



I10062952-E1

# English Home Language Grade 12

Literature: Poetry

I10062952

Edition 1

# ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE GRADE 12

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## Literature: Poetry

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## INTRODUCTION

The notes in this study unit are meant to help you prepare for your literature exam – Paper 2.

You need to purchase the prescribed anthology for your literature studies. Alternatively, you can source prescribed texts at your local library or on the Internet. (See the reference list at the back of this study unit.)



The prescribed poetry anthology is: *Imagined Worlds: An Anthology of Poetry*, published by Macmillan, South Africa, ISBN: 9781431037285.

As you *must* use this anthology, we will often refer to it simply as 'the anthology'.

Please arrange your literature studies as follows – we will assume that you are studying the drama, the novel and poetry in this order when we set your mid-year exams:

- during Term 1, study the play, *Hamlet*;
- during Term 2, study the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; then study the first six *poems*; and
- during Term 3, study the last six *poems*, and revise *Hamlet* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

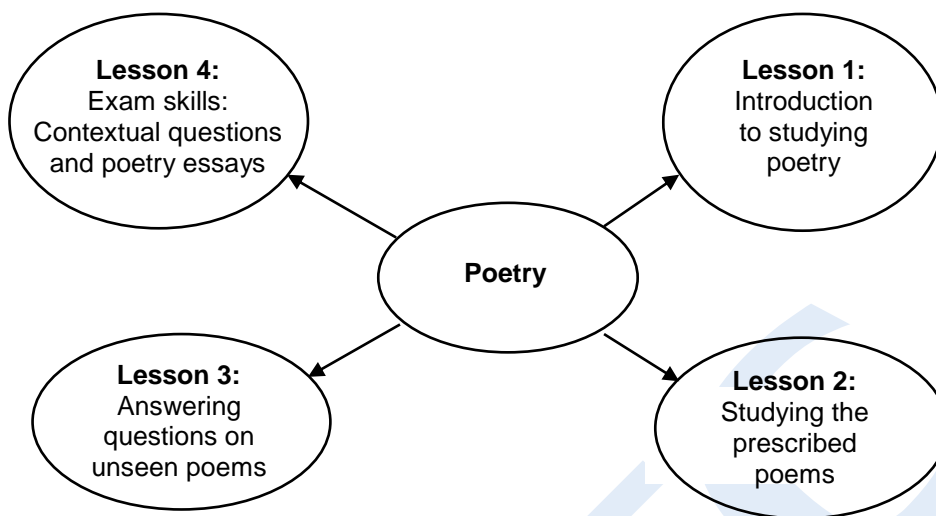
As we have mentioned, please do not think that you will be able to pass your literature paper without having read your play or your novel – or the prescribed poems. It is very important that you realise that you cannot study your literature in one sitting. You should set aside some time every day for reading.

It is a good idea to work through the notes in your texts. The more you read about your prescribed literature, the better you'll do in the final exams.

## Mind map of this study unit

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The mind map below shows you the lessons that we will cover in this study unit:



## The best way to study

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To ensure that you get the full benefit of this study unit, we recommend that you do the following:

- Carefully and diligently work through each lesson.
- Ensure that you complete all the activities in the lessons.
- Ensure that you answer all the self-assessment questions at the end of each lesson. Compare your answers to those provided in this study unit.

If you come across any words that you do not understand, look them up in a dictionary.

## THE ICONS USED IN THIS STUDY UNIT

Read through the descriptions of icons below. Look out for these icons as you work through the study unit. They will show you at a glance where you need to work through activities, self-assessment questions, and so on.

Icon	Description
	<b>Important statement:</b> This signals an important point that you must grasp before you continue with the rest of the study unit. It could also signal an interesting snippet of information.
	<b>Activity:</b> This signals an activity that you should complete as part of your learning. We have interspersed activities throughout your literature study unit.
	<b>Web link:</b> Typing the link into the browser you use will take you to a website or video clip on the topic being discussed.
	<b>Self-assessment questions:</b> This signals the questions that will help you to analyse your understanding of the theory that was covered in the study session. We conclude each study session with a set of self-assessment questions.
	<b>Suggested answers to self-assessment questions:</b> This signals the suggested answers to the self-assessment questions. Please do not look at the answers before you have tried to answer the questions yourself.

## SKILLS AND STRATEGIES: THE READING PROCESS

*English Home Language* has been developed according to the National Curriculum Statement subject guidelines for this subject. The CAPS curriculum aims to give you strategies that you can utilise to acquire the skills you need in order to understand and use English effectively.

Read through the lists below. Your aim is to use the strategies to acquire *reading* skills. We give you this information because you have to own your own learning experience, and you have to keep checking your learning goals.

Your literature studies fall under *Reading and Viewing*. We have adjusted the curriculum document to help you to understand how reading skills can be used to read your literature with more insight.

### Reading process

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We can define reading as a three-phase activity that models independent reading strategies for decoding and understanding text.

