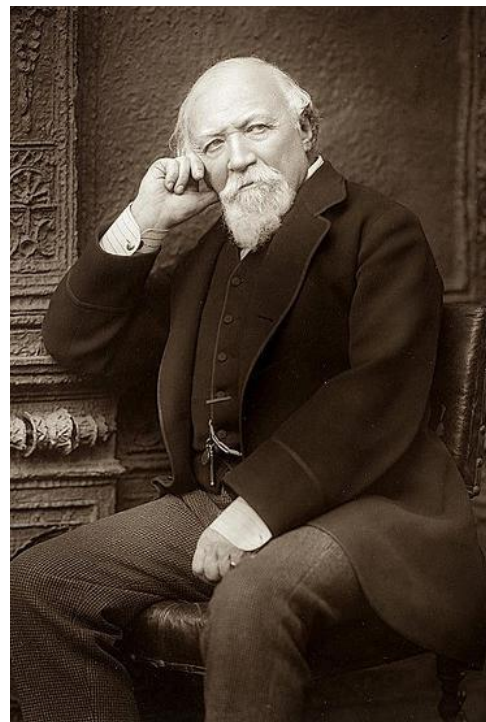
by Robert Browning

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

My Last Duchess is a poem by the English Victorian poet, Robert Browning. Robert Browning became one of the foremost poets of the Victorian period and is equally well-remembered for his love affair and marriage with the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Robert Browning wrote for the stage before turning to poetry and his most famous poems are dramatic monologues, a dramatic form in which one character speaks for an extended period of time. This can be seen as a dramatic form, something similar to the style of writing he presented in his plays.

My Last Duchess is a dramatic monologue told by a gentleman described in the first line as 'Ferrara'. Most people speculate that this identifies the speaker as Alfonso II d'Este, the fifth Duke of Ferrara, who married Lucrezia di Cosimo de' Medici in 1558. Their marriage lasted two years until Lucrezia died, aged 17, in 1561. There was a strong suspicion that she had been poisoned, possibly by her husband. Robert Browning used this story as the basis for his long narrative poem of the Duke's actions.



The Title

The poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by the narrator. It is through him that all the ideas and action of the story are told to us. **This makes us question at times his reliability as the narrator of his story and we wonder, by the end, how much of what he tells us is actually true.** The poem has a steady and regular rhythm of iambic pentameter reflecting the outer calmness of the narrator as he relays his story. It also shows the formal way he is talking to the listener in the poem, condescending to him perhaps. This is further reflected in the regular rhyme scheme of the poem. The rhyme scheme is occasionally varied with the use of enjambment and we begin to get a sense that the Duke's carefully ordered narrative is not all it seems (it may hint at deeper passions and feelings).

The main story of the poem is told with a framing of the Duke discussing the pictures in

his art gallery. One can imagine the two men walking through a long gallery of paintings and sculpture and the Duke stopping to show off his favourite pieces along the way. **It is important to note that Browning chooses to withhold the identity of the listener until the very last lines.** Not until we are aware of what happened to the Duke's first wife are we told that he is addressing an envoy sent to create a contract for the Duke's second marriage. This then places the reader at an interesting point at the end of the poem – we are left wondering why the Duke told the story, was it a confession or a warning?

Ideas and Language

The poem deals with feelings of pride and ownership, which fit well into the Power and Conflict collection. **The Duke is clear about the amount of power he wanted to assert over the Duchess.** Even after her death, her portrait

is hidden since 'none puts by the curtain I have drawn for you, but I'. The Duke may control the painting as he could not control the living Duchess. The use of the word 'my' again implies ownership of the Duchess. He exerts his power not simply over her but over all his subjects. When discussing what people might ask him about the look upon the Duchess's face, he implies that people are scared of him: 'as they would ask me, if they durst'.

The Duke believes that he paid for the Duchess with the mighty gift of his 'nine-hundred-years-old name' and that she should be extremely grateful. **There is a clear indication that she is from a lower social standing than him.** Indeed, if the Duke in question is Alfonso II d'Este, his first wife was considered to be 'new money' and so not of the same social standing as him. He says that he could condescend to teach her how to behave but 'then would be some stooping; and I choose never to stoop.' The repetition of the word 'stoop' in various places references the Duchess's lower status and the Duke's unwillingness to join her on a level on which she feels comfortable.

The Duke's final action, of having his wife killed, is foretold by the references to death in the earlier parts of the poem. He talks of the 'faint half-flush that dies along her throat' which reminds us of the change of colour on dead flesh. The Duchess's only failing seems to be that she was too friendly: 'too soon made glad, too easily impressed'. She liked everything she looked upon and was not sophisticated enough to see the greater worth of the Duke's present to her, his ancient name. The actual confession of the killing is left rather ambiguous: 'I gave commands, then all smiles stopped together' but still implies the Duke's absolute power over all he surveys.

At the end of the poem we become aware that the Duke is discussing his last wife with the

man who will make a contract for his next wife. **The dramatic implications of this revelation are impressive so late in the poem.** We may have already formed a view of why the Duke chose to tell his story but now the knowledge that his listener is sent from the father of his future bride changes our understanding of the story. **Is the Duke not simply confessing his actions or bragging about his power but rather menacingly explaining the actions he will take if his new wife does not live up to his expectations?**



My Last Duchess - Essential Exam Prep

Read *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who is the narrator in the poem? **AO1**
2. Describe the Duke in one sentence. **AO1**
3. What is a rhetorical question? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What is the poet telling us about pride? **AO1**
6. Look at lines 9-10 and line 45. Which words or phrases in the poem convey a sense of the Duke's power? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology in your answer. **AO2**
8. How does the use of the dramatic monologue form enhance the poem's meaning? **AO2**
9. Browning wrote his poem in the 19th century but set it in the 16th century during the Italian Renaissance. How do you think a 19th century audience would react to this portrayal of the Duke? Would modern audiences think differently? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the power of humans in *My Last Duchess* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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The Charge of the Light Brigade

by Alfred Lord Tennyson

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

The Charge of the Light Brigade was written as a tribute to the men who died in this famous charge during the Crimean War. Tennyson was the Poet Laureate at the time he wrote the poem in 1854, while the Crimean War was still being fought against Russia. Although the battle was disastrous, Tennyson wanted to glorify the struggle and bravery of the men. He would also have wanted to stir patriotic feeling for Britain by showing that the act of dying for your nation was noble and deserving of high praise.

The Title

The poem is called *The Charge of the Light Brigade* because it deals with the historical events of a key battle in the Crimean War, in which the British fought against the Russians for territory in the Crimea (north Black Sea region, recently part of Ukraine but now part of Russia). The poem was written by Alfred Tennyson in 1854 when he was Poet Laureate of Britain and is a tribute to the men who died in the hopeless attack of British lightly armoured cavalry against a battery of guns.

Structure

The poem is a story, told through a third person narrator (the poet). The story of the battle is told in chronological order from the galloping in to the retreat. This enhances the feeling of the poem as an epic tale rather than making it seem realistic. This adds to the feeling of grandeur and glory in self-sacrifice. The first three verses reflect on the charge of the men, the fourth on the battle itself and the fifth talks about the aftermath. The final stanza gives Tennyson the opportunity **to reflect on the charge and the bravery of the men. It is meant to be a glorification of the men involved and the third person narration aids this with a sense of distance and respect.**

The regular rhythm of the poem sets up a sense of the galloping of the horses (this is, after all, a cavalry charge). **The fast pace reflects the speed of the advance and the battle's energy**

- **it was all over in 20 minutes.** While there are both rhyming couplets and triplets in the poem, there are also times when the rhythm is lost, perhaps referring to the falling of the soldiers or the futile nature of their endeavour. Some lines rhyme, others don't. This perhaps mimics the chaos the men found themselves in when asked to advance into a valley surrounded by the enemy.

Repetition throughout the poem again reproduces the thundering of horses' hooves and may represent the inevitability of the final results of the charge. **The repetition of 'Rode the six hundred' gives a feeling of inevitability about their fight and eventual deaths.** There is a relentlessness to the words. The final 'honour the' phrase that is repeated reminds the reader what they should do now.

