edexcel INTERNATIONAL

IGCSE

London Examinations IGCSE

English Literature (4360)

First examination May 2005

November 2003

delivered locally, recognised globally

Teacher's Guide

London Examinations IGCSE

English Literature (4360)

Edexcel is one of the leading examining and awarding bodies in the UK and throughout the world. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers.

Through a network of UK and overseas offices, Edexcel International centres receive the support they need to help them deliver their education and training programmes to learners.

For further information please call our International Customer Relations Unit

Tel +44 (0) 190 884 7750

international@edexcel.org.uk

www.edexcel-international.org

Authorised by Elizabeth Blount

Publications Code: UG013031

Contents

Introduction **1**

A single tier of entry **2**

Structure of specification **3**

Assessment requirements **4**

Notes on the assessment objectives 5

Styles of questions 6

Course planning **10**

An example of course planning 11

A blank planning sheet 13

Coursework **15**

The requirements in brief 15

Assessment of coursework 15

Standardisation of coursework 16

Final assessment of coursework at the end of the course 16

Coursework frontsheets 16

Authentication 16

Examples of assignments 17

Managing coursework assignments 17

Subject-specific information **19**

Teaching the drama texts 20

Teaching the prose texts 33

Teaching the Poetry Anthology 48

Support and training **70**

Appendix: Completing the Coursework Frontsheet **71**

Introduction

This Guide is for teachers of the London Examinations IGCSE in English Literature (4360).

The Guide should be read in conjunction with the following publications

- IGCSE in English Literature (4360), Specification (Publications code UG013064)
- Specimen Papers and Mark Schemes (Publications code UG013053).

The aims of the Teacher's Guide are

- to expand on the information about course requirements contained within the specification
- to explain assessment procedures
- to suggest teaching approaches to the set texts
- to provide examples of course planning.

IGCSE and GCSE

The IGCSE in English Literature is **similar** to GCSE English Literature in these respects

- it comprises the detailed study of prescribed texts
- a free resource covers the poetry component of the course
- it has a coursework option for approved centres
- it provides a sound basis for progress to A level English Literature, or equivalent qualifications
- the mark scheme rewards achievement across a wide range of grades (A* - G)
- the A* grade is reserved for a small percentage of students who achieve at the top end of grade A.

IGCSE in English Literature **differs** from GCSE English Literature in these areas

- the study of pre-twentieth century texts is not compulsory
- coursework is not compulsory
- students are not permitted to take their copies of the set texts into the examination, though the named poems from the anthology are printed on the paper
- there is a single tier of entry encompassing grades A* to G in one paper
- texts have been selected with the needs and interests of international students in mind. They include works in translation.

A single tier of entry

Most IGCSEs have Foundation and Higher Tiers of entry. Tiers of entry enable papers to be targeted at a narrower range of achievement, with questions testing specific grades.

However, this was felt to be inappropriate to a study of English Literature. It would be inaccurate to designate certain texts as 'Foundation Tier texts' or 'Higher Tier texts'. The texts were chosen for their inherent merit, and are accessible to students of all abilities. The questions set on the texts are open to response at various levels, so that differentiation is achieved through outcome, not through different questions for different levels of ability. The mark schemes recognise this wide range of ability by allocating marks to four broad mark ranges, each encompassing two grades.

All assessment components, Papers 1, 2 and coursework, test achievement in the whole range of grades, from A* to G.

Structure of specification

Paper/ component	Mode of assessment	Weighting	Length
Paper 1	**Closed text examination paper** **Section A, Drama** Candidates answer **one** question on **one** play. **Section B, Prose** Candidates answer **one** question on **one** text.	70%	1½ hours
Paper 2 OR	**Examination paper, Poetry** Candidates answer **one** question from a choice of two. They are required to write about **at least 2 poems** from the prescribed Poetry Anthology.	30%	45 mins
Component 3	**Coursework, Poetry** Candidates write about **at least 3 poems** from the prescribed Poetry Anthology.	30%	—

Students take **two** of the above components, Paper 1, and **either** Paper 2 (examination) **or** Component 3 (coursework – Edexcel-approved Teaching Institutions only).

Assessment requirements

The three Assessment Objectives are given equal weight in all the examination components.

Assessment Objective	Paper 1 Weighting	Paper 2 Weighting	Component 3 Weighting
AO1 a close knowledge of texts and the contexts in which they were written	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
AO2 understanding and appreciation of the craft of the writer	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
AO3 a focused, sensitive, lively and informed personal response	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%

These percentages are not intended to provide a precise statement of the number of marks allocated to particular assessment objectives.

Notes on the Assessment Objectives

AO1

'**Close knowledge**' of the set texts is essential, especially since the examinations are largely 'closed text'. Candidates are not permitted to bring copies of the set texts into the examination with them. This is to ensure fairness: it would be impossible for Edexcel International to ensure that texts used in an examination did not have additional notes, printed or hand-written, to aid the candidates.

Close knowledge may be demonstrated in the way the candidates range across the text in their answers, showing understanding of the whole as well as the significance of specific incidents or speeches. Candidates should support their points either by referring to particular moments in the text ('*this is clearly shown when Cassius tells Brutus that…*'), or by memorised quotations. Examiners look for well-chosen details from the texts, but these need not take the form of direct quotations.

In Paper 2, named poems in the questions will be printed on the examination paper. Candidates **may not** take their copies of the Poetry Anthology into the examination.

'The contexts in which (texts) were written' may be examined through questions which ask about the society in which a text is set. The answer should always be rooted in the text and how the text reveals the social or cultural setting; it should not be a historical or sociological essay, divorced from the text.

AO2

'The craft of the writer' refers to the techniques used by the writer to achieve effects. These may be specific to prose, poetry or drama. For example, in prose texts the techniques may involve how the narrative is developed; whether there is a third or first person narrator; how characters and themes are presented to the reader. In drama texts, the emphasis will be on dramatic techniques: how words and actions reveal character; how dialogue is used in the interaction between characters; how dramatic contrast is used to highlight differences between characters, moods and actions. In poetry, the techniques will be stylistic, such as use of imagery and adjectives, or how verse form is used.

'Understanding' implies that the candidate shows a grasp of the techniques; **'appreciation'** suggests an ability to explore the effects of those techniques, and an evaluation of their use in the text.

AO3

'Personal response' is shown when a candidate engages with a text in an individual way. The questions are designed to allow candidates to explore, in detail, a specific point or technique, which provide a focus for the candidate's response. Successful answers will be clearly structured around the keywords of the question; less successful answers will tend to be coached, over-prepared responses which are not focused on the question. There is nothing to be gained from candidates learning stock answers to imaginary questions by heart. The outcome of such an approach will be the opposite of the **'focused, sensitive, lively and informed personal response'** required by the Assessment Objective.

Styles of questions

These examples of different types of examination question are taken from the *Specimen papers and Mark schemes* for the course.

Section A: Drama texts

Questions on the drama texts tend to follow a pattern: one question will usually focus on characterisation; the other question will examine another aspect of the play, such as dramatic qualities; theme; structure; social/cultural setting.

Example (a)

***Julius Caesar*: At Caesar's funeral, Mark Antony speaks to the crowd. What do you learn about Mark Antony's character from his words and actions at this point in the play?**

This question addresses only one scene in the play, but a thorough answer is bound to show knowledge, implicit or explicit, of Mark Antony from his words and behaviour in earlier scenes. The question also exemplifies an important teaching point: candidates should be alert to the keywords of the question. It is good practice for students to underline them on the examination paper. Candidates are asked to consider words and actions, and a successful answer will address both.

Example (b)

***Julius Caesar*: Explain the dramatic importance of the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius before the Battle of Phillippi.**

This question requires the candidate to consider one scene as a piece of theatre, both for its own dramatic qualities and for its importance within the structure of the play as a whole. To answer this question successfully, candidates will need to write about the tensions which have led to this confrontation, and how the conflict is resolved.

Example (c)

***The Importance of Being Earnest*: Compare and contrast the characters of Algernon and Jack.**

A *compare and contrast* question requires candidates to explore similarities and differences, referring to words and actions in support of their points.

Example (d)

***The Importance of Being Earnest*: What do we learn of the society portrayed in *The Importance of Being Earnest?* Explain what aspects of this society Wilde appeared to dislike.**

This question touches on the society of the play as it is revealed by the characters' words and actions. It asks the candidate to consider how the writer's views are implicitly conveyed in the drama.

Example (e)

***A View from the Bridge*: By the end of the play, do you find yourself sympathising with Eddie or criticising him?**

This type of question explicitly asks for a judgement, a personal response. It is a good example of how successful candidates cannot simply regurgitate learnt notes: they need to use their knowledge of the play to respond to a specific question.

Section B: Prose texts

Questions on the prose texts follow a similar pattern to the drama questions. One question will usually focus on characterisation; the other question will examine another aspect of the text, such as theme, or social/cultural setting.

Example (a)

***Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*: What personal qualities do you admire in Luo? Show how these qualities are revealed in TWO parts of the book.**

Questions often restrict the candidate to a limited area of the book. This requires the candidate to explore an episode in detail.

Example (b)

***A Man of the People*: Achebe believes that 'any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose'. What do you think is the message and purpose of *A Man of the People*?**

Questions sometimes have a quotation as a starting point for the question. In this case it is a quotation by the writer; it might sometimes be an opinion made up by the question-setter for candidates to agree or disagree with. See example (c) below.

Example (c)

***Stories from Around the World*: '*Both Julia and the rickshaw wallah deserve our sympathy.*' How far do you agree with this statement about the characters in *Nankar*?**

'*How far do you agree that…*' or '*To what extent do you think that…*' - such questions force candidates to make a judgement.

Example (d)

***Stories from Around the World*: Show how humour is used in any two stories from the collection.**

Questions on the short story collection will require the candidate to write in detail about one or two stories, sometimes named, sometimes free-choice.

Paper 2: Poetry

One question will name at least one poem from the anthology. Candidates will be invited to write about that poem and at least one other, which may be named or may be chosen by the candidate from the Anthology. Any poem named in the question will be printed on the examination paper.

Example (a)

***Half past Two* and *Piano* both have childhood as their subject. Explain fully how successful you think the poets have been in writing about incidents in childhood.**

In this example both poems are named and would be printed on the examination paper.

The alternative poetry question allows candidates to select appropriate poems from the anthology for their answer. Candidates will not have the anthology with them in the examination.

Example (b)

What lessons about life have you learnt from two or three poems that you have studied in the Poetry Anthology? Refer closely to the poets' skills with language in your answer.

Candidates may choose any poems from the anthology in their answer. There is no reason why candidates should not refer to the poems which have been printed on the paper for the other question.

Course planning

How long should the course take?

Although the course is designed to be taught over two years, or five terms, it is possible to prepare students adequately, over one year. This will depend on the students' prior experience of literature, and the amount of curriculum time devoted to English Literature on the timetable. If the students are used to the serious study of literature and have come across basic literary terms, then they should cope with a prose text, a play and a collection of fifteen poems in one year. Since there are two examination sessions per year, there is flexibility about the length of the course. It would, for example, be possible to start teaching the course in September and to enter students for the examination in the November of the following year.

However, running the course over two years allows for more background work about literary study in general, and for more examination practice with the set texts.

An example of course planning

The following chart shows a possible five-term course. This could be adapted to a shorter time-scale if required. There then follows a blank planning sheet, on which teachers could devise their own course plans.

Term	Focus/topic	Outcome
Term 1	• The short story as a genre	Use one short story to illustrate some basic literary terms: plot, character, viewpoint, mood/atmosphere and style. Students discuss or write about these terms in relation to another short story. (Short stories from any suitable anthology can be used for this exercise. For example, *Old Man at the Bridge* by Ernest Hemingway works well as an example of writer's techniques.) Students should practise the techniques they have found in their reading of short stories in their own creative writing. They could write freely on a choice of titles provided by the teacher.
Term 2 (first half)	• Prose text: *Stories from Around the World* (from Section B, Prose)	Once students have gained an understanding of the potential and craft of short stories as a genre, they can begin to study the stories in the set text.
(second half)	• Drama text: *Julius Caesar (*from Section A, Drama)	Background: the historical setting and events. If possible, use a video version of the play, or live performance, to give students an appreciation of character and plot before a detailed reading of the script. Shakespeare's language: a study of one speech from near the beginning of the play, illustrating features of language such as archaic words; using a glossary; blank verse.

Term 3	• End of year examination	A scene by scene reading of the play, supplemented by viewing of video/live performances. *Other possible activities:* Class discussion: Is political assassination ever justified? Students in small groups discuss the words and actions of the main characters, and report back to the class. These discussions become the basis for character notes. An interim examination on the two set texts studied so far. Questions devised by the teacher, but based on the style of questions in the Specimen Papers booklet.
Term 4	• The Poetry Anthology (coursework if applicable) • Full 'mock' examination	Use some poems to illustrate poetic techniques such as imagery, tone, style, verse form. In groups, students discuss a given poem from the anthology, then present their views on that poem to the whole class. Connections and links found between the poems Coursework completed (if applicable) Use the published *Specimen Papers and Mark Schemes.*
Term 5	• Cover any remaining subject content • Final revision • Practice questions	

Blank planning sheet

Class…… Teacher……

Texts chosen

Section A, Drama: ……

Section B, Prose: ……..

Term	Topic/focus	Outcome
Term 1		
Term 2		

Term 3		
Term 4		
Term 5		

Coursework

This should be read in conjunction with pages 9 – 11 of the specification.

The requirements in brief

The assignment must enable candidates to respond critically and sensitively to **at least three poems**, and to show understanding of how meanings and ideas are conveyed through language, structure and form. The assignment should allow candidates to make connections and comparisons between poems, referring to details to support their views.

There is no prescribed word length for the coursework unit. Typically the unit may be between 500 and 600 words, but there are no penalties for writing less or more than this guidance.

Each piece of coursework should contain the candidate's name, the date on which the work was completed, the mark awarded and a brief teacher comment, justifying the mark. This comment should be based on the assessment criteria for the mark range awarded.

Coursework pieces may be hand-written or word-processed.

Teachers may advise candidates in the production of coursework, but should **not** proof-read early drafts or correct every technical error. Teachers may suggest improvements to the content of the coursework, but it is the candidate's responsibility to make any corrections. There is no limit to the number of coursework pieces a candidate may produce from which to select the best piece for final assessment, nor to the number of drafts a candidate may write. However, teachers should be mindful of the overall weighting of written coursework (30%) and make sure that the coursework component does not take up an inordinate amount of curriculum time.

Assessment of coursework

Teachers must mark the coursework according to the Assessment Criteria on pages 12 - 14 of the specification. Teachers should use their professional judgement to select and apply the criteria appropriately and fairly to the work of the candidates. Each successive grade description assumes the continued demonstration of the qualities required to achieve the lower grades.

Candidates should be awarded the appropriate mark within any range on a 'best fit' basis, balancing strengths and weaknesses within each essay.

London Examinations will publish exemplar coursework essays with marks and commentaries to help teachers in their assessments.

Standardisation of coursework

Towards the end of the course, London Examinations will request a sample of coursework to be sent to a London Examinations appointed coursework moderator. The moderator will either broadly confirm the marks awarded by the teachers in the centre, or will adjust marks. Where there is more than one teacher of the coursework option within a centre, the centre should conduct internal standardisation. This can be achieved by paired marking with reference to the benchmark material published by London Examinations.

Completed coursework should be kept secure within the centre until at least six months after the examination session. Coursework may then be returned to candidates.

Final assessment of coursework at the end of the course

There will be one mark out of 40. At the end of the course, the coursework may be re-assessed and the marks adjusted in light of internal standardisation.

Effort and potential should not be rewarded. Teachers should reward the quality of the writing and reading demonstrated in the essay. A second opinion, by a teacher other than the class teacher, will help the centre to arrive at an objective judgement on achievement.

Coursework frontsheets

Final coursework marks for each candidate should be recorded on the coursework frontsheet in Appendix 2 of the specification. Teachers should photocopy the number of sheets required. The coursework frontsheet should be attached to the front of the coursework essay. There is an example of a completed coursework frontsheet in the Appendix of this guide.

Authentication

Each candidate's coursework frontsheet must contain a declaration by the teacher that the work submitted for assessment is the candidate's own work.

Attention must be drawn to the seriousness of this declaration. It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that London Examinations' regulations are adhered to and that no candidate has engaged in unfair examination practice.

Teachers should be alert to essays derived from other sources – such as the Internet – when signing the declaration on the coursework frontsheet.

Examples of coursework assignments

There are two possible approaches to setting the coursework assignment.