1. *Pre-reading*. If you are unfamiliar with a literary work or an author, do some research. This will help you to orientate yourself, and ultimately make the text 'less foreign'. Skim through a poem, read the blurb and study the jacket design of a novel, or page through a play and glance at some of the lines and character names. Think about what you consider the poem to be about. Think about what is going to happen in the novel or play.
2. *Reading*. Prepare yourself for close reading of the text. You will be required to apply a few strategies to enhance your understanding, including the following:
  - actively making sense of the text;
  - working out the meaning of unfamiliar words and images by using word attack skills and contextual clues;
  - using comprehension strategies: making connections, monitoring comprehension, adjusting reading speed to text difficulty, re-reading where necessary, looking forward in the text for information that might help;
  - asking and answering questions (from lower to higher order), visualising, inferring, reading for main ideas;
  - attending to word choice and language structures, recognising the text type by its structure and language features; and
  - making notes or summarising main and supporting ideas.
3. *Post-reading* enables you to view and respond to the text as a whole:
  - You will answer questions on the text from lower order to higher order.
  - You will compare and contrast texts.
  - You will evaluate text, draw conclusions and express your own opinion.

- You will develop critical language awareness by considering:
  - facts and opinion;
  - direct and implied meaning;
  - denotation and connotation;
  - the socio-political and cultural background of the author and of texts;
  - the effect that selections and omissions have on meaning;
  - relationships between language and power; and
  - emotive and manipulative language, bias, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, language varieties, inferences, assumptions, arguments, and the purpose of including or excluding information.

### **Skills and strategies for reading and studying poetry**

The two main questions that you need to ask of a poem are:

- What is being said? and
- How do I know this?

You also need to consider your personal response to the poem – how does it make you feel, and why?

Literary writers write because they have something interesting or important to say to their audience. We study the text to find out or reveal, to clarify, and to support and corroborate what the writer has to say to us.

This involves looking at the figurative use of language, of the way verse lines and poems as a whole are presented, of the choice of, rhythm, pace, sound and image – and of the emotive feelings that such images generate. All this is an attempt to reach a tentative conclusion as to what the poet is hoping we will discover to be a meaning of the text. We can seldom reach a final, definite conclusion about a good poem.

The aspects listed below will enhance your understanding of the intended message:

- literal meaning;
- figurative meaning;
- mood;
- theme and message;
- imagery; and
- figures of speech, word choice (diction), tone, rhetorical devices, emotional responses, lines, words, stanzas, links, punctuation, refrain, repetition, sound devices (alliteration, consonance and assonance, rhyme, rhythm, onomatopoeia) and enjambment.



## LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING POETRY

**Table 1** below lists all the prescribed poems that you have to study. You will need to prepare all 12 of the poems in this table for the final exams.

TABLE 1 PRESCRIBED POEMS		p
Poem	Poet	
1. Remember	Christina Rossetti	5
2. First Day after the War	Mazisi Kunene	32
3. The Zulu Girl	Roy Campbell	39
4. Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang	Jeremy Cronin	56
5. Funeral Blues	W. H. Auden	122
6. A Hard Frost	C. Day Lewis	139
7. An African Thunderstorm	David Rubadiri	155
8. An African Elegy	Ben Okri	45
9. somewhere i have never travelled	E. E. Cummings	25
10. The Garden of Love	William Blake	159
11. Felix Randal	Gerard Manley Hopkins	112
12. Vultures	Chinua Achebe	48

When you study a poem for exam purposes, you need to know the content, the figures of speech and the most important interpretations.

Remember that the *speaker* in the poem is the voice telling the story, and is not necessarily the voice of the poet. Even if it seems likely that it is, you should preferably refer to what the 'speaker' says (rather than to what the 'poet' says) when you write about what happens in the poem.



Poets may write from a point of view that is different to theirs, if they think this will be an effective way of showing the reader what they really think or feel. Attitude is what the *poet* feels about the subject (or theme) that he or she is describing, which is not always what the speaker in the poem says or does. The *tone* of a poem describes the *attitude* behind the words of the poem. The tone can be humorous, bitter, gentle and so on.

In Lesson 2 we'll discuss the prescribed poems in detail. First, read the **Introduction** on pages v – xii of your anthology, *Imagined Worlds*. This will introduce you to poetry analysis at the Grade 12 level. The section on 'How to read a poem' on pages vi to viii is particularly important.

You *must* follow steps 1 to 6 on pages vii to viii of *Imagined Worlds* for every poem that you study. You must also read each poem *out loud*, at least *three times*, before you read the analysis of the poem in this study unit. This will help you to understand the poem.

## LESSON 2: STUDYING THE PRESCRIBED POEMS

In this lesson we will discuss the 12 prescribed poems in Table 1 on the previous page. Follow the six steps on pages vii to viii of the *Imagined Worlds* anthology, and read the notes on each poem together with our notes in this study unit. Start by reading each poem out loud *three times* (rather than twice as in Step 1 on page vii of the anthology).

### Poem 1: Remember

The first poem that you will study is *Remember* by Christina Rossetti. Your prescribed anthology focuses on this poem on pages 5 to 8, and you can read it on page 6.

#### About the poet

Christina Rossetti was born in 1830, the youngest of four children in a family of artists, poets and literary scholars. She was romantically involved three times but refused to get married because none of her suitors shared her religious beliefs. She had a wide circle of friends even when she became house-bound as a result of various illnesses. She died of cancer in 1894.

#### Pre-reading activity

In this poem, the speaker addresses a close friend or lover and requests that he does not forget her once she has died. Most of us have experienced the death of a loved one and have, perhaps, wondered how people would remember us. Before you read the poem, think about what might happen if you asked close friends if they would remember you if you died. What feelings would prompt someone to ask that question?

If you have a close friend you can ask to help you, work through question 1 of the pre-reading activities on page 5 of the anthology together.