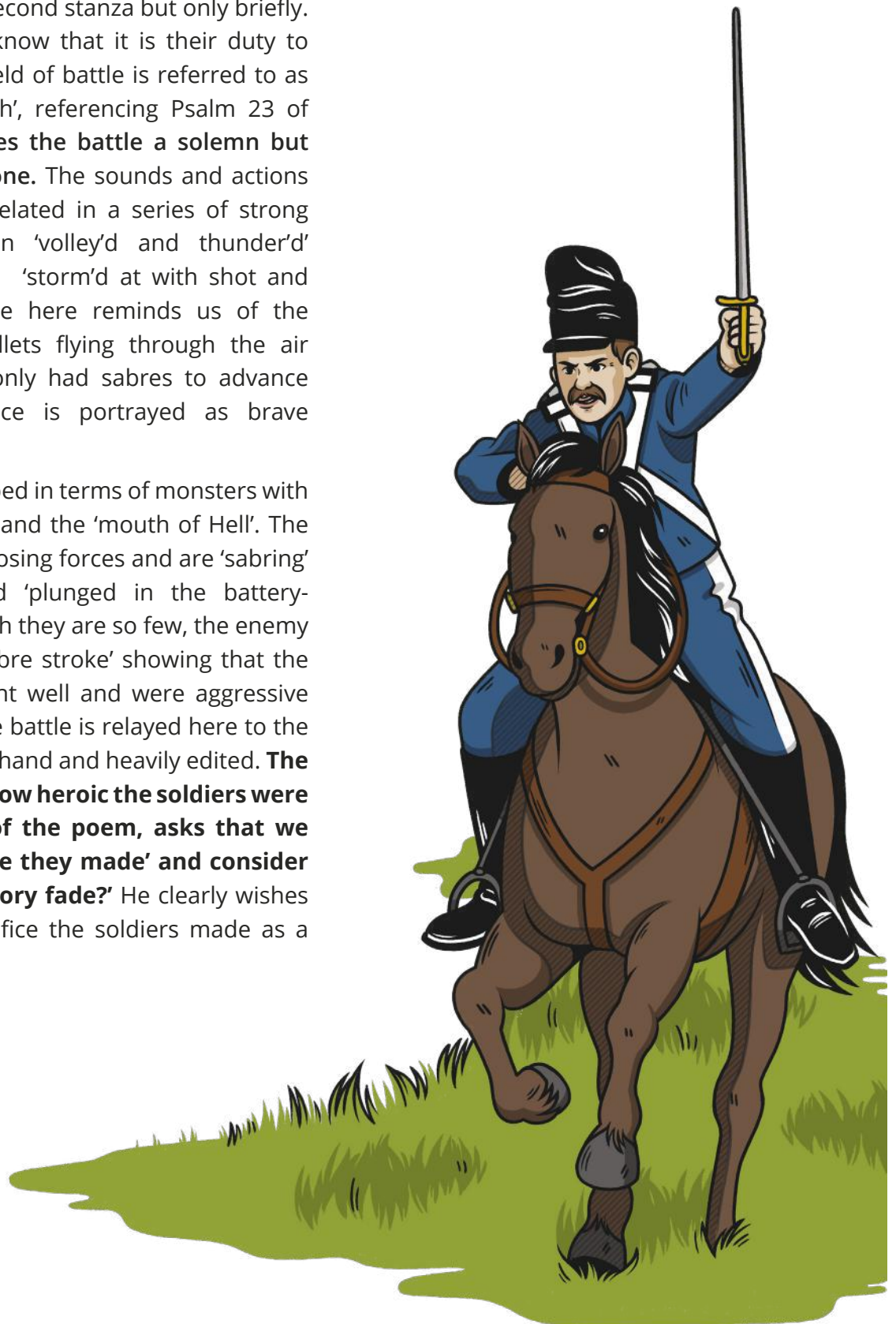
Ideas and Language

The Charge of the Light Brigade is written in the third person. It relates a dramatic version of events of a key battle in the Crimean War. The events had been reported in the press six weeks before Tennyson's version appeared. On 25th of October, 1854 a lightly armoured cavalry unit received a garbled message to attack the Russian forces. Although they knew they were doomed, as the Russians had guns against the cavalry's sabres (a type of sword), the brigade did as they had been told and attacked. Of the

666 men who took part in this charge, 271 were casualties (injured, captured or killed).

The misunderstanding in the commands is mentioned in the second stanza but only briefly. The soldiers only know that it is their duty to 'do and die'. The field of battle is referred to as 'the valley of Death', referencing Psalm 23 of the Bible. **This gives the battle a solemn but almost religious tone.** The sounds and actions of the battle are related in a series of strong verbs. The cannon 'volley'd and thunder'd' and the men were 'storm'd at with shot and shell'. The sibilance here reminds us of the sounds of the bullets flying through the air while these men only had sabres to advance with. Their advance is portrayed as brave and noble.

The valley is described in terms of monsters with 'the jaws of Death' and the 'mouth of Hell'. The men reach the opposing forces and are 'sabring' and 'charging' and 'plunged in the battery-smoke'. Even though they are so few, the enemy 'Reel'd from the sabre stroke' showing that the British forces fought well and were aggressive attackers. While the battle is relayed here to the reader, it is second hand and heavily edited. **The poet focusses on how heroic the soldiers were and, at the end of the poem, asks that we 'honour the charge they made' and consider 'when can their glory fade?'** He clearly wishes us to see the sacrifice the soldiers made as a noble one.



The Charge of the Light Brigade

- Essential Exam Prep

Read *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What type of narration occurs in the poem? **AO1**
2. Which war is being described in the poem? **AO3**
3. What is repetition? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. Why do you think the narrator refers to the group as 'the six hundred' throughout the poem? **AO2**
6. Look at stanzas 2, 4 and 6. Which words or phrases in the poem show us that the soldiers were brave? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology such as adverbs, adjectives and repetition when explaining your answer. **AO2**
8. How does telling the story in real time (from the beginning of the battle to the end) enhance the poem's effect on the audience? **AO2**
9. Tennyson was the Poet Laureate (the official poet of Britain) at the time this poem was written. How do you think this might have affected his writing of this poem about a disastrous event in British military history? How do you think people would have responded to this poem in the 19th century? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the realities of war in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might consider *Bayonet Charge* or *Exposure* as good poems for comparison. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

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AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Exposure

by Wilfred Owen

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

Exposure is a poem of the First World War written by Wilfred Owen, one of the most well-known of the war poets. Owen joined the war effort believing that he and others were doing the right thing in fighting. He quickly became disillusioned through the sheer horror of war. He died in the final days of fighting in 1918 and most of his poetry was published posthumously in 1920. **Most of his poetry deals with the horrors he and the other soldiers faced in the trenches of Belgium and France. The poem reflects his anger at the senseless waste of life he saw.** By describing the terrible natural conditions under which the soldiers lived, Owen highlights little considered issues in war – the boredom, the ongoing suffering and the sense of hopelessness.

The Title

The title of the poem shows the ideas to be included in the poem. **The concentration here is not on the battles and wounds inflicted by the enemy but on the sheer discomfort and desolation of the landscape in which they fought.** The battles of the First World War took place in fields in Flanders (Belgium) and France which might, in a different context, be portrayed as a pastoral idyll. The landscape Owen introduces us to here however is comfortless and devastating to the soldiers. Nature itself seems to be the enemy rather than the soldiers on the other side of the conflict.

Owen's poetry generally reflects on his anger at the huge and senseless loss of life in battle. The soldiers fear the potential attack and feel helpless in the face of nature's blast.

The Structure

Exposure is a poem told from the first-person perspective of the poet. He relates his own experiences of the war including the horrific conditions in which the soldiers regularly found themselves.

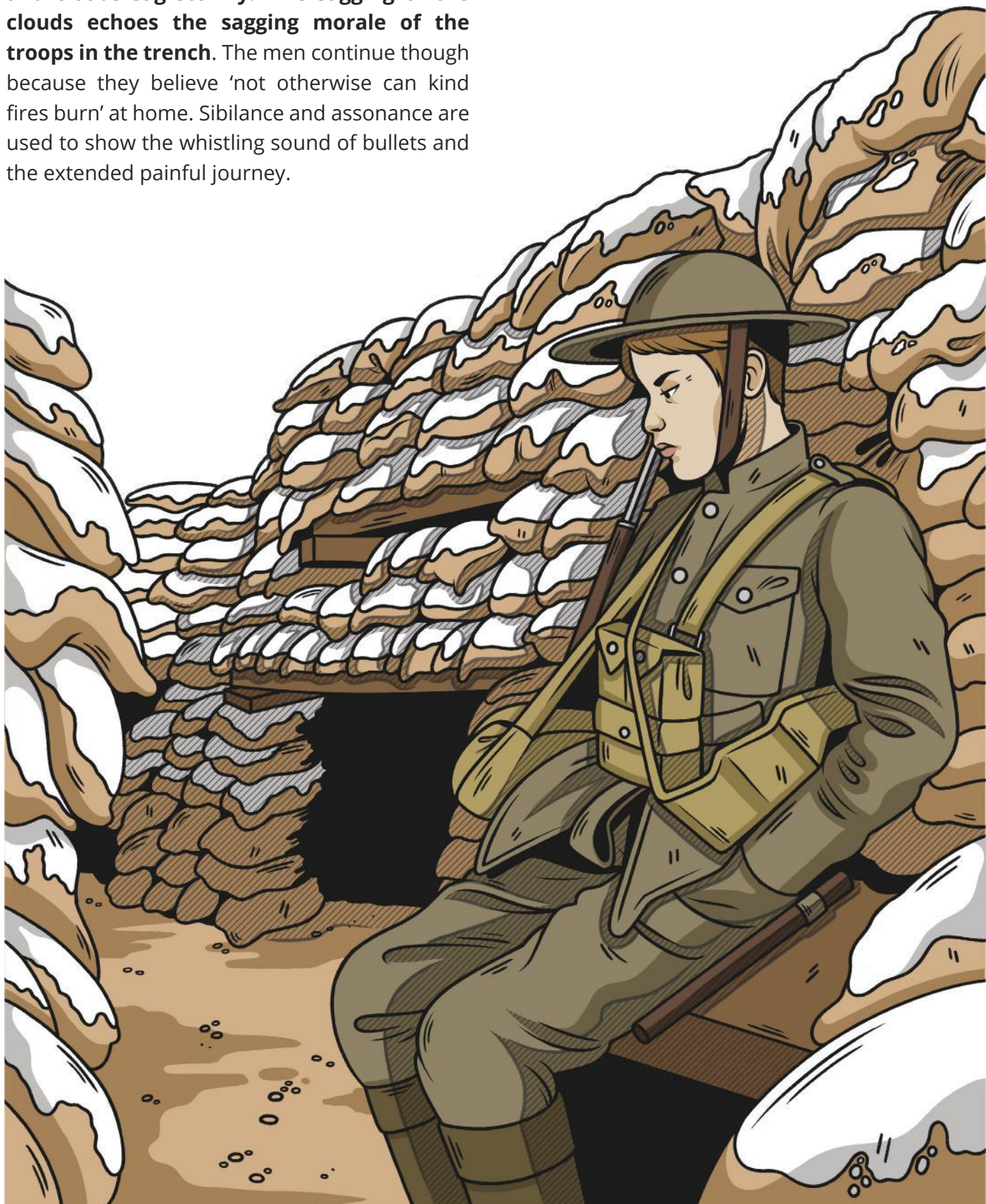
The poem is written with a collective voice ('our', 'we', 'us') showing that this feeling of helplessness is shared by all the soldiers. The poem is in present tense, making the suffering seem simultaneous

with our reading. **We can read about it but do nothing and feel helpless in turn.** The stanzas have regular rhyme schemes and the length of the poem and standard form of the stanzas leaves us with a sense of monotony. The rhymes are often half-rhymes however, perhaps to reflect the confusion and lack of good command and control in the trenches. The line 'But nothing happens' occurs again and again, highlighting the monotony of nights in the trenches.

Ideas and Language

Although the men are in battle, it is the weather that is the enemy here and there is nothing the men can do about it. The actual battle is 'like a dull rumour of some other war' although the sentries 'whisper, curious, nervous' just in case an attack comes. **Nature is personified and threatens the men at all turns: the winds 'knife us' while the 'mad gusts' are like 'twitching agonies of men'.** 'Dawn massing in the east' seems to be drawing together an army of her own, personified to harass the soldiers still further. It is described as 'ranks on shivering ranks' reflecting the discomfort of the soldiers in the trenches. The men are losing hope and fear that their homes are 'all closed: on us the doors are closed'. The conditions are so harsh that 'love of God seems dying' suggesting the soldier's loss of faith in God and the end of battle. **The**

relentlessness of everything is expressed in the line 'We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.' The sagging of the clouds echoes the sagging morale of the troops in the trench. The men continue though because they believe 'not otherwise can kind fires burn' at home. Sibilance and assonance are used to show the whistling sound of bullets and the extended painful journey.



