

Teachers Resource Series

Poetry Pack DBE HL

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Poetry Pack:

DBE Home Language Gr 12 2017ff

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POETRY WORKSHEETS from MACRAT PUBLISHING

Poetry is the most controversial of genres as often teachers and learners differ in their interpretation of a poem. It is nearly impossible for a worksheet to cover all the possible questions, all the interpretations, all the ideas ... and this is not the intention of these worksheets.

The purpose of our worksheets is to provide one approach to the poem (but teachers and learners must remember that this is only *one* approach) and provide a worksheet that may be useful as an introductory activity or could be used for revision. The onus remains on the teacher or learner to explore the full depth of the poem.



Remember to listen to the words, feel the moods and enjoy the sensation created by the whole poem.

Studying Poetry

Sadly, one of the most problematic areas of literature study for many learners is that of poetry. What should be a source of great delight and insight, is often seen and feared as inaccessible and obscure. It is regrettably still common in classrooms that teachers explain poetry line by line to their learners in the hope that they will be able to answer any exam question on that poem. Small wonder that a love of and enthusiasm for poetry is extinguished in the process! We would like to give you and your learners some pointers for poetry study to help you cope with and be able to enjoy this versatile and vibrant genre.

The first thing to remember is not to panic about poetry! If you count up the actual number of marks allocated to poetry in the final exam compared with other sections of the syllabus, you will see that there is really very little need to worry. So, rather enjoy your journey through some of the great poems of our language, and see what the truths which these men and women wrote about can teach you about your world.

Secondly, it is OK not to like some poems! No one says you have to like every poem you read – some will not strike a chord in you at all, and that's fine. After all, no one expects you to like every song you hear on the radio, or every picture you see; it's just the same with poetry. Much more important is to be able to tell a good poem from a bad - and to try your own hand at writing. Who knows, you might be the next great South African poet ...

Thirdly, it is a good idea to read lots of poetry. In most departments' exams, up to half the marks allocated to poetry are given to an unseen poem. Reading poetry, and becoming familiar with its techniques, will help you feel more confident about tackling any poem the examiners give you. So read around the poets in your set anthology, for example, on similar themes and topics, or other poems by the prescribed poets. (Poetry was, of course, designed to be read, not examined for marks!)

Different departments have different requirements for their poetry examinations, but in most cases, learners are required to answer questions on an 'unseen' poem and on one or more of the 'seen' poems they have studied. It is thus important that you grasp some of the skills of poetry analysis because you cannot pre-learn answers to an 'unseen' poem.

The '**unseen**' poems seem to be the ones which fluster many learners. To give you some guidance in tackling the questions which are set, try the following suggestions for a process of answering an unseen poetry question in the exam:

- Read the poem through once, then read it again slowly.
- If you are still unsure about the meaning of the poem, read the questions set on it as they will often help you to work out the theme of the poem.
- Read the poem again.
- Now start to answer the questions. (The mark allocation for each question will give you an indication of the length of answer required.) *Take your time*, and *think* before you write; but if you change your mind about an answer, don't hesitate to cross out and rewrite. Examiners much prefer to see a correct, somewhat untidy answer than a beautifully neat, incorrect one!
- Finally, read through the poem and the questions again to make sure there is nothing you have missed; often an obscure question will become clear at this point.

In preparing for your '**seen**' poems, make sure that you are fully familiar with the issues which the poet is dealing with in his or her poem. Your examiners will obviously expect you to have a deeper understanding of these poems than they will expect from your reading of the unseens. In particular, if you are given only an extract from one of the longer poems on the syllabus, they will at least expect you to be familiar with the rest of the poem.

If you are required to write a critical appreciation of the poem, in the form of an essay, rather than answer a few set questions on it, try using the **SIFT** method, where you consider the *Sense, Intention, Feeling and Tone* of the poem.

For the **sense**, you explain briefly what the poem is about, then you identify the poet's **intention** or purpose in writing it. When you comment on the **feelings** that the poem evokes, you would refer to poetic language and techniques (metaphors and images, use of sound effects, structural considerations etc.) Finally, you need to identify the **tone** of the poem, which needs to be consistent with the poet's intentions.

One area which poses particular problems in poetry analysis is that of **rhythm**. It is, of course, one of the most important aspects of a poem, because rhythm is one of the key features that separates poetry from prose. It has been said that "music is the poetry of our generation", and indeed poetry has a greater affinity to music than to prose. When you listen to music, doesn't the kind of music you choose to listen to depend on your mood at that particular time? And isn't it the rhythm that counts? If you are feeling depressed, you aren't going to choose a song with a lively rhythm (unless you are trying to snap out of that feeling). Things aren't very different with poetry. We tend to focus mainly on the meaning of the words when we read poetry but through considering rhythm too, we deepen our understanding of the poem as a whole. This is because the rhythm reflects the thoughts and feelings conveyed in the poem – the mood, or emotional weight of what is being said.

When analysing the rhythm of a particular poem, always consider the following elements:

- **Metre:** the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Words more heavily stressed are usually central to the poem's meaning
- **Rhyme:** repetition of similar sounds in endings of words. Identify if there is a discernible rhyme scheme or not.
- **Lines:** consider the use of end-stopped versus run-on lines. Look out for caesurae, which are breaks within lines.
- **Punctuation:** consider how punctuation influences pausing, and thus the rhythm and effect of the poem.
- **Sound imagery:** consider use of sound techniques such as alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia, all of which influence the rhythm of the poem.

Remember that variation in any of the above elements is usually meant to achieve a certain effect. If, for example, the first four lines of a poem have 10 syllables each and then suddenly the fifth line has five syllables, obviously the fifth line is being emphasised. Analyse the meaning of that line to determine why the poet is stressing its importance.

Revising your Poetry

Try the following hints on how to tackle your revision:

1. Read through the poem two or three times and determine what the main idea is.
2. Jot down rough notes about tone and atmosphere, rhythm and rhyme scheme (if appropriate), striking words and images.
3. Consider the following factors:
 - ❖ **MEANING** of the poem: WHAT is it about?
(What is the main idea? What happens in the poem?)
 - ❖ **METHOD** of the poem: HOW is it done?
(Consider poetic devices: form, rhyme, rhythm, images, mood and tone. How do all of these add to the meaning of the poem? Show their effectiveness. Exclude irrelevant details.)
 - ❖ **MESSAGE** of the poem: What is the poet's INTENTION?
Has he/she conveyed it in an effective manner? Does the poem succeed?

Complete your revision by working through a worksheet or set yourself a couple of questions and then – preferably on the following day (so that you are really testing yourself) – answer them on paper.



Finally, remember that poetry was meant to be read aloud.
Enjoy its **sound** as well as its meaning!

Selection of useful links, including links to copies of some of the poems

Chinua Achebe

- ✧ <http://www.mahmag.org/english/worldpoetry.php?itemid=456>
- ✧ <http://oscareducation.blogspot.co.za/2013/06/vultures-by-chinua-achebe.html>
- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxTUico43qQ>

W. H. Auden

- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mifAhvkcJU>
- ✧ <https://allpoetry.com/Funeral-Blues>
- ✧ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/funeral-blues>
- ✧ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funeral_Blues



William Blake

- ✧ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45950>
- ✧ <http://crossref-it.info/textguide/songs-of-innocence-and-experience/13/1598>
- ✧ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDSUS_lcfw4

Roy Campbell

- ✧ http://www.bachelorandmaster.com/britishandamericanpoetry/the-zulu-girl.html#.WE_7Kme_xMw
- ✧ http://www.bachelorandmaster.com/britishandamericanpoetry/the-zulu-girl-introduction.html#.WE_8ame_xMw
- ✧ <https://allpoetry.com/The-Zulu-Girl>
- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5HSIRmiVuA>

Jeremy Cronin

- ✧ <http://www.ronnowpoetry.com/contents/cronin/Motho.html>
- ✧ <http://voiceseducation.org/content/jeremy-cronin>
- ✧ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy_Cronin

ee cummings

- ✧ <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/somewhere-i-have-never-travelled-gladly-beyond/>
- ✧ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/somewhere-i-have-never-travelledgladly-beyond>
- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csxavoEgRx4>

Day Lewis

- ✧ <https://allpoetry.com/A-Hard-Frost>
- ✧ <http://www.writework.com/essay/hard-frost-c-day-lewis>
- ✧ <http://blablawriting.com/the-hard-frost-by-c-day-lewis-essay>
- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMmWNgjy5Cg>

G. M. Hopkins

- ✧ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44394>
- ✧ <http://www.exampleessays.com/viewpaper/6355.html>
- ✧ <http://www.markedbyteachers.com/as-and-a-level/english/poem-analysis-felix-randall-by-gerald-maneley-hopkins.html>
- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNn5xEExSZk>

Mazisi Kunene

- ✧ http://slope.org/archive/thirteen/13_kunene.html
- ✧ <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/sep/19/local/me-kunene19>
- ✧ <http://thenewblackmagazine.com/view.aspx?index=435>
- ✧ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mazisi_Kunene

Ben Okri

- ✧ <http://www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/poetry-an-african-elegy>
- ✧ <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/ben-okri>
- ✧ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Okri
- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-3-SgIOE1U>

Christina Rossetti

- ✧ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45000>
- ✧ <https://interestingliterature.com/2016/01/25/a-short-analysis-of-christina-rossettis-remember/>
- ✧ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9m53DcASv9U>

David Rubadiri

- ✧ <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/an-africa-thunderstorm/>
- ✧ <https://tothebalcony.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/an-african-thunderstorm/>
- ✧ <http://ccmpratncu.blogspot.co.za/2013/02/breaking-silence-unleashing-african.html>

[All links accessed 23/01/2017]



Vultures ~ Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe, or to give him his full name, Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, was born in Nigeria in 1930, and died in the American city of Boston in 2013. He is most famous as a novelist, and his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart* is very often set as a school text. More than 12 million copies have been sold and it has been translated into more than 50 languages. The novel concerns traditional Igbo life at the time of the advent of missionaries and colonial government in his homeland. His principal character, Okonkwo, cannot accept the new order, even though the old has already collapsed. After an automobile accident in Nigeria in 1990 that left him partially paralyzed, Achebe moved to the United States, where he taught at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. In 2009 Achebe left Bard to join the faculty of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. In 2007 he won the Man Booker International Prize.