Then look up the meanings of the words in question 2 of the pre-reading activities, on page 6 of the anthology. We will help you with the definitions below:

- *elegy*: an emotional poem written about somebody who has died;
- *epitaph*: words, often written on a tombstone, describing a person who has died;
- *eulogy*: a speech or extended piece of writing honouring someone who has died; and
- *obituary*: a short newspaper article written about someone who is of importance to the readers who has died.

#### Analysing the poem

Read the notes below in conjunction with the notes on pages 6 and 7 of the anthology.



Remember to read the poem (page 6) out loud *at least three times* before reading the notes on analysing it in this study unit and in the anthology.

The poem *Remember* is written in the form of an Italian or Petrarchan sonnet. We can therefore expect the content to fall into a specific structure, as follows:

- Lines 1 – 8 form the *octet*, in which the speaker sketches a scenario. The octet is divided into two *quatrains* of four lines each.
- Lines 9 – 14 form the *sestet*, in which the speaker reveals a change in attitude. The rhyme scheme often divides the sestet into two sections of three lines each, or into a quatrain and a couplet.

### ***The octet***

Let's look at the structure of the first eight lines. Each quatrain (of four lines) starts with the request to 'remember me'. Also:

- The expression 'gone away' is repeated.
- Each quatrain has the same pattern of line indentations.
- The quatrains have the same rhyme scheme.
- Each quatrain ends in a full stop.

*Lines 1 – 4 (the first quatrain)*

#### **Lines 1 – 2**

The speaker makes a simple request. She asks that a person who she addresses as 'you' remembers her when she is 'gone away'. She thus uses a euphemism for death. She does not 'die', but refers to being 'gone away', to the 'silent land' of the afterlife. Her tone is sympathetic, as if she wants to lead 'you' into a gentle acceptance that she may die. There is a semicolon at the end of line 2, making the reader or listener pause. Normally we use a colon, not a semicolon, to indicate that an explanation is to follow. However, in the two lines that follow the speaker will expand on what she has said.

#### **Lines 3 – 4**

The speaker gives us an idea as to why she has a need to be remembered and why the reader or listener may be so affected by her death. The speaker refers to two intimate gestures that suggest that she is speaking to a beloved. She refers to him not being able to 'hold me by the hand' anymore, and to her walking away and doing a 'half turn', looking back as if to say goodbye, and then returning to him after all. This could refer to the fact that she may no longer be able to come back from the brink of death.

The alliteration of the soft 'h' sound in 'hold me by the hand' emphasises the gentle, caring nature of a deep and affectionate interaction.

*Lines 5 – 8 (the second quatrain)*

These lines reveal more details about the intimate relationship between the speaker and her beloved. He has played a leading role in the relationship by planning the future. He has also been there for her when she needed him, by providing advice, 'counsel' and religious guidance, 'pray'.

The speaker's tone is infinitely gentle as she reminds him that he will no longer be able to talk to her daily, 'day by day', about their plans, and that it will be too late for him to give her good advice.

It is clear that the speaker has made peace with the fact that she is dying, but that she has an underlying uncertainty about whether she has had a lasting effect on her beloved. She repeats the command or request 'remember me' twice, and reminds her beloved that there is nothing else he can do for her, except 'Only remember'.

### ***The sestet***

We will now pay attention to the structure of the last six lines. Note the following:

- The line indentations divide the sestet into a quatrain and a couplet (two lines).
- The break in the rhyme scheme indicates a change in tone.
- The conjunction 'yet' at the start of line 9 indicates a change in the point of view.
- The phrase 'better by far' in line 13 implies that better advice is to follow.
- The word 'remember' is no longer at the start of a line, but in the middle of line 10 and line 13.

### Lines 9 – 12

In lines 9 – 12, it is as if reality has set in. The speaker realises that she should not expect her beloved to spend the rest of his life in mourning. She accepts that he will, at times, forget her. When he does remember her, though, he should not grieve for her. He should not remember the 'darkness' of her death or the 'corruption' of her illness. He should rather remember who she really was and what she believed in: 'a vestige of the thoughts that once I had.'

### Lines 13 – 14

The couplet has an optimistic and accepting tone. The speaker would prefer that her beloved forget her and be happy, than remember her and be sad for the rest of his life.

## Post-reading activities

You can find the answers to the questions in the post-reading activities on pages 7 to 8 at the back of the anthology, on page 184.

On pages 223 and 224, you will find examples of typical contextual exam questions. The answers to these questions on *Remember* are on page 242.

Now do the activity that follows, as it will enhance your understanding of the poem.



### Activity 1

1. Of what is the 'silent land' a symbol?
2. What is the effect of the repetition in lines 1 and 2?
3. Supply evidence that the speaker and her beloved were gentle and caring towards one another.
4. What is the effect of placing 'Only remember me;' in line 7?
5. Quote the word in the sestet that suggests a change in tone.
6. Paraphrase the advice that the speaker gives her beloved in the couplet.

### Suggested answers

1. It is a symbol of the afterlife, the place the speaker's soul will go to once she is dead.
2. The words 'gone away' are repeated in lines 1 and 2. In line 1 the speaker uses going away as a euphemism for death. The effect of repeating it as 'gone far away' creates a gentle tone, as if she half wants to protect her beloved from the reality of her death.
3. The speaker refers to her beloved holding her hand, and to her being so reluctant to leave him that she would turn back for a last look and then return to him after all. Her beloved also gave her advice and prayed with her, and made plans for their future.
4. The speaker is emphasising that her beloved will be able to do little more for her than remember her. He has clearly played a huge role in her life. Once she is gone, there will be nothing else for him to do but remember her.
5. 'Yet'
6. It is better to forget a great love that you once had than to remember and be sad for the rest of your life.