1. The assignment may be based on one of the anthology sections.

Examples

- Write about the presentation of childhood in the three poems from that section of the anthology.
- Write about the different aspects of love presented in Section 2 of the Anthology.
- Section 3, Places: How does each poem in this Section present a distinct sense of place?
- Section 5: Different views, in different cultures and times, of the approach of death.

2. The assignment could draw on poems from different sections, finding a way of linking them by theme or form.

Examples

- Poems with a narrative element (*Half-past Two, Plena Timoris, Geography lesson, Crabbit Old Woman*).
- Poems which present different stages of a relationship *(For Me From You, Plena Timoris, Remember*).
- Poems on the theme of memories (*Piano, Remember, Crabbit Old Woman, Poem at 39, In Your Mind*).

Managing coursework assignments

There are various ways of managing coursework in the classroom. The assignment could be set by the teacher for the whole class, in which case the students would all study the chosen poems together. If the teacher wishes to give the students some say in the assignment, the teacher could set a choice of titles from which the students would choose one. A third approach is for the students themselves to choose the poems they wish to write about, and with the teacher's guidance, come up with a coursework title. This approach will work with more able and confident students, who can work independently.

Although students need only write about three poems, they should study them all beforehand. This will allow the teacher to see how students respond to the poems, and which ones generate interest and enthusiasm.

The best coursework is produced from a title which provides a clear focus for the essay. A title such as *'Write about 3 poems which you have enjoyed'* is too vague. The result would be three separate essays, with no attempt to make connections between the poems. Titles which specifically ask for comparison, or the justification of an opinion, are more likely to bring out the best from your students. For example: '*Compare the three poems in Death's Approach. Which poem do you find the most moving?*' requires personal response from the student.

Coursework carries a high weighting of 30%, so the essay should be substantial and detailed. Students are expected to show some knowledge of technical terms, but they should be discouraged from 'feature spotting' for its own sake. There is little reward in simply pointing out that 'This is a simile' or 'Here is an example of alliteration'; students need to explain the effect of such language use, to gain high marks.

Subject-specific information

The following pages give notes on the set texts and the poems in the Anthology. There is background information on each text, and some ideas on such features as theme and language.

These notes represent one teacher's views on the texts. The notes are provided only to stimulate ideas for teachers; they are not intended to be handed out to students as revision notes. They will not inform the setting of questions or mark schemes.

Teaching the drama texts

William Shakespeare: Julius Caesar

Context

Shakespeare's main source for this play was *Plutarch's* Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, from which he focused specifically on the studies of Caesar, Brutus and Antony. For an Elizabethan audience, similarities between the lives of Julius Caesar (c101-44 BC) and Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) would not have gone unnoticed. By the time the play was performed, she had reigned for almost four decades and the resulting political stability was mirrored in Caesar's dictatorship. Like Caesar, she had no heirs and some feared her death would lead to civil war. Julius Caesar's assassination by the conspirators would undoubtedly have reminded Shakespeare's contemporaries of the Earl of Essex's unsuccessful rebellion against the monarchy in 1601.

*Plutarch (c46-120 AD) was a Greek biographer who wrote a series of parallel lives of famous Greeks and Romans, focusing more on personal, than historical, aspects.

Plot Summary

Set in ancient Rome, Julius Caesar's return from a victorious series of campaigns against Pompey and the possibility that he could be made King lead some to believe he is too ambitious, thus they conspire against him. The development of the assassination plot led by Cassius (who soon persuades Brutus to join them) occupies the first part of the story, culminating in the assassination on the Ides of March (15th March). At Caesar's funeral, Mark Antony (having first gained Brutus' permission yet secretly seeking revenge) praises Caesar in a speech to rouse the people against the conspirators, leading them to flee Rome. The second part of the play explores how Antony and young Octavius avenge Caesar's murder by planning to fight Brutus and Cassius. Believing Brutus has been defeated, Cassius commits suicide with the aid of his servant. Facing defeat, Brutus also takes his own life before he can be captured, thus leaving the triumvirs victorious.

Some Themes: (contrasts and opposites feature heavily)

- **Free Will/Fate:** Various characters present different views. The Soothsayer's prediction early on, hints at Caesar's inability to change the course of events. Cassius believes in man choosing his own destiny 'Men…are masters of their fates./The fault…is not in our Stars,/But in ourselves'. Likewise Artemidorus increases tension by stating 'If thou read this, O Caesar, thou mayst live;/If not, the Fates with traitors do contrive'.
- **Order/Disorder:** Ironically, the harmony that the conspirators hoped would follow Caesar's death ('Liberty, Freedom; Tyranny is dead') has led to chaos on the streets. Unrest even exists between the triumvirs.
- **Friendship/Betrayal:** Moments before his death, Caesar treats his assassins with respect and politeness 'Welcome...Good morrow…I thank you', making his realisation that Brutus too is involved all the more poignant '*Et tu Brute?*' The friendship between

Brutus and Cassius is also a significant one, with Act IV providing substantial insight into their relationship.

- **Private/Public Image:** Publicly Caesar dismisses the power of the supernatural, yet privately he believes his wife's infertility will be cured by Antony's touch during the Holy Chase. Additionally he later asks his servant to 'bid the Priests do present sacrifice,/And bring me their opinions of success', reinforcing our impressions of his superstitious beliefs. He repeatedly declares to his 'train' that he is not frightened of Cassius, which maybe hints at a secret fear.
- **Power of Rhetoric:** Two of the prime examples are provided by the speeches of Brutus and Antony following Caesar's death. Brutus attempts to justify the assassination to the Plebeians using reason and logic, employing prose in a bid to appear among equals. Using rhetorical questions, Brutus insinuates Caesar was himself responsible for his own downfall and juxtaposes life and death to persuade them that Caesar's death was vital for their own survival. Antony, on the other hand, delivers a more formal and emotional address in verse form (arguably more fitting to a state funeral) and has the advantage of being able to counter some of Brutus' speech. He manipulates the crowd, repeating the statement 'Brutus is an honourable man' to the point of irony. He then dramatically withholds Caesar's will until the last possible moment, intensifying the Plebeians' sense of greed. A further instance of the strength of words can be found in the death of Cinna the poet, killed by the Plebeians despite his protestations of innocence since he shares the same name as one of the conspirators 'It is no matter, his name's Cinna'.
- **The Supernatural:** References filter through the play and heighten the dramatic tension whilst advancing the plot, such as the Soothsayers's prediction 'Beware the Ides of March'**,** Calpurnia's warning to Caesar 'Do not go forth today', Artemidorus' letter and Caesar's ghost.

Playwright's Craft/Dramatic Conventions

- **Language**
  - **Puns**: The tragic nature of the play is lightened at the start by the numerous use of puns, such as 'soles (souls)' employed by the common people to outwit Flavius and Marullus.
  - **Line Lengths**: Portia's short lines, full of fast-paced questions directed at Lucius in Act II Scene IV, reflect her confused and emotional state, as she is obviously burdened by the knowledge she sought out 'which way hast thou been?…What is't a'clock?'
  - **Imagery**: Elizabethans believed occurrences in the heavens were prophetic of ominous events on earth; thus storms were a dramatic device to indicate forthcoming trouble and upheaval. Likewise, images of fire, blood, animals and poisonous creatures permeate the play, all of which are symbolic of negative events. The recurring image of metals/stones is used to portray those who lack intelligence or worthwhile Roman characteristics, for example, honour. This image is frequently associated with the common people to highlight their shifting loyalties between rulers: 'You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things.'
- **Mood:** From the opening scene Shakespeare depicts a dangerous unrest in Rome via Marullus' scolding words, abundance of rhetorical questions and Flavius' fear that Caesar's 'growing feathers…would soar above the view of men,/And keep us all in servile fearfulness'. Atmosphere is equally skilfully manipulated throughout the play.

- **Dramatic Irony:** It is Brutus who repeats to Caesar 'A Soothsayer bids you beware the Ides of March' and selectively interprets 'the adder' to be Caesar, rather than himself and his conspirators in the 'bright day'. Initially feeling eclipsed by Caesar, Cassius is later ironically overshadowed by Brutus too.
- **Soliloquy:** Cassius' soliloquy in Act I Scene II importantly communicates his hopes for turning Brutus against Caesar, revealing a great deal about his friend's character 'noble…honourable metal…so firm'. Antony's passionate and emotional soliloquy, addressed to Caesar's dead body ('*O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth*'), is a dramatic device to reveal his strength of feeling, since it employs brutal language, contrasting with the polite way in which he has just spoken to the conspirators.
- **Lighting:** Significantly, Brutus does not enter his lighted room in Act II Scene I but remains in the dark, which combined with his insomnia hints at his troubled state of mind and the secrecy of the conspiracy he is about to join.
- **Structure:** Shakespeare makes subtle parallels between Caesar and Brutus, such as the scene where each wife pleads with her husband. Likewise, Antony's request to 'Let each man render me his bloody hand' carefully echoes Brutus' shaking of hands with the conspirators in Act II Scene I 'Give me your hands all over, one by one'. The quarrel between Antony and Octavius is reminiscent of the argument between Cassius and Brutus.
- **Contrasts:** Caesar's politeness and kindness 'Good friends go in, and taste some wine with me' sharply contrasts with the barbarity of his subsequent murder. Brutus' insistence that only Caesar must die contrasts with the first words of the triumvirs who discuss killing their own relatives.
- **Stage Directions:** Implicit in the characters' speeches, these are especially significant prior to the assassination. Brutus, Cassius and Metellus all kneel before Caesar, stressing his power and importance as a leader, even though they ironically use these positions to gain proximity in order to stab him.

Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Earnest

Context

By the close of Queen Victoria's reign (1819-1901), the British Empire had reached its highest point. The English aristocracy prospered, widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Published in 1895, Wilde's comic play satirised and parodied the upper echelons of society (to which he too belonged), by criticising their false values, shallow interests and superficial lifestyles. Wilde's own stated philosophy for his play '*we should treat all the trivial things of life seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality'* is reflected in the petty concerns of his characters.

Plot Summary

Jack Worthing, known as Ernest when in town, has arrived there to propose to Gwendolen and visits Algernon Moncrieff (her cousin). Early on we are aware of a mystery surrounding his birth, since he was found in a handbag at Victoria Station. Lady Bracknell (Gwendolen's mother) snobbishly refuses the attachment. Meanwhile Algernon, now aware of the existence of Jack's eighteen-year-old ward called Cecily, discovers his address in the country and plots to see her. As the scene shifts to the country, Miss Prism (Cecily's tutor) advances the action by confessing she once wrote a novel. Algernon arrives, declaring himself Jack's younger brother Ernest (who is actually fictitious). Jack then also appears, dressed in mourning suit, announcing the death of his brother Ernest! Much to his chagrin, he finds him alive and well and thus orders him to leave. Algernon ignores this request and proposes to Cecily. When Gwendolen enters, she and Cecily mistakenly believe they are both engaged to the same man – named Ernest. Jack is therefore forced to admit the truth. The women forgive them – but each still insists on marrying a man named Ernest. Lady Bracknell's arrival is to further prevent her daughter from marrying Jack. Yet the disclosure of his true birth origins (revealed via Miss Prism who confesses to having mistakenly left him at the station instead of her novel), leads to a happy ending for all, since he is in fact Algernon's older brother, named Ernest.

Some Themes

- **Superficiality/Criticism of Marriage:** Algernon satirises the traditionally sacred state of wedlock, calling it 'business' rather than 'pleasure', and therefore hints at the aristocratic tendency to treat it as a commercial transaction. This view is reinforced by Lady Bracknell who tells her daughter 'I…will inform you of the fact' if she becomes engaged. Cecily's statement that 'a really serious engagement' should be 'broken off at least once' ridicules and undermines the importance of marriage. Even happiness within matrimony is mocked, since the fact that Mary Farquhar 'always flirts with her own husband' is described as 'scandalous'.
- **Absurdity and Shallowness of Manners**: Algernon's belief that 'it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock' demonstrates an adherence to insignificant routines. Wilde pokes fun at the overstated insincerity with which people become attached to each other without prior knowledge via Cecily and Gwendolen's polite exchanges 'I like you already more than I can say'.
- **Triviality of Concerns of Upper Classes**: Jack's missing cigarette case has led him to write 'frantic letters to Scotland Yard', which is ironic, since it depicts the aristocracy as

believing the police exist exclusively for their own minor problems. Jack's notion of self-importance is inherent in his words.

- **Critique of the Values of the Day**: Wilde mocks Literature (especially French and English), general society, universities, and religious traditions, such as christenings.
- **'Bunburyism'**: Adopting another identity, being mistaken or deceiving others, is central to the plot.
- **Ignorance of people in High-Society**: Gwendolen's 'I had no idea there were any flowers in the country' ridicules the upper-class mentality.

Playwright's Craft/Dramatic Conventions

- **Setting/Stage Directions:** Setting is typically elegant e.g. 'Half-Moon Street' is in Mayfair (London's most fashionable area) and 'the Manor House', the backdrop for the remaining acts, suggests affluence. This upper-class environment is reinforced by the stage directions 'Morning-room…luxuriously and artistically furnished'.
- **Humour**: Both verbal and visual humour permeates the play. At times it is farcical, as in Jack's melodramatic 'Yes…mother!', or Algernon's theatrical 'horror' at the absence of cucumber sandwiches. Jack's entrance in Act 2 'dressed in the deepest mourning' is visibly amusing and heightens the audience's enjoyment since we anticipate a conflict between Jack and Algernon. The blowing of kisses between Jack and Gwendolen behind her mother's back represents a comic triumph since this romantic and spontaneous exchange contrasts Lady Bracknell's controlling and unsentimental manner. Characters' movements also provide a source of hilarity, such as when Jack almost chases Algernon over the sofa in a bid to retrieve his cigarette case.
- **Irony**: Ironic quips surround the issue of identity, e.g. Algernon tells Jack 'I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever…' Cecily's diary is a great source of irony, as she has been engaged to Algernon three months prior to their meeting. Algernon magnifies this absurdity as he enters into her fantasy and discusses it as if it is reality.
- **Language**: The play is enriched by verbal witticisms, which are carefully woven within each scene.
  - **Pun**: The play's title advocates sincerity, yet instances of flippancy abound.
  - **Word Play/Reversal of Clichés**: Wilde frequently overturns the usual and expected to mock accepted norms e.g. Algernon's 'washing one's clean linen in public' or Lady Bracknell's 'she looks quite twenty years younger'. The language of the working classes is also parodied, as Lane refers to his marriage as 'a misunderstanding' rather than an understanding.
  - **Biblical Phrases:** These are usually associated with Miss Prism, hinting at her puritanical side: 'As a man sows so let him reap', which contrasts her enjoyment of flirting with Dr Chasuble.
  - **Euphemism**: Miss Prism talks of 'intellectual pleasures' when referring to education (here German grammar) to encourage Cecily to learn.
  - **Paradox**: Jack's 'passionate celibacy' hints at an inability to remain chaste in a world full of temptation.
- **Structure**: Dramatic tension builds throughout the play. Act 1 builds Cecily's character, with our expectation magnified by Algernon's eavesdropping, who (true to the traits of farce) 'reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles', hinting at his next move. Fluency of plot is then

maintained since she is introduced immediately in the next act. Wilde's sense of timing and pace works well, as events can move speedily from one to another. The dénouement in the final act, despite Lady Bracknell's assurance that it will be received negatively, is of course ironically welcome, since Jack really is called 'Ernest'.

- **Parallel Structure**: Wilde's verbal pairing of the couples underlines the insincerity of their words and therefore perhaps emptiness of their thoughts and feelings, as one character's phrases can be easily substituted for another. Pairing Cecily with Gwendolen, and Algernon with Jack, they speak almost identical lines at times, which become more frequent and closer together as the drama and tension increase. Indeed, the two females actually act as a chorus at one point, speaking one line together.

Henrik Ibsen: A Doll's House

Context

1848 witnessed the beginning of a general revolutionary movement throughout Europe. The content of Ibsen's play, written in 1879, reflected that rebellious mood and shocked contemporary audiences by its portrayal of a housewife who comes to reject her husband and children. Ibsen is often recognised as the 'father' of modern drama, since many of his plays broke new ground, marking a move away from the romantic and artificial melodramas which were popular in the nineteenth century.

Plot Summary

Nora, Helmer's initially devoted and loving wife, reveals her 'great secret' to Mrs Linde that she borrowed a large sum of money to take her husband on a convalescent trip to Italy, which he believed was financed by her father. Krogstad, the lender, arrives on the scene threatening to expose Nora to her husband for forging her father's signature to obtain the funds. Although trying her utmost to prevent this revelation as a sign of her love for her husband, when it does happen she is ultimately disappointed in Helmer's reaction, since he fails to sacrifice his honour for her sake, as she believed he would. This motivates a re-evaluation of her life, resulting in a rejection of Helmer and their children in a bid to discover herself.

