

English Literature Revision Guide

Paper 2

Paper 2

Q1 An Inspector Calls- 30 marks

4 marks- accuracy (spelling, punctuation and grammar)

You will be given a choice of two questions (character or theme). You will be expected to respond in the style of an essay.

Q2 Poetry- 30 marks

You will be given a poem from the Power and Conflict Anthology and asked to compare it to another poem (the second poem will not be provided) that links to the question (in the style of an essay).

Q3 Unseen- 24 marks

You will be given a poem that you will not have studied and asked to answer a question (in the style of an essay) on an idea within the poem.

Q4 Comparison-8 marks

You will be given another poem that you will not have studied and asked to compare it to the previous poem.

An Inspector Calls

Priestley's Life:

John Boynton Priestley was **born into a working class family in 1894**. He knew early on that he wanted to become a writer, but decided against going to university as he thought he would get a better feel for the world around him by working. Instead, he became a **junior clerk with a local wool firm** at the age of 16.

When the **First World War broke out**, Priestley joined the infantry and only just escaped death on a number of occasions. After the war, he gained a degree from Cambridge University, and then moved to London to work as a freelance **writer**. Much of his writing was ground-breaking and controversial. He included new ideas about possible parallel universes (Ouspensky and Dunne's Theories of Time) and **strong political messages**.

During the Second World War he broadcast a massively popular weekly radio programme which was **attacked by the Conservatives as being too left-wing**. The programme was eventually cancelled by the BBC for being too critical of the Government.

He continued to write into the 1970s, and died in 1984.

Social Historical Context:

The play was **written in 1945** at the end of 2 World Wars. It is **set in 1912**, Edwardian England, just two years before the first war. This was a very difficult time for England. It was a period when there were many strikes, food shortages and great political tension.

By 1945 Europe was in ruins and two cities of Japan were destroyed by atomic bombs. During the war, the blitz and the evacuation of city children into the country meant that **a lot of people were thrown or forced together**. As a result, they learned about each other and felt responsible for each other as individuals and as a country.

This play has a **moral message** (like a fable, with a lesson to be learned at the end); **that we should think of others and work together to ensure a fairer, more equal society**. This idea is known as **socialism**; even now, the political party Labour to some extent follow this idea. When the play was first published, Labour had just taken over the country for the first time. Before Labour, the country was run by **Capitalists**; these people **believed that each person had to look after themselves**- this belief, however, resulted in unequal treatment of people.

During Edwardian England (**1912**), there was also a divide between the people of England at that time; the rich and the poor. **87% of all the money in England belonged to only 5% of the population!**

In 1912, England had little welfare system, in other words, there was **no dole** if you didn't have a job. Even when you did have a job, there were no real unions or laws that helped people at work- there was no minimum wage and the average number of hours people worked each week

was up to 65, we only work an average 39! Employers could basically treat their workers as they wanted. If you were ill, you were **unlikely to be able to see a doctor if you were poor**.

The play is set in the fictional town **Brumley** - a northern town like **Bradford (where Priestley is from)**. Bradford had many factories owned by rich people who paid very little for back breaking work.

Women had fewer rights than men at the time and had **not yet won the right to vote**. They were **not expected to work unless they were the lower class**, then they would have to work to survive. The eldest male of any home would be the main breadwinner (the person who brings the money home), they were also in charge at home, and their word was law; **a wife would never argue or answer back to her husband or eldest son**.

To Summarise:

The play is about **social responsibility**. Priestley uses the play to present his ideas on responsibility and society. He uses the **character of the Inspector as a mouth-piece for his ideas**. For example the Inspector exclaims 'We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other'. **Priestley is suggesting that we should all look after one another**, and that those who have power over others should use it for the common good, not just for their own benefit. It is clear by the end of the play that these are Priestley's views.

Plot

1. The Birling Family and Gerald Croft are having a dinner celebrating Sheila Birling's engagement to Gerald Croft.
2. Just as Mr Birling is at his most confident; an inspector arrives to investigate a suicide.
3. Mr Birling reveals he sacked Eva Smith.
4. Sheila explains that she had Eva sacked from her next job at Milwards.
5. Gerald recognises the name Daisy Renton (Eva's second name)
6. Gerald admits that he kept Daisy as his mistress.
7. Mrs Birling tells the group that she denied help to a pregnant girl when she went to Mrs Birling's charity organisation
8. Eric enters, just as we realise he is the father of the child.
9. Eric explains his relationship with the girl and how he stole money to help her.
10. The Inspector leaves.
11. The family gradually realises the Inspector could have been a fraud.
12. The celebratory mood is almost restored - then a phone call announces that an Inspector is on his way to investigate a girl's suicide.

Dramatic Devices:

Priestley uses a range of dramatic devices for different purposes. For example, **set, lighting, sound effects, props, characterisation, timing and dramatic irony**.

Stage Directions

At the beginning of Act 1 he uses **stage directions** to set the scene and give us information about the Birling family before we even see them. We can tell that the Birling family are a comfortably off middle to upper middle class family. We can also tell that they are all feeling relaxed and confident at the beginning of the play.

- set - large suburban house
- furniture - 'solid ...but not cosy and homelike'
- props - suggests wealth 'champagne glasses', 'decanter of port'
- costume 'evening dress of the period' white tie and tails - a formal occasion
- lighting - 'pink and intimate'
- characters and how they are described by Priestley

At the start of the play the Birlings are seated and relaxed. By the end all standing and shouting/crying.

Staging- All the action takes place in one room- it is claustrophobic and intense- the pressure builds within the closed room. Birlings are shown to live in a closed, protected world and the Inspector is not welcomed from the outside.

Stephen Daldry's 1992 production showed the house on stilts. Height showed the Birling's separation from the rest of the town, but the stilts seemed unsteady- showing the Birling's could easily fall from their status.

Dramatic Irony. (when an audience knows more about the characters/action than the characters on stage). Priestley uses **dramatic irony to show how ridiculous and wrong Birling's opinions are**. E.g.:

- **Birling says war won't happen** 'I say there isn't a chance of war' but audience knows there were **two World Wars about to happen**
- Birling says that the **Titanic won't sink** - 'unsinkable' - we know it did, later that year.
- Birling thinks **there'll be no tension between employers and employees** 'you'll be living in a world that will have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations' but there were strikes in 1907-1912 because of poor conditions and the **General Strike of 1926**
- The dramatic irony makes the audience think **Birling is foolish and lacking in knowledge about the future**. It also makes his political opinions seem wrong. Priestley is also showing an audience his concern that such idiotic people have some degree of power in this society. Could you relate this to his Priestley's experiences?

The entrance of the inspector

- **Sound Effect**-There's a '**sharp ring of a front door bell**' and Edna interrupts Birling in the middle of his speeches. The '**sharp**' ring would startle the audience - and suggests that the Inspector may be a '**sharp**' (as in intelligent and possibly aggressive) person. The ring also interrupts Birling suggesting that the Inspector will have power and control over Birling.
- There is a **change of lighting from pink and intimate' to 'brighter and harder'** when the inspector arrives. This suggests again that the Inspector is a '**hard**' character who will wreck the cosy world the Birlings live in.

- His name 'Inspector Goole' also suggests something unpleasant/interesting about the inspector - e.g. 'ghoul' means ghost

The inspector develops the dramatic tension

The inspector 'creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'. He also speaks 'carefully, weightily' and 'has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking'. This interests an audience - **we want to know why he is there and how people will react** to his questioning.