Now let's look at the second poem that you need to study. (Look again at Table 1.)

## Poem 2: First Day after the War

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Your second poem is *First Day after the War* by Mazisi Kunene. Your anthology focuses on this poem on pages 32 to 34, and you can read it on page 33.

### About the poet

Mazisi Kunene was born in Durban in 1930. He obtained a Master's degree in Zulu poetry. In 1959 he left to live in exile in the United Kingdom. He became a professor of African Literature at the University of California, returning to South Africa in 1993. Unesco honoured him as Africa's poet laureate. In 2005, he was named South Africa's poet laureate. Kunene was a fierce opponent of apartheid and used his poetry to voice his outrage and despair.

### Pre-reading activity

Read the title of the poem. Write down all the words that you associate with war. Why do countries or people wage war against each other? What do we call different wars? Who are the victims? Who are the victors? What happens when the war is over?

War	After the war
- world wars, civil wars	➤ Celebration
- wars of ideology - like apartheid	➤ Fear of unknown
- proxy wars	➤ Sense of relief
Victims - those who have suffered	➤ Hope for a better future
Who does not suffer in war?	➤ Sense of togetherness
	➤ Sense of loss and grief

### Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 32 to 34 of the anthology.



Read the poem (on page 33) out loud *three times* before reading the notes on analysing the poem in this study unit and in the anthology (pages 33 to 34).

The title of the poem reveals the setting of the poem in terms of time: with the title, the poet announces that the poem is about the first day after the war. We know that he is referring to a specific war because he uses the definite article, 'the'. Knowing a little about the poet, it is likely that the 'the war' refers to the war against apartheid. Is it strange that he refers to the struggle against apartheid as a war? What day is he referring to? It is the day that South Africa became a truly democratic country.

#### Line 1

In line 1 the poet makes a simple observation: 'We heard the songs of a wedding party.'

We can all relate to the feelings of joy and celebration associated with a wedding party. There is a sense of hope for a new future. There is a sense of joy because the bride and groom are going to start a new life together. Something essential has changed in their lives and the community celebrates with them.

Do you think the poet is referring to a real wedding party? It is not clear at first. 'We heard the songs' suggest that he is comparing the arrival of democracy to a wedding celebration. Note that the poet uses the plural pronoun, 'we'. He is not speaking about his own feelings, but about the feelings of society, especially those of his community.

### **Lines 2 – 5**

Read lines 2 – 5 with care. The poet uses dramatic images to describe the dawn of a democratic South Africa.

In line 1 the poet refers to the sounds of an approaching wedding party. In lines 2 – 5, the wedding party appears to be coming closer. At first all people see is the changes in light on the grass. They are quite nervous, hesitant, until they see the footprints of the bride as she approaches them. And then they see her face, her eyes shining brightly with the joy of freedom.

Have you noticed the extended metaphor? The new, democratic South Africa is the bride of the wedding party referred to in line 1. By carefully analysing the diction, we can decipher the layers of meaning.

*Extended metaphor:* Read about metaphor on page 180 in the anthology. An extended metaphor is an implied comparison that continues over a few lines in a poem.



*Diction:* Diction refers to specific words that the poet chooses to use in a poem. When you are asked to refer to the diction in a poem, you must quote the words that you are referring to.

The poet refers to a 'soft light' (line 2). This creates a tone of gentleness and hesitancy. The dawn of democracy is not loud and harsh; it is a gentle, careful event. The idea of a democracy as something gentle and sensitive is repeated in the description of the 'young blades of grass'. (As the anthology mentions, this also suggests a rural setting.)

'Coiling' is usually associated with the actions of a snake. Why would the poet choose this word? There is always a measure of fear, disbelief and uncertainty when things change. It is natural to be hesitant and cautious, and this is why the poet notes that 'At first we hesitated'.

The enjambment (run-on lines) between lines 2 and 3 is also clever. 'Soft light' implies something positive and gentle. 'Coiling' in line 3 has an opposite connotation. This cleverly illustrates the ambivalence inherent to change.

Then reality sets in. It is true: democracy has arrived. They 'saw her footprints' and the 'freedom' in her 'eyes'.

### **Lines 6 – 8**

The interaction between 'we', the people, and 'she', the bridegroom of democracy, becomes personal in these three lines. She 'woke us' out of disbelief and playfully asked what day it was. They knew the answer – it was the dawn of democracy.

The use of dialogue creates the tone of a folklore narrative, as if the poem is an ancient story being told, a story that reminds people of an eternal truth. This truth is revealed in the last line, and we shall return to it a little later.

### **Lines 9 – 11**

The spontaneous joy of a new world is apparent in the next three lines. 'We ran' 'without waiting' to the 'open space'. 'Open space' is particularly touching when contrasted with the restrictions on movement that were enforced during the apartheid era. The overpowering joy is apparent in the 'ululating to the mountains' and 'calling people' from everywhere. Freedom is something to be shared and enjoyed by all.