Some Themes

- **Images of Women**: Ranging from the subservience of females and their inferiority (such as Helmer's tendency to mock Nora's intellect) to feminist ideas.
- **Relationships between Men and Women**, especially a husband and wife.
- **Materialism**: Material goods and the importance of money take precedence for certain characters.

Playwright's Craft/Dramatic Conventions

- **Setting**: The entire action takes place in one room and its claustrophobic implications highlight Nora's feeling of suffocation ('If only I dared go out') and domestic imprisonment. Her comment 'How hot it is in here' communicate how stifled she feels by Helmer's revelations about Krogstad and his deceitful ways as they mirror her own situation. Yet after the dance, she is reluctant to return, showing 'resistance' in Act III as the room is now associated with a problem she does not want to face, leading to Helmer bringing her in 'almost by force'. Only at the end does she actively leave, symbolic of her new-found independence.
- **Dramatic Tension**: Especially effective to present 'the villain'. The arrival of Krogstad provokes a reaction in both women as 'Mrs Linde starts, trembles' and Nora 'speaks in a strained, low voice', indicating there is an obvious prior connection to both females which effectively builds suspense. Even Dr Rank warns us about his 'diseased moral character'.
- **Stage Directions**: Particularly useful in enhancing our knowledge of certain characters. Nora's repeated hand clapping and her excitable movements 'runs to open the door' underline her child-like character.

- **Symbols**: The fancy-dress costume, like Nora, is ‘all torn’ and dependent on others to put right. It is Mrs Linde who offers to repair it, reminiscent of Nora’s dependence on Helmer and her reliance on others to fix things. When her husband tells her to ‘Take off that shawl. Take it off, I tell you’ it is a signal that the fantasy is over, since he now faces the ugly reality of the events she has presented him with. Nora, too, having understood the true meaning of Helmer’s reaction, also removes her fancy dress as a sign that the make-believe is over.
- The **tarantella** is a folk dance from southern Italy that constantly fluctuates in speed, perhaps representing Nora’s vacillating character. Folklore says (falsely) that the dance is supposed to rid the dancer of the tarantula’s deadly bite. In the play’s context this could apply to Krogstad’s ‘poisonous’ letter.

- **Language**
  - **Style:** Nora is capable of both child-like and serious language, emphasising the ambiguity of her character. She utilises disjointed and broken phrases full of hyphenated, abrupt pauses at the crisis point when Helmer is reading the letter.
  - **Metaphors:** Krogstad uses them to portray himself in the role of victim. He fears Helmer will ‘kick’ him ‘downstairs again into the mud’ and later tells Mrs Linde ‘I am a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage’. Mrs Linde reiterates this image as a simile ‘I am like a shipwrecked woman’, thus aligning herself with him.
  - **Disease Imagery:** mostly associated with Krogstad ‘infects and poisons…germs of evil’. Helmer uses images of mental illness in a bid to explain to himself Nora’s sudden transformation ‘You are ill…delirious…out of your mind’.
  - **Animal Imagery:** Bird references pervade the play and are mostly used by Helmer, suggesting Nora’s frailty and weakness ‘my little lark twittering…little featherhead’. Another protective technique is to use the possessive pronoun ‘my’ with the modifier ‘little’, such as ‘my little squirrel’. At the end of Act II his imagery becomes more human ‘you helpless little mortal’, subconsciously coinciding with Nora’s changing character and gains in strength at dealing with her crisis. This is further reinforced in Act III as she metamorphosises into a woman ‘little person…little…maiden’.
  - **Contrast**: Mrs Linde and Krogstad’s relationship is used to contrast that of Nora and Helmer, as it is built on mutual dependence ‘We two need each other’.
  - Helmer sometimes uses the **third person pronoun** to address Nora when she is present, as he too perpetuates the doll-like role she plays. By also addressing herself using this method, Nora can distance herself from her situation, as if the role she adopts can be projected onto a third party. This enables the real Nora to walk free at the end as if it were just a costume she is changing out of, like her fishergirl dress.
  - **Patterns of Three**: These dramatise the action, for example, when Nora wants Helmer to call back the maid with the letter ‘for my sake - for your own sake - for the children’s sake!’ and Nora’s ‘He was…doing it. He will do it. He will do it…’
  - **Irony**: Helmer suggests Nora is dancing as if her ‘life depended on it’ to which she replies ‘So it does’, as she fears his discovery of the letter will result in one possible outcome: her own suicide.

Arthur Miller: A View from the Bridge

Context

In 1947, whilst researching the disappearance of a longshoreman* who worked on the waterfront at Red Hook, Brooklyn, Miller was told the story of another longshoreman who informed the Immigration Bureau about two of his own relatives, to prevent one of them marrying his niece. *A View from the Bridge* is therefore based on a true story. Miller wrote two versions of the play, a one-act version in 1955, followed by a reworked two-act version which was first performed a year later. The playwright himself worked for almost two years in the Brooklyn navy yards and therefore experienced first-hand the quotidian lives of the Italian workers and their struggle to compete for jobs every day, always at the mercy of the hiring boss. He recognised this system as both humiliating and open to corruption, as if the usual regulations of American society did not apply there. The title of the play therefore implies a cosy, middle-class America is observing events from a privileged and distanced location, viewing the practices of an unfamiliar world.

*worker who loads and unloads ships.

Plot Summary

The arrival of Beatrice's two Italian cousins (illegal immigrants) causes problems in the Carbone household. Eddie is unhappy with the developing relationship between his seventeen-year-old niece Catherine and Rodolpho, the youngest cousin. Eddie grows to dislike Rodolpho for several reasons, mainly because in his view he acts in an effeminate manner, and therefore hints at his possible homosexual inclinations. Despite earlier registering his disgust at the story of a man who 'snitched' on his own uncle to the Immigration authorities, Eddie nevertheless informs them about his two relatives, who are later picked up, along with two other recently arrived immigrants. Beatrice and Catherine are convinced of Eddie's guilt. Marco, the eldest cousin, also accuses him and spits in Eddie's face during his arrest. But Eddie's denunciation has been in vain, since Catherine's marriage can still go ahead, and Rodolpho's resulting American citizenship will ensure he remains there. Marco, however, must return to Italy. Whilst on bail, Marco seeks revenge and stabs Eddie with Eddie's own knife.

Some Themes

- **Fate:** Alfieri communicates the inevitable outcome, as we are warned of Eddie's destiny from the start and reminded of it during the play: 'powerless as I…run its bloody course'.
- **Jealousy**: Eddie's overprotectiveness towards Catherine appears to exceed the natural concerns of an uncle. His frequent derogatory labelling of Rodolpho as 'that' so as to avoid using his name 'That's gonna be her husband?' attempts to undermine his status as a rival. Eddie's complaint to Catherine is redolent of a resentful lover 'I don't see you no more' and his 'reasons' for Rodolpho's unsuitability as a potential husband are mostly unsound. Alfieri hits a raw nerve when he tells Eddie 'She can't marry you, can she?' as Eddie's response is one of anger '[furiously]. What the hell you're talkin' about!'
- **Homosexuality**: Eddie fails to articulate adequately what it is he dislikes about Rodolpho. It is clear he is hinting at homosexuality 'gives me the heeby-jeebies…weird…wacky hair…chorus girl', using himself and Marco as his benchmarks since he believes the latter is 'like a man'. In the lawyer's office Alfieri, who like us remains unconvinced by Eddie's logic, elucidates that American law cannot prevent their

relationship. Alfieri is perceptive, also suspecting 'there is too much love for the niece' and attempts to warn Eddie about it. In a scene which parallels that of Beatrice giving advice to Catherine, Alfieri twice counsels Eddie to 'Let her go'.

- **Masculinity**: Different versions are offered by the three main male characters, each of which is valid, despite Eddie's attempts, concerning Rodolpho, to insinuate otherwise.
- **Differing Views of Law**: Alfieri represents the criminal law of America, which Eddie mostly subscribes to, whilst Marco's law is based on family loyalty, believing that justice is in the hands of man, not God. Yet Eddie goes against the Italian code of honour by denouncing the cousins, then conveniently tries to take the law into his own hands in the last scene.

Playwright's Craft/Dramatic Conventions

- **Use of a Narrator**: Alfieri's role is two-fold, since he also enters into the drama. He tries to remain objective, portraying Eddie in a positive light 'He was as good a man as he had to be in a life that was hard and even'.
- **Language**: Eddie's family speaks mostly colloquially, using grammatically incorrect phrases which are frequently abbreviated – this adds a realistic texture to the play. Notice Eddie employs biblical references at the moment of Marco's challenge, as if to elevate and purify his position. Eddie's barrage of questions concerning Catherine's job is reflective of his need for authority and his pessimistic outlook, such as his prediction her new job will lead to her moving out and seldom visiting. This is coupled with negative language 'no…not…never…nowheres'. Although as a lawyer Alfieri's language is more refined, it does not alienate Eddie during their scenes.
- **Euphemism:** such as Beatrice's 'When am I gonna be a wife again', in reference to her lack of intercourse with Eddie.
- **Song Lyrics:** the words of Paper Doll are pertinent to Eddie's relationship with Catherine 'tough to love a doll that's not your own'.
- **Irony**: Eddie's advice to Catherine is unconsciously ironic 'you can quicker get back a million dollars that was stole than a word that you gave away'. Likewise, Eddie's denunciation achieves nothing: not only has he failed to prevent the wedding, but also he has lost Catherine's love and respect – which we suspect he values above all else.
- **Structure/Form**: Alfieri plays a major role in furthering the action and offers ideas on how the audience should receive it. Events are cleverly linked in both acts, each of which is carefully structured, despite the lack of scene divisions, with parallels evident. Miller manipulates pace for optimum effect, for example, after the officers arrest the immigrants, the pace quickens as other characters quickly exit as a sign of Eddie's guilt and subsequent ostracism. Dramatic tension is heightened at the end during the fight scene, emphasised by Marco's drawn out insult 'Anima-a-a-l!' and an abundance of exclamation marks.
- **Setting**: Most of the action takes place in the Carbone's apartment where the outside world is brought in via their conversations. This intensifies and heightens the drama, especially since it represents Eddie's domain.
- **Symbols:** Such as Catherine's 'new high heels' with their onomatopoeic 'clack, clack, clack' which in Eddie's mind represents a version of femininity he tries to protect her from.

Athol Fugard: My Children! My Africa!

Context

Apartheid (an Afrikaans word meaning 'apartness') refers to the official government policy of racial segregation which formerly existed in South Africa. The National Party introduced this system of discrimination in 1948 and laws were passed to enforce it which emphasised territorial separation and police repression. They remained in place for several years, despite opposition. 1985 saw the abolition of the inter-racial sex and marriage laws, followed in 1991 by the remaining apartheid laws. By 1992 the legal structures of apartheid had been removed.

Race laws touched every aspect of social life, for example, marriage, employment and education. The 1953 **Bantu Education Act** devised a curriculum that suited the 'nature and requirements of the black people'. Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, said, "*Natives [blacks] must be taught from an early age that equality with Europeans [whites] is not for them*". Black people were not to receive an education that would lead them to aspire to positions they would not be allowed to hold in society. Instead, they were to receive ones designed to provide them with the skills to serve their own people in homelands or to work in labouring jobs under whites.

In Thami's soliloquy at the end of Act 1, whilst critically rejecting the 'important' white history dates they have been taught, he refers to three significant dates in black history, which the Bantu Education syllabus would never teach them:

In **Kliptown** in **1955** various anti-apartheid groups presented their Freedom Charter (containing their demands for the kind of South Africa they wanted) which was adopted at the Congress of the People. The government claimed it was a communist document (Communism had been banned in 1950) so they arrested 156 activists. The subsequent 'Treason Trial' lasted five years and eventually resulted in an acquittal for all.

In **Sharpeville** in **1960**, a protest campaign (declared non-violent by its organisers) against apartheid laws took place. Campaigners were protesting particularly about black people being made, by law, to carry passes, which they said restricted their movements. The government declared a state of emergency; 69 black people were shot dead and 180 were injured.

Student anger and grievances against Bantu Education exploded in **Soweto** in **1976** when tens of thousands of high school students protested against compulsory use of Afrikaans as the main teaching language in black schools. At least 12 black people were killed in a series of violent clashes.

Plot Summary

Set in 'a small Eastern Cape Karoo town in…1984', a debate is held in the black Zolile High School between visiting white school team members (with Isabel as speaker) and a resident black team (with Thami as speaker). The white team wins. The black teacher Mr Myalatya (known as Mr M) is so enthused by the power of each speaker that he proposes they both join forces and enter a combined team for a forthcoming interschool English Literature quiz.

Initially willing (despite not being asked) Thami starts studying with Isabel, under Mr M's guidance. Very soon, however, Thami's political beliefs prevent him from continuing, as he has joined the struggle to end apartheid and therefore rejects everything connected with Bantu Education – including Mr M, whose own opinions on the issue he classes as 'old-fashioned'.

Following a boycott of classes, with the students outside the classroom ready for violence, Thami enters in a bid to persuade Mr M to join them. But it is too late, as Mr M confesses he denounced them to the police and walks outside to his death.

Some Themes

- **Power of Words** (exemplified by Mr M) versus **Power of Actions** (represented by Thami and the Comrades) as the best method to end apartheid
- **A Critique of the Bantu Education System**
- **Cultural Differences** e.g. Isabel and Thami
- **Teacher/Student Relationships.**

Playwright's Craft/Dramatic Conventions

- **Symbolism**: In Act 1 the **school bell** stands for Mr M's authority, as he initially 'rings it violently. This works', whereas in Act 2 it symbolises his loss of control 'ringing…school bell wildly' and desperate attempt to remain in charge. Just as **stones** represent violence, the **dictionary** is a physical representation of the power of words.
- **Stage Directions** are comprehensive, helping to build and define mood and atmosphere.
- The **soliloquy** is used to maximum effect in both acts as a tool to communicate how events have reshaped a character's thinking and depending on content can either slow or quicken the pace between tense scenes.
- **Plot/Pace**: The opening plunges us immediately into the middle of a fast-paced, heated debate and therefore grabs our attention from the outset, building to a climax full of conflict between Thami and Mr M. Act 2 is slightly shorter than the first one, as events happen with intensity and speed. The play takes place during a short space of time and it is only at the end that we realise a further three weeks have passed since Mr M's death, thus giving Thami ample time to reflect on his own feelings.

- **Setting**: The classroom setting contains the action and although we feel removed from disturbances on the streets, we witness it through the characters' descriptions. It is only at the end that the two converge as the mob arrives outside the classroom.
- **Language**: In this educational setting, conversational language is often elevated via use of imagery such as metaphors, similes and personification. The inclusion of local dialects at various points aids realism and especially reminds us of Thami's cultural roots. Patterns of three occur mainly in speech (and are characteristically used by Mr M to voice his enthusiasm 'Splendid! Splendid! Splendid!') as well as appearing occasionally in the stage directions, adding unity to the play's structure.

Approaches to teaching the prose texts

Note

These notes represent one teacher's views on the texts. The notes are provided only to stimulate ideas for teachers; they are not intended to be handed out to students as revision notes. They will not inform the setting of questions or mark schemes.

Jane Austen: Pride and Prejudice

Context

Although written at a time of great upheaval in world affairs, the focus in Jane Austen's (1775-1817) novel is social, not military. Despite Great Britain's continuous military action in Europe (the Napoleonic wars), Ireland (Irish Rebellion) and India (Mahratta wars) during the author's lifetime, she chooses instead to highlight 'three or four families in a country village' as she advised her niece Anna, who aspired to be a novelist. Military activity is therefore a backdrop to her novel, as any spotlight on the regiment is in terms of its effects upon Meryton's social life, such as the dancing partners it provides for the Bennet sisters. The society that Austen depicts is one of strict class divisions, defined by family connections and wealth. Since female advancement was chiefly via marriage, the pursuit of a husband is seen as a major occupation, particularly for the mother of a large family of daughters like Mrs Bennet. Throughout the novel, Austen wittily mocks the conduct of the middle and upper classes, constantly lacing her observations with humour, sarcasm and irony.