Exposure - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Exposure* by Wilfred Owen, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who seems to be speaking in the poem? **A01**
2. Which war is being described in the poem? **A03**
3. What is assonance? **A02**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **A01**
5. What is the effect of the collective voice in the poem ('Our', 'We', 'Us')? **A02**
6. Look at lines 1 and 6 and all of stanza 3. Which words or phrases in the poem make us see nature as the enemy of the soldiers? **A01**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. You might use appropriate terminology such as personification, adjectives and imagery in your answer. **A02**
8. How does the regular rhyme scheme reflect the monotonous nature of the soldier's experience? How does the repetition of the phrase 'But nothing happens' strengthen this sense of monotony? **A02**
9. How does your knowledge that Owen fought in the First World War affect your understanding of this poem? Do you think Owen believed his sacrifice for his country was worthwhile? **A03**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the power of nature in *Exposure* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might want to compare it to *The Prelude* or *Storm on the Island*. **A01, A02, A03**

Remember!

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A01: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

A02: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

A03: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Storm On the Island

by Seamus Heaney

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) was a Northern Irish poet. He often wrote about childhood and nature and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. The poem *Storm on the Island* comes from the 1966 collection *Death of a Naturalist*, which won several awards and gained Heaney international recognition. The collection also included the famous works *Digging* and *Death of a Naturalist*, which are often studied in schools. Heaney was a world-renowned poet and had terms as a professor at the universities of both Harvard and Oxford. He has been called 'the most important Irish poet since Yeats'.

The Title

The title is blunt and explicit. It shows that the poem will deal with the issue of a storm. The choice remains with the reader about how they interpret the 'storm'. **Some might see it as a literal storm on a small island off the coast of Ireland, while others will see it as a metaphorical reference to the Troubles in Northern Ireland at the time of the writing of the poem.** The first eight letters of the title create the name 'Stormont' – the home of the Irish National Assembly. Heaney rarely wrote directly about the conflict raging in Ireland at the time. His oblique reference to it here is typical of his work.

Structure

The poem is a first-person narrative in which the narrator speaks directly to the reader. The text is inclusive, as if 'we' are part of the action. **It makes the storm feel like a communal experience with the people working together to respond to the threat.** While the opening of the poem shows absolute confidence in the villagers' safety, the later part of the poem shows the fear caused by the 'huge nothing' of the storm. The blank verse gives the poem the feeling of a conversation.

With no breaks or separate stanzas, the poem seems like a solid block, like the houses the people build against the storms. It has also been published as a four-stanza poem, however, with three stanzas of five lines each and one of

four lines. This creates line breaks in particularly interesting places such as at 'like a tame cat/ Turned savage.'

The poet speaks directly to the reader: 'you know what I mean'. This makes us remember our own experiences of the noises trees make in a storm. On this island, there is none of that which Heaney says 'might prove company'. The poem moves from the feeling of peace from being well prepared for the storm to fear when the storm comes.

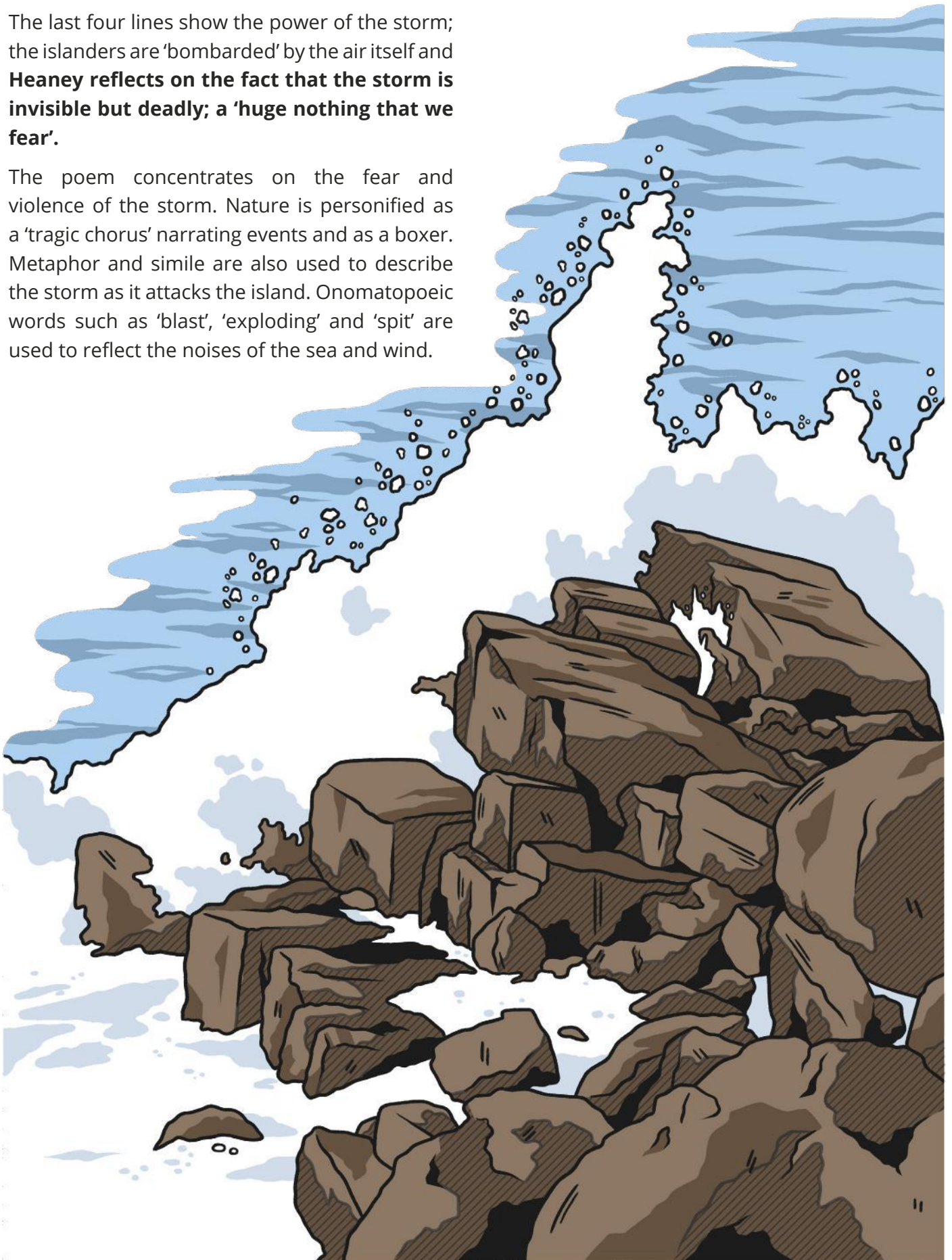
Ideas and Language

This poem looks at a small island community in Northern Ireland. The island is quite inhospitable to begin with: few trees and other things grow there, the 'wizened earth' doesn't trouble the islanders by producing hay and so there are 'no stacks or stooks that can be lost'. There are also no trees that might 'prove company when it blows full blast'. The island is quite a barren wilderness but the sea might seem like 'company' and could be seen as 'exploding comfortably' until the storm comes.

Nature is against them on the island: there is 'no natural shelter'. At line 14 the storm hits. The spray from the sea 'spits like a tame cat turned savage'. It is a tame thing, welcomed in, that turns against its owners. All the humans can do is 'sit tight' while the wind is like a fighter plane that 'dives and strafes'. **It is invisible and impossible to capture, highlighting its ultimate power.**

The last four lines show the power of the storm; the islanders are 'bombaraded' by the air itself and **Heaney reflects on the fact that the storm is invisible but deadly; a 'huge nothing that we fear'**.

The poem concentrates on the fear and violence of the storm. Nature is personified as a 'tragic chorus' narrating events and as a boxer. Metaphor and simile are also used to describe the storm as it attacks the island. Onomatopoeic words such as 'blast', 'exploding' and 'spit' are used to reflect the noises of the sea and wind.



Storm On the Island - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Storm on the Island* by Seamus Heaney, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. In what ways might a storm be powerful? **AO1**
2. Write down three facts that you learn about the environment in the poem. **AO1**
3. What is sensory description? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What is the moral or message of the poem? **AO1**
6. Look at lines 7, 10 and 13. Which words or phrases convey the strength of the storm? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. How does the structure and form of the poem enhance its meaning? How does the rest of the poem compare to the final line? **AO2**
9. The poem is an indirect description of the troubles Northern Ireland has faced. What does the poem suggest these events would have been like for the people living there? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the power of nature in *Storm on the Island* and *Kamikaze* from the Power and Conflict cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Bayonet Charge

by Ted Hughes

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

Bayonet Charge was written and published in 1957 but concentrates on the battles of the First World War. Ted Hughes (1930 – 1998) is known as one of the most important English poets of the 20th century. He became Poet Laureate in 1984. Hughes had spent time in the military as a mechanic before going to university but his father had served in and survived the First World War.

The Title

The poem is called *Bayonet Charge* and centres on the feelings of one soldier as he goes 'over the top' to charge towards the enemy trenches. His initial feelings of patriotism are replaced, as he charges, with an overriding sense of fear. The bayonet of the title is the knife commonly fixed to the front of a soldier's rifle as they charged the enemy. The bayonet charges, when soldiers went over the top of their trenches and tried to gain land on the other side, were notorious for the casualties suffered during them.

Being born in 1930, the experiences of the First World War were not first-hand for Ted Hughes. He was fascinated by his father's stories of fighting during the First World War however and so invented this impression of the thoughts and feelings of a regular foot soldier during the conflict. The feelings of patriotism and then fear are not personal but more universal.

Structure

The text is in third person, giving a remoteness and reportage quality to the poem. Lines are uneven and there is much use of enjambment and caesura to create an irregular rhythm to reflect the soldier's panic and possibly his struggle through the deep mud of the field.

The poem begins **in media res** (in the middle of things/action) and so is immediately gripping. It shows us the soldier's thoughts, feelings and actions over a very short period of time. **The soldier begins with feelings of pride and**

patriotism but these are quickly replaced with fear. The first stanza deals with him coming to his senses in the middle of the battle scene; he is 'suddenly' awake and running. The second stanza notes his confusion and pause in 'bewilderment'. Time seems to stop momentarily. In the third and final stanza, he is compared to a startled hare and seems to have lost focus on all the reasons he fought in the first place. The soldier is 'he'; he could be anyone on this, or any other, battlefield.