### Lines 12 – 13

Like line 1, lines 12 – 13 can stand as a single sentence. This suggests that, like line 1, the lines make an important statement. In line 12 'we' woke up 'the old man'. Once again, the diction (word choice) is interesting. The action is 'shook up' and it suggests that this is more than a physical waking up – the old man (note that the poet uses the definite article) is shaken out of a state of sleep-walking, of not knowing what is going on around him. They are jolting him into the realisation that there is a new beginning, an event worth celebrating. Their determination is made more forceful by their *demand* for a festival – they insist that he celebrates as well. Who could the old man symbolise? Could it be those among us who were set in our ways and having difficulty changing? Or those among us who were too cynical to believe that the struggle was really over?

Line 13 links to line 12: not only do the people demand a festival, they also ask for the 'all the first fruits of the season'. In many cultures and religions people offer the first fruits of the season to their gods. You may be familiar with this idea if you have ever celebrated a harvest festival. The alliteration of the 'f' sound in 'first fruits' emphasises the importance of the idea that the birth of democracy has a spiritual dimension.

### Lines 14 – 17

If, as lines 12 and 13 suggest, the birth of democracy in South Africa is an auspicious event worth celebrating, its effect on the people of the nation will be tremendous too. And it is: In line 14 the people 'held hands with a stranger'. This implies an end to the us-and-them culture. The repetition of 'we' throughout the poem suggests a sense of unity and a call for peace. There is a sense of uncontrolled delight as 'we shouted' and a sense of unity as 'people came from all lands'. 'All lands' could refer to people returning to South Africa from exile when apartheid ended. It could also refer to the universal recognition of the need for the peace and stability of real democracy.

Is there another word you find interesting? 'Waterfalls' in line 15 is a detail that stands out. Water symbolises life and growth, and waterfalls send abundant water to far-off places; 'shouting across waterfalls', people spread the joyous news across the land. It is clear that life in a democratic South Africa will be fruitful and positive for all citizens.

### Line 18

In African cultures the ancestors form an important link between ordinary people and divine spirits or gods. The ancestors are often asked for advice and consulted to guide actions. The end of 'the war' with the birth of a peaceful new order is an event that they have intervened for a long time to achieve. The poet acknowledges the role they have played in the achievement of our new democracy. The ancestors are 'travelling tall' – they are proud of the recent political events, and the events have elevated their status.

### Post-reading activities

You can find the answers to the questions on page 34 at the back of the anthology, on pages 190 and 191.

You will also find an example of typical exam questions on pages 224 and 225. The answers to these questions on First Day after the War are on pages 243 and 244.

The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



#### Activity 2

1. Refer to line 1. What indication is there that the poet is not referring to a literal wedding?
2. Refer to lines 2 and 3. Name the poetic device used to link the two lines.



## Activity 2 (continued)

3. Explain the apparent contradiction in 'soft light' and 'coiling'.
4. Refer to lines 9 – 11. Quote the words that illustrate the uncontrolled joy associated with the birth of democracy.
5. Does the poem suggest that people experience democracy as a unifying force? Substantiate your answer by quoting from the poem.

### Suggested answers

1. They only hear the 'songs' of the wedding party. The actual wedding is never referred to.
2. enjambment
3. 'Soft light' suggests a sense of suspended disbelief that democracy has arrived in South Africa. 'Coiling' suggests a sense of fear that the democracy that has been hoped for is not a reality.
4. 'without waiting'  
'we ran to the open space'  
'ululating'  
'calling people'
5. Yes, the poem suggests that democracy is a unifying force. The poet refers to 'we' throughout the poem. There is also a call for people 'from all the circles of the world' to join in the celebrations. There is a universal need for democracy as 'people came from all lands.'

We hope you enjoyed this stimulating poem. Did you notice that you learnt about *different* aspects of the poem in the study unit and in the anthology? As you can see, we can approach a poem from different perspectives. Our answers and the answers in the anthology may thus differ slightly from your answers, and your answers may contain other interesting insights. Always remember, though, to read the question carefully and to quote correctly from the poem. Now turn to page 39 in the anthology.

## Poem 3: The Zulu Girl

In your third poem, *The Zulu Girl* by Roy Campbell, we will explore the effects that an unfair social system and form of government like apartheid have on ordinary people.

### About the poet

Roy Campbell was born in Durban and relocated to England in the early 1920s. He was a staunch opponent of racist colonial ideas and was critical of a labour system that enriched one sector of society at the cost of the other sectors. The poems written in South Africa are considered to be some of his best work.

### Pre-reading activity

In the last few years we have seen growing activism against colonial attitudes and approaches in academic institutions. You will know of the Rhodes Must Fall demonstrations and the Fees Must Fall campaigns. Speak to friends and family, and share your views. Do research and find out about the underlying reasons for the way that different people feel about these issues.



## Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 39 to 42 of the anthology.



Remember to read the poem (page 40) out loud *three times* before reading the notes on analysing the poem in the anthology and in the study unit.

The poem is written in five stanzas of four lines each. Each stanza has a fixed, alternate rhyme scheme. Each stanza ends with a full stop, suggesting that each stanza has a complete idea.

The action in each stanza is quite simple and easy to understand. Diction (word choice) and imagery (figures of speech) supply the layers of meaning and innuendo. Let's take a look at the first stanza so that you can see what we mean.

### Lines 1 – 4

The main action can be found in lines 3 and 4: 'A girl flings down her hoe, and from her shoulder / Unslings her child'.

Let's focus on the diction of the lines containing the main action.

The word 'flings' implies that the girl is not enjoying this work. She does not *put down* the hoe, she throws it down.