Follow this link to Achebe reading his poem:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxTUico43qQ>
[Accessed 16/01/2017]



When you think of vultures, what images or words come to mind? What are the connotations of these images or words?

1. 1.1 Write a brief 1–4 word title for each stanza.
1.2 What do you notice about how Achebe's thoughts unfold over the course of the poem?
2. Why does Achebe describe the vulture's head as 'bashed-in'?
3. 3.1 Sketch the 'broken / bone of a dead tree' that the speaker observes in the first stanza. What words could you use to describe this tree?
3.2 What is the effect of the line break between 'broken' and 'bone'?
4. What seeming contradictions does the poet notice in the vultures' behaviours?
5. How does the poet's use of 'charnel-house' in stanza two link the ideas in the first and third stanzas?
6. In his personification of love in the second stanza, why does the poet describe love as having 'her face / turned to the wall'?
7. In the third stanza, the poet refers to Belsen, a famous concentration camp in Nazi Germany at which approximately 50,000 people were exterminated, including Anne Frank and her sister Margot. Most of the victims were Jews, but gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and political prisoners also died there. The words Achebe chooses to describe the daily events at Belsen are deeply shocking. What is it about the phrase 'fumes of / human roast' that disturbs us? And how is this contrasted with the later actions of the Commandant in the stanza?
8. What is the effect of the poet's copious use of enjambment throughout the poem? (Think about the connections he makes in 'Vultures' between superficially dissimilar things.)
9. In the final stanza, the reader is offered two choices of how to respond to Achebe's thoughts here. What are these two choices? Which do you choose, and why?
10. What is this poem about, precisely? Vultures? Concentration camps? Or something more universal and profound? Explain your answer.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS: *Vultures*

1. 1.1 Personal response. Suggestions: 'Affectionate Scavengers'; 'Love in Strange Places'; 'Chocolate and Concentration Camps'; 'Choices'.
1.2 Achebe makes a leap of imagination from his observation of vultures being affectionate to the seeming impossibility of concentration camp guards being warm and loving family men.
2. Achebe's overall description of the vultures is extraordinarily vivid and disturbing. This particular image, as well as being an accurate depiction of how the heads look, emphasises the violence emanating from the birds. There are no 'soft edges' on these creatures.
3. 3.1 Answers will vary according to artistic ability – this is really an attempt to get learners to picture the scene, using Achebe's imagery. The best drawing would reflect words such as 'skeletal', 'dark' 'bare'.
3.2 The line break causes you to focus on the brokenness of the bones of this tree – and prepares the reader for the grim reality of the vultures' eating habits described in the next lines.
4. He observes the affection the birds seem to show for each other as the vultures incline their heads towards each other – and then he recalls the horror of what they have been doing: [picking] 'the eyes of a swollen / corpse'; [eating] the 'things in its bowel'.
5. A charnel house is defined (by Merriam Webster) as *a building or vault in which corpses or bones are piled*. It is very often used to describe Nazi concentration camps, such as Belsen. So it links the 'swollen corpse' of the vultures' food fest to the corpses that are the Commandant's handiwork in stanza three.
6. Usually, one turns one's face to the wall in despair. It is as if they don't want to be reminded of their surroundings or of their earlier behaviour as the memory causes pain or discomfort.
7. In order to efficiently deal with the tens of thousands of corpses produced in Hitler's 'Final Solution', the corpses were burned; the smell of this clings to the Commandant. But juxtaposing the words 'human' and 'roast' makes the act seem almost cannibalistic. Further horror is piled on by the contrast of the man stopping at 'the wayside sweet shop' to buy some chocolate for his child at home.
8. Enjambment is a poetic term that describes moving from one line to another without a terminating punctuation mark. The whole poem is filled with these – and they reflect the smooth transition between ideas that Achebe achieves here: from vultures in Africa, to love being found in unlikely places, to thoughts of the concentration camps of Europe. The poem moves freely as does one's mind from subject to subject.
9. The two choices are '**praise**' – that love can be found even in 'icy caverns of a cruel / heart' – and '**despair**' that such a heart can also hold 'the perpetuity of evil'. [Answers to the second part of the question will be of a personal nature.]
10. The poem seems to be about the extraordinary ability of the human heart to encompass simultaneously both immense evil and love/tenderness. Like the vultures, feeding on carrion, but caring for each other, we seem somehow to be able to assimilate (or process) these contradictions. Whether that is a positive thing or a horrifying one is up to each of us to decide.



Funeral Blues ~ W. H. Auden

This poem is now most famous for its rendition at the funeral in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. It is well worth watching the movie again to see this reading, which is among the most moving scenes in recent film history.

Auden first published it in 1936 as part of a play, *The Ascent of F6*. It formed part of a quartet of poems called "Four Songs to Miss Hedli Anderson" and was written in the style of the Berlin Jazz Cabaret.

Since its appearance in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* it has become one of the favourite poems to be found on the Web - check out the Internet for some interesting interpretations and discussions.

1. a) List the expressions of endings – e.g. 'stop' (all the clocks) found through the poem.
b) What is their cumulative effect?
2. What is the impact of the opening line?
3. a) What is the name of the figure of speech which imagines the physical world to reflect emotions of the poet?
b) How does Auden use it here?
4. How is the total involvement of the speaker of this poem with her lover communicated through the poem?
5. Describe the rhythm of the poem and explain how the rhythm reflects the subject matter?
6. The language of the poem is characterised by its simplicity.
Why does Auden choose to use such simple language?
7. If you were to set this poem to music, what sort of music would it be?
8. What does Auden communicate to us through *Funeral Blues* of the nature of love and loss?



Consider the use of the word 'Blues' in the title and the various meanings it may have.

Think about it:

In the answers, you'll notice that we have assumed that the speaker is a woman.
Do you agree? Does it matter?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS: *Funeral Blues*

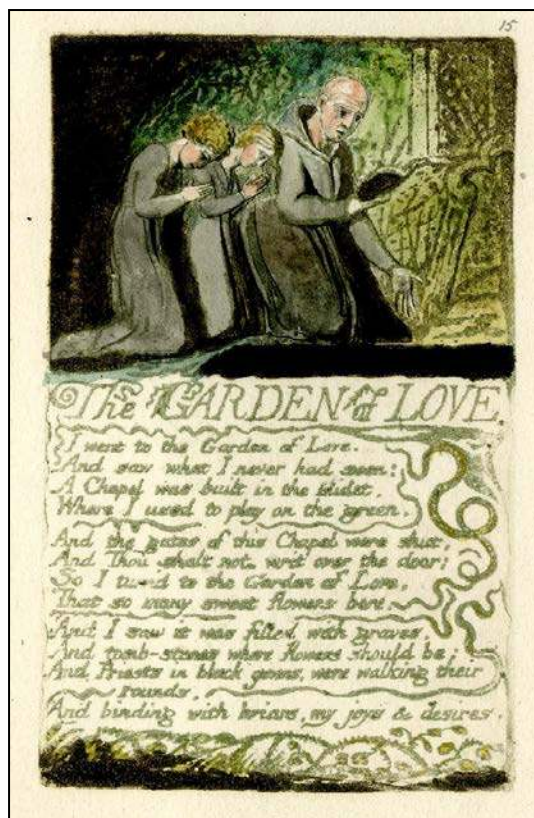
1. a) *Stop; cut off; prevent; silence; put out; pack up; dismantle; pour away; sweep up*
b) The cumulative effect of these expressions of endings is to emphasise the way the speaker senses that her world has come to an end with the death of her lover.
2. Auden's opening line (*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone*) is a command to the world to stop time itself, and to halt the process of communication that is such an important part of being human. In her loss, the speaker no longer wishes to take part in everyday life and wants to remove herself from the contact of others.
3. a) Pathetic fallacy
b) Auden employs this figure of speech to emphasise the totality of the loss his speaker feels – it is as if everything in nature should reflect her loss e.g. the sky without the moon and stars is blank and bleak to reflect her anguish.
4. '*He was my North, my South, my East and West, / My working week and my Sunday rest*'. All aspects of the speaker's life were entwined with her lover's: her time, her place, her very sense of being are lost with him.
5. The rhythm in stanzas 1 and 2 is sharp and staccato (almost like a sharp drumbeat) and this reflects her urgent need for the whole world to respond to her pain and sense of loss. The rhythm in stanzas 3 and 4 is slow and measured which reflects the speaker's feeling of despair and anguish.
6. All the greatest and most deeply felt human emotions are best reflected in simple language; to attempt to use overblown descriptions or highbrow vocabulary to communicate pain doesn't work, and sounds false. The most sincere words of loss are the simplest. Also, all people feel a sense of loss at some stage and the language should not prevent some people from understanding or appreciating it.
7. Personal response. Before you answer, consider the title of the poem and the various rhythms.
8. On a very basic level, Auden shows us that the deeper the love, the greater the sense of loss. Because this lover was so enmeshed in the details of her love's life, his death comes as a blow that is almost impossible to survive. It seems untenable that existence can continue – not only for her but for all of us – after his death. Thus loss can kill hope for the one who is left behind – the real meaning of despair.