Plot Summary

The arrival of a rich, upper-class male tenant at Netherfield Park causes great excitement in the Meryton neighbourhood and is particularly good news for Mrs Bennet who immediately begins planning Jane's (her eldest daughter) introduction to Mr Bingley, with a view to securing her marriage. At the next ball, Jane does indeed dance with Mr Bingley, whilst her sister Elizabeth is slighted by his friend, Mr Darcy, who is generally regarded to be a proud and arrogant man. The attachment Jane forms with Mr Bingley is deliberately broken by Darcy, which he later reveals was motivated by his desire to protect his friend from an unsuitable match (largely due to Jane's middle-class roots and family 'defects'). Elizabeth's growing prejudice towards Darcy is further fuelled by his supposed misconduct towards Mr Wickham. Darcy, however, overcomes his earlier prejudice towards Elizabeth to the extent that he proposes to her – albeit in an unromantic manner. Her refusal and explanation for her reasons prompts him to re-evaluate his general behaviour. His letter to Elizabeth explaining his recent conduct concerning her sister Jane and Mr Wickham sets in motion her own transformation of feelings towards him, particularly when she learns he arranged her younger sister Lydia's marriage to Mr Wickham after their elopement brought shame on their family. The novel therefore witnesses Elizabeth and Darcy stripped of their pride and prejudice to form a happy marriage, matched by the nuptials of Jane and Mr Bingley.

Some Themes

- **Views on Marriage:** Austen contrasts those marriages that are based on financial gain with those based on love, trust, friendship and understanding (like Elizabeth and Darcy). The author uses Charlotte Lucas to voice her sceptical views on matrimony 'Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance'. For Charlotte, marriage is a necessity and therefore she cannot afford to be choosy. Financial insecurity for females was often the result of a lack of male heirs in their direct family, since tradition dictated the path of inheritance. Likewise, men like Wickham who lack their own fortune are equally unscrupulous in courting women with money to advance and secure their own position. Wedlock is also seen as a competition, as Mr Bennet teasingly adds 'if *we* do not venture, somebody else will'. Mr Collins epitomises the fickle male suitor. The author takes great delight in mocking the shallow way in which his choice of a wife is decided in the same speed as a mundane, domestic chore, since he 'had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth – and it was soon done – done while Mrs Bennet was stirring the fire'
- **Love:** At times cynically portrayed, relationships stemming from love are rare in the novel, suggesting true love can only be achieved once society's superficial expectations of marriage are surpassed and difficult circumstances are overcome. Not only must Elizabeth and Darcy master their pride and prejudice, they must also rise above several obstacles, such as Lady Catherine's interference.
- **Pride and Prejudice:** Whilst Elizabeth and Darcy are guilty of both, several other characters also display these characteristics, such as Bingley's sisters and Lady Catherine.
- **Expectations of Behaviour:** Both genders are presumed to live according to a strict code of conduct. Mrs Bennet fears that Mr Bingley might be an unsuitable tenant, since his constant departures means he will 'never be settled at Netherfield as he ought to be'. Mr Darcy gives offence at the ball as he dances only twice. Elizabeth's decision to walk three miles in the rain, alone and on foot, exposes her to disapproval from both her own mother and Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley, who find it 'incredible' that a woman should behave in such a way. All three criticise her resulting appearance. Lydia's elopement with Wickham understandably brings disgrace on her family and her actions unfairly threaten the fate of her other sisters, since they are all publicly tarnished by her selfish and thoughtless act.
- **Class:** Divisions existed *within* classes, as well as *across* them. Members of the 'true' upper classes acquired their wealth via land, title or inheritance. Those whose fortunes had been made by other means, such as trade, were viewed as inferior, such as the Bingleys, as snobbery was rife. Mrs Hurst highlights Jane's 'low connections' and Austen reminds us of Darcy's position concerning Elizabeth 'were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger'. The author satirises the condescending and patronising attitude of Lady Catherine De Bourgh, who is shocked by the Bennet girls' upbringing and news that all five daughters are 'out [in society] before the elder are married!', because it does not adhere to her strict interpretation of social convention. Indeed, Lady Catherine is so superior and full of self-importance that she is even credited with predicting the following day's weather!
- **Insincerity:** Content to openly criticise the Bennet family amongst themselves, Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley nevertheless feign 'a renewal of tenderness' towards Jane in public. Mr Collins' blatant lie that he chose Elizabeth as his wife as soon as he saw her emphasises his hollow nature.

- **Social Conventions:** Strict rules and regulations govern society. Unless Mr Bennet makes the first introduction to Mr Bingley, his daughters could not possibly entertain the idea of visiting their new neighbour. Once the Netherfield ladies have visited the Bennets, the favour must be returned. Miss Bingley has to be prompted by her brother to 'say what the occasion required' during Mrs Bennet's visit to Jane's 'sick bed', as Austen hints at the false, theatrical nature of such civilities 'She performed her part…' Protocol must be followed during balls, as tradition dictates only a married woman may chaperone unmarried ones.

Author's Craft

- **Light-hearted Tone:** Austen often employs humour or sarcasm to mock her characters, such as Mr Bennet's display of dry wit towards his wife when discussing her nerves 'They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least'. She makes fun of society's preoccupation with insignificant detail, such as the Bennet girls' 'fortunate' discovery that Mr Bingley 'wore a blue coat and rode a black horse'.
- **Plot:** The use of journeys in the novel advances the plot and serves as a catalyst for change. Elizabeth's journeys allow Austen to present her with Darcy, and we witness the dramatic alteration in her feelings for him by comparing these two isolated encounters.
- **Setting:** The author presents a microcosm of society, only venturing infrequently into other counties. The majority of the action takes place inside, reflecting the private concerns of the characters. Pemberley, however, is described in great detail, with some of its qualities reminiscent of its owner Mr Darcy since they are repeatedly described as 'handsome'.
- **Irony:** Austen pokes fun at the society in which she lived, as exemplified by the supposed 'truth universally acknowledged' of her opening line.

Language

  - Darcy's initial romantic interest in Elizabeth is depicted in a comically tongue-in-cheek fashion using the vocabulary of imprisonment, as his discoveries are described as 'mortifying' and he is '**forced** to acknowledge' some of her attractive qualities, feeling '**caught**'.
  - The abundance of dialogue in the novel allows us to experience the diversity of characters and their speech mannerisms, such as Mrs Bennet's tendency to overdramatise, Mary's dry, logical explanations devoid of feeling and Lady Catherine's haughty, superior air.
- **Narrative Viewpoint:** Elizabeth's previously unbiased view of Darcy has been clouded and misguided by Wickham, as she is too quick to believe him, and thus lacks our objectivity. Austen provides us with subtle hints that Darcy is not as arrogant or proud as our heroine presumes. He avoids joining in with Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley to criticise Elizabeth and is later sensitive to the rude manner in which they exclude and isolate her during a walk, actively suggesting they take another route to allow all four to continue together. The inclusion of letters in the first person narrative widens the narrative voice and deepens our understanding of certain characters. Darcy's lengthy letter allows us a first-hand, honest insight into his character, which, whilst confirming some of Elizabeth's accusations, also contrasts with them.

Dai Sijie: Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress

Context

The Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976) greatly believed in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1969) which he promoted essentially taught the Chinese masses that it was 'right to revolt' against those in posts of authority and to play an active role in making decisions. In a bid to ensure fidelity to Chairman Mao's ideology, all government officials, politicians and those generally seen as a threat were subjected to 'revolutionary self-criticism and struggle sessions'. These could take any form, such as large public humiliation trials (like Luo's father in the novel), Red Guard interrogations, imprisonment, exile or death beatings (in some cases individuals committed suicide to avoid these). In addition, in the early years following 1968, an estimated 12 million urban youths were relocated to the countryside to be 're-educated' by the peasants. In contrast to the propaganda posters depicting exquisite rural scenes where the youths enjoyed their experiences and flourished under the peasants' guidance, many young intellectuals found it hard to cope with the harsh reality of life in the mountains and some died. Furthermore, the peasants often resented their presence, viewing them as a threat to their own existence. Dai Sijie was himself 're-educated' between 1971 and 1974.

Plot Summary

When the two lively main characters, the narrator (17) and his childhood friend Luo (18), are sent to the remote Phoenix Mountain to be 're-educated', life is undoubtedly grim. Not only are living conditions extremely basic, but they are sometimes given disgusting jobs to do, such as carrying buckets of animal/human excrement on their backs up the high mountain paths. Thankfully their acquaintance with 'The Little Seamstress' brightens up both their lives. Luo begins a relationship with her and sets about trying to educate her since in his opinion she is not as cultured as he would like. It is their acquisition of a forbidden novel by Balzac (and later their theft of a whole suitcase of similar books) that also makes life endurable and in Luo's hands becomes the perfect tool to transform the Little Seamstress. Whilst Luo is given one month's leave to spend at his mother's sickbed, the Little Seamstress discovers she is pregnant and decides on an abortion, arranged by the narrator who traded his beloved Balzac novel for her operation. Clearly transformed by the whole experience and having been inspired by the French novelist in her own way, the Little Seamstress decides to leave the mountain (and therefore Luo and the narrator) for a new life in the city.

Some Themes

- **The Transformative Power of Literature:** The power of Balzac's words profoundly enriches the lives of the three main characters as the narrator so aptly reveals 'falling headlong into a story of awakening desire, passion, impulsive action, love'. The discovery of Western Literature enables them to be uplifted from the monotony of their everyday existence and the narrator even feels intoxicated in its presence 'My head reeled, as if I'd had too much to drink'. Luo's metaphor concerning Balzac has unfortunate consequences on the future of his relationship with the Little Seamstress 'He touched the head of this mountain girl with an invisible finger, and she was transformed, carried away in a dream'. Desperate to change her, he succeeds, but the direction of that transformation is ironically beyond his control. Hence his physical destruction of the books by fire is really an attempt to annihilate the characters and their lives which inspired the Little Seamstress' departure.

- **Emotional and Physical Effects of Re-education:** With their 0.3% chance of being allowed home, both Luo and the narrator feel understandably pessimistic about life on Phoenix Mountain and effectively communicate the physical and emotional strain 'dispiriting…depressed…doomed…dejection…insomnia'.
- **Cultural Beliefs:** Chinese traditions permeate the novel, such as the diversity of cures for Luo's malaria (his colleagues whipping him with a peach tree branch and willow branch; the Little Seamstress' herbal remedy and invitation to the four 'sorceresses' to keep watch at his bedside).
- **Friendship:** The close relationship between Luo and the narrator is extremely dedicated and is based on loyalty and trust, compared to the unpredictable one they have with Four-Eyes.
- **Storytelling:** The telling of tales is a significant aspect of the novel, since the Chinese oral tradition has a long history, emerging particularly strongly from those areas with low literacy levels.

Author's Craft

- **Humour:** comical scenes are in abundance, enabling Sijie to soften the harsh realities of re-education. At times we laugh *at* characters, whilst at others we laugh *with* them. The amusing anachronism '*Mozart is Thinking of Chairman Mao*' that Luo promptly invents to avert accusations of bourgeois tendencies is amusing since it highlights (rather cruelly) the ignorance of the peasants, as Mozart obviously died over a century before Mao's birth! The boys' adventures are often threaded with humour, such as their hilarious meeting 'in role' with the poor miller in a bid to acquire some authentic folk songs.
- **Structure:** Presented in three parts, the author carefully divides events so as to control the pace of the narrative. Part I successfully sets the scene and introduces the major characters, culminating in the suggestion that the Little Seamstress has fallen in love with Luo. Part II is then ready to relate the crux of the story: the discovery of the Balzac and the major effect it has on the lives of the main three youths, making clear the relationship between Luo and the Little Seamstress is now sexual. The final part witnesses their awakening to the rest of the suitcase's contents and temporarily switches the narration to include three different interpretations of the same event. Unfortunately the lovers' encounters have resulted in an unwanted outcome which builds towards the novel's denouement and clearly affects the decision the Little Seamstress takes at the very end.
- **Irony:** Luo's desire to re-educate the Little Seamstress is greatly ironic, since his own experiences of re-education have been negative. Likewise, the boys' discovery of Western Literature during their re-education is ironic in the context of re-educating them away from 'bourgeois' ideas, as it actually steers them towards them.
- **Elements of Fairy-Tale**
    - **Symbolism:** The presence of the black raven (representative of the Little Seamstress in the narrator's dream) forebodes danger, highlighted by the narrator's own negative concerns 'I felt apprehensive about how his adventure with Balzac and the Little Seamstress would turn out'. The keys Luo symbolically throws into the pool signify his lack of hope of ever being set free.
    - **Folk-Tale Scenes:** Specific episodes are reminiscent of folk-tale, such as Four-Eyes' failed attempt to glean the information he needs from the old miller which is then rectified by Luo and the narrator. Even the sorceress' words remind us of folklore and legend 'My bow is from Tibet, and my arrow is tipped with silver'.

- **Narrative Style:**
  - The narrator's opinions of events concerning the Cultural Revolution are delivered in a subtle tongue-in-cheek, often ironic manner. In his description of re-education, his understatement that the country was 'profoundly altered' speaks volumes. When referring to Luo's father's misdemeanour of mentioning to his dentist students that he had mended Mao's teeth, he ironically states 'it was beyond belief, an unpardonable, insane crime'.
  - The first person narrative delivery allows a more direct reader participation, as the narrator frequently personally addresses us to make us feel more involved and to maintain the storytelling mode 'Dear reader, I will spare you the details…' He is also able to offer a more intimate portrait of life under Mao than that of a strictly historical account.
  - Intrigue and suspense are built on several occasions as the narrator arouses our curiosity (especially at the close of a chapter) 'our lives…were about to be completely shaken up'.
  - The brief inclusions of the stories of The Old Miller, Luo and the Little Seamstress widen the narrative by offering different voices, both old and young. Luo's story allows us an insight into his personal lack of faith in ever leaving the mountain, whilst the Little Seamstress' recounting of her role in the drama they re-enacted foreshadows the ending of both their relationship and the novel. The Old Miller's tale focuses more crudely on their underwater love-making and appears to address the narrator directly, communicating his shock at what he witnessed.
- **Language**
  - Scenes are powerfully evoked by rich description, such as the active verbs used to describe the episode where the peasants are fascinated by the narrator's violin '**swarmed** inside the cramped room, **clung** to the windows, **jostled** each other', portraying their desperate, frantic attempts to witness this exciting event.
  - Alliteration enhances the humour of the village headman's colloquialisms 'you **l**azy **l**outs, you spawn of **b**ullocks' **b**alls'.
  - The narrator's language is often blunt and frank, employing mild profanities which reflect the crude and harsh nature of their environment, such as 'buckets of shit'.
  - **Imagery:** Sijie uses an abundance of similes to intensify the scenes the narrator depicts 'like parched earth under a shower'. The Phoenix of the Sky communicates the metaphoric 'rebirth' of the youths via their re-education, rising out of the ashes of their previous 'intellectualism' like the mythological Egyptian bird. The extended military metaphor employed to reflect the lice-infested room of the old miller appropriately mirrors Mao's use of the army and Red Guards to enforce his regime. Significantly, once exposed to the wealth of romantic novels in Four-Eyes' suitcase, the narrator's metaphor reflects his newly discovered fascination with love and desire 'I had intended only a brief flirtation, a skim read…The flirtation turned into a grand passion'.

R.K.Narayan: The English Teacher

Context

By Narayan's own admission, his novel is highly autobiographical in content. His own personal tragedy occurred in 1939, when his wife Rajam died from typhoid just five years after they were married. Like Krishna, he chose to bring up their only child Hema alone and also attempted to contact his wife spiritually. The author chooses to set his novel in the fictional southern Indian town of Malgudi, and published it in 1945, it would be a further two years until India gained independence from its colonial ruler, Great Britain.

Plot Summary

After a ten-year period of living in a hostel whilst working as an English teacher in a college (and previously as a student there himself), Krishna feels increasingly dissatisfied with the routine of his daily life and the mundane manner in which his subject is taught. The arrival of his wife Susila and seven-month-old daughter Leela inject new life into his monotonous and mechanical existence, leading him to rent a house and live in domesticity with them, surprising himself by the enjoyment he gains from this new experience. Whilst househunting with Susila, she inadvertently steps into an insanitary 'toilet' and soon falls ill. Sick with typhoid, she dies, leaving Krishna to bring up Leela which he chooses to do alone, despite offers of help from his relatives. His psychic contact with Susila via a medium temporarily serves to lift him from his loneliness and depression and initiates a new way of viewing the world, aided by his friendship with the headmaster of a local infants' school. After becoming increasingly discontent with his career, he resigns from his position in order to work with the headmaster. Shortly after, he achieves his first independent psychic communication with Susila, since his self-imposed release from the shackles of his everyday life has led to a previously unobtainable level of spiritual receptiveness.