The Inspector 'inspects' or interrogates each person in turn. He shows a photo of Eva Smith to each character in turn that only they see. The **audience is intrigued** and wants to know what this is.

- Interrogation of Birling. Birling feels uncomfortable and tries to threaten Goole with his friendship with Colonel Roberts. Audience think Birling is selfish and arrogant.
- Beginnings of **conflict between younger generation** (Sheila) and older generation (Birling). Sheila responds much more instinctively and emotionally to the report of Eva Smith's death. This creates tension and the audience feel some sympathy for Sheila.
- Inspector leaves the room, having introduced Eva Smith's change of name to Daisy Renton. **Audience want to know why this has occurred.**
- Look at the final exchange between Sheila and Gerald. In a sense, Sheila begins the inspector's task. The fact that the audience knows that Gerald is involved (the third out of five characters) **suggests to the audience that the momentum will continue and that all the characters will be involved.**
- The inspector returns at the end of the scene and asks his question 'Well?' This is a cliff-hanger - **audience want to watch on to see how Gerald and Sheila react.**
- **Act 2 also ends with CLIFF HANGER.** The front door slams, announcing Eric's return, but the audience have to wait until Act 2 for his confession.
- **(The front door bangs every time someone enters or leaves the house. The characters and audience can hear this, and wonder who enters the house- effective sound effect in creating tension.)**

Timing

- **Timing** of entrances and exits is crucial. For example, the Inspector arrives immediately after Birling has told Gerald about his impending knighthood and about how "a man has to look after himself and his own."
- **Sheila runs off stage when she realises she is the reason Eva was sacked - creates intense atmosphere.**
- **Sheila and Gerald are left alone to discuss Daisy Renton- this draws information out for audience.**
- **A great deal of tension has been created for the audience by the end of Act 1** and they have the desire to know how all the characters were involved. By having a break at this point between Acts One and Two and creating **a dramatic pause** Priestley creates **tension for the rest of the play.** Act 1 ends with the Inspector asking, "Well?" This builds suspense for the start of act 2 which begins with the same question and we are desperate for the answer.
- Tension is further created by the way **information is gradually revealed**, one person at a time. The audience and characters are kept on their toes.

Priestley has already **suggested to the audience some of the themes** that he develops later in his play: e.g. the idea that **those in power are often undeserving of that power and foolish** (as shown in his presentation of Birling in particular) and that the **younger generation are more open to positive change** (as in his presentation of Sheila's remorse). Most importantly he has suggested that the Inspector is going to be the character to question the arrogant self-confidence that the Birlings have, just as he as a playwright confronts his audience's own prejudices about power in society.

The Ending

The **ending** leaves the audience on a cliff-hanger. In Act 3 the Birlings believed themselves to be off the hook when it is discovered that the Inspector wasn't real and that no girl had died in the infirmary. This releases some of the tension - but the final telephone call, announcing that a real inspector is on his way to ask questions about the suicide of a young girl, suddenly restores the tension very dramatically. It is an unexpected final twist.

Dramatic Structure/Genre

Follows the rules of **Greek Drama**- the three unities of **place, action and time are kept to in a realistic manner**. i.e. The Drama all unfolds in one place- Birling's Dining room. Action all takes place in one evening, time passes in the same way as in real life. This makes the play realistic.

The **Inspector acts like a Greek chorus (Narrator)**. He sums up what has happened, and explains to both actors and the audience the lessons we must learn.

Equally might be seen as a simple **crime/ mystery play**- 'Who dunnit?'

Furthermore, The play has **myth-like quality in that it carries a moral message** that we should take better care of our fellow human beings, so in some ways is like a **parable**.

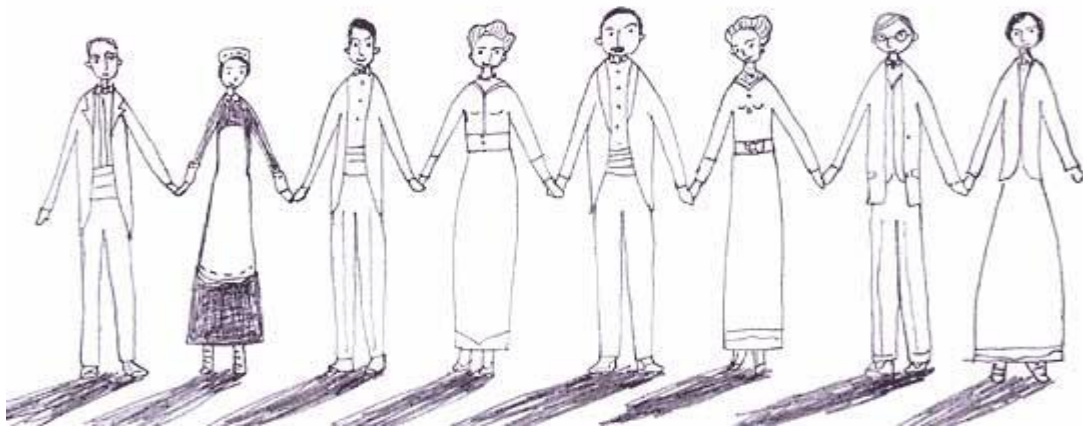
The Inspector himself adds dramatic tension:

- He controls the **pace** and **tension** by dealing with one line of enquiry at a time. Slowly the story of Eva's life is unravelled, like in a 'whodunnit'.
- He is in command at the end of Act I and the start of Act 2, and the end of Act 2 and the start of Act 3. He is a brooding, inescapable presence, very much in control.
- He is very mysterious and seems to know what is going to happen before it does. Consider his name 'Goole'. A ghoule is a ghost. Is he a supernatural being? The voice of Priestley or even God, come to morally judge them?

Themes

Responsibility: The Inspector wanted each member of the family to share the responsibility of Eva's death: he tells them, *"each of you helped to kill her."* However, his final speech is aimed not only at the characters on stage, but at the audience too:

"One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do."



Class: Priestley is trying to show that the upper classes are unaware that the easy lives they lead rest upon hard work of the lower classes. They're selfish/uncaring and immoral.

ATTITUDES TO THE LOWER CLASS:		ATTITUDES TO THE UPPER CLASS:
To this character, Eva was...		At the start of the play, this character was:
cheap labour	Mr Birling	keen to be knighted to cement his hard-fought rise to the upper class
someone who could be fired out of spite	Sheila	happy spending a lot of time in expensive shops
a mistress who could be discarded at will	Gerald	prepared to marry Sheila, despite her lower social position
easy sex at the end of a drunken night out	Eric	awkward about his 'public-school-and-Varsity' life
a presumptuous upstart	Mrs Birling	socially superior to her husband, and embarrassed at his gaffes

Age: The older generation and the younger generation take the Inspector's message in different ways. While Sheila and Eric accept their part in Eva's death and feel huge guilt about it, their parents are unable to admit that they did anything wrong.