Ideas and Language

Hughes attempts to show the juxtaposition between the events and the surroundings as he mentions the pastoral 'green hedge' and the 'yellow hare'. The pain of the soldier and his youth and inexperience are indicated by words like 'raw' and 'bewilderment'.

The soldier is shown as a frightened and helpless creature in this battle. His lack of control is highlighted straight away with the phrase 'Suddenly he awoke'. It seems as if he only comes to understand where he is and what is happening around him as the poem begins. Phrases reflecting the sounds and sights around him are used to make the scene real to use: his uniform is 'raw-seamed', the fields are 'dazzled with rifle fire' and the bullets are 'smacking the belly out of the air'. Words like 'bewilderment' are used to describe his attitude.

The control of others over his actions is evidenced in his comparison to the second hand on a much bigger 'cold clockwork'. **He is at the mercy of the commands of others.** When he runs, the soldier is described as 'a man who has jumped up in the dark', like a man just awakened and stunned with sleep.

The final stanza really highlights his terror. All the reasons for the battle: 'King, honour, human dignity, etcetera' are 'dropped like luxuries' as his body fights to get him out of the 'blue crackling air'. **The soldier has been dehumanised by his own terror at the end and is more like a weapon: 'his terror's touchy dynamite'.**



Bayonet Charge - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Bayonet Charge* by Ted Hughes, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is a bayonet? **AO1**
2. What are the soldier's overriding emotions? **AO1**
3. What is third person narration? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. How does Hughes want readers of the poem to feel? **AO1**
6. Look at stanza one. Pick three words or phrases which suggest panic and chaos. **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words or phrases you picked in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology (such as simile, verb or onomatopoeia) when explaining your answer. **AO2**
8. What is the effect of Hughes beginning his poem, 'Suddenly he awoke and was running -'? **AO2**
9. Does it matter that the poet wasn't born at the time of the First World War? You could consider:
 - the subject matter of the poem;
 - when it was written;
 - what the poet's message was;
 - how different audiences might interpret it. **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the realities of war in *Bayonet Charge* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might want to consider *Exposure* or *Remains*. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Remains

by Simon Armitage

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

Armitage was born in West Yorkshire in 1963. He graduated from Portsmouth with a degree in geography, and later completed an MA at Manchester University, where he wrote his dissertation about the effects of television violence on young offenders. He had several jobs before becoming a freelance writer, including: shelf stacker, disc jockey and lathe operator.

Armitage has published several poetry collections, such as: *Zoom* (1989), *Kid* (1992), *Book of Matches* (1993), *The Dead Sea Poems* (1995), and *Moon Country* (1996). Armitage has also written for TV, stage and radio.

Remains is from a collection of poems called *The Not Dead*, which was written in 2007 for a TV documentary of the same name. It is a collection of modern war poems based on the experience of soldiers in recent conflicts. *Remains* is based on the experiences of a soldier who served in Basra in Iraq. He suffered severe PTSD as a result of his experiences and the poem recalls one particular event where the soldier shot the looter of a bank and was left with horrendous flashbacks reliving the moment of the man's death. **He turned to drink, drugs and crime on his return to Britain and the poem focuses on his overwhelming feelings of guilt and his struggle to come to terms with his experience.**

The Title

The word 'remains' has several meanings: it is often used to refer to what is left of a human body after death – in this case, the brutally injured corpse of the looter. It could also refer to the guilt and remorse felt by the soldier which 'remains' long after the event and haunts his dreams every time he closes his eyes. **Perhaps it also refers to the 'remains' of the soldier, suggesting that he is changed as a result of his experiences and is only a shell of the man he was before he went to war.**

Structure

The poem is written as a first-person monologue, with the soldier as the speaker, and is presented in a very anecdotal style. The poem is structured into eight stanzas, the first seven of which contain four lines and the last one only two. **The shorter last stanza leaves the reader in no doubt that this soldier is not likely to recover from the mental effects of his experiences any time soon.** The focus of the first four stanzas is on the

actual shooting and the final four portray the ensuing mental torture of the soldier when he returns home.

The lack of regular rhyme or rhythm, along with the use of enjambment, help to create a sense of natural speech and the idea that the speaker is relating an anecdote. The opening phrase, 'on another occasion', also suggests that this was not an isolated incident, but one of many faced by the soldier on a daily basis.

The irregular line lengths and varied sentence lengths also imply an erratic chain of thought; the short sentences in stanza six signifying interrupted sleep. **The faster-paced rhythm of the long final sentence portrays the disintegration of the speaker's mind and thought processes and he seems to be increasingly more anxious and agitated by his guilt-laden flashbacks.**

Ideas and Language

The poem contains a great deal of colloquial language, such as 'legs it up the road' and 'one of my mates.' **This helps to create an authentic voice, implying that this could happen to any soldier.** The colloquialisms, along with the use of the present tense, also create an intimate relationship with the reader, as though the speaker is addressing a friend.

The use of the present tense also helps convey a sense of immediacy for the reader, putting us at the scene and keeping the narrator there in his head, reliving the moment countless times. The fact that the soldiers who shoot alongside the speaker are referred to as 'somebody else and somebody else' reinforces this idea of the ordinary soldier experiencing life-changing events in the course of a day's work – the details aren't important, because it is just another day like any other.

The use of the passive voice at the start of the poem, 'we get sent out', reveals that the soldiers are following orders and at the mercy of their superiors who decide what they need to do. It also serves to distance the soldier somewhat from his actions, suggesting that shooting the looter was not his decision; it was something he was ordered to do.

The poem contains some violent, graphic imagery, which lends itself well to comparison with Wilfred Owen's *Exposure*. **The metaphor of the bullet 'ripping' through the man's life and body so that the soldier can 'see broad daylight' through his bullet wounds is particularly shocking and disturbing.** The image of the looter on the floor 'sort of inside out' is equally dramatic, albeit scarce on details. We are, however, left in no doubt that this is a traumatic sight and one that will stay with the speaker forever. **It encourages the reader to view war as a particularly unpleasant experience, but**

one that becomes dangerously routine over time.

The horror of the shooting is amplified by the description of the other soldiers' casual reaction to it. One of the men 'tosses his guts back into his body' and he's 'carted off in the back of a lorry.' The verbs 'toss' and 'cart' suggest a complete lack of respect for the victim and perhaps a desensitisation to death for some of the soldiers. **The description dehumanises the victim and portrays him almost like cattle being disposed of without dignity or care.** Reflecting on the event, the speaker is filled with remorse that he didn't feel at the time.

The repetition of the line 'probably armed, possibly not,' portrays the speaker's lingering doubts. He is tortured by the fact that the looter may not have been a threat and has great difficulty justifying the killing of a potentially unarmed man.

Guilt is also shown through the use of anaphora. Using the phrase 'I see...' to begin two lines effectively shows how the moment of the looter's death is etched on the speaker's mind forever. Armitage also uses alliteration 'but I blink, and he bursts again through the doors of the bank' to emphasise the speaker's feelings of guilt. **The repetition of the plosive 'b' lends a punch to these memories as they almost pierce the conscience of the soldier and disrupt his sleep.**

The language used at the end of the poem suggests some bitterness and anger about the way the soldier's life has been negatively affected by his experiences. The use of sibilance and assonance in the lines 'in some distant sun-stunned, sand-smothered land' create a sharp hissing sound, perhaps hinting at the fact that the speaker is angry about being sent off to fight

a war that he feels has little to do with him. The pair of compound adjectives, seemingly offered sarcastically, present an idealistic view of the war zones.

In reality, war was no holiday; the profound effect the experience had on the speaker's life is summed up in the last line, 'his bloody life in my bloody hands.' **The tacit reference to the bloody hands of Lady Macbeth - who descended into a deep depression and took her own life after her part in King Duncan's murder - alludes to the seemingly endless psychological effects of murder.**



Remains - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Remains* by Simon Armitage, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who seems to be speaking in the poem? **AO1**
2. Pick out two words or phrases that show the soldier's casual way of speaking (use of colloquial language). **AO1, AO2**
3. What is sibilance? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. What is the effect of the speaker changing from speaking of 'we' and 'us' to talking about 'I' in the second stanza (moving from first person plural to first person singular)? **AO2**
6. Look at lines 9, 12 and 15. Which words or phrases are **graphic and gory**? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. What does this graphic depiction show us about the soldier? You should use appropriate terminology in your answer (words like colloquial, nonchalance and graphic imagery could be used). **AO2**
8. At line 17 the narrator says 'End of story, except not really.' This is the volta or turning point in the poem. How does the switch from casual anecdote to detailed descriptions of guilt enhance the poem's meaning? **AO2**
9. Armitage chose the name *Remains* for this poem about the effects of war on an ex-soldier. Do you think it is effective? Why? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the individual experience of war in *Remains* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might choose to write about *War Photographer*, *Bayonet Charge* or *Exposure*. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

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AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Poppies

by Jane Weir

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

Poppies is a 21st century poem by the Anglo-Italian poet Jane Weir. Weir was born in Italy in 1963 and grew up in Italy and Manchester. She moved to Northern Ireland during 'the Troubles' in the 1980s and so has experienced conflict in a close and personal way.

Poppies was her response to a commission for war poems by the Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy. This, and nine other poems, appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2009. Her poem was a response to the losses already suffered during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. She felt, as the mother of two teenage boys, that speaking from a mother's perspective about loss would be powerful. She was right – her poem struck a nerve with many mothers who had lost their children during the conflict. Many people from across Europe contacted her to tell her about how the poem had struck them. She has since said that she was thinking specifically of Susan Owen (mother of the World War I poet, Wilfred Owen) when writing this piece.

As well as writing poetry and prose, Jane Weir is a textile artist and designer. Weir has said that she likes the 'cross-dressing' in her writing, borrowing words and phrases from other genres. She often uses the language of textiles and sewing in her poetry in the form of metaphor.

The Title

The title of the poem, *Poppies*, is simple. It reflects both the feminine voice of the poem (being named for flowers) and the fact that Armistice Day is specifically referenced in it. Armistice Day began in 1918 to commemorate the end of World War I. An 'Armistice' is the agreement to cease fighting. The day is now better known as Remembrance Sunday and is used to commemorate all those lost in conflicts throughout the world. Poppies have been a symbol of the loss of human life in battle since 1921. **It became a symbol of the losses of World War I after the poem *In Flanders Fields* was published which mentioned the poppies growing around the graves of young soldiers.** Weir uses the poppy in the first stanza to represent what going into the army can mean. After the son's departure, the mother walks to the war memorial, another reminder of remembrance and the dead.