Some Themes

- **Purity of Childhood versus 'Curse of Adulthood':** The headmaster believes that we have a great deal to learn from children and reveres their innocent state to the extent that he appears to find it difficult to function in adult company. He holds a low opinion of the adult world 'Helpless fools…'.
- **Western Education:** Krishna relates the mundane way in which English is taught 'admonishing, cajoling and browbeating…mug up Shakespeare…secure high marks' lacking creativity, with the goal of merely passing exams. Even the poem he produces for Susila is plagiarised. After his wife's death, the futility of his job only increases. Likewise, the headmaster feels that schools 'put blinkers on to us'.
- **The Spiritual World:** Krishna's psychic communication with Susila transforms his mood 'I felt as if a dead load had been lifted' and comforts him. The headmaster accepts his astrologer's predictions of his death date – which happens metaphorically rather than physically, since he is in fact 'reborn' after the date passes to live a life of his choosing, rather than one of obligation.
- **Predictability versus Unpredictability:** Krishna's transition from a life of certainty to one of spontaneity is initiated not only by the arrival of his family, but by Susila getting rid of his old alarm clock. Even though the clock is unreliable and when it goes off unexpectedly he always stifles its cries with a book, it nevertheless represents a part of

his former life; one filled with the familiar, the routine, the habitual. It is unsurprising therefore that her actions cause conflict between them, as she has unwittingly removed a symbol of the predictability and comfort of his previous lifestyle. Susila at times adds an unrestrained and impulsive air, such as when she 'pleaded recklessly' to walk along the river before viewing the new house. Despite his reservations, Krishna actually finds himself enjoying this unpremeditated decision 'a most exhilarating walk'. Unfortunately it is Susila's unpredictable venture into the unsanitary lavatory that causes her illness.

- **Eastern Culture versus Western Culture:** Narayan mocks the trivial concerns of colonial settlers, such as Mr Brown who feels 'shock' that a student had misspelt 'honours' by omitting the 'u' (ironically the student might have been using the American spelling, highlighting even further Mr Brown's narrow-minded view that the 'British' way is the only acceptable one). Krishna's sarcasm feels justified when he notes that during his thirty years in India, he doubts Mr Brown can say one phrase correctly in any of the two hundred Indian dialects – highlighting his boss's superior air and cultural ignorance. The arrival of the *Swamiji* (Holy Man) and his subsequent rituals (invited by Susila's mother to rid her daughter of the 'Evil Eye') make Krishna feel 'ashamed' enough to apologise to the doctor (who practises western medicine), since he does not appear to hold his culture's traditional beliefs in high regard. Ironically, he later totally immerses himself in them via meditation, since it brings him not only closer to Susila, but inner peace.
- **Indian Traditions:** Rituals and customs are important to the characters, such as Krishna's mother using vermilion at the entrance to their house to welcome her daughter-in-law. Susila twice has a vermilion dot (*bindi)* applied to her forehead which is a blessed symbol used to protect women and their husbands (and thus ironic here since it neither protects her from illness nor Krishna from grief).
- **Philosophy:** For Krishna, death is the ultimate reality 'There are no more surprises and shocks in life…Nothing else will worry or interest me…hereafter'. Krishna later tells one of his students not to be anxious about an academic concern, since 'they are trash…all the time the problem of living and dying is crushing us…' His reality now exists outside the realm of literature and exams, since their rules are inadequate to deal with the larger questions of life. Likewise, he shuns life's 'illusions' to absorb himself in 'the barest truths and facts'. Krishna finds comfort in his theory of 'the law of life', meaning that the moment the umbilical cord is cut, we are alone and continue to be so until death. Narayan's own philosophical viewpoint seems to underpin two incidents: the doctor's certainty of Susila's recovery and the headmaster's conviction of his own death date. Here the author conveys the notion that no matter how much confidence and belief you may invest in the future, it is impossible to predict.

Author's Craft

- **Irony:**
  - Krishna is initially amused by Susila's worship of the gods, calling it her 'deep secret life' and he lightly mocks her beliefs, teasingly calling her a 'yogi'. Yet his former amusement and joking soon evaporate once he realises he can contact her spiritually after her death, recognising for himself the immense peace those 'magical words' can bring.
  - Despite acting as a 'father figure' to the children in his school, the headmaster appears to fail in his own duties as a father.
- **Foreshadowing:** The poem that Krishna 'writes' for his wife ironically prefigures later events, as it contains spiritual vocabulary 'phantom…apparition…angel-light'. In Chapter

Three Krishna's prophetic simile regarding Susila 'like a **vision**' and her '**unearthly** loveliness' also subtly hint at forthcoming episodes.

- **Language:**
  - Krishna's use of the **third person singular** (rather than the possessive pronoun 'my') when first referring to his daughter 'the child' and wife 'that girl' feels impersonal. It reflects a fear of responsibility and maintains a distance from them – since he recognises the academic world he inhabits is far removed from the domestic world he envisages. Once gaining sole responsibility for Leela, however, he mostly refers to her as 'my child'.
  - **Repetition**: This is used to convey the doctor's misplaced confidence and optimism 'nothing to worry about…'
  - **Present Tense:** Narayan momentarily switches to this tense from the past tense immediately after Susila's death via Krishna's diary extract in order to keep her memory alive. It also conveys the immediacy of this tragic event 'I am blind, dumb, and dazed' and helps us to identify with his intense pain and suffering.
  - **Style:** The author employs an uncomplicated, direct style in his novel which is echoed in the headmaster's words 'Children have taught me to speak plainly'.
- **Contrast:** Narayan contrasts Krishna's hurried panic at the railway station in Chapter Two with Susila's calm and composed actions. His frantic movements are communicated by the numerous questions and exclamation marks, inclusion of short, jerky sentences and persistent dialogue, whilst Susila is 'sitting serenely…merely smiled…unconcernedly moved on'.
- **Setting:** Both the hostel Krishna has been living in at the start and the college he has been working in depict a stifled academic world, where routine has become monotonous. Clearly the attraction has been one of comfort and security. In contrast, his rented house exudes energy, enhanced by the presence of Leela and Susila's fresh approach to life.
- **Structure:** Narayan's narrator Krishna relates events as he experiences them, in the first person singular, giving us a direct, yet subjective insight into events. The story unfolds effortlessly in a seemingly day-to-day basis, as we follow him in his spiritual, mental and emotional journey.

Chinua Achebe: A Man of the People

Context

Achebe's novel, set in an ethnically diverse, unnamed and corrupt West African country, provides both a satire and critique of the extortion and power struggles surrounding Nigerian politics following its independence from Great Britain in 1960, reflecting his bitter disappointment with its progress since that time. In fact, reality soon mirrored fiction, since the military coup d'état described in its final chapter foreshadowed Nigeria's actual military coup in January 1966 (taking place only days after the novel's publication). This was a result of the widespread disillusionment with the fraudulent and egotistical politicians and their inability to preserve law and order and guarantee the safety of lives and property.

Plot Summary

Formerly a schoolteacher, Odili the narrator resigns from his post to enter the shady world of politics, spurred on not by political or ideological reasons (since he represents the new intellectual generation) – but by revenge. Whilst staying with the unethical Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP, the Minister sleeps with Odili's 'girlfriend' which incites him to do the same with Chief Nanga's young 'parlour-wife' Edna. Odili is alert to his own naivety when entering into the political arena, aware it is riddled with frequent bribery. The Minister does everything in his power to suppress Odili's attempts to contest his seat, such as arranging the arrest of his father, bribing Max and cheating the ballet boxes. Ironically, the methods Odili employs to oppose Chief Nanga mirror the corrupt ones he so openly abhors in the Minister; as he too hires a bodyguard and is fully aware of the bribery and violence that fuels his own campaign. However, Odili is no match for Chief Nanga, as he is beaten both politically and physically. Yet he is victorious in love, as he succeeds in his quest to win Edna, unscrupulously using money from his party's funds to pay her 'bride-price'. Politically, Chief Nanga's victory is short-lived since a military coup soon ensues, imprisoning Government members, including Chief Nanga who is arrested trying to escape.

Some Themes

- **Corruption of Political Life:** Whilst hypocrisy and bribery are the currency of politics, selfishness, greed and the desire for power are characteristics of political leaders such as Chief Nanga. Odili's father knowingly reveals the 'mainspring of politics is personal gain'. Few have faith in the system, yet it does not prevent them from trying to drain its resources. Even the media is biased towards the elected party 'the newspapers and the radio carried the Prime Minister's version'. Although Achebe provides a reason for such greedy behaviour, describing it as 'man's basic nature' – he does not excuse it. When Chief Nanga publicly slaps Odili after he is caught in disguise at the Minister's inaugural campaign meeting, as the beatings begin the authorities consciously fail to intervene 'all the policemen turn round and walk quietly away'.
- **Cultural Traditions:** Customs are depicted as being firmly embedded in Achebe's fictional country, especially a belief in the supernatural, such as the powers of juju (magic charm used by some tribes in West Africa) or the woman who 'circled her head with her right hand and cast the evil towards the shop'. The kolanut is also significant, as it is viewed as a sign of respect and reverence and is important in hospitality rites.

- **Critique of the African People:** Odili is harshly critical of his fellow countrymen for voting for such a venal leader 'silly, ignorant villagers…poor contemptible…cynical'. Yet Achebe uses Odili's opinion to relate the commonly held view that many would have done the same in Nanga's position; that it is unlikely 'that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth'. This implies his actions were inevitable and predictable given the circumstances of the country.
- **African Culture versus Western Culture:** Anti-European culture, particularly a criticism of its education, is at times strongly felt in the novel. Odili relates his disillusionment with the political party he had joined as a student, when a newspaper that supported it reported on 'the damnable and expensive university education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture'. Chief Nanga supposedly advocates the customs and beliefs of the pre-colonial African culture, by championing the common man and opposing those post-colonial intellectuals, exposed to European education. Yet the colonial influence is still strong, as Odili laments 'We have all accepted things from white skins that none of us would have brooked from our own people'.
- **Hypocrisy:** This filters through every level of society, with several examples embodied in the actions of Chief Nanga. Even Odili's Proprietor praises him in front of Chief Nanga merely to increase his own status 'saying the first good word about me'. Odili is also guilty of double-standards, as he is quite prepared to be unfaithful to Elsie, but cannot accept her cheating on him 'I knew she would come down shedding tears of shame and I would kick her out'.
- **Attitudes to Women:** Chief Nanga's reputation precedes him, and his boastful nature is evident as Odili tells us 'he had five stories to every one of mine'. Odili's sexual experiences suggest a certain amount of promiscuity, yet he is conscious of speaking 'in derogatory terms about women' (although this does not stop him), attributing some comments to the macho conversations he shared with his host. His negative, dismissive attitude towards European females 'I don't mean the white girls – you can **have** those out here nowadays' is evident, as is the speed with which he met and slept with Elsie 'the same day…within an hour'. He also sleeps with Jean soon after they meet and it is his uncomplimentary attitude towards Elsie 'She is just a good-time girl' that leads to Chief Nanga sleeping with her. Both Mrs Nanga and Edna relate the role of women as inferior to men, given minimal education and literally sold like a commodity ('bride-price') to their prospective husbands.

Author's Craft

- **Irony:**
  - Despite Odili's strict principles and morality concerning corruption, he exhibits double-standards. He admonishes Max for accepting money from Chief Koko, yet is fully aware of the dishonest practices of his own bodyguards and he even 'borrows' money from the funds of the election campaign at the novel's close.
  - Odili joins the Common People's Convention – but it appears to have few common people as members, only left-wing intellectuals.
  - Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, MP – his wordy title suggests integrity, which we see little evidence of in the novel. Achebe mocks his Minister of Culture status, highlighted by his unfamiliarity with the country's 'most famous novel'.
- **Humour:** Achebe's novel contains several comical episodes, encouraging us to laugh at the situations he describes, such as how Odili acquired the name 'Assistant Ralph'; or by

depicting one of Chief Nanga's 'conquests' whose husband put 'juju on her breasts' in a bid to ensure her fidelity. These lighten the serious tone of the novel and help achieve a balance.

- **Imagery:** Descriptive language intensifies Achebe's portrayal of his characters, such as Odili's use of metaphors to relate his intense anger at discovering Chief Nanga slept with Elsie 'a huge sledgehammer was beating down on my brain' or his simile 'I was just flapping about like a trapped bird' to communicate how weakened he felt by the episode.
- **Language:**
  - **Pidgin English/Igbo vocabulary:** Achebe's incorporation of Igbo vocabulary (a very unique and distinctive language) and pidgin English enriches the text, giving us a constant reminder of African culture, which has over 300 ethnic groups speaking an estimated 350 to 400 languages, many with dialects.
  - **Proverbs/Aphorisms:** Nigerian literature has a rich oral tradition. In Igbo culture, an effective orator is one who employs traditional proverbs skilfully, frequently including them in conversation. Achebe successfully reflects that tradition in his novel with their abundant use, as he demonstrates how proverbs permeate all sections of society. From scenes of domesticity 'better the water is spilled than the pot broken' to the underhand world of politics 'a man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time' the author communicates how they can be applied to any situation in life. This last proverb is especially significant since it underpins the philosophy of many Africans, regardless of whether or not they themselves had made it 'in from the rain'.
- **Narrative Structure:** Achebe employs a direct narrative approach, as Odili is conscious of his role as narrator. He often addresses the reader, attempting to clarify points as he relates them and foreshadowing a negative outcome with his subtle hints 'You could never think – looking at him now – that his smile was anything but genuine' which serves to intrigue us.

Stories from Around the World

Naukar by Anya Sitaram

Some Themes

- **Prejudice:** This infiltrates all levels of society, as even the cook pre-judges the rickshaw-wallah, calling him a 'goonda' (layabout) merely because he is sitting outside waiting. Julia too initially makes the assumption that he wants money, demonstrated in her intention of 'shooing him away' as if he were a stray dog. Nilkant wastes no time in accusing the rickshaw-wallah of theft and offering his cruel idea of a suitable punishment 'He deserves to be whipped'.
- **Eastern versus Western Culture:** The root of Julia and Nilkant's problem is their cultural difference, since in applying her western understanding to the problems of life in India, she fails to appreciate the distinct cultural nature of those difficulties.
- **Rich versus Poor:** The divide between the two is clearly marked in this story, as the two worlds are greatly contrasted by the dramatic description of each, especially that of Calcutta itself and its poor people. Julia's expensive necklace 'heavy with gold, diamonds, emeralds and rubies' highlights the diversity of wealth that exists.

Author's Craft

- **Setting:** Descriptions of Calcutta are vivid, reflecting an unattractive city, highlighted by the negative verbs 'roads **choked** with chaos…**reeked** of poverty, death and confusion' and alliteration '**h**ungry **h**ands of **h**awkers…**s**kinny **s**tray dogs'. The unflattering verb used to depict the beggars 'littered the streets' is strikingly noticeable in the way in which it dehumanises them, to the extent that it is no longer possible to even differentiate between them and the rubbish. Sitaram's metaphor strengthens the image further, adding a violent tone 'The city was a seething, multi-mouthed volcano…spouted putrid, resentful lava…threatened to explode' and in fact reminds us of Nilkant's character later on in the story, as he too exhibits resentment at Julia's actions and often explodes at her. Their environment has clearly affected Calcutta's inhabitants, as they are imbued with anger, vengeance and vigilante tendencies 'tore him limb from limb…lynched by a mob'. The catalogue of common nouns 'The heat, the dust, the din, the dirt, the smells, the crowds, the flies….' bombards our senses with its intensity.
- **Language:**
  - **Imagery:** Sitaram employs heavily descriptive language which evokes intense images, enhanced via several similes and an appeal to our senses.
  - **Patterns of Three:** Julia's observation of the rickshaw-wallah's physique 'puny waist, puny hips and thin poles of legs' mocks her initially uncharitable and naïve attitude. She labels his appearance as 'almost obscene', revealing her ignorance about the Indian culture and its way of life. Her superficial comment is of course ironic, since malnutrition is hardly a choice.
  - **Opening:** The arresting opening paragraph immediately seizes our attention with its appallingly shocking and negative images of the rickshaw-wallah's frail physique and taxing work. His body is clearly malnourished and skeletal in appearance 'protruding shoulder-blades…thin neck…sticks of legs'. The list of present tense verbs encourages us to sympathise with the acute discomfort he must be experiencing

'rubbing…scraping away…straining…sweating' to the point where we too are made to feel uncomfortable. The oppressive heat only serves to intensify his pain, as does the chaos on the road which is aptly conveyed by personification 'a bus, which screamed past', communicating the overwhelming din of the traffic. By contrast, and serving to further reinforce the rickshaw-wallah's distress, Julia's own 'discomfort' is trivialised, dismissed as merely a 'nuisance'.