(So *is* it 'better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all', as the saying goes?)

The Garden of Love ~ William Blake

William Blake (1757-1827), is famous today as an imaginative and original poet, painter, engraver and mystic. His poetry is usually seen as part of the Romantic Movement that included such poets as Coleridge and Wordsworth. But Blake's work, especially his poetry, was largely ignored during his own lifetime, and took many years to gain widespread appreciation. He was a visionary, who even as a child claimed to have seen 'bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars' in a tree near his home. As a young man, he was apprenticed to a printmaker and worked on murals and engravings in Westminster Cathedral. In 1782, he married Catherine Boucher, who became a rock of stability for the volatile poet and engraver. Although always in demand as an artist, Blake's intensely felt personal beliefs and radical politics meant that he was often attacked by his more staid contemporaries. His work received some negative reviews and he descended into illness and paranoia. But he remained a dedicated artist and thinker to the end, and centuries after his death has been recognised as a giant of the imagination and a remarkable poet.



Songs of Innocence and Experience

Blake experimented with combining poetry and image in a process he invented himself in 1789, which used different ways of printing. His most well-known work, of which 'The Garden of Love' forms a part, was 'The Songs of Innocence and Experience', originally produced in 1794 as illuminated books, engraved, hand-printed, and coloured by Blake himself. The text of the poem and the accompanying illustration formed an integrated whole, each adding meaning to the other. (For a look at some more of the illustrated versions of the poems, visit the Tate Gallery's website: <http://tinyurl.com/zc4kdxk>.) [Accessed 17/01/2017] In the work, Blake investigates, as he puts it in the subtitle, 'the two contrary states of the human soul'. Despite the simple rhythms and rhyming patterns, and the images of children, animals and flowers, the Songs are often troubling, argumentative or satirical, and reflect Blake's deeply held political beliefs and spiritual experience. Blake's vision embraces radical subjects such as poverty, child labour and abuse, the repressive nature of the state and the church, as well as the right of children to be treated as individuals with their own desires. Many of the poems in Songs of Experience respond to counterparts in Songs of Innocence.

Questions

1. What or where do you think the 'Garden of Love' is? Is it a reference to a real place or a metaphorical state of being?
2. What 'sweet flowers' (line 8) do you think such a Garden would grow?
3. Which social institution does Blake blame for desecrating this Garden? In what ways?

4. As one of Blake's poems from the collection 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' which of the two 'contrary states of the human soul' does the poem reflect? Why do you say so?
5. Blake makes use of a seemingly simple metric scheme in this poem – but pay attention to where he breaks or changes this metre. Scan the first and second stanzas. Where do you find the metre breaks? What is the effect of this break in the rhythm?
6. The final lines of the poem differ in two ways from the rest of the poem.
 - 6.1 Identify these two ways?
 - 6.2 Note how these lines contain internal rhymes. Which words are linked by rhyme in each line, and why did the poet choose to do this, in your view?
7. Comment on Blake's use of assonance (vowel sound repetition) in the final lines. What effect does it have?
8. Some critics have noted a progression (more perhaps a regression) over the course of the poem from carefree innocence to restricted adulthood. How does the vocabulary of the poem support this view? (Consider the connotations of those word choices.)



Think About It

What social institutions might Blake take issue with in today's world?
Explain your answer.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS: The Garden of Love

1. The obvious answer is the Garden of Eden – Adam and Eve’s dwelling place before the Fall in which they separated themselves from God by sin. But it could equally be the innocence of childhood before that innocence is lost as humans grow up.
2. Personal response. Suggestions: joy, freedom, love, innocence.
3. Blake blames the Church (‘a Chapel was built in the midst’) for destroying this Garden, by applying punitive rules and laws that prevent humans from living in freedom and innocence. [Note the use of capital letters.]
4. The two contrary states are innocence and experience – this poem is clearly a Song of Experience, filled with images of restriction (‘binding’) and pain rather than carefree children at play.
5. The metre breaks most noticeably in the second line of the second stanza: ‘And Thou Shalt not. writ over the door’. This break in the rhythm effectively draws the reader’s attention to the harsh sounds of the opening phrase of many (seven, in fact) of the Ten Commandments. These monosyllables are all stressed, and we feel the heaviness of the burden the Church (in Blake’s view) has placed on its children.
6. 6.1 The final lines are longer (contain an extra ‘foot’ in terms of metre*). There is a change in the rhyme scheme with no end-rhyme. The rhythm in the last two lines depends on the internal rhyme.
6.2 The words linked are *gowns* and *rounds*, and *briars* and *desires*. Blake presents the Church as a destroyer of innocence: the priests in gowns walk in a ceaseless enclosing of humans’ natural and innocent desires with thorny rules and punishments.
7. The long ‘ow’ sounds and the long ‘i’ sounds in the rhyming words are mournful, reminding the reader of a human cry of pain or distress.
8. The first stanza has ‘love’ and ‘play’ and ‘green’; the second has these words too, but also ‘shut’ and ‘not’. By the time we are in the third stanza, the negative connotations are thickening, in words such as ‘graves’, ‘tombstones’, ‘binding’, ‘briars’.



*If you are a poetry nerd, you might be interested to note that the name for the metre he employs is ‘anapaestic trimeter’ – three anapaests (˘ ˘ / - unstressed, unstressed, stressed) in each line.

The Zulu Girl ~ Roy Campbell

Roy Campbell (1901 - 1957) was born in Durban and was educated at Durban High School. He loved the outdoor life and was a keen horseman, fisherman, hunter, and swimmer. He left South Africa as a young man to study at Oxford and travelled extensively in Europe, where, as poet, cowboy, fisherman, Spanish Civil War partisan, raconteur, and translator, he became a legend in his own time. He published many volumes of poetry including the long poem *The Flaming Terrapin* (1924) which established his reputation as a skilled craftsman of traditional verse. In this poem, Campbell describes a working Zulu mother breast-feeding her child in the heat of the day. His use of simile and metaphor makes the poem rich in imagery.

1. a) What is the girl doing in the first stanza?
Discuss this situation, bearing the child's welfare in mind.

- b) Which words tell you of the extreme heat of the day?

2. What evidence is there in the second stanza that this is not a healthy situation for the child?



3. '... a ring of shadow pooled / By thorn trees ...'
Explain how 'pooled' constitutes a metaphor?



Remember: when explaining a metaphor, always say what two things are being compared, and then what they have in common (in what way/s they are similar).

4. Identify the two similes in stanza 3 and explain what Campbell is suggesting about child and mother in each one.
5. Campbell's use of the word 'Yet' at the beginning of stanza 4 suggests a change – the peaceful scene is not quite what it seems. Explain what the child 'imbibes' from its mother's milk.
6. In the final stanza, the Zulu girl's body is compared to a hill or to a cloud, both with very different connotations. Explain how each of the similes indicates very different ideas.

7. What do you think Campbell is referring to in 'the coming harvest'?

GLOSSARY:

smoulder: burn slowly, without flame
langours: feelings which lack energy, are slow-moving
imbibes: drinks
ferocity: fierceness
sullen: passively resentful

SUGGESTED ANSWERS: The Zulu Girl

1. a) She, along with a group of labourers, is working in a field, hoeing the soil. Her baby is slung over her back while she works. (Discussion question: the exposure to the extreme heat, the lack of any mental stimulation, the irritation of the flies – none of this is good for the child.)
b) ‘the hot red acres smoulder’ and ‘the sweating gang’. The fact that the child is ‘tormented by the flies’ is also partly indicative of the heat.
2. The presence of ticks is disconcerting. When Campbell describes the mother as moving her nails through his hair ‘with sharp electric clicks’ one assumes that she is removing insects or even ticks from the child’s hair. Ticks are serious disease-carriers – a fever from a tick-bite would almost certainly kill a child.
3. In this metaphor, Campbell compares the area of shadow cast by the thorn-trees to a pool of water. Pooled can also mean ‘brought together’ which describes how the thorn trees are clustered together to form a surrounding shade break from the sun. Pool, with its connotations of water, also suggests coolness and refreshment.
4. ‘Tugs like a puppy’ – the baby’s mouth is compared to that of a puppy as he drinks from his mother’s breast. Puppies tug enthusiastically at things they get their teeth into, so the simile suggests the child’s hunger and determination to drink.
‘Like a broad river’ – the mother’s feelings are compared to a wide river moving slowly along. Her feelings run deep despite her lack of energy, just like a broad river which appears smooth and calm and slow on the surface but moves strongly beneath. (The image of ‘still waters run deep’ helps explain this comparison.)
5. The child drinks in the heat and fierceness of the old Zulu tribes. They may have been defeated, but their passion and resentment still burn inside them and that cannot be stopped.
6. In comparing her body to a hill, the poet suggests protectiveness – the child is like the village resting in the shade of the hill. In comparing her to a storm cloud, however, the suggestions are more menacing. She looms above him like a cloud about to unleash ‘terrible’ storms and heavy downpours. While it sounds threatening, like any storm clouds are, it is also life-giving, as the waters bring on the new growth that will ultimately be harvested as food.
7. On one level, ‘the coming harvest’ extends the agricultural idea of reaping the rewards of labour in the fields, aided by nature’s supply of rain. But continuing the metaphor of the child drinking in the mother’s passions, the image suggests that it will be the child’s generation that will ‘bear the fruit’ of those passions – they will rebel against their previous defeat and take charge once again. Campbell’s image is prophetic here.

Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang:

A Person is a Person Because of Other People

~ Jeremy Cronin

Jeremy Cronin (1949-) was born in Durban but has spent most of his life in the Cape. While he was studying Philosophy at UCT he joined the Radical Student Society and was later recruited into the then banned SA Communist Party. After obtaining a Masters degree at the Sorbonne, he began lecturing in the Philosophy Department at UCT and working in the propaganda unit of the SACP. His job there was to prepare and distribute pamphlets for both the SACP and the ANC. He was arrested under the Terrorism and Internal Security Act, tried in 1976 and was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment in Pretoria Central. During his time in prison he wrote a number of poems of which this is one. Because the writing of poetry was banned 'inside' he had to either carefully conceal the poems or memorise them. After his release he published the poems in a collection entitled *Inside* (1984) and it won the Ingrid Jonker Poetry Prize. Before 1994 he lived in exile with his second wife and two children. (His first wife died of a brain tumour while he was in prison.) After 1994 he became an MP and is presently Deputy Minister of Public Works, the Deputy General Secretary of the SACP and a member of the National Executive of the ANC.

1. Refer to lines 1–2. Why would the poet use a mirror this way?
2. Read lines 3–4. Explain the change from 'person' in line 3 to 'prisoner' in line 4.
3. In lines 5–6 the mirror has begun to fulfil its purpose. Explain.
4. Lines 7–19 describe a conversation of sorts.
 - 4.1 Why are lines 12, 15 and 19 enclosed in brackets and placed some way away from the margin?
 - 4.2 Comment on the way the 'conversation' recorded in these lines (12, 15 and 19) progresses.
 - 4.3 Why is the repeated and hyphenated 'slow-slow' (line 18) better than just 'slow'?
5. How is the section of the poem in lines 20–23 different from the rest of the poem? [Note that there are several ways.]
6. Describe the tone of lines 20 and 22
7. Comment on the apparent contradiction of 'talkative' (line 24) and 'quietly' (line 25).
8. The pattern of the 'conversation' changes in the final lines. Explain how and then say what effect is created by doing this.



After answering these questions, find a partner and act out the 'conversation' which is silent except for the exchange with the warder. You will have to work out details such as positioning, angle of mirror, how the poet responds to the signs etc. Remember that the mirror would not be a big one.



How did it make you feel? Did this help you to get some sense of what such a 'conversation' means to a prisoner?

9. In the light of the whole poem, discuss the significance of the title and its importance in this context. Note that another translation of the words is: I am because you are.
10. In what way could a theme of this poem be appearance and reality?

FOR GENERAL DISCUSSION:

What other kinds of language/communication are humans capable of besides words? Try having a 'conversation' using one of them.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS: Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang: A Person is a Person Because of Other People

1. The poet is in a prison cell and thus is cut off from other people. The mirror allows him to see something of the world outside of his cell. The mirror enables him to see further than he is otherwise able to.
2. 'Person' is a neutral word whereas 'prisoner' is very specific. The poet recognises the man as a person before labelling him as a 'prisoner'. If one did not already know that Cronin is in prison one would need to be told that this is a prisoner not a warder or outside worker.
3. The mirror is creating a connection between the two prisoners because it enables them to see each other. They know they are not alone. They can support each other – not physically but emotionally.
4. 4.1 The brackets enclose how the poet interprets the prisoner's sign language. This language is obviously something that has been worked out to help them communicate without being noticed. They are hidden secret signs and the brackets help to convey this. The placing of the lines draws attention to the words as well as showing the distance between the two prisoners.
4.2 As with the spoken language, which is indicated by italics (lines 20 & 22), in line 12 the poet tells the reader 'This means' and then writes the sign language in italics. In line 15 the reader is given the translation directly. In line 19 the first word which is signed by the prisoner in the passage is italicised and then the poet expands on what it means to him so that the reader understands more. The reader is thus drawn into the 'conversation' and to these two inmates, as they are drawn closer to each other by this exchange.
4.3 The repetition slows down the reading so that one gets a better sense of the prisoner's movements. He is taking his time with his work in order to carry on this 'conversation'.
5. These lines record actual words: an exchange between the prisoner and a warder who is watching him. The speakers are in a very different relationship from that of the silent speakers. The use of Afrikaans, the different placement of the spoken words and the use of italics highlight this difference. There are no brackets so it seems like an open conversation but actually the prisoner is concealing the truth.
6. The warder's tone is peremptory while the prisoner's is subservient, placatory – the 'No.' indicates that as well as the word 'baas'.
7. The 'talkative' hand has been using sign language until the warder interrupts the exchange. Now, in order to make a final statement of encouragement, the prisoner must slip that hand 'quietly' behind his back so that the warder doesn't notice what it is 'saying'. This shows up the nature of the conditions under which the prisoners live. It creates a tension, wondering what the hand is going to say next. By telling the reader to watch as well ('now watch') it makes him or her complicit in this secretive action.
8. This time the 'words' come first and the sign ends the poem, creating a powerful conclusion. The inclusion of 'brother', even though he is white, indicates the solidarity between political prisoners. The 'black fist' was a sign of the anti-apartheid movement and the word 'Amandla!' (power) is associated with it.
9. The title encompasses the idea of *Ubuntu* – the connectedness that exists or should exist between people and the need for human kindness. As such, the title suggests that one needs other people to truly have an identity, to be recognised or seen by another or others, and also that there is great support in being part of a group. In prison a person particularly needs companionship. Here he knows he is not completely isolated, that he can rely on others to give him strength to cope with his situation and to keep him human. The title records the value and importance of others to provide group strength.
10. In this poem there appear to be two entirely separate prisoners but in reality they are joined in conversation. The prisoner doing the communicating appears to be just slowly doing a job he has been ordered to do but actually he is using the opportunity presented by the mirror to make contact with another prisoner in a cell.

Some other kinds of language/communication:

- *Body language*
- *Facial signals*
- *Tone of voice also affects communication*
- *Codes e.g. Morse code*
- *Braille*
- *Hand signing for the deaf (often seen on TV)*



Somewhere i have never travelled ...

~ e e cummings

Edward Estlin Cummings - there is some debate in academic circles at present about whether he wished his name always to be represented in lower case - is an American poet whose work is some of the most exuberant and joyous to be found in the English language. He experiments with words and how they are presented on the page in an exciting manner. He graduated from Harvard with an M.A. in 1916, and then volunteered as a member of the ambulance corps that went to Europe to fight in the First World War. He was wrongfully imprisoned during the war for three months, an experience which gave him further impetus to write. After the war, he stayed in Paris for some years painting and writing, but eventually returned to America. A short extract from the preface to his collection 'Poems 1923 - 1954' follows: '*The poems to come are for you and me and are not for mostpeople - it's no use trying to pretend that mostpeople and ourselves are alike. Mostpeople have less in common with ourselves than the squarerootofminusone. You and I are human beings; mostpeople are snobs...*'



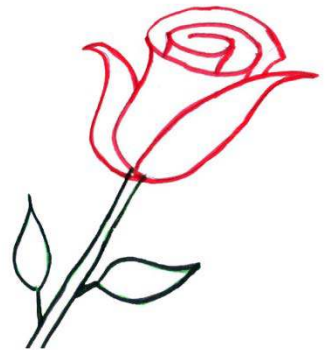
Before you read his poem, think about a time when you went somewhere you had never been before. How did you feel before you set off on your journey? What went through your mind while you were travelling? What did you gain from this new experience?

Now read the poem twice: once to get an overall feel for the poem and a second time taking careful note of the unusual punctuation.

1. Who is the speaker addressing in this poem?
2. What is he saying to this person?
3. Cummings uses a number of contradictions and opposites in the poem: closing/opening; fragility/power; large or vast/small.

How do each of these contradictions and opposites help us to understand what the speaker is revealing about the way he feels about this person:

- a) closing and opening?
 - b) fragility and power?
 - c) vastness and smallness?
4. Discuss the effectiveness of the following figures of speech in the context of the poem:
 - 4.1 your eyes have their silence
 - 4.2 you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens / (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose
 - 4.3 as when the heart of this flower imagines / the snow carefully everywhere descending
 - 4.4 nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands
 5. How has this poem contributed to your understanding of love?