The Old (Mr and Mrs Birling)	The Young (Sheila and Eric)
The old are set in their ways. They are utterly confident that they are right and they see the young as foolish.	The young are open to new ideas. This is first seen early in Act 1 when both Eric and Sheila express sympathy for the strikers - an idea which horrifies Birling, who can only think of production costs and ignores the human side of the issue.
The old will do anything to protect themselves: Mrs Birling lies to the Inspector when he first shows her the photograph; Mr Birling wants to cover up a potential scandal.	The young are honest and admit their faults. Eric refuses to try to cover his part up, saying, " the fact remains that I did what I did. "
They have never been forced to examine their consciences before and find they cannot do it now - as the saying goes, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.'	Sheila and Eric see the human side of Eva's story and are very troubled by their part in it. They do examine their consciences.
Mr and Mrs Birling have much to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they know they will lose everything.	Sheila and Eric have nothing to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they have already admitted what they have done wrong, and will change

Gerald Croft is caught in the middle, being neither very young nor old. In the end he sides with the older generation, perhaps because his aristocratic roots influence him to want to keep the status quo and protect his own interests.

Ultimately, we can be optimistic that the young - those who will shape future society - are able to take on board the Inspector's message.

SOME character Quotes

Inspector

Mystical and ghostly figure who calls to reveal to the Birlings how dangerous, selfish and immoral their lifestyles are.

'It's better to ask for the earth than to take it.' (14) The Insp's lesson to Mr B is that at least Eva Smith only asked for a rise. Mr B just takes all of his money without asking anyone.

'There are a lot of young women... if there weren't the factories and warehouses wouldn't know where to look for cheap labour. Ask your father.' (19) The Insp shows he knows how business works and how the workers are exploited by Mr B.

Gerald points out that they are respectable citizens, not criminals. Insp says 'Sometimes, there isn't as much difference as you think ... I wouldn't know where to draw the line.' (22) Insp suggests that even though no legal crime has been committed, they are guilty of a moral crime.

'You were annoyed with yourself and passed the annoyance onto her.' (25) The Insp knows why Sheila did what she did to Eva Smith.

'She wanted to keep this youngster out of any more trouble - isn't that so?' (47) Eva Smith wouldn't accept any more money from Eric because she thought he'd get into trouble for it. Eva is morally superior to her superiors - irony.

'You're offering the money at the wrong time, Mr Birling.' (56) The Insp offers moral, not legal lessons. Mr Birling appears not to know the difference.

'One Eva Smith has gone... but there are millions... of Eva Smiths... all intertwined with our lives... if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.' (56) The message Priestley wanted to put across when he wrote the play?

Birling

Bullying, mean head of the family who sees his employees as expensive machinery rather than human beings.

'look forward to a time when Croft's and Birling's are no longer competing but working together - for lower costs and higher prices.' (4) Mr B may only want Gerald to marry his daughter for business purposes.

'The Germans don't want war... the Titanic, she sails next week... and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.' (7) Mr B is wrong about the war and the Titanic. This is how the writer tells us he is wrong in the way he treats people too - dramatic irony to 1945 and modern audience. This links to pages 9/10 and his views, which the audience will also see as wrong. ***Good evidence to show you understand 'structure'.***

'The way some of these cranks talk now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else.' (10) Mr B can only ever think of looking after himself.

'But it doesn't convey anything to me.' (12) Mr B doesn't even remember sacking Eva Smith until he is reminded about it.

'Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.' Insp suggesting that Mr B has a 'duty of care' to his employees - something we take for granted in 2012. (41)

Mrs Birling

A snobbish woman who judges everyone by their financial situation, not by their character.

'Girls of that class...' (30) Mrs B looks at everyone as members of various classes, not as human beings.

'Alderman Meggarty... we are learning something tonight.' (35) Mrs B realizes that people she thought were civilised are corrupt and immoral. Suggests the wealthy are remote from reality? Link to today?

'She seemed to me to be not a good case - and so I used my influence to have it refused.' (44) Mrs B admits turning the girl away but refuses to accept that this was wrong. Very matter of fact language.

'Some drunken young idler, then that's all the more reason why he shouldn't escape.' (48) Mrs B doesn't yet know that the drunken idler is her own son. As a hypocrite, she doesn't say the same when she finds out!

Sheila

A basically warm hearted girl who admits that she suffers from sudden jealousies. She eventually realises that they did wrong to the girl, unlike her parents.

'She was a very pretty girl too... and that didn't make it any better.' 'I couldn't be sorry for her.' (24) Sheila admits to being jealous of Eva Smith.

'...talked about building up a wall that's sure to be knocked flat.' (32) As one of the more intelligent characters, Sheila suspects that it is useless to try and fool the inspector.

'I don't care about that, the point is that you don't seem to have learnt anything.' (58) Sheila reveals her generous nature and that she knows that whether the girl died or not, the sins they committed are still with them / have taken place.

'I suppose we're all nice people now.' (63) As above. Ironic tone.

Eric

A basically pleasant young man but he admits he drinks too much and doesn't work hard enough. He eventually realizes that they treated the girl badly.

'She wouldn't take any more and she didn't want to see me again.' (54) Eric explains how Eva/Daisy behaved more decently, even in poverty, than any of the Birlings did. Wouldn't accept stolen money.

'and the child she'd had too - my child - your own grandchild - you killed them both - damn you-' (55) Eric reveals the Insp's ability to turn them against themselves. Hyphens used to show his distress - harsh language used. Don't forget to look at the stage directions as well!

'The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters.' (65) Eric proves that he is good at heart and understands that they were morally very bad to the girl.

Gerald

Another gentle character who might have helped Eva in generosity but allowed his superiority over her to lead to sex. Perhaps he should have considered what would happen to the girl when his help stopped, as it was always going to.

'And I've told you - I was awfully busy at the works all that time.' (3) Gerald proves that he is capable of being so dishonest to someone he should respect, i.e. Sheila.

'I didn't install her there so I could make love to her... I was sorry for her.' (37) Gerald may have tried to help her but he never considered what would happen when he took the help away.

'She told me she'd been happier than she'd ever been before.' (39) As above. Gerald's sense of generosity is not only providing him with sex without responsibilities, it is also misplaced.

MODEL ANSWER: How important do you think social class is in 'An Inspector Calls' and how does Priestley present ideas about social class?

Checklist for success:

- Clear focus on the theme in question
- Reference to the text shown
- Analysis of language
- Subject terminology
- Contextual links used to inform discussion

Within *An Inspector Calls*, Priestley presents the theme of social class as a means of demonstrating his socialist message. Set in 1912, the play's society was one in which class structures were rigid and there was a clear hierarchy; however, the audiences of 1945 and beyond would be able to see just how far they had come towards being more socialist (Priestley's political preference) and would thus be encouraged to continue to progress towards a fairer and more accepting society.

Primarily, at the play's opening the theme of social class is demonstrated through the set Priestley references in his opening stage directions. The Birling family live in a 'large' house, though it is described as 'not cosy and homelike'. Instantly, the audience would be led to believe that the family are of a higher class; however, by suggesting that the house is 'not...homelike', they can infer that appearances are more important than comfort to the family, indicating that their social status may be of great importance to them. Furthermore, using the lighting Priestley is able to present the

viewpoint of the family. The lighting is said to be 'pink and intimate', which could be seen to imply that the family have a somewhat rose tinted outlook on life, not concerning themselves with anyone outside of their social circle (in 1912 social classes were rigid and viewed with great importance). Yet, upon the inspector's arrival, Priestley shifts the lighting to 'brighter and harder' - the comparative adjectives here allude to a spotlight, suggesting the family (and their classist views) will be under scrutiny.