In the next line, the poet uses the word 'Unslings'. The noun sling in this case would be a blanket with the ends tied together to form a loop that the mother could sling over her shoulder to carry her baby. When used as a verb, to 'sling' can mean to secure with a sling, or to fling something. 'Unslings' tells us that the child was strapped to the mother's back, and suggests she took him off with some effort and frustration.

Why has the poet inverted the word order in lines 3 and 4? It would have been much easier to read had it been: 'A girl flings down her hoe and unslings her child from her shoulder.' Poets often invert the word order to perfect the rhyme scheme. Often the inversion emphasises something. By placing 'shoulder' at the end of line 3, the poet emphasises the mother's discomfort. It cannot be easy to work in the fields carrying a child on your back.

The other lines and words in the first stanza supply important information about the setting and the poet's attitude.

In line 1 we are informed that workers are working 'in the sun'. That seems simple enough until we read that the 'hot red acres smoulder'. It is so hot that it feels as if the workers are working on red-hot coals. The word 'smoulder' contains the metaphor that compares the hot fields to the coals of a fire. 'Smoulder' is also a word commonly associated with pent-up, repressed rage, and we may think of it later in the poem.

The word 'acres' implies that the workers are not working on their own domestic plots. They are evidently working for a farmer who has 'acres' of land. The words 'gang' and 'labour' support this idea. 'Plies' is an action that accentuates the bending action of workers hoeing the ground.

The 'gang' of workers is doing unpleasant work under unpleasant conditions. We can now understand why the girl 'flings' down her hoe and 'unslings' her child. The inhumane working conditions are emphasised by the description of the child 'tormented by flies'. Surely this is not the ideal environment for a young child.

### Lines 5 – 8

Read the second stanza with care, and find the lines or phrases with the main action.

The main action is as follows:

'She takes him to ... (the) 'shadow' (of) 'the thorn-tree' and 'caresses' ... 'his hair'

It is only once we carefully analyse the poet's diction and imagery that we can identify the layers of meaning.

When we usually think of 'shadow' or 'shade' on a hot summer's day, we imagine relief and some form of comfort. The poet reminds us of this association by using the word 'pooled' – creating the anticipation of relief from the elements. Notice that 'shadow pooled' are placed next to one another at the end of line 5.

Now read line 6 with care. The mother does not take the child to a huge tree at the end of the field. The only trees are 'thorn-trees'. There is not much shade under a thorn tree, and it is not comfortable. Not only is there a chance of sitting on a thorn, but the tree is also covered in ticks that have been feeding off livestock or people. We all know that tick bites can become infected and cause severe illness. What message is the poet conveying? Not only does the woman have to work under harsh conditions, but she also has to look after a baby. There are no facilities for her to care for her child. It is a harsh, dangerous life. This must have an effect on how well she is able to care for him.

Read lines 7 and 8 carefully. The mother is carefully combing through the child's hair, making sure that his head is free of ticks. The action 'caresses' is something that we usually associate with a mother caring for her child. But the harsh conditions force her to use her 'sharp' nails to 'prowl' through his hair. 'Prowl' is usually a word we associate with beasts of prey. Does this mean that the mother is cruel? No: it hints at the fact that she has to behave differently because of her setting. Why does she make 'sharp electric click' sounds? She may be tired, frustrated or in despair.

### **Lines 9 – 12**

Lines 9 and 10 focus on the intimacy of the child suckling on his mother. The description of the suckling child is warm and sweet. He is sleepy and cuddly, making greedy 'puppy' sounds as he feeds. But there are a few words in lines 9 and 10 that stand out. He is 'plugged by the heavy nipple'. The description does not suit the cuddly image of the sleepy child drinking thirstily. The poet could have referred to the mother's full breasts. Why does he say 'heavy nipple'? Does it seem dehumanising? Even in this intimate moment, the mother and child are not granted the luxury of easy humanity. Even now the baby is not really free to express himself – he is 'plugged'.

In line 11 the child is described as having 'frail nerves'. Children are not meant to be nervous. We can assume that the poet is, in actual fact, referring to the mother's frail nerves. The child adopts her state of mind. She is tired and weary ('languors') and her fatigue is like river water flowing through reeds. In the intimate moment of breastfeeding, the mother can 'sigh' and release her tension. The metaphor effectively illustrates the mother's fatigue that is as endless as a 'broad river'.

### **Lines 13 – 16**

In line 13, the river that was used in the metaphor in line 12 becomes a symbol of the dignity of the baby's tribe. African tribes are often described in history books as being ferocious or fierce. However, they could not deal with the guns of the colonial forces and were overpowered. Their strength and power were destroyed: 'curbed ferocity'.

As the young child drinks from his mother in his sleepy ('drowsy') state, he symbolically tries to quench the thirst of his beaten tribe – the thirst to be powerful again. The desire for dignity and restoration is an 'unsmotherable heat' – there can be no release. The proud tribe has dignity even in defeat, but there can be no joy – they are 'sullen', unhappy. 'Unsmotherable heat' (line 14) reminds us of 'smoulder' in line 1. Do you think that this is because their anger at their suppression is smouldering?

## Lines 17 – 20

What is the role of the mother? What is the role of women? The 'girl' becomes the lost country, the 'hill' that looms over the baby, that protects him. She becomes the embodiment of all that is lost – the symbolic 'village' in which he can rest. Mothers become the bearers of hope. Mothers become the 'first cloud' that can bring rain and a new harvest – a new beginning, freedom. However, the description of the first cloud 'that bears the coming harvest' as being 'terrible' suggests ominously that the process of obtaining freedom may be 'terrible', perhaps violent.