SUGGESTED ANSWERS: *somewhere i have never travelled ...*

1. He is addressing someone he cares deeply about. There is a sensuous quality that suggests a lover. [Some academics say that the poem was written following the birth of his daughter, hence the reference to 'frail' and 'fragility'. Others insist it was an ode to his second wife, Anne Barton. There are some who claim it to be an attempt to transcend sexuality, lust and love while others feel it is a poem of praise, and an exploration of God's power to touch our lives. See if you can find evidence for these points of view before you decide for yourself.]
2. He is saying he loves this person and that the strength of his love is beyond his own understanding. He compares his love to a journey to somewhere he has never been before suggesting that the intensity of his love/emotion is a new and extraordinary experience for him. His attraction for this person is so great; he takes this journey 'gladly'.
3. a) closing and opening: The speaker tells us that this person can 'easily uncloset' him suggesting that he/she has the power to open up his heart. His love is so intense he is willing to die for him/her: 'if your wish be to close me, i and / my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly'.
b) fragility and power: The delicate nature of the one he loves is what makes his love more powerful. He sees this love, in all its textures and colours, as beyond the measure of what is known or understood in the world. This love is everlasting.
c) vastness and smallness: His love is as vast as countries but there is a paradox in the fact that this power is wielded by 'small' hands. It seems beyond his comprehension that someone with such a delicate touch can have so much power over him.
4. 4.1 'your eyes have their silence' – this personification brings life to the eyes highlighting that mysterious and inexplicable pull one feels when drawn to someone. Our 'eyes' are the windows into our soul and by looking into this person's eyes, the speaker expresses his desire to be one with this person. The 'silence' suggests that this experience (of loving someone so) is beyond words. [Have you ever experienced this i.e. looking deeply into someone's eyes and finding yourself totally speechless?]
4.2 'you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens / (touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose' – this simile compares how this person has the capacity to open him up emotionally in the way spring opens its first rose. The transformative power of spring is miraculous which speaks volumes about the way he feels about this person. When one bears in mind that a rose is a symbol of love, this image becomes even more powerful. The personification of spring (note that Spring has a capital letter) emphasizes the skillful, mysterious way in which this love is able to touch and transform him. It also intimates the physical aspects of this relationship.
4.3 'as when the heart of this flower imagines / the snow carefully everywhere descending' – in this simile, he compares the way a flower closes up when it snows to his own closing up at the will of the person he loves. This comparison emphasizes the power this person has over him while the personification of the flower, as something with a heart, reminds us of the speaker's intense feelings.
4.4 'nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands' – in this example of personification, the rain is described as having small hands. This comparison highlights the paradox of the immense power this person has over the speaker despite being fragile. The reference to 'hands' is also a reminder of the physical aspects in the relationship. [Find other examples of touch in the poem.]
5. Personal answer. [It is difficult for us to fully understand how people fall in love. What is it about that one person that manages to touch your whole being and open you up to one another? It is this experience which Cummings attempts to capture in this poem but then admits that the power of love remains a mystery. During a series of lectures, Cummings summed up his thoughts on the subject of love: "I am someone who proudly and humbly affirms that love is the mystery-of-mysteries, and that nothing measurable matters 'a very good God damn'; that 'an artist, a man, a failure' is no mere whenfully accreting mechanism, but a givingly eternal complexity – neither some soulless and heartless ultrapredatory infra-animal nor any understandingly knowing and believing and thinking automaton, but a naturally and miraculously whole human being – a feelingly illimitable individual; whose only happiness is to transcend himself, whose every agony is to grow."]

A Hard Frost ~ Cecil Day Lewis

Cecil Day Lewis (1904 -1972) was born in Ireland but spent most of his life in England. He studied at Oxford and made his reputation as a lyric poet with his first collection of poems entitled *Beechen Vigil* published in 1925. In Oxford in the 1930s he became part of a group of poets with left-wing sympathies, being influenced by T.S. Eliot and Marx. He was even a member of the Communist Party for a time. World War II broke up the group and tempered his political views. His poetic temperament was more romantic: he felt more at home with nature poetry and personal lyrics. He was a lecturer at Cambridge and later taught poetry at Oxford, spending a year as Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University. He was also a respected critic and translator of classical writers such as Virgil (*The Aeneid*). Under the pseudonym, Nicholas Blake, he published a popular series of mystery stories (19 of them), one per year. In 1968 he was made Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom, a position he held until his death. His father had made his surname Day-Lewis, but Cecil removed the hyphen, feeling it was too pretentious. He is the father of the actor, Daniel Day Lewis, and the film maker and TV chef, Tamasin Day Lewis.

VOCABULARY

changeling: there used to be a belief about children who were different in some way. It was believed that the real child had been stolen by the fairies in infancy and they had left this child in its place, hence a changeling.

precocious: grown up before one's time, maturing earlier than usual

amorphous: without a clearly defined shape or form

fairings: a very old fashioned word meaning a small present bought at a country fair



This is a very English poem in some ways, particularly the references to flowers that we do not see in South Africa. These illustrations will help you to picture what the poet is talking about in the first stanza. One needs to be able to visualise the scene he describes.



<https://auntiedogmasgardenspot.wordpress.com/tag/irises/>



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Willow_catkin_2_aka.jpg



<https://za.pinterest.com/pin/508343876662035409/>



Line drawing of winter aconite



<https://za.pinterest.com/pin/484207397417979535/>



<http://tinyurl.com/z9yerd5>



Read the poem carefully and take note of all the imagery that is used, particularly personification, but also metaphor and alliteration. Now answer the following questions.

1. Frost is a deposit of small white ice crystals formed on damp or wet surfaces when the temperature falls below freezing. What does the adjective 'Hard' in the title tell you about *this* frost?
2. In this poem personification is used very effectively, giving human qualities to the frost, the countryside and, briefly, the sun. Refer to lines 1–2 to comment on the actions of this hard frost. Begin by listing the verbs which carry the personification connected with the changeling, the object of the actions.
3. Why is this changeling 'a precocious/ Image of spring, too brilliant to be true'? Pay attention to the underlined words.
4. Why is there a colon at the end of line 3?
5. Discuss the textures of the various frost flowers in lines 4–5
6. What has happened to the 'elms behind the house'?
7. The 'mist that hangs in the valley below' is described in a simile in lines 8–9. How does the simile take the description of a winter scene to another level?
8. In your own words explain what happens when the 'sun looks out' (line 10)?
9. 9.1 The poet addresses the frost as 'Mockery spring'. In the context of lines 11–14, what tone is apparent here? Give a reason for your answer.
9.2 What does the personification of the countryside in these lines add to the way the poet feels about this frost, beautiful as it makes things look? You will have to discuss the image first in order to reach a conclusion.
10. A new idea begins in the middle of a line in the middle of stanza 2. Why does the poet call all that he has described as such beauty up till then 'this flounce and filigree of death' (line 15)? Does the alliteration add anything to the line? Discuss.
11. Comment on the word 'real' (line 16) in the context of the line and in the poem as a whole.
12. The frost is seen in a different way in lines 17–20. Paraphrase the lines, making clear the different image of the frost.

TO DISCUSS:

- ✕ Is the first section of this poem only critical/negative?
- ✕ This poem plays with the concepts of appearance and reality as well as with ideas of life and death.
- ✕ How does Lewis use the extended metaphor to effect in this poem?



SUGGESTED ANSWERS: A Hard Frost

1. This is a severe form of frost. It suggests that things are frozen solid because the temperature has dropped very low. Perhaps this has happened after rain, when everything is very wet and more susceptible to frosting.
2. The verbs are: came, stole and left. The frost is a fairy or magical creature who has come secretly in the night and taken away the winter countryside the poet knows well, leaving in its place what looks like early spring. It has done this by transforming everything into something new and beautiful.
3. An image is a picture of something, in this case it is a picture of spring, not the real thing. It is precocious because, like a child who is 'forward' / behaving in a way too mature for her age, it is still winter not spring. This changeling is not natural as it is too brilliant to be true. Here 'brilliant' does not refer to intellect (which is often how the word is used for children) but to something shiny, bright and hard. All these adjectives aren't associated with spring but with the glittering whiteness of frost. All this indicates that the changeling is only pretending to be spring.
4. The colon introduces a list of what the frost has created which could be seen as flowers but actually aren't.
5. White lilac is on the window pane so it appears as a pattern which is flat and two dimensional; the grass blades are so coated with frost they have become furry, seemingly soft but bumpy to the touch, while the may bush is like a softly spreading snowdrift on the hedge. There is so much of it, it 'loads' or weighs the hedge down.
6. Their branches and leaves have turned into crystal-like flowers or blossoms (a word associated with spring). They seem like flowers which have grown out of the mist below.
7. The mist, having no clearly defined shape, reminds the poet of the raw material of creation. The words move this particular picture of a specific scene in nature to a wider, more universal idea. The words 'blind tissue' refer to his view of the very beginnings of life on earth before anything was formed into particular species.
8. When the sun appears out of an overcast sky, the scene is suddenly bathed in sunlight. It makes the hard frost glitter and gleam, shooting off light ('blazing') as a diamond does when it catches the light.
9. 9.1 The tone is strongly and negatively critical, accusatory, disparaging, perhaps even indignant, because the frost has turned the countryside into a bride dressed in white just for a short while, then taken it all away (by melting), leaving only the plants which flower in winter. The exclamation mark in line 14 emphasises this tone.
9.2 The countryside is described as an unsophisticated young country girl who briefly becomes a bride and then is left, cheated of her finery. All she has now are the ordinary little plants, the meagre little gifts, which flower in winter. It makes her sad and unhappy. The poet feels that the frost is a cheat and a tease. It doesn't seem fair to get the girl's (the countryside's) hopes up then let her down like this.
10. All the delicate frost crystals ('flounce' [frills] and 'filigree' [delicate ornamental metal work]) making such beauty cannot survive – they melt away as it grows warmer (die) and perhaps also kill the plants that are not strong enough to resist the ice cold, unlike the aconite and snowdrop. The alliteration of 'f' and 'l' creates a sense of lightness and attitude. It is as though the frost is showing off. The word 'flounce' also has connotations of showing off highlighting the poet's disapproval of 'this behaviour'.
11. This word marks the difference between what has changed above the ground and what is changing below the ground. One can see what is happening on the surface, a transformation or change that is ephemeral. What is unseen is what is real and important.
12. Here, deep underground, the frost is at work in a positive way. It does not give up its task because it is 'worrying' the 'clods' of earth which are holding the seeds tightly. 'Worrying' tells us that it does not give up, even though the clods are clenching the seed. It just keeps at it. It is forcing the clods to let go of their tight grip in order that, when warmer days arrive (spring), they will be able to grow out of the soil into the air. The seeds are the future and the frost is giving them space to get ready for spring growth, to 'breathe' (a long, gentle sounding word).