Furthermore, the theme of social class is shown through the 'hard headed' man of 'business', Mr Birling. In Act One, Birling is shown to be extremely concerned with his place in society as he frequently references his chance of a 'knighthood' and recognises that the match between his daughter, Sheila, and Gerald is one which will be of great benefit to his business. Birling can be seen as Capitalism (a system in which the poor work to profit the rich) personified through his drive on 'profits', and Priestley ridicules this through the use of dramatic irony suggesting that this outlook is flawed. In suggesting that the Titanic is 'unsinkable - absolutely unsinkable' and remarking that 'there isn't a chance of war', Birling would have been scorned by the 1945 audience who knew the Titanic sunk, and had just lived through two world wars. Here, Priestley mocks the higher class capitalists who seem to know nothing about the world. Furthermore, by referencing the Titanic Priestley reinforces the theme of social class, and the reference can be seen as a metaphor for Edwardian society. Upon the ship, the higher classes were the first to be saved, and the poor were left to die - much like the conditions of Britain in 1912 where poor, working class people had to fend for themselves.

One of the people left to fend for herself was Eva Smith within the play. Using a characternym, Priestley suggests that Eva (stemming from the biblical Eve) represents every woman, with Smith linking her to the working class. As the play progresses, the audience learn that

each member of the Birling family had a role in driving Eva to suicide, presenting the lack of social care in society in 1912 and the **rich's mistreatment of the poor**. Having first been sacked by Mr Birling for wanting higher wages, Eva is then also dismissed from Milwards because of Sheila's 'awful temper'. Here, Priestley **presents the higher classes as selfish**, and encourages his audience to resent people like Sheila who make assumptions based on looks ('she looked like she could take care of herself'), and **use their class as power**. The adjective 'awful' to describe Sheila's temper indicates that she knows she was in the wrong, reinforced by the fact that 'now [she] feel[s] much worse'. These feelings of remorse echo Sheila's earlier sentiments that 'these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people'. **With the typographical emphasis on 'people' Priestley dismisses social class**, highlighting that we are all 'members of one body'; he also sets Sheila apart from her family, allowing for her socialist development across the play and encouraging the audience to mirror her political sentiments by the play's ending.

In conclusion, **Priestley uses the theme of social class to present the issues he saw in society in 1912, and to encourage his 1945 audience to avoid regressing to the rigid class structures of pre-war Britain.**

Poetry: Anthology

Read through the poetry connections grid, to help you generate some ideas for the following questions.

1. Compare the ways the poets in **Kamikaze** and one other poem present internal conflict. (30)
2. Compare the ways **Emigree** and one other poem present conflict between the past and the present. (30)
3. Compare the ways the poets in **Bayonet Charge** and one other poem present conflict in war. (30)
4. Compare the ways the poets in **The Prelude** and one other poem present nature's power. (30)
5. Compare the ways the poets in **London** and one other poem present the power of a place. (30)
6. Compare the ways '**Checking out me History**' and one other poem present conflict over identity. (30)
7. Compare the ways **Storm on the Island** and one other poem present conflict with nature. (30)
8. Compare the ways **War Photographer** and one other poem present attitudes to conflict. (30)
9. Compare the ways the poets in **Tissue** and one other poem present ideas about conflict. (30)
10. Compare the ways the poets in **Poppies** and one other poem explore the power of memories. (30)
11. Compare the ways the poets in **My Last Duchess** and one other poem present the power of pride. (30)
12. Compare the ways the poets in **Remains** and one other poem present the effects of conflict. (30)

13. Compare the ways **Exposure** and one other poem present ideas about suffering in conflict. (30)

14. Compare the ways **Charge of the light brigade** and one other poem present ideas about conflict. (30)

15. Compare the ways **Ozymandias** and one other poem present a decline in power. (30)

MODEL ANSWER: Compare the ways poets present ideas about power in Storm on the Island and in one other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

Checklist for success:

- Clear links to the theme in question
- Relevant evidence used from each poem
- Comments on poetic devices and language
- Comments on poetic structure
- Comparisons made between the two poems
- Contextual links made

Both Heaney's Storm on the Island and Owen's Exposure present ideas about power through focusing on the power of nature and war throughout their poems. Despite the disparity in settings, power is shown have great influence on both poets throughout their work.

Firstly, the power of nature is presented to the reader within the title of the poems. By immediately referencing a 'storm', Heaney encourages the reader to view nature negatively, as the noun 'storm' often connotes destruction and strength. The isolated setting of 'the island' implies vulnerability, and could be seen to reinforce the power of nature as there is no protection from it. Similarly, Owen's title of 'Exposure' also connotes vulnerability, and - as the poem begins - the reader learns that the World War One soldiers are exposed to the harsh weather within the trenches. The single worded title

demonstrates the conditions they lived in, with nothing to protect them from the 'merciless iced east winds'.

Wind is also shown to be powerful within *Storm on the Island* through Heaney's use of personification. In suggesting that they 'are bombarded by the empty air', Heaney personifies the air to be a threat to the island's inhabitants. The use of the verb 'bombarded' develops the semantic field of war used by Heaney throughout the poem with words like 'salvo' and 'exploding' exemplifying the power nature had on the island, as though they are at war against the storm itself. It can be argued that the storm referenced in the poem is actually an extended metaphor for the infamous Troubles in Northern Ireland, therefore adding a different layer of meaning to the language of war used by Heaney as he highlights the devastation caused by the conflict at the time. Similarly, alongside the brutality of nature within *Exposure*, Owen presents the power war held upon the soldiers in *World War One* (having been a soldier himself, and dying at war, Owen writes from his own personal experience). Heaney repeats the phrase 'But nothing happens' throughout his poem, demonstrating the boredom and unease of the soldiers as the war dragged on. The use of the conjunction 'but' to open the repetitive line exemplifies how the soldiers remain expectant, only to find themselves in the same situation once more, highlighting the power the war had over their lives.

Furthermore, the power nature holds over the island is shown through the repetitive nature of the storm and, as in *Exposure*, the islanders are constantly preparing for something to happen. In the opening line, Heaney uses the inclusive pronoun 'we' in suggesting that 'we are prepared'. The use of the pronoun unites the islanders against the storm, highlighting the power it holds over them as they have to ensure that they are ready to fight it – they have to adapt to nature as it is uncontrollable and more powerful than them. This idea is furthered through the oxymoronic description of the sea 'exploding comfortably' which implies that this is how it is most comfortable, but the verb 'exploding' has devastating connotation for the island. Similarly, in *Exposure* Owen questions 'is it that we are dying?', also uniting the soldiers using the inclusive pronoun 'we'. The rhetorical question indicates the power nature has over the soldiers as the harsh conditions leave them questioning

how long they can survive, again showing that nature is uncontrollable and something much stronger than them.

Finally, Heaney highlights the power that nature has over one's emotions. In suggesting that the storm is 'a huge nothing that we fear', Heaney suggests that even though they are used to the storms and know they can survive it unscathed, they still 'fear' it. The use of 'fear' illustrates the emotional impact the storm has, as fear is a powerful emotion, and the oxymoron 'huge nothing' shows that whilst they know their emotions are unreasonable, the storm still holds power over them. This is reinforced through Heaney's use of the single stanza and enjambment within his poem which can be seen to reflect the pace and power of the storm as it forces the reader to continue reading with increased speed. On the other hand, in Exposure Owen presents the weather as something which should be feared, and uses separate stanzas of similar length to demonstrate the repetitive nature of life in the trenches. He also uses zoomorphism to describe the soldiers like animals as they 'cringe in holes' to escape the elements, showing the dehumanizing power of nature and war on the soldiers of World War One.