Structure

Poppies is a free verse poem, free from the constraints of a regular rhyme or rhythm. This,

and the first-person narration, make the reader feel a part of the mother's own memories and emotions. **Long sentences and enjambment are used to reflect the rather rambling nature of memory.** The woman is absorbed in her thoughts about her son. Caesura is also used, this time to show the woman's attempts to hold in her emotions in front of her son, most memorably at 'steeled the softening of my face'.

The poem relates the experience of her son leaving in a chronological fashion. She is shown pinning a poppy to his blazer and smoothing down his collar before he leaves the house. Later she walks to the war memorial, thinking of him. The poem is placed in the past tense and so we are not certain what has happened to the son. Perhaps the mother is remembering this moment because she has heard of her son's death or injury. The memories of his leaving for the army are intermingled with other memories of earlier childhood, 'Eskimo' kisses and hearing his 'playground voice'. **This intermingling**

sometimes obscures the chronological story of her son's departure for the army, just as memories are always obscured by other things.

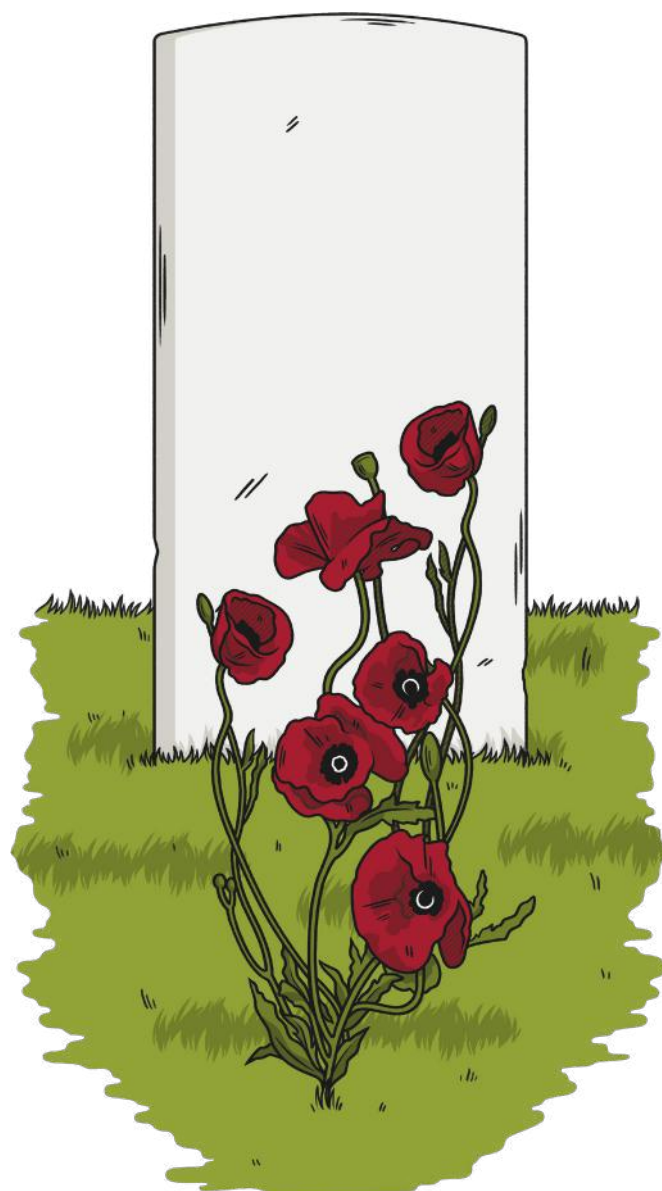
Ideas and Language

The poem opens with memories of three days before Armistice Day. The mother, preparing her child for the army, pins a poppy to his blazer while she thinks of 'individual war graves' (the personal losses of other mothers). **The poppy is 'spasms of paper red', making the reader, even in the first stanza, think of an injured body racked with pain and the red of splashed blood rather than dyed red paper.**

While Armistice Day is mentioned, it is the simple domestic scene that pulls at the heart strings here. Language of war such as 'a blockade' of 'bias binding', 'reinforcements' of winter clothing and the sellotape being 'bandaged' around her hand seem to bring the conflict directly between the mother and son. The mother struggles to let her child go to this dangerous environment, while the boy is 'intoxicated' by the future and sees the world 'overflowing like a treasure chest'. There is a reminder here of school days as she reminisces about touching noses like 'Eskimos' and his 'playground voice', and the scene becomes a reflection of that earlier letting go, preparing a child for their first days of school.

The mother's closeness to her child is shown in the number of times she touches him or references wanting to touch him. She smooths down his collar, picks off cat hairs and considers running her fingers through his hair. This may also reference her longing to touch him now that he has gone. **Weir has said herself that she was considering women who had lost their sons when writing this poem and her mention of the gelled 'blackthorns' of the son's hair seem to be a reference to Jesus and his crown of thorns, an indication that the son has made the ultimate sacrifice.**

The mother is nervous and full of anxiety for her son and this is reflected in the sewing imagery used to describe the butterfly sensation in her stomach. **She speaks of her stomach making 'tucks, darts and pleats', again bringing the semantic field of sewing and womanly domestic pursuits into this poem about war.** This use of sewing metaphors is repeated with her words 'turning into felt' having been flattened and rolled, while the dove (symbolically her son) is described as 'an ornamental stitch', something small but beautiful in the vast sky.



Poppies - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Poppies* by Jane Weir, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who is the narrator of the poem? **AO1**
2. What is Armistice Sunday? **AO3**
3. What is enjambment? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. What is the effect of the phrase 'world overflowing/ like a treasure chest'? **AO2**
6. Look at lines 4 – 8. Which words or phrases in the poem are examples of domestic imagery? Which are examples of war imagery? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. The poem has no regular rhyme scheme or precise form. What is the effect of the lack of rhyme and rhythm within the poem? **AO2**
9. Weir has said that she likes 'cross-dressing' in her poetry – adding words from one sphere of life into a poem about something completely different. How does Jane Weir's work as a textile designer have an impact on her poetry here? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the theme of fear in *Poppies* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might look at *The Prelude*, *Storm on the Island* or *Bayonet Charge* as your other poem. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

When answering the Component 1 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

War Photographer

by Carol Ann Duffy

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Carol Ann Duffy made history in 2009 when she became the first woman to hold the post of Poet Laureate. *War Photographer* is a poem about war and its effects on civilians. The poem discusses the lasting effects of war trauma on those photographers who take pictures of famine and battle. It also deals with the broader ethical issue of whether observing and photographing war rather than helping is the right thing to do. It makes us question, along with the photographer, the worth of risking life to document conflict around the world. Through the newspaper business, money is being made with these pictures of human suffering.

The Title

This poem was written by Carol Ann Duffy and published in 1985. The subject of the poem is a war photographer, used to taking pictures of graphic and disturbing conflicts around the world. It is a poem written in the pre-digital camera age and so deals with an earlier form of photography in which pictures were taken from rolls of film and had to be developed manually. Here the photographer has returned to his darkroom to process the images he has taken in conflict zones. **He is clearly suffering from some form of PTSD but the poem deals not just with his feelings but the wider issues of journalism in war situations.**

The poet talks about Phnom Penh where the Cambodian genocide occurred. The poem also mentions fields that explode 'beneath the feet of running children'. This might be in reference to a famous image from the Vietnam War of young children running from a napalm attack. It is one of the most famous war photographs in history.

Structure

The poem is set out in four stanzas, equal in length, and follows a regular rhyme scheme. This reflects the 'ordered rows' of his photos in the dark room as he waits for his pictures to develop. **At 'Something is happening' in stanza three, a clear volta occurs.** The photos begin to develop and the focus shifts to individual images. While the actions of processing the film happen

throughout the poem, his thoughts continue to return to the scenes he has witnessed while taking his pictures.

In the last stanza we see the way the photographer feels about the public who will view his pictures in 'Sunday's supplement'. **Each one of the places where he witnessed terrible events is punctuated with caesura: 'Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh.'** There is further use of caesura in the simple openings to the second and third stanzas. These are matter of fact references to the job he is doing by developing his film. The full stops may indicate the end of ordinary life in these conflict areas, the brutal harshness of the world in those places.

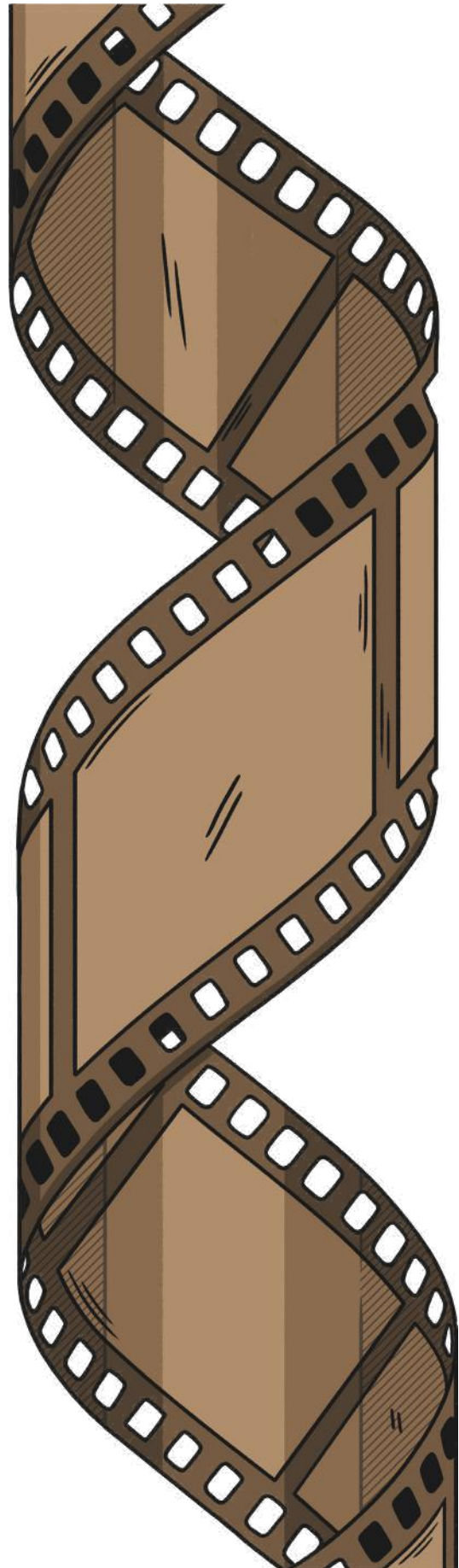
Ideas and Language

The poem is full of emotive language. The nature of the photographer's work is immediately apparent when we learn that he is developing 'spools of suffering'. The photos he produces are 'a hundred agonies'. The photographer is 'finally alone', showing us that he has hardly had time to be alone with his thoughts while away collecting images. Now he has time to think and his hands 'which did not tremble then' seem to once back in 'Rural England'. **We are left to wonder whether the trembling is from stress and PTSD symptoms or from anger at the indifference he perceives around him.**

The photographer has clearly put his own emotions aside in order to take these pictures, as he 'has a job to do'. The photographer remembers how, on seeing a man dying, he sought permission to take photographs, to do 'what someone must'. He sees his role as documenter of the conflicts as important but still struggles with the way his pictures are received by the public. **The pictures contrast with the 'Rural England' he has returned to and there is a sense that the readers of the newspaper supplement where his pictures will appear are apathetic to the issues shown in the photos.** This is known as compassion fatigue (the inability to process images appropriately and empathetically owing to the sheer volume of news seen).