## Post-reading activities

You can find the answers to the questions on page 42 at the back of the anthology on page 192.

You will also find an example of a typical exam question on page 239. The answer to the question is on page 262.

The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



### Activity 3

1. What is the effect of 'smoulder' at the end of line 1?
2. Refer to line 7. Identify two contrasting images and explain the impact of the description.
3. Discuss the image of the river in stanza 3 and stanza 4.
4. What does this poem reveal about the poet's attitude towards colonialism?

### Suggested answers

1. 'Smoulder' is associated with the hot coals of a fire. The word accentuates the extreme heat and intolerable working conditions of the labourers in the field. It is also associated with suppressed anger, and thus introduces an ominous tone.
2. The two contrasting images are 'sharp nails' and 'slow caresses'. 'Sharp nails' is not easily associated with the image of a mother caressing her child. The contrast emphasises that the mother's natural instinct to care for and nurture her child is hampered by the harsh working conditions and her dehumanised status in society – she is a labourer in the fields who is not given the dignity of human working conditions.
3. In lines 11 and 12 the mother's fatigue is compared to the constant flow of water through reeds in a river. In line 13 the river becomes a symbol of the fallen tribe's need to regain their dignity and power.
4. The poet is critical of western attitudes towards the indigenous people of the nations they have colonised. In line 2 the workers are described as 'sweating gangs' – a workforce as opposed to individuals.

In stanzas 2 and 3 the poet explores the dehumanising effect of racism. The mother 'prowls' for ticks and the baby drinks milk like a puppy.

In stanzas 4 and 5 it becomes clear that the poet empathises with the 'beaten tribes' and recognises their 'sullen dignity'. The poet also hopes for the promise of a 'coming harvest' – the restoration of the African nation – although he suggests in the last two lines that this 'harvest' might not be peaceful.



Look at the interesting analysis of the poem in the link below.

<http://www.bachelorandmaster.com/britishandamericanpoetry/the-zulu-girl.html#.WGeWJ1N97IU>

## Poem 4: Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang

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Your fourth poem is *Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang* by Jeremy Cronin. Turn to page 56 in the anthology.

### About the poet

Jeremy Cronin is one of the stalwarts of the anti-apartheid movement. He was arrested under the Terrorism and Internal Security Act and imprisoned for a total of seven years (1976 – 1983). His wife, Anne Marie, passed away while he was in prison.

### Pre-reading activity

The title of the poem refers to the African philosophy known as *Ubuntu*. It is a way of life that recognises that a person is only a person because of others, and an individual human being can only be happy and content if others are as well. If one person suffers, the community suffers too. *Ubuntu* speaks of collective suffering and collective joy.

Political prisoners are imprisoned because they refuse to sacrifice their beliefs. They are willing to suffer for the greater good of society. People like Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Robert Sobukwe and Jeremy Cronin were willing to sacrifice their freedom so that South Africa could become a truly democratic society.



Read books such as *Letters from Robben Island* by Ahmed Kathrada and *Life as a Political Prisoner* by Robert Vassen to learn about what it was like being a political prisoner during the apartheid era.

<http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/sidebar.php?id=65-258-8&page=1>

### Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 58 and 59 of the anthology.



Remember to read the poem out loud *three times* before reading the notes on analysing the poem in the anthology and in the study unit.

The title of the poem suggests that the setting of the poem is South Africa. The prison guard speaks in Afrikaans and is referred to as 'baas'. This is a clear indication that the events take place during apartheid. The reference to 'a black fist' in line 28 makes it evident that the two prisoners have been jailed for their political beliefs.

### Lines 1 – 2

We can assume that the speaker in the poem has been isolated from the other prisoners. He goes to extraordinary lengths to see outside his prison cell. He has a small mirror that he holds out of the window in his door and just manages to see a person at the end of the passage.

Take note that 'see' has been placed at the end of line 1. This emphasises the speaker's need to make contact with the world outside his cell. Line 1 runs on into line 2 and the speaker's 'clear' vision down the length of the passage highlights his sense of isolation.

### Lines 3 and 4

Both lines end in a full stop, as if the speaker is making two nervously excited statements. In line 3 he exclaims that there is a 'person' – another *human being*.

The alliteration in line 4 'prisoner polishing' emphasises the speaker's realisation that this is a person similar to him – a prisoner – with whom he can make contact.

### **Lines 5 – 12**

The repetition of 'mirror' in lines 5 and 6 is ironic. The speaker is eager and happy to see a fellow prisoner, but the meeting is not face to face. It is more of an illusion seen through reflecting images. The speaker sees a mirror image of the prisoner in the mirror he is holding in his hands. The prisoner sees a reflection of the speaker in the mirror the speaker is holding. The speaker's joy at the interaction is evident in the repetition of 'see' in lines 5 and 7.

The communication between the speaker and the other prisoner is limited to hand signals. They do not make a sound. Both characters in the poem are concerned with their safety and there is an element of fear in the prisoner's hand signals. All that he can manage to sign is that there is a warder on duty that could see them communicating.

Take note of the typography (the definition is on page 183 of the *Imagined Worlds* anthology) of line 12. It is justified to the right and between brackets. The poet uses this technique to show that the line is an explanation and not part of the communication between the speaker and the other prisoner.

### **Lines 13 – 15**

The prisoner makes another signal indicating that he is being watched by the warder. The word 'wiggle' is paradoxically (definition page 181) playful. The consequences of being caught communicating are terrible. Even if the communication between the prisoners is minimal and hardly a conversation. Once again the speaker provides a translation of the sign language in bracketed line justified to the right.