Felix Randal ~ Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was born in Stratford, Essex, England. His family members were very religious High Anglicans. When he was studying Classics at Oxford University, he converted to Catholicism. He went on to become a Jesuit priest and much of his poetry involved exploring his Christian faith. He often felt torn between his intense desire to enjoy natural beauty and to celebrate its diversity, and the more serious side of his devout faith.



In terms of history, Hopkins is considered a late Victorian, but his work was not published until about thirty years after his death. In terms of subject matter, he had Romantic leanings: passionate faith and an intense love of nature. In terms of style and innovation, Hopkins is more modern than many modernists. He loved innovating and played with alliteration and assonance, internal rhyme and an often surprising use of syntax and rhythm. His diction often included neologisms or the use of existing words in surprising contexts.

Hopkins was somewhat reluctant to be a poet. While he lived, he only shared his poetry with some family members, and a small circle of friends. It was thanks to his close friend, Robert Bridges, that his work was eventually published in 1918. Although he could have sought fame and acclaim during his lifetime (he certainly had the skill and flair), he chose to become a Jesuit priest. In 1867, he made a vow to stop writing poetry and he destroyed all his poems, not writing again until 1875.

Why the change? In 1875, a German ship, the *Deutschland* was wrecked during a violent storm near the Thames River. Among those who drowned, were five nuns. Hopkins felt compelled to write a poem that would capture this incident.

He described how he ... 'long had haunting [his] ear the echo of a new rhythm ... not ... altogether new ...' This was his epiphany about sprung rhythm. The key idea of sprung rhythm was to write using a regular rhythm intended to imitate the rhythm of natural speech. He enjoyed playing with the sound effects of words and creating new words. One word he introduced is 'inscapes' which refers to the inner essence of poetic technique; a way of exploring the innermost distinctive nature of something or someone. Since the 1920s readers continue to be fascinated and enthralled by the technical and imaginative skill of Hopkins.

Vocabulary:

farrier – blacksmith
anointed – blessed, given a sacrament*
all road – in every way
fettle – make, repair
drayhorse – large, work horse

* The last sacrament involves a particular blessing – a sacred prayer just before someone dies.

In the Catholic context, the last rites are meant to prepare the dying person's soul for death, by providing absolution for sins by penance, sacramental grace and prayers for the relief of suffering through anointing, and the final administration of the Eucharist, known as 'Viaticum'. *Wikipedia*

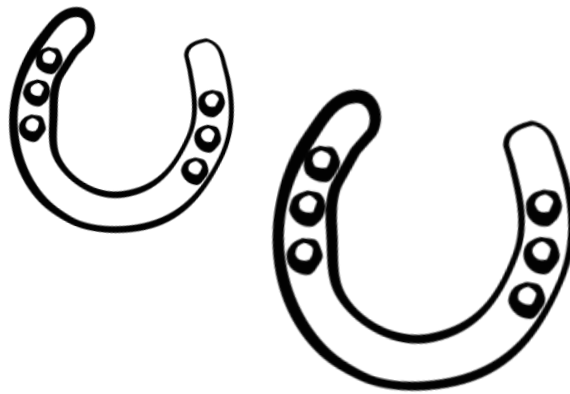


Preamble:

While reading the poem, think about the opposites (contrasts) and the similarities: the Liverpool slums where Felix died, as opposed to the forge where he worked. The slums compared to the privileged world of Oxford, where Hopkins studied. In a way, both Hopkins and Felix are dislocated: the tiny figure of Hopkins, as a ministering priest, compared to the almost gigantic figure of Felix and of him working hard in his forge, compared to the smaller, dwindling figure of a dying man in bed.

Questions:

1. Suggest words that show the strength and power of Felix.
2. How do we know that Felix did not die suddenly? Quote to support your answer.
3. Show how the poet indicates his closeness to Felix.
Suggest what sort of relationship they had.
4. How is a sense of serenity and faith conveyed in the poem?
5. Briefly comment on the sonnet's structure and rhyme scheme.
6. Discuss how the poet uses the sonnet form to structure his message.
7. Comment on the change in tone of voice in the last 6 lines of the poem.
8. What do you think the poet's intention was in writing this poem?



SUGGESTED ANSWERS: *Felix Randal*

1. 'big-boned', 'boisterous / years'; 'powerful amidst peers'
2. There is evidence of the man's suffering in the poem: 'watched his mould of man ... Pining, pining, till time ...'; 'Sickness broke him. Impatient he cursed at first, but mended ...'; 'Months earlier ...'
3. The use of personal pronouns ('my'); words suggesting a close bond as a priest (a counsellor doing 'my duty') and a spiritual mentor ('Being anointed'). Ultimately, they become close friends as indicated in the tenderness and warmth suggested by: 'Tendered', 'My tongue had taught thee comfort' and 'Thy tears that touched my heart ...'
4. The diction – 'God rest him', 'sweet reprieve', 'heavenlier heart' – presents the idea that faith has brought peace to a dying man.
5. The poem is a Petrarchan sonnet made up of an octave/octave and a sestet. The rhyme scheme is abba, abba, ccd, ccd.
6. **The octave** explores the character of Felix and his illness. In the first quatrain (set of 4 lines) the poet-speaker declares that Felix Randal is dead and recalls the illness with which Felix was afflicted. In the second quatrain, there is a sense of spiritual awareness. At first Felix was angry that he was sickly and cursed his lack of strength. But, over time, Felix became more patient with himself and more accepting of his disease. As his priest/spiritual advisor, Felix asks God for forgiveness for any sins that he might have committed.
The sestet expresses the poet's compassion for Felix Randal. He expresses his own sorrow for his loss. Nevertheless, he comes to understand that, no matter how sad it is to lose a parishioner, through the act of tending to that person, he has been privileged and blessed: he has had the opportunity to minister and offer comfort to someone in need. The poet-speaker is thus blessed, as a servant of God. Felix too, is blessed as a child of God.
7. The first section of the poem is rather matter of fact but in the last six lines (the sestet), the tone is initially sad (an expression of the poet's sorrow after losing someone he has grown so close to) and finally hopeful (as the poet takes comfort in the fact that Felix received the last sacrament). Thus, his soul is prepared for heaven. The mould or outer shell (the human body) is dead, but the spirit is risen. The reader is left with the memory of this muscular, labouring man, who worked hard as a blacksmith making horse shoes for the biggest horses. Now that he is dead, when people hear the sound of horse shoes ('steel sandals') on the cobbled streets, they will remember this admirable man.
8. Own answer – be flexible. [Suggestions: To express the poet's dismay at the death of a parishioner; to pay homage to Felix, this hardworking, determined man. / To share the poet's insight that it is a blessing for a priest to be able to offer blessings to his community. / While Hopkins mourns the loss of this remarkable, strong man, he is comforted by the fact that Felix led a good life, a life of service and is now free of suffering in Heaven.]



First Day after the War ~ Mazisi Kunene

Mazisi Kunene (1930-2006) was a South African poet whose inspiration was the history of the Zulu people, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the oral tradition of African literature. He was born in Durban and studied at the University of Natal. After graduating with a Masters Degree, he spent years in exile as a political activist and as an academic. After teaching at various universities in America, he was appointed as a lecturer in African Literature at the University of California (UCLA) in 1975. He was declared Poet Laureate of Africa by UNESCO in 1993, the same year that he returned to South Africa to take up a post at the University of KwaZulu Natal. He was named South Africa's Poet Laureate in 2005. Kunene's best known poem is 'Emperor Shaka the Great', a nationalistic epic based on Zulu oral tradition which he compiled in Zulu and later translated into English. It was Kunene's belief that true African literature should be written in African languages. Since he wrote most of his poems in Zulu first, an understanding of Zulu philosophy, rhetoric and symbols is necessary to fully appreciate them.



Can you remember being so excited about something that you wanted to tell everyone? Share this experience with your peers. Describe the moment of surprise and the emotions you felt when you fully realised what had just happened.

Assignment: Ask your grandparents what they remember about the first free election in South Africa in 1994. How did they feel on voting day? If they voted, ask them to describe the atmosphere inside and outside the voting stations.

Now read the poem carefully and answer the following questions.

1. The first line refers to a wedding.
 - 1.1 Given the title of the poem, why is this surprising?
 - 1.2 Describe the type of songs you hear at a 'wedding party' and why this is significant.
 - 1.3 Comment on the symbolic significance of a 'wedding party'.
2. Discuss the imagery of 'the soft light / Coiling round the young blades of grass'.
3. The speaker mentions 'footprints'. Who/what do you think he is referring to?
4. Suggest two reasons why the people run into 'open space', ululate 'to the mountains and the pathways' and call 'people from all the circles of the earth'.
5. Who is the 'old man' referred to in line 12?
6. In traditional Zulu culture, a 'first fruits ceremony' was held annually to celebrate Nomkhubulwane (the Zulu divinity in female form). What contemporary message is implied by the poet in lines 12-13?
7. How does the end of the war influence the people's relationships with others? Refer to lines 14-17 in your answer.
8. Comment on the effectiveness of the alliteration in 'travelling tall' in the last line of the poem.