He has taken images of 'a hundred agonies' and his editor will only pick out five or six to put in the Sunday supplement that people will read. Although he feels the reader's 'eyeballs' will 'prick with tears' this will only be temporary: 'between the bath and pre-lunch beers'. The word 'prick' reminds us of the phrase 'pricking the conscience', it is neither a deep nor abiding wound/feeling. In the last line he stares 'impassively at where he earns his living'. This seems to reference him flying away on yet another trip to a conflict zone. **He is emotionally cold to his homeland and, in the final phrase, he notes that 'they do not care'.**

Religious imagery makes us see the seriousness of the photographer's work. Duffy speaks of the glowing red light as 'though this were a church'. She imagines the photographer in the guise of a priest 'preparing to intone a Mass' giving the production of the photographs the solemnity of a religious act. In particular the reference to 'Mass' and the sombre nature of the subject matter makes the reader think of a funeral service.



War Photographer - Essential Exam Prep

Read *War Photographer* by Carol Ann Duffy, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is a war photographer? **A03**
2. Look at lines 2, 3 and 7. Pick out two words or phrases that are photography related. **A01, A02**
3. Why might Belfast, Beirut and Phnom Penh be mentioned in this poem? **A03**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **A01**
5. The poem begins by describing a photographer in his darkroom. It is only later that we see him remembering the war zone he has come from and thinking about the readers of the newspaper he produces pictures for. Why does the poet's focus shift and change throughout the poem? **A02**
6. Look at the last stanza. Which words or phrases in the poem show that the photographer is distressed by the disinterest of the newspaper readers? **A01, A02**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **A02**
8. Why does the poet choose to have the photographer remember both the war zones and 'Rural England'? **A02**
9. What greater issues is Carol Ann Duffy attempting to broach with this poem? Think about war, the journalism of war and the attitudes of those who view the papers. **A03**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the individual experience of war in *War Photographer* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. Think about comparing *Kamikaze* or *Bayonet Charge*. **A01, A02, A03**

Remember!

When answering the Component 1 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

A01: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

A02: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

A03: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Tissue

by Imtiaz Dharker

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

Imtiaz Dharker, born in 1954, is a contemporary poet who was born in Pakistan and moved to Glasgow before she turned one. In addition to her poetry, Dharker is also a documentary maker and artist. She identifies herself as a 'Scottish Muslim Calvinist', showing her mixed cultural experiences and beliefs. Her multi-cultural background has informed much of her work and she explores themes such as identity, home and searching for meaning.

Summary

This poem explores both the strength and fragility of human life through the extended metaphor of tissue paper. Within the poem, Dharker explores the many different uses of paper, such as religious books, maps, receipts and architectural drawings, demonstrating the impact they can have and their integral links to human life: paper can change things and record memories; people's lives are mapped by paper; there are key links to journeys, money and homes. The poem ends with a direct link to 'living tissue' to imply the importance of human life, but also the vulnerability of it; human life can outlive buildings and paper, but there is also the suggestion that, like these items, human life too cannot last forever.

The Title

The title *Tissue* has a number of different connotations.

One is a literal reference to tissue paper and the ways that paper can be used, such as in books for recording information over many years. **The poet explores the fragility of the paper that allows fleeting information to be captured and stored, therefore giving it power and impact.**

Another interpretation from the title is human tissue and how the human body in many ways has similarities to paper, through the fact that skin ages and the way life leaves its mark on the body.

Structure

The poem has ten stanzas that do not have a regular rhyme and have irregular line lengths. **This could symbolise the fragility of the tissue paper and the unpredictability of life.**

The stanzas are all four lines long. However, the

final stanza is one single line that highlights the links between tissue paper and human skin and their significance. It also emphasises the clear ending of the poem and might show how there is an end to all things, including paper and human life in old age.

Enjambment is used from one line to the next and from one stanza to the next, perhaps mimicking the flow of paper and also the ongoing nature of human life, shown also through the fact that the line lengths vary throughout. Significantly, the line lengths noticeably decrease towards the end of the poem, symbolising human life and its decline.

Ideas and Language

The poet uses an extended metaphor throughout the poem, using tissue paper to symbolise human life.

The poem opens with religious connotations through reference to 'light' and how this can 'alter things'. **The idea here is the significance**

of paper and the impact it has on human life – such as when people are able to find enlightenment in religious texts. The ‘paper thinned by age’ represents how paper can have an impact by being seen by many different people over time. However, this also explores the impact of age on tissue, given that skin becomes thinner as we grow older just as paper thins and fades with time. **The suggestion here is that age and wisdom go hand in hand, but also that age causes things to degrade.**

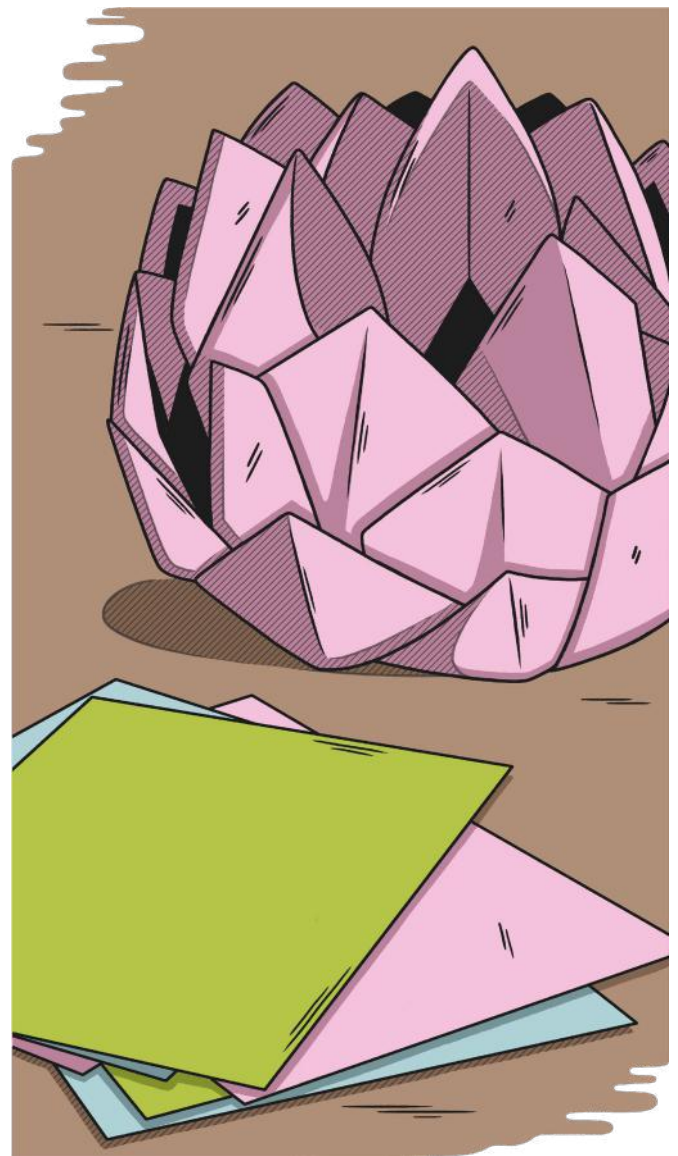
The poem explores the contrast of strength versus fragility, such as in stanza two when it is shown through references to religion. **The ‘well-used books’, which have had ‘written in the names and histories’ of people may have thin paper, but the knowledge that the pages hold also holds great power.** This instils paper with great influence and affection, and this is linked to human skin through the verbs used in stanza three: the pages are ‘smoothed and stroked’ just like human skin would be. This alliteration is repeated in stanza nine of the poem to emphasise the care and respect needed for both tissue paper and human tissue.

This contrast is also shown in stanza four when the poet imagines that ‘buildings were paper’, suggesting that even a structure that is built for strength and durability is ultimately not able to last. **This is a metaphor for the human condition and the fact that life too will not last forever.** However, this gloomy inference is balanced by the use of the simile ‘might fly our lives like paper kites’, suggesting the fun and freedom that life affords in the time that we have, buffeted by different events and influences, although it is still ultimately anchored to responsibility like the line of a kite.

The poet explores how paper is integral to human life. She references ‘maps’, ‘fine slips

from grocery shops’ and architectural drawings to show how human life is mapped out by paper in different forms. **Despite its delicateness, paper structures and organises human life.** In this way, paper is like the structures built by architects: it is a ‘monolith’ – a pillar that upholds human life.

The poet ends the poem in the ninth and tenth stanzas by linking paper explicitly to life through the phrases ‘living tissue’ and ‘turned into your skin’. **These demonstrate again both strength and fragility – that human life is both valuable and significant whilst also being fragile and fleeting.**



Tissue - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Tissue* by Imtiaz Dharker, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What different uses are there for tissue paper?
A01
2. Pick three words which describe what tissue paper is like. **A01**
3. What is a metaphor? **A02**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain what the poet refers to. **A01**
5. What is the poet trying to tell the audience about tissue? **A01**
6. Look at lines 4 and 34. Which words or phrases convey a sense of the fragility of tissue? **A01**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology (such as verb or hyperbole) when explaining your answer. **A02**
8. Why do you think the poet does not use stanzas in this poem? **A02**
9. When reading Dharker's poem, what commentary do you think she is making about our world now? Does this poem have a key message or moral?
A03

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present individual experiences in *Tissue* and *Remains* from the Power and Conflict cluster. **A01, A02, A03**

Remember!