- **Sentence Manipulation:** By interspersing short sentences with long ones at key moments, the author manages to increase tension and heighten the suspense. When the necklace disappears, we are informed 'It was gone…Panic welled inside her' which is then followed by an immensely long sentence mirroring Julia's lengthy, frenzied and breathless search for it.

The Martyr by Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Themes

- **Prejudice/Racism:** Mrs Smiles and Mrs Hardy hold deep-rooted prejudices towards the 'natives', gloating that their biased opinions about their 'depravity and ingratitude' have supposedly been proved right. The author mocks Mrs Smiles' ignorance, by referring to her disposition to pre-judge as 'almost her calling', implying she foolishly believes she is performing some sort of religious duty by constantly differentiating between her 'civilised' nature and the natives' 'savage' one. Her superior air is intensified by her use of the first person plural '**We**'ve stopped slavery', as if she personally played a huge part in the 'civilisation' the 'natives' never even asked for. Mrs Smiles' reference to Lady Macbeth's advice to her husband is also ridiculed and full of irony, since her knowledge of Shakespeare would indicate a certain level of intelligence, yet her opinions suggest otherwise. The extreme bigotry of Mrs Hardy is also scorned.
- **Tolerance:** Mrs Hill advocates this, as her philosophy is to '*treat them kindly*', demonstrated by her 'liberal' attitude towards the 'natives' and her attempts to help them.
- **Eastern versus Western Culture:** The cultural gap between the blacks and the whites in this story is immense, since neither side really comprehends the lives of the other. Njoroge's death was futile, achieving nothing to bridge that gap or enhance the existing lack of understanding, as the story goes full circle with Mrs Hardy's concluding unenlightened remark 'All of them should be whipped'.

Author's Craft

- **Atmosphere:** Suspense is built early on by the connection subtly made at the start of the story between the murder of Mr and Mrs Garstone 'in their home' and the 'remote, lonely house' of Mrs Hill.
- **Foreshadowing:** As with the setting of mood, clues are laid in advance which prefigure later events, such as the houseboy who 'urgently asked' the Garstones to open their door, in the same way that Njoroge will frantically knock on Mrs Hill's door at the end of the story. At this point we already anticipate Mrs Hill's actions and so are prepared for his subsequent death. Likewise, although Mrs Smiles and Mrs Hardy's views are racist, their negative comment 'I don't like him. I don't like his face' serves to warn us against Njoroge.

- **Irony:** The metaphor used to describe Mrs Hill's determination 'stuck to her guns' is highly ironic given the fact that this is the weapon she uses to later kill Njoroge. Mrs Hill also unwittingly kills 'her saviour', with the further irony that she supposedly battled 'a gang fifty strong'.
- **Ambiguity:** Mrs Hill is portrayed in a complex manner. Although her motives appear genuine (albeit somewhat deluded) her actions are nevertheless sometimes portrayed in an ironic and sarcastic manner ('*brick*, mind you'), as the author ridicules her attempts to help her 'boys'.
- **Contrast:** The author carefully juxtaposes Mrs Hill's belief that Njoroge likes her, with Njoroge's statement that he dislikes her. A parallel structure is also employed between these two main characters, since shortly after Njoroge's re-evaluation of Mrs Hill, she herself re-evaluates him 'It was the first time she had ever thought of him as a man with a family'.
- **Language:**
  - **Imagery:** The stars are personified as giving Njoroge a 'cold stare', initiating his decision to save Mrs Hill's life.
  - **Turning Point/Sentence Construction:** The third cry of the night bird signals Njoroge's change of heart, since it leads him to consider his 'Memsahib' in a new context; as a human being capable, like himself, of love and tenderness. For the first time he is able to look beyond his anger, hatred and label of her as a 'settler'. This new revelation is reflected in the short, simple sentence structure 'He could not kill a woman. He could not kill a mother' etc. At the end of the story, in order to raise the tension, the author again uses extremely short sentences to reflect the panic which overcomes Mrs Hill 'It was Njoroge's voice. Her houseboy. Sweat broke out on her face…This was her end. The end of the road'.

Teaching the Poetry Anthology

Note

These notes represent one teacher's views on the texts. The notes are provided only to stimulate ideas for teachers; they are not intended to be handed out to students as revision notes. They will not inform the setting of questions or mark schemes.

Approaches to Teaching the Collection

Section 1: Childhood

Half-past Two – U. A. Fanthorpe

Summary

A primary school child is made to stay behind after school, but his concept of time does not yet include numerals, only daily time modules such as 'TVtime', so he therefore does not really grasp when he can go home. There is a clear contrast in this event's significance: whereas this punishment represents a big moment in the boy's life, his teacher has almost forgotten about it and when she sees him waiting in the classroom for her, dismisses him home in an instant.

Introducing the Poem

'Memories of Primary School: Remember your early days there: what were they like? Try to recollect some experiences: your hopes, fears or even your relationship with a particular teacher. Is there one memory in particular that you will never forget?'

Structure and Form

An eleven stanza, free verse poem of equal line length written in the third (and occasionally first) person singular. These small three-lined 'chunks' of narrative, aided by enjambement, resemble the small boy's tendency to compartmentalise his day into time modules, as mirrored in Fanthorpe's presentation of his words, which lack spaces.

Language/Comments

- The fairy-tale opening 'Once upon a' builds our expectations of a narrative and links perfectly to a child's experience at primary school, aptly delivered in a child-like tone. This is one technique Fanthorpe uses (and later we find echoes of in the poem) to encourage us to identify with the boy's experiences and see the world through his eyes.
- The points of view and voices of different characters are established through language and successfully blended. Capital letters differentiate the teacher's voice 'Very Wrong' and the drawn-out emphasis she places on these words; to the extent they are magnified in the boy's mind as having a great consequence. Ironically the enormity of the 'offence'

is immediately undermined and trivialised by the narrator in line three, '(I forget what it was)', whose own voice is distinguished via brackets.

- Fanthorpe's language choices match the vocabulary stereotypically heard in primary schools 'cross…wicked' and help locate our imaginations within that setting. The lack of spaces in the boy's language 'Gettinguptime' communicate his interpretation of their visual representation, as this is exactly how he hears these words spoken. To a small boy these are indeed 'important times' since they dictate his daily life – he has as yet no comprehension of numeric time. The theme of childhood innocence is heightened here, but we are not invited to laugh at him, merely understand his predicament and comprehend how small matters can adopt a huge significance for a child.
- Stanza six marks a move away from conversational to more poetic language, with the use of personification 'little eyes…two long legs' and the onomatopoeic 'click'. Yet despite the elevated mood of this verse, the language still remains child-like in tone, as the vocabulary demonstrates a teaching method commonly used to tell the time. Enjambement carries the element of fantasy introduced here into the next two verses, as if we too are soaring with his imagination 'onceupona … timefors…escaped'. The pattern of four repetitions of 'into' appeals to our senses of smell, sound (with the oxymoron 'silent noise') and touch, retaining the dream-like quality already introduced, as if he himself is daydreaming.
- Italics express the teacher's direct speech and express how trivial the matter was for her too, like the narrator earlier. Notice she speedily releases him from his prolonged waiting in a mere two sentences, as if his 'detention' was really of little consequence to her. Fanthorpe attempts to portray his teacher in an unfavourable light as she describes her as 'scuttling in', just like a small animal. The teacher has also remained nameless and is subsequently depersonalised throughout the poem, often referred to as 'She…Her'. The poet therefore possibly uses her as an example to criticise adults who are dismissive of children in this manner, reinforced by the casual way 'she slotted him back'.
- The nostalgic quality at the end of the poem 'he never forgot' emits a refreshing feeling of freedom, a temporary world lacking time restrictions, with the lovely fantasy image of a 'clockless land' and the personification of the final line 'Where time hides tick-less waiting to be born'. Living in a modern world of schedules and appointments, we too can empathise with this euphoric state once in a while.

Piano – D. H. Lawrence

Summary

The narrator mentally returns to the warmth and comfort of childhood days at home with his mother by the piano. Yet he appears to berate himself for doing so, viewing himself as less masculine for giving in to his nostalgic impulses.

Introducing the Poem

'Recall one positive childhood memory spent with your family (e.g. a birthday party, the arrival of a new puppy etc): try to bring it alive in your imagination by using the different senses. Describe the moment or event, adding as much detail as possible.'

Structure and Form

The uniformity of this poem, with its rhyming couplets, equal number of lines per verse and regular syllable count, match the sense of harmony and security the childhood memories bring. Despite the hints of negativity 'insidious…betrays…weeps', the rhyme and rhythm remain upbeat, reminiscent of the many references to music and its power to uplift.

Language/Comments

- Initially the mix of first and third person singular feels curious, as the narrator begins using 'me…I' but then appears to refer to himself as 'A child' for the memory, adding distance, as if it is not really him. We soon realise, however, that this is a deliberate ploy by the narrator to express the internal battle he is feeling – as if he is fighting the memories and the sentiments of personal weakness they will bring.
- Allusions to sound are echoed throughout the poem and in the first stanza the calm of 'Softly' is contrasted with the powerfully, musical onomatopoeic '**boom** of the t**in**gl**in**g str**in**gs' (which is enhanced and prolonged by the internal rhyme), as he advances in his memory. This technique is later repeated in 't**in**kl**in**g' in stanza two. Song is a powerful tool here (further evoked in 'insidious mastery of song'), capable of transporting him into childhood 'taking me back…vista of years'.
- The narrator's description of his mother in line four, though short, speaks volumes. His relationship with her is a physically close one 'pressing', and suggests a devoted bonding. Her feet are 'poised', implying elegance, sophistication, dignity and precision and her mood is happy 'smiles'.
- Despite his attempts to be strong and fight the memory, it is too compelling and reverberates to the very core of his being 'the heart of me weeps to belong'. Lawrence's language choice here 'weeps' suggests the emotional state the narrator has been reduced to: one of intense sadness and poignancy. This is further reinforced in the final line 'I weep like a child' indicating the internal struggle has been lost, since here, unlike earlier, the first person singular 'I' is openly associated in this simile with 'a child'. Yet the recollection's setting is positive, bringing familiarity and comfort 'old Sunday evenings…hymns in the cosy parlour'.
- Feeling defeated in verse three, yet strangely elated, the narrator accepts his fate 'my manhood is cast/Down in the flood of remembrance'. He is overwhelmed by the unstoppable waves of emotion he has experienced, intensified by the use of the present tense throughout the poem, and is inconsolable 'I weep'. The juxtaposition of man and child appear at odds for him, as if loyalty to both cannot co-exist in his world.

My Parents Kept Me from Children who were Rough – Stephen Spender

Summary

Recollections of the verbal, physical and mental bullying experienced by the narrator as a boy from other children, predominantly owing to his parents' conscious decision to protect him from them, which possibly exacerbated the problem.

Introducing the Poem

Discuss those who bully and their victims: what motivates the bully? What kinds of bullying are there? How do victims feel? Where can they turn to for help? If students are comfortable to share their own or others' experiences, these could be used as a starting point for discussion.

Structure and Form

This three-stanza poem is carefully structured to build the list of bodily grievances the narrator feels, since the bullies represent an oppressive physical presence in his life. Each verse adds more to the ongoing inventory and is further intensified by the repetition of 'and' which serves to communicate the endless acts they commit '**And** who threw…**And** their jerking hands **and** their knees tight'. The poem's free verse form lacks restraints and regulations; reflective of the 'rough' children and their disregard for what is right and wrong.

Language/Comments

- The subject of the first line 'My parents' reveals a subtle, subconscious laying of blame on the narrator's part, later returned to in the final line 'I longed to forgive them'. The parental restraint 'kept me' suggests a lack of freedom the bullies have clearly sensed and therefore been able to exploit, as the narrator appears to have been physically shielded from them, hidden away like a caged animal himself.
- The poem exudes social class differentiation, undoubtedly instilled in the narrator by his parents. The bullies are judged by their garments 'torn clothes…rags' and their actions 'ran…climbed…stripped…sprang out…threw mud'. All of these are meant to imply vulgarity and distaste – but who has really judged them? We cannot help but feel these comments have come from the mouths of his parents. This class divide is later cemented by the narrator's own admission 'Like dogs to bark at **our world**', as if the bullies inhabit a separate sphere, far removed from civilisation, cleanliness and order.
- Although the narrator presents the actions of the bullies in verse one as vulgar, his view is of course biased and our objective opinion views them as typical boyish adventures. These wild escapades are ones that later, via the final line's revelation, we sense he himself is secretly envious of and given the chance would love to join in with, if only he was released from the shadow of his parents' disapproval. The alliteration heightens their attraction 'climbed cliffs'.
- Undoubtedly the acts of bullying are cruel: the physical pain of their vice-like grip on his arms and the mocking of his lisp are inexcusable. The boys take on an almost super-human, comic strip appearance in the simile 'muscles like iron'. Twice they are associated with animals 'more than tigers…like dogs' which further enhances their animal

savagery. (Earlier he linked them with the wildness of nature 'stones…cliffs…streams…hedges…mud').

- Yet despite their catalogue of torture, the narrator, of course, yearns to be given the opportunity to make friends - a chance the bullies continually deny him. Having witnessed the emotional and physical turmoil the narrator has experienced, we are left with the lasting impression that maybe his parents were essentially wrong to shield him from these children which makes us question their well-intentioned decision.

Section 2: Love

Plena Timoris – Thomas Hardy

Summary

Narrative poem in which a female begins to re-evaluate her relationship with her lover upon witnessing the recovery from a canal of another female who has committed suicide, seemingly due to her lover's abandonment of her. Hardy's Latin title 'Plena Timoris' (meaning 'full of fear') from the start casts a negative atmosphere over the poem which is reflected in the final three stanzas and is therefore in contrast to the positive opening verse. The poem's main theme, the transience of love, is hinted at several times 'Until he grew tired…So much for love in this mortal sphere…Dim dreads of the future'.

Introducing the Poem

What qualities would we expect to find in a love poem? (e.g. setting, mood, characters, feelings, language etc).

Structure and Form

Four five-line stanzas with a regular rhyme scheme and rhythm give the poem a sense of order and security, which is in contrast to the relative disorder which takes place in verse two and the insecurity the female feels about her relationship at the poem's close.

Language/Comments

- Although Hardy's language is at times archaic 'blent…dropt…upbore…tryst' (coupled with the Latin title), the theme of one partner falling out of love with another is timeless and universal. The use of the world 'tryst' reflects overtones of a secret, clandestine affair, which is reinforced by Hardy calling them 'lovers'.
- Initially we are offered typical romantic images of love: 'moon…silver…twinkled…arm around her…laughed' which suggest an optimistic and relaxed mood. Indeed, the setting is almost fairy-tale like and she feels physically secure as his arm envelops her. The alliteration of line one 'lovers looked' is echoed in line five 'laughed and leant' and further strengthens their happy union.
- Stanza two marks a turning point in the poem, where the mood immediately shifts to one of alarm, fear and slight panic, with the introduction of death. The inclusion of direct speech, projecting the poem's tense from the past into the present, adds an air of immediacy and realism to the situation. The conversational, direct and matter-of-fact language also detracts from and contrasts the poetic vocabulary employed in the first stanza.
- The flowing enjambement and calm atmosphere of stanza one are countered in stanza two by the short, abrupt phrases which are speedily punctuated 'They said; climbed over; slid down; let go'. This mostly monosyllabic delivery adds a staccato effect, reflecting the

physical actions of the suicidal woman and her short, jerky movements in the moments preceding her death. Images in this verse are far from romantic 'dripping body'.

- The narrative unravels in the third verse as we strongly surmise the woman killed herself because of the anguish she felt after the relationship was terminated by the man 'Until he grew tired'. Notice that for the first and only time Hardy uses a full stop within the line. This technique isolates and emphasises the importance of these words, which appear to have a profound impact on the girl as she applies them to her own situation.
- The tone becomes desperate, 'And hope, till hopeless despair began' and cynical 'So much for love in this mortal sphere!', as the negativity that permeated stanza two pervades.
- We are reminded of the female's youth in the final verse, as she is termed a 'girl', yet mentally she appears mature since she anticipates her own relationship will also falter and leave her with painful memories. Long vowel sounds 'dr**ea**ds…future gr**ew** sl**ow**ly…s**ei**ze' slow the line down as it almost comes to a halt, mirroring the way she too feels arrested by this experience. Physically she has been greatly traumatised by this tragic event 'heart shuddered…freeze her…seize her' which subtly connects her to the dead woman's body and the title. Another link is the 'arm', which moves from the warmth and tenderness of 'his arm' to the morbid coldness of the dead woman's arm 'arm upbore' and culminates in her abandoning the physical connection she has with him 'her arm dropt from his.' Such a symbol helps achieve unity within the poem and brings it full circle. As far as her lover is concerned however, this appears to have been an insignificant event for him as his reactions are not revealed, which explains the dominance of the third person singular focusing on the female.