SUGGESTED ANSWERS: First Day after the War

1. 1.1 We expect to hear the songs of a 'war party' (as in a group of warriors) rather than a 'wedding party'.
- 1.2 Happy songs/songs of joy; wedding songs are songs of celebration and the end of a war is an excellent reason to celebrate.
- 1.3. A wedding means the joining of two people and the start of a new life together. This suggests that (two) nations have come together at the end of the war. In Zulu culture, the 'wedding image' symbolises fertility and so this image also represents new life and the rebirth of a nation.
2. The words present an image of the soft light of daybreak slowly encompassing the young blades of grass like a snake. This gives us the idea that the people are slowly coming around to the idea. Although they have heard it is the end of the war, and are filled with hope, they are still not able to believe that it is really happening. [In Zulu poetry, green leaves symbolise new life. In this instance, the young blades of grass could symbolise youth and a new generation given the chance to live in a time of freedom. In Zulu mythology, the snake is the goddess of rivers, a fertility symbol and a good luck charm.]
3. In keeping with the image of the dawn breaking, the footprints might belong to the sun whose face finally emerges, or the light gradually spreading across the landscape. The words 'She woke us up' indicate that the people are now sure that the war is really over. [Note that in most cultures, the sun is a symbol of life. By using 'her' rather than 'he', Kunene draws on the analogy of Nomkhubulwane, the goddess of change and balance, who is associated with light, rain, and fertility.]
4. They are overcome with joy and wish to share their happiness with everyone, especially those in remote areas who might not have heard the news. Another reason is that people would not have been able to run into 'open space' or travel safely across the mountains and pathways so freely during a war, especially during the apartheid era when movement of people was controlled.
5. The rural setting of the poem suggests that the 'old man' could be the tribal leader who would have been too old to leave the tribal lands and fight the war against apartheid. Of course, Kunene could also be referring to Nelson Mandela, the oldest head of state in South Africa's history, who took office after the first democratic election at the age of 75. [If so, what political statement is the poet making by writing, 'We shook up the old man ...']
6. The poet sees the end of the war as a catalyst for the renewal of traditions. [The celebration of Nomkhubulwane disappeared during the colonial period and has since been re-introduced as a way of asserting an African cultural identity and to respond to calls for moral regeneration and increased HIV/AIDS awareness.]
7. In celebrating the end of the war, the people joined hands with strangers and shouted their joy to the world. This perfectly describes the euphoria after the first free election in 1994 when people from all over the world came to South Africa to celebrate this country's new democracy.
8. The alliteration highlights the two words in the middle of this line emphasising that the Ancestors are now able to move freely in the lives of the people and that they are standing 'tall' and proud.

An African Elegy ~ Ben Okri

Poet and novelist, Ben Okri, was born in 1959 in Minna, Nigeria, to an Igbo mother and an Urhobo father. Part of his childhood was spent in London where his father went to study law. His family moved back to Nigeria in 1968 and much of Okri's early fiction explores the political violence that he witnessed during the civil war in Nigeria. He later returned to London where he is now based as a writer. His writing career began early: his first novel, *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), was published when he was only 21 years old and, until 2013, Okri was the youngest recipient of the Booker Prize for Fiction for his novel *The Famished Road* (1991). His first collection of poems, *An African Elegy*, was published in 1992. Most of the poems in this anthology reflect his experiences during his childhood in Africa.

Discussion

- ✧ Before you read the poem, discuss stereotypical views related to the word 'African'.
Do you consider yourself to be an 'African' and, if so, what does it mean to you to be 'African'?
- ✧ Look up the meaning of the word 'elegy' in a good dictionary.
- ✧ Given your understanding of the words 'African' and 'elegy' when they are placed together, what are your expectations of the poem after reading the title?



Questions

1. Refer to Stanza 1.
 - 1.1 Who are the 'miracles that God made'?
 - 1.2 Why does the poet use the first-person-plural pronoun in these opening lines?
 - 1.3 Identify figures of speech in the line, 'To taste the bitter fruit of Time', and comment on their effectiveness.
 - 1.4 How do the sound devices enhance the meaning of the line referred to in 1.3?
2. Refer to Stanza 2
 - 2.1 Discuss the imagery in the line: 'There are things that burn me now / Which turn golden when I am happy.'
 - 2.2 Comment on the purpose of the rhetorical question.
3. Refer to Stanza 3
 - 3.1 Comment on the juxtaposition of the words 'curse' and 'bless'.
 - 3.2 Discuss the poet's use of sensory imagery in the first three lines of this stanza.
4. Refer to Stanza 4.
 - 4.1 The poet first referred to 'the air' in stanza 3. In this stanza, the personification is more noticeable. What do you think he means by 'the air' and what do you think 'the air' remembers?
 - 4.2 Suggest what the poet means when he describes the miracles as 'secret'.



- 4.3 Look closely at the single sentence at the end of this stanza and say why it is so effective.
- 4.4 Why is it important for the poet to have heard ‘the dead singing’?
5. Refer to Stanza 5
Explain the paradox of living ‘gently / With fire’.
6. Refer to Stanza 6.
What is the main point of the message in this last stanza? Explain your answer.
7. Now that you have studied the poem carefully, comment on the poet’s choice of title.



SUGGESTED ANSWERS: An African Elegy

Discussion

- ✧ African stereotypes are often negative (stereotypical images of Africans include the starving child, the Idi Amin-like dictator etc.). Many people from overseas think all Africans are black people and consider Africa to be one big country instead of a continent. These stereotypes make it difficult for some of us to know who qualifies as 'African'.
- ✧ The definition of 'elegy' from the *Oxford Dictionary*:
elegy: n.
 - 1 (in modern literature) a poem of serious reflection, typically a lament for the dead.
 - 2 (in Greek and Latin verse) a poem written in elegiac couplets, as notably by Catullus and Propertius.
- ✧ Our expectation of 'An African Elegy' may well be of a sombre, pessimistic account of the African experience or, given Okri's history, a lament for the Africa that was before colonialism, drought, poverty, political turmoil etc.

Questions

1.
 - 1.1 The people of Africa [Of course, all human beings are 'miracles of God' but by using the word 'African' in the title, Okri provides a specific context.]
 - 1.2 By using 'We', the poet personalises his message and creates an association with his readers. In this context, the 'we' emphasises that the poet (or speaker) is part of the African community.
 - 1.3 There are several **allusions**: 'bitter fruit' could refer to God's punishment in the Garden of Eden; 'Time' could refer to Father Time from Greek mythology (personified as a bearded old man holding a scythe and an hourglass).
The **personification** of 'Time', as indicated by the capital letter, gives 'Time' mythological significance and emphasises that this is an important theme in the poem. [Note that 'Time' appears again later in the poem.]
The combination of words in 'bitter fruit' is an example of an **oxymoron**: when two words contradict each other as in a **paradox**. We think of 'fruit' as sweet in contrast to something 'bitter'. This paradox infers that in time, suffering can lead to something better.
 - 1.4 The repetition of the 't' sound emphasises the words 'bitter', 'fruit' and 'Time' (the climax of the sentence). The alliteration also forces the reader to pronounce each word adding to the solemnity of the line and the appropriate seriousness of the speaker's tone of voice.
2.
 - 2.1 The word 'burn' gives the reader an idea of how the poet feels about Africa – he feels passionate about his country and its people. If something burns it also causes pain. It can create scars. In this sense, the poet carries these scars and will experience feelings of sadness and anger. When he is happy, these feelings 'turn golden'. The word 'golden' can be associated with something precious and rare; something memorable and worthwhile. This suggests that at these times he feels that all he has suffered has been worth it. When life is good, he appreciates his happiness even more having experienced sorrow or hardships.
 - 2.2 The rhetorical question addresses the reader directly, thus fully engaging the reader's attention and at the same time placing more focus on the poet's central idea about the 'mystery of the pain' – that inexplicable quality that Africans have which enables them to 'bear' the weight of poverty and still be able to 'sing and dream sweet things'.
3.
 - 3.1 The words 'curse' and 'bless' are used paradoxically in the sense that the poet uses 'curse' for positive experiences and 'bless' for negative experiences instead of the other way around. This suggests that Africans have the ability to accept life as it comes. Even in times of suffering, they are able to find joy and when things are going well they do not forget to show their gratitude.
 - 3.2 The poet uses the sense of touch (warm 'air'), taste ('fruit') and sight ('lights ... on the waters') to give the reader a greater sense of those positive moments in life: when you are warm, well fed and have time to enjoy the wonders of nature.
4.
 - 4.1. In stanza 3, 'the air' can be understood in the literal and figurative sense but this second reference makes it clear that 'the air' is something more mystical/spiritual. If 'the air' is the spirit of the Ancestors, it stands to reason that they would remember a person's past or heritage.

4.2 To be 'secret' means that these 'miracles' cannot be seen or known, or that they are not meant to be seen or known. The religious overtones ('miracles of God') and the references to African mysticism ('the air' and 'the dead singing') remind us that there are some things that are beyond ordinary understanding.

4.3 As a stand-alone sentence, the reader is forced to stop at the end of the stanza. This pause gives the reader time to register what the poet has just said, thus emphasising the statement and creating anticipation for what follows. The sudden change to 'I' also gives the reader the sense that he is being allowed to share in one of the poet's secrets. This makes the poet's argument more personal and even more convincing.