When answering the Component 1 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

A01: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

A02: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

A03: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

The Émigrée

by Carol Rumens

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

The Émigrée is a 20th century poem by the English poet Carol Rumens. She was born in London in 1944 and has produced many collections of poetry and prose. As well as poetry, Rumens writes novels, writes and produces plays and lectures at various universities. She works in translation as well and is currently Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Bangor, Wales. She participates in international poetry festivals and has received many awards for her poetry. She currently chooses the poem of the week in *The Guardian*. Rumens lived for a number of years in Belfast and has travelled widely in Russia and Eastern Europe. She finds foreign cultures to be a great inspiration for her work.

Carol Rumens wrote *The Émigrée* for her collection of poems, *Thinking of Skins*. It was published in 1993 during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Certain images in the poem seem to relate to this particular area of the world.

When asking herself whether she is a poet, Rumens has said: 'I would rather describe myself simply as someone who loves language, and who tries to make various things with it – poems, chiefly, but also essays, plays, translation, occasional fiction and journalistic odds and ends.'

The Title

An émigrée is a woman who has chosen or been forced to leave her home country and to live somewhere else. Some people emigrate for financial reasons, for better living conditions or to be near family. Other people are forced out of their own countries and must find somewhere else to live. Émigrée is the feminine form of émigré. In this poem title, Rumens has chosen to specify the sex of her narrator for the reader. This is a uniquely feminine response to the place the woman has come from.

Structure

The poem uses no regular rhyme or rhythm. It is in three eight-line stanzas but none of these has a rhyme scheme attached. Rather, the lines flow from one to the next, particularly in the first two stanzas. **This seems to reflect the fluid nature of her memories and the freedom of memory over real experience.** The final stanza contains more stops, use of caesura and end stops. These seem to emphasise the prison of her experience now: she has no passport and cannot return

to her homeland. The new city seems to create walls around her.

Ideas and Language

The poem relates the experience of a woman who has left her homeland. **She is remembering the place as it was when she was a child, full of sunlight and beauty.** There is an indication that the country and her city are now in trouble; that a 'tyrant' or enemy government has taken over. She still thinks of the place with nostalgia however; for the narrator it will always be a place of enchantment. The reader is left to puzzle out whether they believe the country and city to be real.

In Carol Rumens's poem, we see the narrator looking back over time spent in another land. This is somewhere she hasn't seen since she was a child. She opens the poem with the phrase: 'there once was a country', giving the place the air of a fairy tale location. **From the beginning the reader is led to expect the unusual, the**

magical of this land. The magical quality of the place is further explored in the poet's continued reference to 'sunlight'. The country and city of her youth are bright, colourful and never wintery. She mentions the failings of her memory as she states that she does not remember seeing it in 'that November' that comes to all cities.

Her reminiscences of the city are wrapped in the language of toys and childhood. She remembers her view of the city as 'the bright, filled paperweight' and her child language is one she 'carried here like a hollow doll'. Her memory of the place is coloured by the fact that she hasn't seen it since she was a child. Even though 'time rolls its tanks', and she has heard that the city is drastically changed, the narrator continues to remember the city as she saw it last, in her childhood.

The narrator seems to be set apart from her city, prevented from returning by some government coup, some 'tyrant'. Since there is no way for her to return to the real city, the narrator sees the city come to her 'in its own white plane'. **Her yearning for the city of her youth makes it appear to her.** The city is personified so that it appears like a friend or lover to the narrator. It 'lies down' in images reminiscent of a pet dog. Later, the city takes her 'dancing' through the 'city of walls' as though these two cities are separate entities. The second city mentioned may be her new home, although this is ambiguous. This is where the narrator meets the 'they' of the poem, an ominous group who threaten her and her remembered city. These accusations and threats pick up the language of the rest of the poem, in which words relating to conflict are mentioned. The final stanza breaks from the more free flowing lines of the other two stanzas and uses a number of end stops. These seem to reflect the 'city of walls' she mentions.



The Émigrée - Essential Exam Prep

Read *The Émigrée* by Carol Rumens, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is an émigrée? **AO1**
2. What is your impression of the speaker's homeland? **AO1**
3. What is personification? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What has happened to the speaker's homeland? Briefly tell her story. **AO1**
5. What feelings is Rumens trying to elicit in readers? **AO1**
6. Look at stanza three. Pick three words or phrases which show the speaker's predicament. **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words or phrases you picked in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology (such as **metaphor**, **caesura** or **juxtaposition**) when explaining your answer. **AO2**
8. How does the poet use structure to reflect memory? Consider the effect of irregular rhyme and meter, and the arrangement of stanzas. **AO2**
9. Is the theme of feeling dislocated one that could apply to any time and any place? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the impact of conflict in *The Émigrée* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might want to consider *Remains*, *Poppies* or *Kamikaze*. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

When answering the Component 1 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Kamikaze

by Beatrice Garland

NOTES
- f o r -
STUDY

Context

Kamikaze is an early 21st century poem by the English poet, Beatrice Garland. Garland was born in 1938 in Oxford. At school she was punished for misdemeanours by being made to memorise large sections of poetry. The poetic lines stuck with her and she says sometimes they were 'like sweets, something that could be saved up and enjoyed for their marvellous taste.'

She became an NHS clinician and still works in the NHS and as a researcher and teacher in the field of psychological medicine. She never lost her love of poetry however and began to join poetry classes and workshops.

Kamikaze is taken from her first collection of poems, *The Invention of Fireworks*. The collection includes a number of poems that look at the cultural divide between the west and the east.

Her poem *A Kosovan Ghost Story* refers to the shame and dishonour brought about in war – in this case the fact that women raped in the war were seen to have brought dishonour on their families and so the atrocities of war were often not spoken of to the investigators who arrived to investigate war crimes. *Kamikaze* also references the shame of war.

The Title

The word *kamikaze* means 'divine wind' in Japanese. It was first used to describe a series of typhoons (serious storms from the sea) that prevented two of Kublai Khan's attempts to invade Japan in the 13th century. The word was later used by the Japanese press to describe the flying units of the Japanese military that agreed to carry out suicide missions during the Second World War against American warships. The pilots typically went out with only enough fuel to reach their target. They were then expected to fly their plane directly into the warship, causing maximum damage.

The title of the poem is precisely the subject of the poem. The poem tells us about a kamikaze pilot from the Second World War. He embarks on his final, suicide mission filled with thoughts of glory and his country but then sees the world below him as he flies. **With memories of his childhood entering his head, the pilot turns back from his suicide mission and is afterwards shunned by his family.** This was

often the real response to pilots who chose not to complete their suicide mission.

Structure

Kamikaze is a free verse poem, without the constraints of a regular rhyme or rhythm. This makes us feel a part of the pilot's daughter's reminiscences as she explains to her own children what her father must have felt like as he progressed on his suicide mission. **The opening stanza is full of the patriotic words that might have fuelled his decision to begin the suicide run.** Later, as he looks down at the boats, the poem revolves around the glories of nature and the sea. There are two sections where the narrator (the pilot's daughter) interjects and the poem becomes a first-person narrative. The last two stanzas of the poem are written in this way as the daughter explains the impact of her father's decision to return home. **The father's voice is never actually heard in the poem.** Even the thoughts about what was seen below his plane are actually the daughter's. This further

enhances the sense of disconnect from the reader and the man's family.

Ideas and Language

The poem tells us about a Japanese woman's father. He was a kamikaze pilot in the Second World War, fighting for the Japanese. He sets out or 'embarks' on his suicide mission one sunrise. The word 'embarks' is magical, indicating a journey of epic proportions. Halfway there he looks down at the boats below him on the sea and begins to remember his childhood. He realises he can't commit suicide and returns to his base. He is shunned, even by his own wife, from that moment on.

The poem *Kamikaze* deals with elements of Japanese culture and the militarily sanctioned suicides of Japanese pilots during the Second World War. **As such, it presents the national identity of Japan in various guises.** The opening stanza begins with a mention of the 'samurai sword' carried by the pilot, a clear indicator of the culture from which the pilot comes. Rather than simply an indication of Japanese culture, the sword is identified with the samurai, the ancient warriors of Japan known for their code of honour (bushido) and the commitment to ritual suicide (seppuku). This signals the continuation of the samurai tradition through the actions of the kamikaze pilots.

At the beginning of the poem there is a sense of the overwhelming pride in one's nation that fighters were meant to feel in the war. The patriotism and honour of the kamikaze pilots is felt with the words 'one-way journey into history', showing that the pilots felt that their actions would bring both themselves and their country glory in some way. The pilot has a 'shaven head' which is full of 'powerful incantations', both images more indicative of Buddhist or Shinto monks and priests than soldiers and pilots. The 'powerful incantations' line gives a reader a sense

of the mystical and almost fanatical nature of the way the pilots were prepared for their journeys. There is also a deeper, darker reading of brain-washing and state manipulation in the line.

The pilot's actions were meant to be bold and affirmative and bring honour and glory to the nation. This pilot however turns back and is forever shunned afterwards. The words spoken in the later stanzas are the daughter's imaginings of what her father saw and thought ('half way there, she thought') rather than the pilot's own. **The daughter imagines why her father chose to turn back, seeing the earth and sea below him and remembering his own childhood.** There is a lengthy sequence dealing with the strong imagery of the sea and the power of nature. The tuna, a 'dark prince', reminds us of the dangers and menaces of the natural world. The words are spoken with wonder however. The word 'safe' is repeated across two stanzas, perhaps reflecting the pilot's desire for safety himself. The first full stop of the entire poem occurs at the end of the fifth stanza as the pilot makes the life altering decision to turn back and the remainder of the poem is in the voice of his daughter.

Throughout the poem the father/pilot is silent. **His voice is lost because his family chooses to shun him.** This reflects the Japanese notion of honour and saving face. His action (of returning home rather than committing suicide) shamed the entire family and the nation. Indeed, the pilot's wife 'never spoke again in his presence' and the children eventually 'learned to be silent'. **The pilot's daughter reflects on whether this shunning was like a death in itself:** 'he must have wondered which had been the better way to die.' Her father was a ghost of a man from the time he chose to return home. Although his decision was made because of a deep desire to remain with his young family, the result was not that of a happy family unit.