Poem at Thirty-Nine – Alice Walker

Summary

Memories of a deceased father and her relationship with him are brought to life by Walker in this (seemingly autobiographical) celebratory poem as she details the qualities she admired in him and how much he taught her about life. Revealing her age in the title suggests maturity brings a better, more knowledgeable appreciation of parents in this exploration of paternal love.

Introducing the Poem

'What qualities do you most admire in one of your parents/guardians? Detail the ones you believe you share, explaining why. Are there any qualities that others say you have inherited that you are not so happy about?'

Structure and Form

Free verse suits the mood of this six stanza poem as Walker's tone is quite conversational (yet coupled with lively poetic phrases), flowing freely on the page as she flits from memories in the past, to her subsequent actions in the present. Enjambement appears more abundantly in some verses than others, as at times her thoughts are more spontaneous, whilst at others she uses punctuation to consciously pause and reflect on her father.

Language/Comments

- The direct opening line ‘How I miss my father’ is echoed later in the fourth stanza with one addition which reinforces it: an exclamation mark. Both lines are the only ones in the poem to appear as full sentences, highlighting the sadness she continues to feel at his loss and blatant refusal to feel ashamed about it, as age is no barrier to grief. This repeated euphemism for death (along with ‘before the end’) serves to comfort her as, despite the fact his death could have happened several years before, the pain of his bereavement is still deeply felt.
- Regret and sadness are communicated in stanza one as the implication is he had little time for her from the start of her life, probably because of work commitments continually exhausting him.
- Walker’s present actions in verse two evoke imagined past memories of her father dealing with his finances, as he seemingly tried to set a good example by following the correct procedures. Her parents were descendants of freed slaves and lived as share-croppers*. Thus Walker could be hinting at using education as a means to move on from this difficult agricultural existence ‘to escape/the life he knew’ and has learnt from an early age the importance of being as financially independent as possible.
- Physical abuse is indicated in verse three, suggested by ‘beating’, which has connotations of violence and brutality. Yet she does not judge him and advocates the advice he gave her in being honest, highlighted by the alliteration ‘taught…telling the truth’. Ironically she applies the word ‘grieved’ to her father, not herself, as she feels guilty at her past actions and how they must have upset him during his life.
- The dark mood which began to settle in stanza three now changes to one of happiness and celebration of both her father and herself until the poem’s close. The original simile ‘He cooked like a person/dancing/in a yoga meditation’ reflects the joy and passion he felt whilst preparing food, which totally absorbed him, and communicates his delight in sharing it.
- Assonance across the verses ‘cooked…good food’ links her father’s past actions with her present ones ‘Now I look….cook’. She is proud of their similarities and aptly chooses a culinary metaphor to express how she lives her life, which hints at a carefree ‘tossing this and that’ and generous existence (another connection to her father) ‘happy to feed/whoever strays my way’.
- In the final stanza we again sense the regret she felt at the start and reveals, as was hinted earlier, that she wasn’t the ‘perfect’ daughter during his lifetime, as expressed in the phrase ‘**grown** to admire’. The qualities she advocates at the end are homely, active ones which achieve a balance: at times she is energetic, at other times she is contemplative and peaceful. These are in keeping with the characteristics she admired in her father.

* A sharecropper, is a tenant farmer who pays a large percentage of the crop value as rent, after being provided with all his equipment by a landowner.

For Me From You – Rita Anyiam St John

Summary

A Nigerian female contemplates married life and seriously questions her own happiness within it. In addressing her partner in a deliberately repetitive manner she strongly hints at the monotony she will experience if she marries him primarily due to the monetary value he places on everything, including his love.

Introducing the Poem

- Discussion: focusing on marriages in different cultures, discuss reasons why people choose to get married/have marriages arranged.
- Role-play: a fiancée tells her fiancé she wants to call off the wedding three months prior to the event. Detail the reasons for this decision and the other partner's reactions.

Structure and Form

A distinctly unconstrained and fast flowing poem, full of repetition, echoes and patterning (especially patterns of two and three) resembling a stream of consciousness. Free verse, intense enjambement and minimal punctuation are characteristic features and thoroughly communicate her breathless outpouring of emotion on this extremely personal and important issue, made all the more immediate by the present tense. Rhyme is carefully used in places both at the end of lines and within them to accentuate key points. Verses are not restricted by an ordered number of line numbers or length, mirroring her spontaneous thoughts on freeing herself from the restrictions she feels marriage could place on her.

Language/Comments

- The fact that the title is repeated seven times within the poem and is the concluding line conveys the mechanical monotony she feels each time her partner reiterates it. Although on a first glance this phrase appears heartfelt and generous, clearly the way it is delivered diminishes its sincerity, since it is a fixed reminder he is the breadwinner. It is repeated to her like a mantra and therefore almost adopts a sort of spiritual/religious quality, as if to constantly remind her how grateful she should be to him for providing for her. He never lets her forget who provides her with the gifts, which detracts from their power to please. He can never merely say 'For you' but unceasingly 'For you from me' and thus must always refer to himself to remind her of her gratitude towards him.
- This feeling of tedium is alluded to in the opening line 'days and days' which later becomes 'nights and nights' – his words are endless. The metaphor she uses 'poured and poured' effectively transmits his incessant repetition and implies it is a one way conversation from the start i.e. she is the vessel that gets 'filled' with his phrases.
- We too, like her, feel almost hypnotised by the dominant and ceaseless repetition of 'much' in the first stanza, repeated an amazing ten times. In his mind, everything is measurable as he applies this quantifiable, commercial word to every aspect of his devotion towards her 'love…care…sacrifice' to the extent that she too begins to think in those terms as his words even invade her imagination 'in my mind'. Quite clearly, she

feels suffocated and frustrated by it all – feelings which multiply in the course of the poem and are also reflected in its fast-paced rhythm. His mention of 'sacrifice' is deliberate as it is used to instil feelings of guilt in her and increase her thankfulness.

- Pressure is evident by the immediate expectation of a male heir, almost as if it is a commercial request and she has a choice over when she falls pregnant and the subsequent sex of the baby! We feel her jealousy because of his job and the party which appears to exclude her 'for you and your friends', suggesting she is maybe not good enough for his colleagues and further adds to her feelings of isolation and vexation.
- The 'dark' and later 'moonless room' she refers to is reminiscent of her feelings and the bleak predicament she finds herself in: airless and stifling. She catalogues the monetary acquisitions he will make in the future '**nice big** kitchen…**little** car…trunk box…fat allowance' and we cannot help but notice the inclusion of some adjectives delivered in a patronising tone, as if he is addressing a child. Her anger explodes in this verse, represented by the use of capital letters.
- The refusal to sell some wares by the different tribeswomen in the marketplace could be a metaphor for a turning point in her thinking. Up until now, she has not compared herself to other women and their attitudes, albeit here towards commercial goods. The realisation comes in an abrupt two line stanza (the shortest of the poem) ending 'I see what I am buying for me from you' as if she has literally seen the light and is now full of insight, echoed in the repetitions of 'see' in the following verse. Clearly she predicts her situation will not change 'days endless' and uses 'uncountable' as a direct opposition and in defiance to the monetary value he has placed on everything.
- We are left with hope in the penultimate line 'if', as maybe it is not too late for her to change her future, although the lack of control she has so far been able to exert in the relationship makes us doubt a positive outcome.

Section 3: Places

In Your Mind - Carol Ann Duffy

Summary

Duffy's narrative, seemingly broken in places which befits the way the mind quickly flicks from one image to another, reflects the power of imagination to transport an individual from mundane, dreary situations to preferred ones, transcending time and place. In this poem, a character imagines he leaves behind his work on a rainy, autumn afternoon and catches a plane to a country he used to live and work in, where he then relives some of the experiences of that time associated with the place.

Introducing the Poem

'Certain places evoke certain memories. Identify one place (such as a town or another country you visited for a holiday or may have lived in) to which you attach specific recollections. Describe the people, the language, the climate, the culture, why you were there and why it holds such significance for you.'

Structure and Form

A complex poem, as its regular visual layout (four six-line stanzas of free verse) is deceptive since it masks an intricate style.

Language/Comments

- The opening question in line one is indicative of the involved, ambiguous role the narrator plays in this poem, both leading the character through the memories as if issuing a set of instructions 'you will leave/on the plane', yet at the same time standing back and narrating events as they unfold. 'The other country' is made the subject of the sentence, rather than the object, which communicates the control the narrator will have throughout the poem as this will be the direct focus of the character's thoughts.
- The dreary setting from which the character mentally escapes at the start 'rain…falls' is returned to at the poem's close as the memory fades 'English rain'. This reminds us of the transient nature of the imagination to transport us elsewhere, since it is only 'For a moment'.
- By predominantly employing the present tense (coupled with the enjambement), Duffy is able to make the memories more immediate and fast flowing, which particularly heightens the character's movements throughout the poem 'you put aside and head…you go…dawdling'.
- The apt simile in stanza one 'fades like newsprint in the sun' serves several purposes. It prepares us for the climate of 'the other country' (which we surmise is hotter than England due to the 'warm coat' being left) and is another technique used to bring the poem full circle, marking the end of the memory 'A newspaper'. Additionally, it reflects the short-lived nature of the memory 'fades'.

- The naivety of the boy's question in verse two (unless this poem was written pre-moon landing) could suggest a more exotic setting, where education is not widespread, especially since a 'boy' is serving a drink, rather than an adult. Yet the character's response is puzzling 'No./Never'. The poetic imagery here reflects an almost dream-like quality 'moon like an orange…peel itself into the sea' as it leads straight into 'Sleep' in the next stanza.
- Line lengths are manipulated to juxtapose both long and short sentences which are used to control the pace of the poem. Stanza three is a good example of this, as brief, staccato sentences (many of which are monosyllabic) mirror the additional memories and subsequent hurried movements that the italicised '*Of course*' evokes. One-word sentences are characteristic here 'Sleep…Seagulls…Bells' and appear as almost photographic flashes, as they suddenly enter the character's mind.
- Alliteration has also directed our focus through the poem 'A beautiful boy..bar', 'blue bridge' and 'six swans' reflecting some of the attractive qualities it holds for the character.
- Familiar objects in the last line, expressed in short sentences, jolt the character back into reality 'A newspaper. A window. English rain'. The full stops literally punctuate this happy memory and bring it to an abrupt close. Although the recollection has been a positive one, it is unfortunately short-lived and fleeting.

An Unknown Girl – Moniza Alvi

Summary

Moniza Alvi was born in Pakistan (her father Pakistani, her mother English), but left when she was a few months old to live in England. Previously, the poet has used some of her poems as tools to explore her cultural identity. Although apparently set in India, this poem also appears autobiographical in tone, as the narrator feels her cultural roots and traditions have been reaffirmed and reawakened in the bazaar by the 'Unknown Girl's' simple act of hennaing her hand. This new lease of life even filters through into her descriptions of the market, as she brings it alive with her newfound energy and confidence.

Introducing the Poem

'Markets are renowned for being busy, noisy places, full of people buying and selling products and services. Imagine a market you visited, whether in your own country or another. Try to bring it to life for your classmates by appealing to their senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell in your descriptions.'

Structure and Form

Free verse suits the narrator's exploration of thought, flowing as one long verse like a stream of consciousness as she describes what is happening to and around her. The poem's visually pleasing centred layout is reminiscent of her newly decoratively, hennaed hands. Using a pattern of three, Alvi maintains the poem's unity, as the first four lines are repeated (with only slight variations) like a chorus three times, with the same phrases rejuggled as a final reminder at the poem's close. The single verse style effectively maintains the link

between the narrator and the bazaar with all its cultural associations, whereas a series of verses with pauses between them would break this precious connection.

Language/Comments

- The poem's vocabulary immediately places it in an exotic, foreign location 'bazaar…rupees…henna…kameez', brought to life in several ways by the narrator. Although the girl herself is 'unknown', she nevertheless shows great skill and precision in her work 'steadies…deftly' and is therefore greatly respected. Textures are often described, appealing to our sense of touch 'wet…satin-peach knee…cloth canopy me'. Sounds are contrasted 'furious…hushed' and visually, colourful images come alive 'neon…peacock…balloon…amber bird'.
- The narrator initially applies her existing cultural references to the girl's artwork 'She is **icing** my hand'. Later, her traditional cultural roots seem to be more established 'I have new brown veins…I am clinging to these firm…lines', as if she now has a new life force flowing through her veins.
- The personal, inner conflict between cultures that the narrator experiences is also demonstrated publicly by the shop dummies (no doubt wearing traditional costumes) who sport 'Western perms'. Likewise, the posters for 'Miss India', a competition of Western origin, require a modern, perhaps less modest approach to female presentation than the Indian culture traditionally advocates.
- The simple act of hand-hennaing has initiated a powerful sense of yearning by the narrator for her roots, which is communicated by the repetition of 'clinging' and subsequent mention of 'longing'. Although the henna might physically 'fade in a week', we feel certain that the feelings that have been reawakened by this experience will continue to flourish.

Geography Lesson – Zulfiker Ghose

Summary

On the surface, this appears to be (as the title implies) a poem teaching us about geography. Yet it ends on a philosophical note, questioning man's capacity to hate and kill each other.

Way into the Poem

After handing out and reading the first two stanzas only and discussing the content, rhyme scheme and patterning of the opening and closing lines, students could attempt to write the final stanza. Compare their third verse with the original, considering their differences.

Structure and Form

The regular rhyme scheme of the first two stanzas lulls us into a false sense of security. Initially it is carried into the last verse but the pattern changes in lines four to seven to mark the turning point of the poem. These lines in particular are used to express the crux of the narrator's feelings. Likewise, the repeated pattern that develops in lines one, two and eight of

stanzas one and two is seemingly being repeated in stanza three. Yet we witness an important difference in the closing line, where the narrator jolts us out of our familiarity in order to digest his point of view and reflect on his words.

Language/Comments

- The poem's real subject matter, that of war, death and destruction, is not apparent until the last verse. Until that point, the narrator subtly prepares us for it by gradually expanding our vision, from city to country to the earth, at each stage making observations on the landscape and how it has developed.
- The jet's energy and force is apparent from the start as it firstly 'sprang into the sky.' Perhaps here Ghose is carefully hinting at war, as this type of aircraft can be easily associated with combat.
- Ghose's pattern of 'it was clear why…' is repeated in each verse, but contrasted in the last stanza and used to conclude the poem '…it was not clear why'. During the poem, the physical reasons for the geographical layout have been made 'clear', yet in the remaining verse logic seems to have been abandoned, as the narrator applies emotional, personal and political reasons for hate, war, death and destruction and finds no answers.
- The turning point in stanza three beginning 'But it was difficult to understand' defies sense in the narrator's simply expressed, yet emotionally loaded opinion.
- The narrator's initial objective therefore of teaching us a 'lesson' (albeit a different one from expected) has succeeded – there are no excuses 'to hate…build walls…and to kill'.

Section 4: Thoughts

If – Rudyard Kipling

Summary

Kipling's famous poem about human nature offers a catalogue of thoughtful advice to a young male, consisting of the many qualities he feels are essential to become a man, such as self-belief, modesty, humility and truthfulness.

Introducing the Poem

' What advice would a father give to a son who is ready to leave home and venture out into the world on his own? Explore the different areas of life you think the father feels are important enough to guide his son through. Imagine the conversation between them.'

Structure and Form

Kipling's guidance takes the form of a series of opposites, for example, 'keep…lose' and 'trust…doubt'. These slowly build up in the course of the poem to reveal only in the concluding line the main reward for doing so, that is, as a symbol of having reached manhood. The alternate rhyme scheme maintains the momentum of the counsel and since this lengthy poem appears to be merely one sentence long, this implies the spiritual and mental journey to manhood is a long, complicated and challenging one.