4.4 Ancestors play an important role in African tradition. As an African, the poet would wish to feel these connections with his past.

5. While 'living gently' suggests living quietly, carefully and without any fuss, 'with fire' assures that this does not mean without passion for life, with no warmth and no hope. It is therefore possible to be thankful for the little you have as well as to have hope for the future. [Discuss other points of view.]
6. The main point is to tell fellow Africans not to be afraid but to remain hopeful as things do get better over time. [Consider other interpretations.] This point follows the poet's argument that if God ('the unseen') has reasons (a 'surprise') for what happens in life, there should be no reason to worry. There will be good stories and sad stories ('The ocean is full of songs.') and the gods, mystical beings or ancestors (in 'The sky') are not against them. The poet ends with 'Destiny is our friend.' suggesting that the future is something to look forward to.
7. If you think of this poem as the poet's way of expressing his personal loss and admiration for Africa, it does fulfil the function of an elegy: to praise and express sorrow for loss. When writing an elegy, a poet will often find some consolation in the contemplation of some permanent principle. In this poem, Okri sees hope in the mystery of the indomitable African spirit. It is therefore an appropriate title and especially relevant at a time when we need as much positive affirmation as possible for those who live on this beautiful continent. [Some might see the title as ironic in that the poet seems to be communicating the opposite of what one would expect from an elegy.]

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Find other elegies for comparison and discussion.
- Feeling inspired? Write a serious or humorous poem entitled: **A South African Elegy**



Note: there is a poem with the same title which was written by Robert Duncan in 1959. You can find it online at:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/46681>

[Accessed 18/01/2017]

Working in pairs, prepare readings or presentations of the two poems with the same titles.



Remember ~ Christina Rossetti

Christina Rossetti was the youngest child of Gabriele Rossetti, an Italian political refugee who came to England in 1824. She was deeply religious and her poetry is suffused with piety; she modelled herself on the 17th century spiritual poet George Herbert. She also shared the Pre-Raphaelite taste for beautiful but sad and rather languid imagery. Her diction is admired for its simplicity and sincerity - unusual in poetry of the second half of the 19th Century.

1. Where do you think the speaker is going? Substantiate your answer.
2. Quote the line that suggests that there is no choice in her leaving.
3. Quote the line that tells us that she is not expecting to leave immediately.
4. What does the poet mean by 'Only' in line 7?
5. What reason does the poet give for why this person should not 'grieve' if he forgets her for a while? Re-read the last two lines before you answer this question.
6. The poem is an Italian or Petrarchian sonnet. Substantiate this statement with at least two reasons.
7. How does the focus of the poem change from the octave to the sestet?
8. Why could the focus of the sestet be considered ironic?



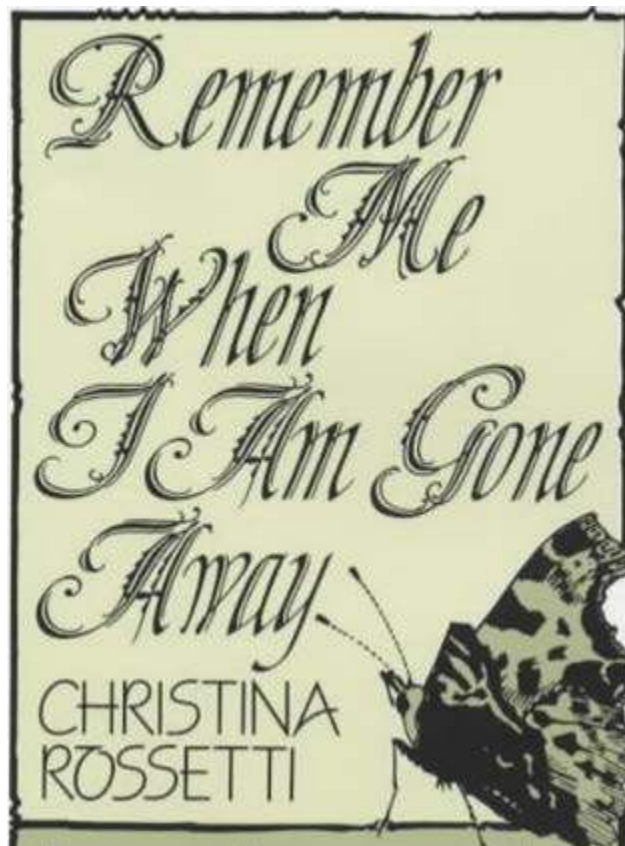
The tone of the poem changes as it progresses. In groups, discuss where you think the tone changes and then try to find suitable adjectives to describe the various tones.



Is there someone you really cared about who is no longer with you? Perhaps you have drifted apart or they have moved far away? Did you promise never to forget them and feel guilty when days go by without you thinking about them? Now is the time to send that person an email or long message. Tell them what they meant to you. Remind them of the times you shared and let them know what you are doing now.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS: Remember

1. She is referring to when she dies because she writes about going 'into the silent land'.
2. 'Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.' (At other times, she turned to go but was able to change her mind.)
3. 'Remember me when no more day by day / You tell me of our future that you planned:'
4. 'Only' emphasises that the poet does not want to be forgotten. She at least wants the person to think of her even though she will no longer be part of his daily life or part of the future he has planned. It could also mean that she does not expect any more from him other than to be remembered.
5. If thinking about her reminds him of the sad times, then it is better that he should forget her and be happy.
6. The poem is clearly divided into an octet (8 lines) and sestet (6 lines), with the word YET at the beginning of line 9 that shows that the focus/tone/line of thought is going to change. The octet follows the typical rhyme scheme for this type of sonnet – *abbaabba* – while the rhyme scheme in the sestet (where flexibility is often shown) is *cddece*. As is typical of this sonnet form, the octet sets out a train of thought and then there is a change of tone and of thinking which contrasts to the first eight lines.
7. The focus in the first eight lines is on remembering: we realise that the speaker is going to die and she considers their relationship and what they had planned – but she hopes to be remembered. However, in the sestet she contends that if remembering her makes the other person sad, it might be better for them to forget her.
8. Although the title of the poem is 'Remember', the sestet suggests that forgetting her might be an easier path to follow.



An African Thunderstorm ~ David Rubadiri

James David Rubadiri is a diplomat, academic, poet, playwright and novelist born in Malawi in 1930. He is ranked as one of Africa's most widely anthologized and celebrated poets to emerge after independence.



In groups, brainstorm your impressions of thunderstorms – what you remember most of them in terms of sound, smell and sight. Put all your thoughts on paper. Then read Rubadiri's poem which describes the effect of an approaching storm on an African village.

1. The poet uses numerous similes and metaphors to describe the storm. Consider what he evokes in each of the following:

1.1 'Like a plague of locusts' (line 6)

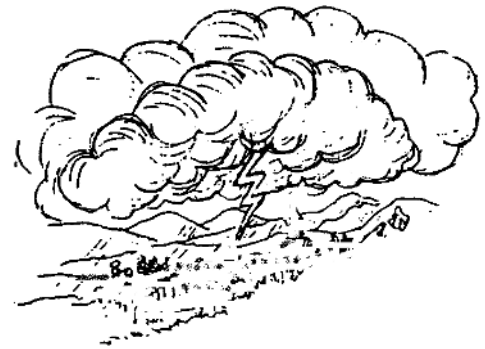
1.2 'like a madman chasing nothing' (line 9)

1.3 'pregnant clouds' (line 10)

1.4 'like dark sinister wings' (line 13)

1.5 'trees bend to let it pass' (line 15)

1.6 'the pelting march of the storm' (line 33)



2. How is a sense of frantic movement and activity evoked in the third stanza?
3. The actual thunder and lightning part of the storm is only described in the last four lines of the poem. Comment on the poet's use of sound devices here.

FOLLOW-UP:

Go back to the points you jotted down from your group's brainstorm on thunderstorms. Rework some of them into similes or metaphors of your own, and then write a short poem in a structured format (e.g. a haiku) about a storm.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS: An African Thunderstorm

1. 1.1 The clouds are compared to a rush of locusts that come swooping in over a village, driven by the wind which can cause as much damage as locusts might do. Rubadiri tries to evoke a sense of the darkness that comes with these clouds and, with the violent wind, the inherent danger.
1.2 He compares the wind and the dust and leaves etc. that it tosses up to a madman who rushes about with no sense of purpose and in all directions. It evokes the chaos of the raging wind and how it darts about everywhere.
1.3 The clouds filled with impending rain are compared to a pregnant woman. As she will give birth, so the clouds will send forth their life-giving water (though water can also be destructive in the case of flooding).
1.4 The clouds are compared to a bird that is ready to swoop on the village and with its 'dark sinister wings', potential danger and harm is suggested.
1.5 The trees are personified here – the wind blows so hard that they are bent over and the poet evokes a sense of surrender to the power of the wind in his description of their bending to let it go by.
1.6 The storm keeps coming in a relentless fashion, and by comparing its approach to a 'pelting march' the poet suggests its steady, unstoppable approach using various tactics: rain, thunder, and lightning.
2. The use of short lines and short, sharp words conveys this movement particularly in 'Dart about / In and out'. The use of alliteration and assonance is a further technique conveying this activity in 'Toss and turn / In the din of whirling wind'.
3. The poet repeats several harsh sounding consonants such as j, g, b, and ck in 'jaggeder blinding flashes / Rumble, tremble and crack' and there is the alliterative effect in 'smell of fired smoke' which suggests the hissing of something burning. The regular beat in the final line also echoes the march of the storm as it hits the village.