Kamikaze - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Kamikaze* by Beatrice Garland, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What styles of narration occur in the poem? **AO1**
2. What is meant by 'one-way/journey into history'? **AO1**
3. What is a kamikaze? **AO3**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. We never hear the father/pilot speak in the poem. Why not? **AO2**
6. Look at the first stanza. Which words or phrases in the poem are related to the pilot's kamikaze role? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Look at lines 11-12, lines 14-18 and lines 27-30. Which words or phrases are images of nature? What is effective about the inclusion of such phrases? **AO2**
8. In the fifth, sixth and seventh stanzas we hear the direct speech of the Japanese woman whose father was a kamikaze pilot. Why is this effective? **AO2**
9. In Japan a person can bring shame upon his/her family by behaving in a way not acceptable to society. Why is it important to remember this concept when discussing this poem? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the issue of identity in *Kamikaze* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might think about *Checking Out Me History*, *The Emigrée* or *Tissue*. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

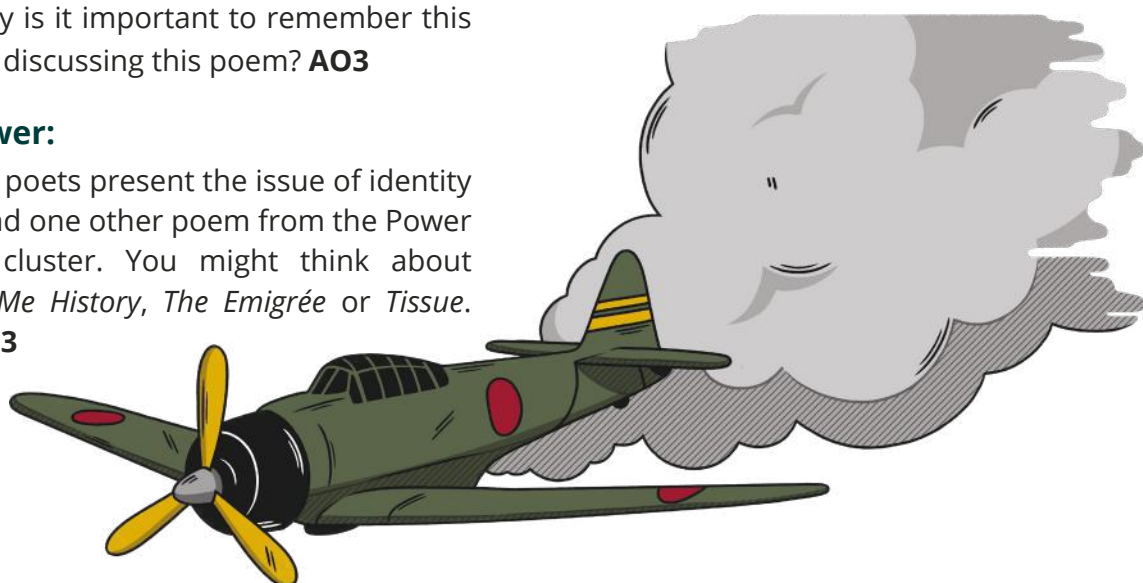
When answering the Component 1 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.



Checking Out Me History

by John Agard

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Context

Checking Out Me History is a modern poem by the Guyanese poet, John Agard. Agard was born in Guyana (then British Guiana) in 1949 and spent his childhood in the South American country. In 1977, he and his partner Grace Nichols moved to Britain to pursue dreams of being professional writers. They live in Sussex. John Agard received the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 2012 and his poetry frequently appears on the GCSE curriculum. **He chooses to discuss issues of cultural identity, issues of race and power in his poetry.**

The Title

The title of the poem reflects the subject matter. **The poem is clearly written from the perspective of someone from a Caribbean culture, as the title is written in a Creole dialect.** The words 'Checking Out' seems to make the idea of looking at history less formal, the poet is doing this in his own time rather than the more formal 'studying' of history we do at school. The word 'me' shows that he is looking into a more personal aspect of history than might be expected in a formal setting. One might suppose this will be a poem about family history or ancestry but it is instead about the whole of Caribbean and African history, long neglected in schools.

Structure

Checking Out Me History is a poem of two sides. Agard wants us to be aware of both the things he was taught at school and the things he did not learn in the mainstream curriculum that he feels are important. He uses the physical separation of the stanzas and the font styles to indicate which culture he is referencing. The sections written in regular font refer mostly to the British Colonial education of his youth. The lines are longer and more regular in form although the rhymes used are simplistic, implying the lack of importance Agard associates with these things.

Agard has used elements from his own Caribbean culture throughout the piece.

He rejects European syntax and English pronunciation throughout the text, choosing to write instead with a Caribbean, Creole dialect. He also rejects mainstream and traditional forms of poetry in favour of a much more fluid form of verse, without punctuation. **The verses use many of the signposts of oral poetry tradition, reflecting the Afro-Caribbean situation.** In many countries it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write. The oral tradition markers include repetition and chorus use, as well as strong rhythms and a chanting, lilting style. These are emphasised when Agard performs his poetry himself.

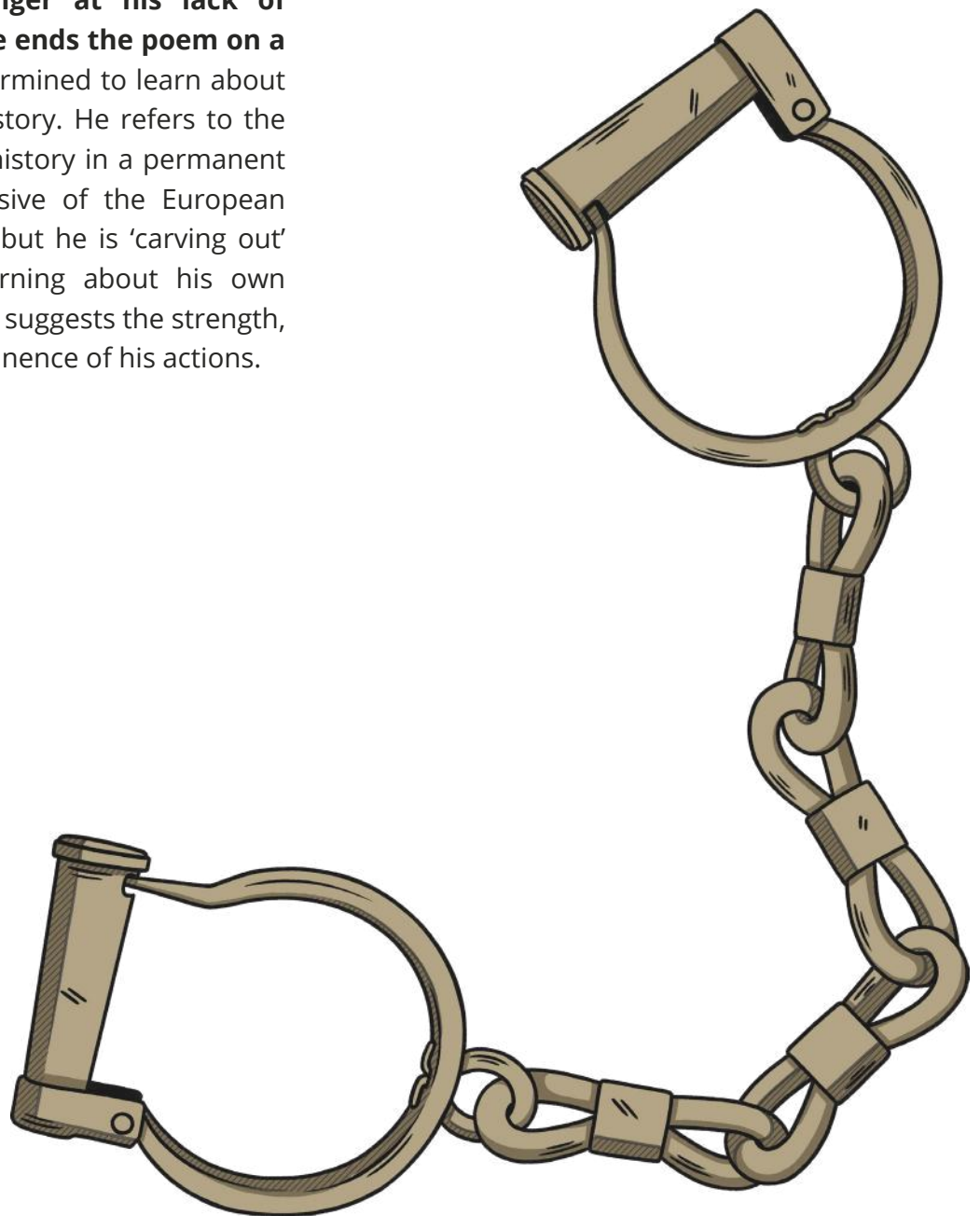
Ideas and Language

The poem *Checking Out Me History* is both an angry and assertive poem that links the history one is taught in school with a sense of cultural identity or lack thereof.

Agard talks of 'dem' and 'me', clearly separating himself from those who taught history at school. Agard references both the blindness he felt at knowing nothing of his own culture: 'Bandage up me eye' and 'Blind me to me own identity' and the light and vision he ascribes to learning about people from the Caribbean. **A bandage should be healing in nature but here it is used to hide the truth from the poet.** The use of 'bandage' perhaps refers to the fact that colonialists felt they were doing this (giving a

European education) 'for the good of the people'. He refers to 'Toussaint de beacon' and Mary Seacole as the 'healing star' and 'yellow sunrise', all images of light and warmth and healing. **Seacole is described at being like a heavenly body, linking her to the greater universe.** Mary Seacole's defiance of the British is referred to as a heroic action: 'even when de British said no'. She is shown to be more sensible and brave than the British who tried to prevent her from reaching Russia.

While Agard shows anger at his lack of Caribbean education, he ends the poem on a positive note. He is determined to learn about and embrace his own history. He refers to the need to learn about his history in a permanent way. He may be dismissive of the European history, calling it 'all dat' but he is 'carving out' his identity through learning about his own history. The term 'carving' suggests the strength, determination and permanence of his actions.



Checking Out Me History - Essential Exam Prep

Read *Checking Out Me History* by John Agard, in AQA's Power and Conflict cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who seems to be speaking in the poem? **AO1**
2. Who is Mary Seacole? **AO3**
3. What is metaphor? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. Oral poetry features such as repetition, chanting, strong use of rhythm and non-standard spelling are used here. What is the effect of these in the poem? **AO2**
6. Look at lines 4-5, 12 and 27. Which words or phrases in the poem make us think about vision and blindness? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. Agard uses a mix of styles and forms in the poem. His sections of British history are wordier and have a more defined structure whereas the Caribbean sections are shorter with broken syntax. How does the tone and structure of the poem enhance its meaning? **AO2**
9. The narrator mentions several British and Caribbean cultural and historical figures. Choose two of these and explain their importance to the overall message of the poem. **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the theme of anger in *Checking Out Me History* and one other poem from the Power and Conflict cluster. You might look at *London* or *War Photographer* for comparison. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

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