Language/Comments

- The long list of qualities that Kipling suggests lead to manhood are numerous (and viewed realistically, appear collectively unattainable). This is why the future conditional tense is repeatedly used (signalled by 'if') as it expresses the sheer difficulty of the task. Yet the rewards offered justify any sacrifices made 'Yours is the earth…you'll be a Man'.
- By constant repetition of the second person singular 'you' (with implications of a plural address too, encompassing us all), the narrator achieves a direct appeal and maintains our interest. By the end of the poem we are intrigued to discover where his lengthy advice leads.
- The imperatives issued do not feel commanding, but friendly and good-natured 'don't deal in lies…don't give way to hating'. The focus is on avoiding excesses in life (notice they are largely inner qualities and values, as material excesses are only briefly mentioned 'winnings'). The advice is to approach all things moderately, with a degree of patience and maturity.
- Poetic techniques strengthen the counsel. Fulfilling every moment in as energetic and enthusiastic manner as possible is advocated in the metaphor 'fill the…minute/With sixty seconds' worth of distance run'. Personification is used to promote caution against 'impostors', such as 'Triumph and Disaster'.
- Although the majority of the guidance is sensible and prudent, there are hints of recklessness too, as in the area of gambling 'risk it all', suggesting chances can be taken

and that life should not be mundane but lived to the full. The important aspect is not to publicise any losses.

- The crux of the poem, revealed in the final two lines, expresses the huge rewards that can be expected. Significantly, being 'a Man' is perceived as infinitely better 'which is more' than acquiring 'the earth and all that's in it'. The final exclamation mark can be viewed as a closing symbol of encouragement.

World! Why do you hound me? – Juana Ines de la Cruz

Summary

Described as a 'poet nun', Juana Ines de la Cruz had an insatiable desire to understand everything around her. Born into a world where women's education was minimal, she used to sneak away to learn. The subject of this probably autobiographical poem therefore is in keeping with her quest for knowledge, as her thoughts advocate improved understanding over material wealth and beauty.

Introducing the Poem

'Frustrations are common in all aspects of life. What frustrates you at the moment? Imagine you have a chance to address whatever or whoever it is: what would you say to them and what written format would your grievances take e.g. a letter, a song, a poem? Draft your response before reading it out to a partner/sharing it with the class.'

Structure and Form

The four stanzas of free verse comprise several rhetorical questions, as de la Cruz challenges accepted notions of her time. Phrases are constantly inverted, again in order to overturn preconceived ideas.

Language/Comments

- The frustration the poet feels is immediately inherent in the questioning title '**hound** me?' suggestive of victimisation. Her immediate, direct address to the 'World!' also communicates annoyance via the exclamation mark.
- Use of the present tense indicates how immediate the anxieties are. This is a current issue for the poet, who wants instant answers to her frustrations. The two questions posed in the second line cast a slight shadow of doubt over her self-belief. The second question 'Really?' implies she received an affirmative answer to her first question. Yet it does not prevent her from continuing to challenge.
- Verse one makes clear from the start (using capitalised nouns) that beauty is not valued, just as stanza two dismisses wealth and material comforts 'I have no interest'. The tone of the poem is not completely negative however, as positive alternatives are offered 'When all I want…it gives me more satisfaction'.

- Echoes of the first two stanzas are found in verse three ‘A Pretty Face is soon gone:’ as de la Cruz comprehends the temporary nature of beauty and time’s ‘daily loot’. Adjectives such as ‘forged’ reflect the artificiality and superficiality she feels surround affluence.
- A search for ‘Truth’ represents the poet’s goal, leading to a pure understanding of life, not distracted by ‘the vanities of Life’ such as she criticises for their empty concerns.

Poem – Allama Mohammed Iqbal

Summary

Allama Mohammed Iqbal was an Urdu poet-philosopher and as an influential thinker, criticised the West for, in his opinion, its superior attitude and materialism. This philosophically religious and spiritual poem advocates self-evaluation leading to faith in God for spiritual fulfilment, via a law trial scenario.

Introducing the Poem

‘Have you ever been asked to assess how well you did something e.g. played in an important match, performed in an exam or test or acted a role on stage etc? What do you think you learnt about yourself and how difficult was it to complete the self-evaluation? Discuss your experience with a classmate and share with the class.’

Structure and Form

The layout of this free verse poem, with its two line stanzas (many of which begin with one word followed by a colon), is reminiscent of the script of a play. This structure is befitting the court case setting which it mimics, with different characters called to give evidence and a presiding judge. Repetition and echoes are a key characteristic of this piece, as the poet constantly makes links between his ideas to reinforce them. Questions are also a main feature, since the objective, of spiritual rebirth and having total faith in God, can only be achieved via self-evaluation.

Language/Comments

- The tone of the poem is demanding and questioning, which is made clear from the very first stanza via a question and two imperatives ‘Call These…and judge’: two techniques repeated throughout. The challenging mood therefore matches the narrator’s request for self-evaluation and change.
- A pattern of three initiates the trial process, as the sequential ‘One…Two…Three’ takes us through each stage. We are invited to call the personified ‘Three Witnesses’, each of which revolve around ‘Consciousness’. At every step, we are bombarded with repetition ‘Quiz yourself’. Patterning continues with the four repetitions of ‘Think’ which introduce the idea of eternity and being brave enough to face God, as well as the three recurrences of ‘Alive and Forever as God’. The theme of courage before God is returned to ‘Can you stand, unquaked’. It is taken for granted that God will be faced, as we are constantly presented with ‘**When** you dare’ rather than ‘If’.

- Metaphors of a precious metal are used to encourage our journey towards God, ‘gold, pure gold…blaze it gold’, the colour of which is echoed in ‘Sun’, implying warmth and energy.
- Pessimistic language is used to hasten our spiritual rebirth ‘old dead-habited you…smoke-ring, wasting, wasting’ so as to inspire us to take God’s path in a move away from our existing negative one. The question ‘Are you only a dab of dust?’ attempts to provoke our reactions by trivialising our importance.
- The vocabulary of religion and law continues to the very end of the poem. We are left with the impression of life’s transience and how temporary our lives will be without this re-evaluation of ourselves and our relationship with God. Not only have we played the roles of witness and prosecutor during this ‘trial’, we are now being invited for the second time to ‘judge’ the outcome too.

Section 5: Death's Approach

A Crabbit Old Woman – Phyllis McCormack

Summary

The old lady's objective in this poem is to be perceived differently by the nurses who care for her in the home, so that they see past the stereotype she believes they apply to her and start looking at her as an individual.

Introducing the Poem

'How are old people generally, or those cared for in homes, sometimes stereotyped?'

Structure and Form

This is a long, breathless, one-stanza attack on the care of the old from the point of view of an old woman in a home. Line length is deliberately short and makes optimum use of enjambement to increase the momentum of the charge, aided by the constant rhyming of alternate lines which speeds up the poem's pace, as do several monosyllables. This controlled, enthusiastic and active delivery is in itself a conscious opposition to the stereotypical passiveness usually associated with an elderly person.

Language/Comments

- The initial attack takes the form of a series of questions and statements which serve to reveal the typical associations she believes the nurses make when dealing with her. Images of a grumbling, complaining, mentally inferior, distant, physically incapable, deaf, forgetful and baby-like old lady abound. The old woman feels hurt that the nurses do not even engage with her in any manner 'are you thinking' and feels irritated that they blatantly voice their impatience, mimicking their cliché 'I do wish you'd try'.
- The first turning point in the poem comes after the imperative 'Then open your eyes/you're not looking at me', as she demands to be seen both physically and mentally as a person in her own right. The mood changes here from one of harsh, negative attack to a sequence of happy, nostalgic memories as she leads us through her life. Notice how she takes control, with the dominant use of the first person singular 'I' as she prepares to change their deep-rooted perceptions of her.
- The language becomes less conversational and more poetic, such as the metaphor she uses which suggests the freedom of youth she once enjoyed 'with wings on her feet' and the romance she hoped for. Undeniably, this woman once experienced close family relationships with her parents, children and grandchildren. She is eager to relate to the nurses that others once depended on her (just as she now must ironically depend on the nurses) 'Who need me to build/a secure, happy home'. Life has clearly gone full circle for her. Loyalty was important to her 'Bound to each other', as she appears to find this lacking in her own present predicament in the home.

- The recollections of her life take on an almost photographic quality, as they are so precise and follow such a logical progression we feel as if she is turning the pages of an album ‘at twenty…at forty’. Significantly even these past memories are described in the present tense, a technique which assists in keeping them fresh and alive in her mind, allowing her to relive them at her will.
- The second turning point marks another mood change, from positive to negative, and begins ‘Dark days are upon me’ as she now brings us up to date, indicating what her present life is like; namely, sad and fearful. Both the personification of nature ‘’Tis her jest to make/old age look like a fool’ and the simile used here reveal her inner feelings – she feels reduced to an idiot, someone to be laughed at.
- Physically decrepit images ‘crumbles…old carcass…battered heart’ already begin to employ the vocabulary of death, as she ponders death’s approach. Yet mentally and spiritually she battles on, with memory as her weapon to lift her flagging spirits, as reflected in the alliteration ‘loving…living/life’.
- Although she regrets the speedy passage of time, she is realistic enough to accept her own mortality as a ‘stark fact’ and concludes by imploring once more, that the nurses look **beyond** her frail physique, to see the individual beneath.

Remember – Christina Rossetti

Summary

Rossetti’s sonnet explores the theme of grief experienced after a partner’s death, initially the narrator advocates the partner mourning her, but then changes her mind and advises it is better to forget her and get on with his life.

Introducing the Poem

Descriptive Writing: Imagine you are one partner from a relationship, perhaps a husband or wife, who knows he/she is going to die from an illness. Write a short letter to your remaining partner, which details the difficult thoughts and heart-breaking feelings of being close to death.

Structure and Form

Rossetti was fond of experimenting with the sonnet form, which is why she changes the rhyme scheme at the end of this poem from the two most commonly used at that time. She uses ABBA twice, but then, instead of following the pattern of using CDE twice, she changes it to CDDECE. Significantly, she deliberately does so, as the meaning of the poem changes in the sestet to the possibility of forgetting and being happy, rather than instructions to remember, which occur in the octet. The use of iambic pentameter aids the softness of the rhythm and message that Rossetti is trying to convey.

Language/Comments

- Patterns of repetition are an important feature of this sonnet, such as 'Remember…gone…no more'. The first 'Remember me' is addressed directly to her loved one and although it is an imperative, does not feel in any way imposing or commanding. The personal pronouns signal this is a very personal, emotional poem.
- The euphemism for death 'gone away' is sadly touching and its power is heightened by the addition of distance 'gone **far**'. Rossetti's metaphor 'silent land' portrays a calm, peaceful afterlife and serves to lessen the pain of her departure for him.
- The alliteration of 'hold me by the hand' makes clear their relationship and hints at the physical contact that will be lost, coupled with the monosyllables in line three which add an air of finality. The poignant tone is increased here by the allusion to their future, with even the possibility of a wedding 'that you planned'.
- Rossetti's punctuation break of a semi-colon in line seven indicates the change of meaning she advocates in the sestet, as she hints at an unselfish love, with the potentiality of forgetting her. She would rather he forget her and be happy, than wallow in grief for her - 'darkness and corruption'. The ending is therefore optimistic as the poem allows for the opportunity of moving on and forgetting, in contrast to the opening which requested his remembrances of her.

Refugee Mother and Child – Chinua Achebe

Summary

An emotionally touching, heavily descriptive poem narrating the utter devotion of a refugee mother towards her son, making her moments with him even more distressing and precious since she knows his time is limited, due to the effects of disease or malnutrition.

Introducing the Poem

Visual Stimulation: showing either newsreel, newspaper photographs or charity leaflets, discuss and describe the shocking situations witnessed across the world, via the media, of some refugees and the conditions they endure.

Structure and Form

Using merely one sentence in the initial stanza, Achebe manages to summarise the entire poem. His second verse, much longer but again using only two or three sentences, then goes into descriptive detail, shocking us with its honest portrayal of daily life for these refugees. Economical with punctuation, this free verse poem deliberately employs ongoing line lengths reflective of the ongoing suffering and catalogue of pain these refugees endure – as if there is so much suffering to relate, Achebe finds it hard to know where to stop.

Language/Comments

- By referring to the revered ‘Madonna and Child’ in the first line, Achebe instantly evokes religious images of purity and worship, therefore automatically raising the status of the refugee mother and child. It suggests her devotion far surpasses anything previously witnessed and also attaches a sacred, spiritual quality to her love for her son. The opening is full of pathos – but the poem invites us more to admire her courage and dedication in the face of adversity, rather than pity her.
- The second verse is loaded with negative, intentionally repulsive language portraying the awfulness of the situation for these refugees. An appeal to our senses of smell, sight and touch is strong ‘odours of diarrhoea…blown empty bellies…combed the rust-coloured hair’. Achebe’s language is powerfully direct and harsh, as he wants us to experience the cruel reality of the effects of war or political persecution, that is, the suffering of thousands of innocent victims. Physical descriptions of skeletal-like children visually appal us, ‘washed-out ribs…dried-up bottoms’. The long first line of stanza two contains few verbs, suggestive of the lack of energy and inaction experienced by many because of the effects of malnutrition. Alliteration here ‘bottoms…behind blown…bellies’ commands our attention – we are not allowed to turn away from this sickening sight.
- The vocabulary of death ‘ghost’ is twice associated with the mother, preparing us, as in the first stanza, for the inevitable outcome of loss she will encounter and maybe even hinting at her own mortality as she too is probably physically frail. We greatly respect the mother’s positive spirit ‘smile…pride…singing in her eyes…carefully’ as her actions are untainted by the horrific circumstances enveloping her. The devotion and love she feels towards her son is unconditional as she tries hard to maintain a daily, normal routine in a situation which is far from normal. This heart-breaking, simple gesture is imbued with sadness – he has barely any hair left on his ‘skull’ (another skeletal reminder), yet she meticulously combs it anyway, in preparation for his death.
- Achebe sharply reminds us of their previously normal existence ‘breakfast and school’, bringing them closer to the reader as these are part of our everyday routine too. Although the closing simile returns to the son’s forthcoming death and is heavy with foreboding, we are left with an absolute admiration for the mother’s human spirit. Her love is stronger than the devastation around them, even though she is realistic enough to know she cannot prevent its fatal consequences.

Support and training

Training

A programme of INSET courses covering various aspects of the specifications and assessment will be arranged by London Examinations on a regular basis. Full details may be obtained from

International Customer Relations Unit
Edexcel International
190 High Holborn
London
WC1V 7BE
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 190 884 7750

E-mail: international@edexcel.org.uk

Edexcel publications

Support materials and further copies of this specification can be obtained from

Edexcel Publications
Adamsway
Mansfield
Notts NG18 4LN

UK

Tel: +44 (0) 1623 450 781
Fax: +44 (0) 1623 450 481
E-mail: intpublications@linneydirect.com

Other materials available in 2003 include

- Specimen papers and mark schemes (Publication code: UG013053)
- Specification (Publication code: UG013064)
- The IGCSE English Literature Anthology (Publication code: UG013316)
- Student Study Guide (Publication code: UG015643).

Appendix – Completing the Coursework Frontsheet

Form A – IGCSE in English Literature (4360) : Poetry Coursework frontsheet

Date: <u>May</u> or November 20 *<u>05</u>*

Centre no. *9XXXX*	Candidate no. *XXXX*
Surname and initials *CHANG R. K.*	

Centre's Final Mark for Coursework /40	***28***

Date work completed	**Assignment title (including poems used)**
May 2004	*Compare the way poets have written about memory, referring to at least 3 poems from the Anthology.* *Poems used: Piano, Remember, Crabbit Old Woman, Poem at 39.*

Summative comment relating candidate's overall mark to assessment criteria

R. K. tackles the poems confidently, making his own choice of poems to write about. He supports his points by close reference to the poems. He shows a sound understanding of poets' techniques, and is beginning to explain their effect on the reader. He uses technical vocabulary appropriately. He makes an informed, personal response to the question.

DECLARATION BY TEACHER: I declare that the candidate's activities were kept under regular supervision and that, to the best of my knowledge, no assistance has been given apart from any which is acceptable under the scheme of assessment and has been identified and recorded.

Signature……*A. Teacher*…… Date:……*23 March 2005*……

Further copies of this publication are available from
Edexcel International Publications, Adamsway, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 4FN, UK

Telephone: 44 (0) 01623 450 781
Fax: +44 (0) 1623 450 481
Email: intpublications@linneydirect.com

Order Code UG013031 November 2003, Issue 1

For more information on Edexcel International, please contact our
International Customer Relations Unit on +44 (0) 190 884 7750
or visit www.edexcel-international.org
or email international@edexcel.org.uk
Edexcel Limited. Registered in England and Wales No. 4496750
Registered Office: 190 High Holborn, London WC1V 7BE, UK

edexcel INTERNATIONAL