Unseen Poetry

Read through the following poems and then answer the corresponding questions.

In preparation for your unseen comparison: read through the unseen poems and try to organise them into pairs. Think: what type of question could the examiner ask about the two poems? I.e. try to find a common theme.

You Being Born

Brian Jones

I saw you born.
It was remarkable.
You shot out from between your mother's legs
like a rugby ball from a scrum
and the stocky Geordie midwife caught you neatly
and cried 'Whoops! She's come!'

You had a wrinkled jammy head
and spasmy legs like a portly frog's.
From your belly button a white root waved
that had fed you all the months you'd grown

and ripened in your mother's womb.
And let me tell you – I'm ashamed –
I forgot your mother completely – she had been
those things to me that one day you'll discover
in someone else, and think 'God, this is it!'
– My sweetheart, my warm dear, my red hot lover –

But for those moments, as the doctor
shoved cotton wool up your flat nose
and swabbed your eyes and cleaned your bum
I forgot completely all my life and love
and watched you like a pool of growing light
and whispered to myself 'She's come! She's come!'

My Parents Kept me from Children who were Rough

Stephen Spender

My parents kept me from children who were rough
and who threw words like stones and who wore torn clothes.
Their thighs showed through rags. They ran in the street
And climbed cliffs and stripped by the country streams.

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron
And their jerking hands and their knees tight on my arms.
I feared the salt coarse pointing of those boys
Who copied my lisp behind me on the road.

They were lithe, they sprang out behind hedges
Like dogs to bark at our world. They threw mud
And I looked another way, pretending to smile,
I longed to forgive them, yet they never smiled.

Dad

Elaine Feinstein

Your old hat hurts me, and those black
fat raisins you liked to press into
my palm from your soft heavy hand:

I see you staggering back up the path
with sacks of potatoes from some local farm,
fresh eggs, flowers. Every day I grieve

for your great heart broken and you gone.
You loved to watch the trees. This year
you did not see their Spring.
The sky was freezing over the fen
as on that somewhere secretly appointed day
you beached: cold, white-faced, shivering.

What happened, old bull, my loyal
hoarse-voiced warrior? The hammer
blow that stopped you in your track
and brought you to a hospital monitor
could not destroy your courage
to the end you were
uncowed and unconcerned with pleasing anyone.

I think of you now as once again safely
at my mother's side, the earth as
chosen as a bed, and feel most sorrow for
all that was gentle in
my childhood buried there
already forfeit, now forever lost.

Brendon Gallacher

Jackie Kay

He was seven and I was six, my Brendon Gallacher.
He was Irish and I was Scottish, my Brendon Gallacher.
His father was in prison; he was a cat burglar.
My father was a communist party full-time worker.
He had six brothers and I had one, my Brendon Gallacher.

He would hold my hand and take me by the river
Where we'd talk all about his family being poor.
He'd get his mum out of Glasgow when he got older.
A wee holiday someplace nice. Some place far.
I'd tell my mum about Brendon Gallacher.

How his mum drank and his daddy was a cat burglar.
And she'd say, 'why not have him round for dinner?'
No, no, I'd say he's got big holes in his trousers.
I like meeting him by the burn in the open air.

Then one day after we'd been friends for two years,

One day when it was pouring and I was indoors,
My mum says to me, 'I was talking to Mrs Moir
Who lives next door to your Brendon Gallacher
Didn't you say his address was 24 Novar?
She says here are No Gallachers at 24 Novar

There never have been any Gallachers next door.'
And he died then, my Brendon Gallacher,
Flat out on my bedroom floor, his spiky hair,
His impish grin, his funny flapping ear.
Oh Brendon. Oh my Brendon Gallacher.

Medusa

Carol Ann Duffy

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
grew in my mind,
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes
as though my thoughts
hissed and spat on my scalp.

My bride's breath soured, stank
in the grey bags of my lungs.
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,
yellow fanged.
There are bullet tears in my eyes.
Are you terrified?

Be terrified.
It's you I love,
perfect man, Greek God, my own;
but I know you'll go, betray me, stray
from home.
So better by for me if you were stone.

I glanced at a buzzing bee,
a dull grey pebbly fell
to the ground.
I glanced at a singing bird,
a handful of dusty gravel
spattered down

I looked at a ginger cat,
a housebrick
shattered a bowl of milk.
I looked at a snuffling pig,
a boulder rolled

in a heap of shit.

I stared in the mirror.
Love gone bad
showed me a Gorgon.
I stared at a dragon.
Fire spewed
from the mouth of a mountain.

And here you come
with a shield for a heart
and a sword for a tongue
and your girls, your girls.
Wasn't I beautiful
Wasn't I fragrant and young?

Look at me now.

The Falling Leaves

Margaret Postgate Cole

Today, as I rode by,
I saw the brown leaves dropping from their tree
In a still afternoon,
When no wind whirled them whistling to the sky,
But thickly, silently,
They fell, like snowflakes wiping out the noon;
And wandered slowly thence
For thinking of a gallant multitude
Which now all withering lay,
Slain by no wind of age or pestilence,
But in their beauty strewed
Like snowflakes falling on the Flemish clay

Come On, Come Back

Stevie Smith

(incident in a future war)

Left by the ebbing tide of battle
On the field of Austerlitz
The girl soldier Vaudevue sits
Her fingers tap the ground, she is alone
At midnight in the moonlight she is sitting
alone on a round flat stone.

Graded by the Memel Conference first
Of all human exterminators
M L 5
Has left her just alive
Only her memory is dead for evermore.
She fears and cries, Ah me, why am I here?
Sitting alone on a round flat stone on a
hummock there.

Rising, staggering, over the ground she goes
Over the seeming miles of rutted meadow
To the margin of a lake
The sand beneath her feet
Is cold and damp and firm to the waves' beat.

Quickly - as a child, an idiot, as one without
memory -
She strips her uniform off, strips, stands and
lunges
Into the icy waters of the adorable lake.
On the surface of the water lies
A ribbon of white moonlight
The waters on either side of the moony track
Are black as her mind,
Her mind is as secret from her
As the water on which she swims,
As secret as profound as ominous.

Weeping bitterly for her ominous mind, her
plight,
Up the river of white moonlight she swims
Until a treacherous undercurrent

Seizing her in an icy amorous embrace
Dives with her, swiftly severing
The waters which close above her head.

An enemy sentinel
Finding the abandoned clothes
Waits for the swimmer's return
('Come on, come back')
Waiting, whiling away the hour
Whittling a shepherd's pipe from the hollow
reeds.

In the chill light of dawn
Ring out the pipe's wild notes
'Come on, come back.'

Vaudevue
In the swift and subtle current's close
embrace
Sleeps on, stirs not, hears not the familiar
tune
Favourite of all the troops of all the armies
Favourite of Vaudevue
For she had sung it too
Marching to Austerlitz,
'Come on, come back'.

Hawk Roosting

Ted Hughes

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads -

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

Born Yesterday

Philip Larkin

For Sally Amis

Tightly-folded bud,
I have wished you something
None of the others would:
Not the usual stuff
About being beautiful,
Or running off a spring
Of innocence and love —
They will all wish you that,
And should it prove possible,
Well, you're a lucky girl.

But if it shouldn't, then
May you be ordinary;
Have, like other women,
An average of talents:
Not ugly, not good-looking,
Nothing uncustomary
To pull you off your balance,
That, unworkable itself,
Stops all the rest from working.
In fact, may you be dull —
If that is what a skilled,
Vigilant, flexible,
Unemphasised, enthralled
Catching of happiness is called.

Praise Song for My Mother

Grace Nichols

You were
water to me
deep and bold and fathoming

You were
moon's eye to me
pull and grained and mantling

You were
sunrise to me
rise and warm and streaming

You were
the fishes red gill to me
the flame tree's spread to me
the crab's leg/the fried plantain smell
replenishing replenishing

Go to your wide futures, you said

The Flea

John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that, self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
Find'st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;
'Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:
Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

The Relic

John Donne

When my grave is broke up again
Some second guest to entertain,
(For graves have learn'd that woman head,
To be to more than one a bed)
And he that digs it, spies
A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,
Will he not let us alone,
And think that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way
To make their souls, at the last busy day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

If this fall in a time, or land,
Where mis-devotion doth command,
Then he, that digs us up, will bring
Us to the bishop, and the king,
To make us relics; then
Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I
A something else thereby;
All women shall adore us, and some men;
And since at such time miracles are sought,
I would have that age by this paper taught
What miracles we harmless lovers wrought.

First, we lov'd well and faithfully,
Yet knew not what we lov'd, nor why;
Difference of sex no more we knew

Than our guardian angels do;
Coming and going, we
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;
Our hands ne'er touch'd the seals
Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free;
These miracles we did, but now alas,
All measure, and all language, I should pass,
Should I tell what a miracle she was.

The Canonization

John Donne

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honor, or his grace,
Or the king's real, or his stampèd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one more to the plaguy bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.
The phœnix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for Love.

And thus invoke us: "You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize)
Countries, towns, courts: beg from above
A pattern of your love!"

The Rising Sun

John Donne

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us ?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run ?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court-huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices ;
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams so reverend, and strong
Why shouldst thou think ?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,

But that I would not lose her sight so long.
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and to-morrow late tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, "All here in one bed lay."

She's all states, and all princes I ;
Nothing else is ;
Princes do but play us ; compared to this,
All honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
Thou, Sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus ;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere ;
This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere.

Questions for 'You Being Born'

1. What picture do you get of the narrator as you read the poem? Think about what he is like and the types of feelings he might experience.
2. What emotions is he experiencing?
3. What effect do the following similes and metaphors have on the reader/listener? Pay particular attention to the words that have been underlined:
 - a. "You shot out from between your mother's legs like a rugby ball from a scrum"
 - b. "You had a wrinkled jammy head and spasmy legs like a portly frog's"
 - c. "From your bellybutton a white root waved that had fed you all the month's you'd grown"
4. What is the effect of the caesura in the opening lines of the poem? How does this contrast with the enjambment in the rest of the poem?
5. How does the poet show his love and admiration for his new born daughter?
6. What is the poet "ashamed" of in this poem? Why do you think this is?

Questions for 'My Parents Kept me from Children who were Rough'

1. What impression do you get of the narrator in this poem (clue: look at his background, his behaviour and why he wants to forgive the rough children)?
2. How does your impression of the narrator contrast with your impression of the rough children (clue: how they speak, their clothes, their behaviour)?
3. Look at the imagery used to describe the rough children. Choose some examples and explain how they strengthen your impression.
4. Why is the narrator so fascinated by the rough children? Why is he keen to be a part of their lives?
5. Who do you think the poet is writing this poem for – the rough children, himself or an unknown audience? Explain your answer fully.
6. What is the purpose of this poem – to warn against bullying, to describe what happened to him, to entertain us...? Explain your ideas fully.

Questions for 'Dad'

1. What do you think the writer means in line 1 when she says: "Your old hat hurts me"?
2. What impression do you get of the father from the lines "... old bull, my loyal / hoarse-voiced warrior?"
3. What was the father like, even to the end of his life?
4. Choose a phrase or line that you think shows the writer's emotions. What effect does this have on the reader/listener?
5. Who do you think the writer is writing the poem for – an unknown audience, or for herself? What is the purpose of her poem?
6. What impressions do you get of the narrator? What has her relationship with her father been like?

Questions for 'Brendan Gallagher'

1. What does Brendon look like?
2. What type of home life did he have?
3. What words/phrases are repeated through the poem?
4. How is Brendon presented as 'real' in the poem?
5. Why do you think he is presented this way?
6. Why do you think the narrator wanted Brendon as a friend?
7. Is there one specific character, or is the poet focusing on a 'character type'?
8. What is the poet using this character for – do they represent something about human nature in general?

Questions for 'Medusa'

1. Who is speaking in the poem?
2. What imagery is being created? What/how is it effective?
3. What are the main themes featured in the poem?
4. Who is the poem addressed to? Why?
5. What types of language/devices are used in this poem? What effect do they have on the reader/listener?
6. How is the poem laid out? What is the structure of the stanzas? Why has Duffy chosen to structure it in this way?

Questions for 'The Falling Leaves'

1. This poem was written in November 1915. What is significant about this date?
2. What sort of afternoon is it? Do you think this is important for setting the mood of the poem?
3. Describe how the poet conveys the leaves falling from the tree in your own words.
4. Why are the leaves falling "silently" and what does this seem to indicate?
5. What effect does the line "like snowflakes wiping out the noon" have on you?
6. What does "gallant" mean? Who is the poet referring to here?

7. What does “multitude” mean, and why do you think this word has been used?
8. Why do you think the poet has used the word “withering”?
9. What is the effect of the word “slain”?
10. Why do you think the poet refers to the leaves as “strewed”?

Questions for ‘Come On, Come Back’

1. Do any of the words strike you as peculiar in the context of the poem? Why is this?
2. Read the poem again. Identify:
 - a) simile
 - b) metaphor
 - c) repetition
 - d) alliteration
 - e) personification.
3. Explain in your own words what each of these quotations mean.
4. What impact would these quotations have on the reader?
5. In the first stanza, the word ‘ebbing’ is used to describe the battle retreating. Are there any other words in the poem you find an odd choice? Identify them and explain why you think the poet chose them.
6. Where does the poem rhyme, and what is the effect of this?
7. The poem is set in a ‘future war’: do you think this makes it more or less effective? Explain why.
8. What views do you think the poet holds about conflict at war, and why?
9. What tense is the poem written in, and what effect does this have on you?

Questions on ‘Hawk Roosting’

1. What is ‘roosting’, and why do you think Hughes chooses to write about the hawk in this state rather than attacking/killing?
2. How does Hughes make the hawk sound violent and intimidating in the first stanza?
3. Why do you think the high trees are “convenient”?
4. What is the effect of the exclamation mark at the end of this statement?
5. What does ‘buoyancy’ mean, and how does this and the “sun’s rays” put the hawk at an “advantage”?
6. Why do you think Hughes uses the word “inspection” at the end of the second stanza?
7. Why does Hughes use the word “locked” in the third stanza?
8. What do you think is meant by, “It took the whole of Creation / To produce my foot, my each feather”?
9. In turn, what is meant by, “Now I hold Creation in my foot”?
10. What sort of image does “revolve it all slowly” give you?
11. What impression does Hughes give of the hawk’s character in the fourth stanza?
12. “My manners are tearing off heads” – in your own words, explain what this line suggests to you about Hughes’ depiction of the hawk.
13. Describe what you think is happening in the fifth stanza.
14. The final stanza begins, “The sun is behind me.” What sort of image does this give you?
15. What do you think, “Nothing has changed since I began” means?
16. What is suggested in the final line of the poem?
17. Read the poem as a whole. Hughes has the ‘hawk’ repeatedly using pronouns – “me, mine, I.” What is the effect of this?
18. Is the bird presented in a largely positive or negative light?
19. What particular images does Hughes give of the bird that are striking?

Questions for ‘Born Yesterday’

1. Explain in detail a couple of levels of the metaphor “Tightly closed bud” in Line 1.
2. What is curious about the address (the ‘I’ and the ‘you’) of the poem? Why do you think Larkin chose this structure?
3. Much of the first stanza is written in colloquial language – pick out some of these phrases and explain the effect which Larkin is seeking.
4. How does Larkin widen and shift the reader’s understanding of what ‘ordinary’ means in the first part of the stanza?
5. How does Larkin redefine the way in which the reader views the word “dull” in the final part of the stanza? Discuss the use of consonance and alliteration here.
6. The lines are quite short in both stanzas. The longest lines are at the end of the poem. Meanwhile, the first stanza is one full sentence. Comment on how these features support the message of the poem.

Questions for ‘Praise Song for my Mother’

1. This poem is written in free verse. Using your knowledge of this poem’s context, give a few reasons why this is appropriate here (clues: Africa, praise song, childhood).
2. Despite being in free verse, repetition and structure are key parts of this poem. Why do you think Nichols repeats the phrase “You were... to me” in every stanza?
3. The pattern of three descriptive words is repeated through the first three stanzas. Explain how these work and the possible reasons behind this technique (clue: nouns/verbs).
4. The idea of “moon” is intriguing in the context of a mother and child. Can you say why this might be an appropriate metaphor? How does “mantling” continue and extend this?
5. In the fourth stanza, the references become more immediate. Discuss the pattern and arrangement of the images here (clue: associations of memory/colour/theme of nourishment)
6. The final stanza switches voice to the mother’s message to her daughter: why is this an emotional ending to the poem?
7. The poem is written in the past tense, alluding to the fact that Nichol’s mother has died. Why was it important for her to write this poem in the way she did as a tribute?

Questions for ‘The Flea’

1. What features in the first stanza mark out this poem as a rhetorical argument?
2. Explain two contextual factors which deepen our understanding of how members of Donne’s coterie might have interpreted the first stanza (clue: script and medical beliefs)
3. Can you explain the double-entendre which runs through the last two lines of the stanza?
4. In the second stanza, Donne becomes more original. How does he twist the trope of the flea from simply being a symbol of sexual licence?

- Pick out and explore some of the religious imagery in this stanza.
- Explain the contextual factors which would make this illicit affair more dangerous.
- Donne begins the final stanza with an extra-diegetic interruption. What is it?
- In what ways is the otherwise silent female represented in this stanza?
- What is the rhetorical flourish which sees the narrator triumph in this battle-of-wits?
- How do you see this poem – is it simply a jeu d'esprit or a profound meditation on the nature of identity?

Questions for 'The Relic'

- Donne begins with what is fairly far-fetched hypothetical scenario. How does he imbue it with a sense of certainty (clue: conjunctions and verbs)?
- Line 6 was T.S Eliot's favourite line in Donne. What aspects of this line and its scenario do you think appealed to him (clue: technique/themes)?
- What does the bracelet symbolise (lines 7-10)?
- What is the significance of the choice of the word "misdevotion" (clue: context)?
- Donne's lover will be believed to be Mary Magdalen – what possibilities are there for a "something else"? Which do you favour and why?
- How does Donne increase the importance of his poem at the end of the first stanza?
- What kind of love does Donne describe in the opening of the second stanza? Pick out a couple of key pieces of imagery and explore them.
- The word "miracle(s)" is repeated four times over the closing lines of the two stanzas. Why is this term so thematically important to the poem?
- What reasons are there for Donne to avoid a detailed description of his lover in the context of the poem's message?
- In what sense is the poem itself 'The Relic' (clue: manuscript)?

Questions for 'The Canonization'

- Donne is once more in a declamatory mode here. How does he establish the identity of his opponent in the first stanza?
- What aspects could make this a humorous opening for the readers (clue: self-deprecation/disparagement)?
- Donne begins the second stanza with a series of rhetorical questions. How are these humorous (clue: hyperbole/Petrarchan sonnets)?
- The third stanza seems to equally address the lover. Do you agree? What aspects make it seem less concerned with the outside world?
- Explain some of the imagery in this stanza. How does Donne mix sexual and spiritual love in his account here?
- How does Donne increase the importance of the poem he is writing through his predictions in the fourth stanza?
- Explain the wordplay in the phrase 'pretty rooms'. Why is the use of the word "hymns" either ironic and/or controversial?
- How does Donne play with scale in the first section of the poem? Why is this appropriate to the poem's message (clue: lovers' opposition to the world)?
- What do you think the narrator means by "a pattern of your love"? What are the implications of this phrase (clue: physical vs spiritual love)?
- The process of 'canonization' is a Catholic one: why is this striking in the context of reading Donne's poem?

Questions for 'The Sun Rising'

- Donne begins this in a bombastic mode – pick out some of the derogatory epithets he uses for the Sun and explore them. Can you spot some further wordplay (clue: sun/son)?
- This poem is about the aubade tradition – can you supply some evidence to place it here? What is intriguing about the poem (clue: consider tone)?
- Later in the poem, the narrator will claim his preeminence over all of Creation – what clues are there that this will come later in lines 5-8?
- In this stanza, Donne focuses on the Sun's function in the measurement of chronological time for mankind. How does he suggest his contempt for this in lines 9-10?
- The solipsism which underlies the bold claim in line 13 creates great irony. Explain the humour and wordplay contained in this line and how the narrator skilfully then retreats.
- How does Donne widen the scope of the poem in the latter part of the second stanza? What effect does this have?
- In the third stanza, Donne begins with an incredibly bold claim. Explore this analogy – can you say why it would be more controversial in Jacobean England? What implications does it have for gender relations?
- How does the narrator strike a more conciliatory note in the final section of the poem (clue: shift in the Sun's function)?
- How convincing do you find the final couplet of the poem? Explain some factors which might influence your interpretation.
- Explore two contextual beliefs which would have been key to a contemporary audience's reading of this poem (clue: Copernicus/Chain of Being)?

Further Practice

Have a look at The Guardian newspaper's online interactive collection of love poems (<http://www.theguardian.com/books/interactive/2012/feb/13/best-love-poems-interactive>) and practise your responses to unseen poems. To get you thinking about the poem, choose one from the collection and answer these questions:

- What does the title tell you?
- Who is speaking?
- Who is being addressed?
- Who/what is it about?
- What do you think of the person or people it is about? What do you think the poet feels about them?
- Where is it taking place?
- When is it taking place?
- What happens in the poem?
- What does it look like on the page?
- How is it arranged? Why do you think it's arranged this way?
- Does it rhyme? Can you identify a pattern?
- What difference does the rhyme or lack of rhyme make?
- Is there a regular rhythm or beat? Can you identify it?
- What difference do the rhyme and rhythm make to the mood of the poem?
- What would you say the mood is?
- Is there anything interesting about the language the poet uses?
- Does the poet use particular literary techniques, such as alliteration, repetition or onomatopoeia? If so, what effect do they have?
- Is there any interesting imagery, e.g. similes and metaphors?
- What does the choice of imagery tell you about the poet's feelings?
- What is the poem really about?
- What is the poet's attitude to his/her subject?
- Has the poet made his/her point successfully?
- What do you think about the subject?
- Does the poem remind you in any way of any other poems you have read?

English Literature: Contemporary Poetry (Unseen)

PROCESS:

1. Use the Contents Page to find the right question – THE UNSEEN POEM.
2. Read the question (including the bullet points) and highlight the key words.
3. Read the poem twice.
4. Underline all of the positive words/images.
5. Underline all of the negative words/images.
6. Try to decide – does the poet have a positive/negative/mixed feelings toward the subject-matter of the poem?
7. Next to each stanza summarise what you think is happening and the poet's feelings.
8. From 1-7 above, try to determine what the poem is about – its THEMES – and the poet's viewpoint.
9. The bullet points will be a combination of 'WHAT' and 'HOW'. Label them 'WHAT' and 'HOW'.
10. Locate the section(s) in the poem that deals with the first WHAT. Underline and annotate 3-4 details in the poem which will help you answer the question: these should include language, structure, and any other relevant 'HOWS' from the HOW bullet points.
11. Repeat this for the other 'WHATS'.

REMEMBER TO:

- Use the **wording of the question** throughout the essay.
- **Address each bullet point** and use the wording from the bullet point in your response.
- Write about structure as well as language.
- Add detail to your explanations – its not enough to say that a feature reveals the poet's feelings – exactly what are those feelings?
- Write a lot about a little - Close Word Analysis – discuss individual words in detail. What associations do they have? Are they positive or negative? What do they make you think of? Why has the poet chosen them? What do they reveal?
- **Link each point you make to:**
 - THEMES
 - FEELINGS/ATTITUDES OF THE POET/CHARACTER IN THE POEM
 - HOW IT MAKES THE READER FEEL
 - WHAT IT MAKES THE READER THINK OF

WHAT TO REVISE:

- The process (above).
- The **UNSEEN POEM ESSAY PLAN**.
- The **POETRY FEATURES AND EXPLANATIONS HANDOUT**.

In 'Blessing' how does the poet present ideas about being poor?

Checklist for success:

- Clear links to the question
- Relevant evidence used to support ideas
- Comments on poetic devices and language
- Comments on structure
- Connections and comparisons made

Ideas about being poor are primarily presented by Dharker in the poem's title 'blessing'. The single word has religious connotations and could be seen to allude to putting faith into something invisible, something completely separate from material objects, and something which offers hope. Alternatively, the word could be seen to emphasise just how poor the people presented are as something as small (to a Western reader) as water becomes an act of God, and a lifeline blessing them. This title demonstrates the setting of the poem as a place where clean water is sparse.

The opening simile reinforces this setting, highlighting the heat of the location as 'the skin cracks like a pod'. The use of the verb 'crack' suggests a painful experience and indicates the severe heat and dehydration of the people, encouraging the reader to see just how little they have - they cannot even protect themselves from the sun's harsh glare. Building on this, the poem's two opening lines take the form of two simple sentences, with the simile followed by simply 'there is never enough water'. Dharker's use of the simple sentence presents the statements as fact, and emphasises the state of desperation that the people live in. Structurally, this encourages the reader to reflect on their own state and begin to feel empathy for those who are poorer than themselves with little description offered at this stage.

This idea of reflection is furthered with Dharker's use of the verb 'imagine' in the following line. The verb choice not only encourages empathy from the reader, but also indicates just how rare fresh water is if people can only 'imagine the drip of it'. The onomatopoeic 'drip' and 'splash'

present just how little people have, as these both suggest limited amounts of water, and the sounds created contrast to the gushing tap a reader is probably used to. Also, by using the metaphor that the sound of the water is 'the voice of a kindly God', Dharker develops the religious connotations from the title and reinforces the idea that water offers hope (like religion) to people who have very little.

Furthermore, Dharker uses listing to present ideas about being poor within the poem. When 'the municipal pipe bursts' the people are said to 'butt in, with pots, / brass, copper, aluminium, / plastic buckets, / frantic hands'. Here, the listing demonstrates the desperation of the people to store the water they have been blessed with – it implies they will use anything they can to contain the water for their use. This desperation is reinforced with the zoomorphism of the 'roar of tongues'. The animal imagery presents the people as primal in their need for water, suggesting they do not have enough to live as many humans would. Their 'small bones' also indicate that they are poorer than most as it could be seen to connote a lack of growth due to limited means.

Model answer: In both 'Blessing' and 'The Rich Eat Three Full Meals', the speakers present feelings about being poor. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present those feelings?

Both 'Blessing' and 'The Rich Eat Three Full Meals' present ideas about being poor through their use of language within the titles. Within 'Blessing' the title suggests that the poor have very little, as water is seen to be an act of God from the religious connotations of the title. On the other hand, Kheim uses the title of the poem to reference how much the rich have, acting as a contrast to the poor. Like in Blessing, this encourages the reader to 'imagine' what it would be like to have fewer than three meals a day, presenting the plight of the poor who have to survive on less.

Within the poems themselves there is a contrast in the presentation of ideas about being poor. Blessing highlights the lack of basic comfort which the poor have using the simile 'the skin cracks like a pod' in the metaphorical 'liquid sun'. This indicates that the poor have no shelter from the blazing heat and the use of the verb 'cracks' implies that they are suffering. On the other hand, Kheim suggests that 'peace is what matters' and (in contrast to the 'liquid sun') the speaker is 'warm' as they 'lie in the shade'. The language used in the second poem is much calmer, demonstrating that whilst the speaker has less than the rich with 'two small bowls', they are in a safer setting that allows them to find 'peace'.

Despite this difference, both poems end positively to show the reader that the poor can find happiness in small things, for example water and peace. This suggests to the reader that money is of little consequence, as 'when the municipal pipe bursts' 'the blessing sings'. The personification here exemplifies how grateful people are for water, as 'sings' has positive connotations and juxtaposes the harsh 'crack' from the start of the poem. Similarly, Kheim's poem finishes considering 'Heaven's heaped up flavours' – the religious imager similar to that of 'Blessing' – indicating that the poor are still able to find positives in the little that they do have and can also see themselves as blessed.

Blessing

By Imtiaz Dharker

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

Sometimes, the sudden rush
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,
silver crashes to the ground
and the flow has found
a roar of tongues. From the huts,
a congregation : every man woman
child for streets around
butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,

and naked children
screaming in the liquid sun,
their highlights polished to perfection,
flashing light,
as the blessing sings
over their small bones.

The Rich Eat Three Full Meals

By *Nguyen Binh Khiem*

The rich eat three full meals, the poor two small bowls
But peace is what matters.

Thirsty, I drink sweet plum tea;

Warm, I lie in the shade, in the breeze;

My paintings are mountains and rivers all around me,

My damask, embroidered, the grass.

I rest at night, rest easy,

Am awake with the sun

And enjoying Heaven's heaped-up favours.