### **Lines 16 – 19**

Throughout the sign-language communication the prisoner has continued polishing the door handle. He is obviously working very slowly to make communication with the speaker possible. This time he uses his free hand to make the signs of the hands on wrist watch to indicate that he would try to speak at a later time.

Take note of the progression of the 'translations' provided between brackets.

- (This means: A warder.)
  - At first the speaker's interaction is cryptic – he does not want to reveal too much because he does not know whether it is safe. 'A warder' stands separately after the colon – the 'warder' is the most dangerous element in their lives.
- (He's being watched.)
  - The translation is presented as a full sentence. The continuous tense emphasises that 'being watched' is an ongoing condition of prison life.
- (Later. Maybe, later we can speak.)
  - The repetition of 'later' emphasises the poet's desperate need for communication and contact. 'Maybe' implies that it is unlikely that they do communicate. This makes the desperate effort of communication through a mirror even more touching.

### **Lines 20 – 21**

The speaker and the prisoner never *say* anything. The only spoken dialogue is between the prisoner and the warder. The spoken dialogue is printed in italics to make it obvious that it is a different kind of conversation. The warder's suspicion that the prisoner may be doing something other than just polishing exposes how threatened he feels by the political prisoners.

The warder speaks Afrikaans because most of the prison warders during the apartheid era were white Afrikaners.

The prisoner answers him in English but addresses him as 'baas' in a mockingly submissive tone. He is clearly not 'just polishing', and if the warder was doing his job properly he would have noticed it.

### **Lines 23 – 28**

The prisoner turns away and makes a last signal to the speaker – he shows him the sign of a black fist as he turns his back. The black fist is a universal sign of unity and power. The speaker translates it as meaning 'have strength'.

It is ironic that the speaker refers to the prisoner's hand as being 'talkative' because they have not spoken a single word. By using the word 'speak' in line 19 and 'talkative' in line 24, the poet emphasises that political prisoners were not allowed to talk to one another.

The prisoners may not have been able to talk to one another, but they have found a way to communicate because they are bound to one another by a common cause – the fight for a free and democratic South Africa. The authorities may have tried to destroy the liberation movement by isolating prisoners, but they did not succeed. The spirit of *Ubuntu* that bonds them is stronger than the prison cells that keeps them separated.

### **Post-reading activities**

You can find the answers to the questions on page 59 at the back of the anthology, on page 196.

The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



#### **Activity 4**

1. Refer to lines 7 – 8. Account for the detailed description of the prisoner's hands.
2. Refer to lines 7 – 11. Suggest a reason why the poet uses five lines to describe the prisoner's action.
3. Comment on the appropriateness of the form and content of line 20.
4. Discuss the tone of line 19.

#### **Suggested answers**

1. The speaker describes what the prisoner is doing with his 'free hand' to emphasise that the conversation takes place while the prisoner is pretending to continue polishing the door handle. The speaker refers to his 'fingertips' because the prisoner is making small, delicate movements that cannot easily be detected. The reference to the 'bunch' (of fingers) suggest that, although the movements are small, the meaning is big.
2. The prisoner has to take care that his actions do not look suspicious. He knows that he is being watched by the warder. The extended description adds tension and anticipation – the speaker has been waiting for the opportunity to communicate. It is a rare privilege.





### Activity 4 (continued)

3. The words spoken by the warder are printed in italics to indicate that this is actual dialogue and different to the 'signed' communication between the speaker and the prisoner. The warder speaks Afrikaans because most prison warders were Afrikaans-speaking during the apartheid era.
4. The tone in line 19 is hopeful. The speaker repeats 'later' in an attempt to convince himself that the conversation will take place. 'Maybe' suggests fear that it might not take place after all. Nothing is certain.

## Poem 5: Funeral Blues

Your fifth poem is *Funeral Blues* by W. H. Auden. Turn to page 122 in the anthology.

### About the poet

In addition to being a poet, W. H. Auden was also a playwright and wrote the lyrics for cabarets. He also wrote play reviews and was a film critic.

### Pre-reading activity

We all deal with the death of a loved one differently. If you can, listen to the Norman Shaw rendition of *Funeral Blues* copied in the link below.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zggqsJTP1O8>

As you listen to the song, write down your own feelings about losing a loved one.

### Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 122 – 126 of the anthology.



Read the poem out loud *three times* before reading the analysis of the poem.

*Funeral Blues* was a song in the satirical play *The Ascent of F6*. Auden reworked the song and published it as a poem in 1940. The structured rhyme scheme of aabb, ccdd, eeff, gghh and the regular rhythm are a remnant of the poem's lyrical beginnings.

The poem explores the speaker's intense emotions after the passing away of a loved one. The rhyme scheme and regular rhythm also serves as an attempt to harness the speaker's strong feelings. There is a sense that the speaker cannot contain the enormity of his emotions, but can control the structure of his writing.

The poem is divided into four stanzas of four lines each. Each stanza deals with a different aspect of the speaker's experience of loss.

### Stanza 1 – everyday things

The first line reads as a command: 'Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,'. We are ruled by daily routines and often watch the time to keep to our schedules. The speaker's request to 'Stop all the clocks' reveals that he cannot continue with his normal routine. He needs time to stand still so that he can absorb the enormity of his emotions. In the same way, he requests that nobody phones him. He does not want to make any connections with the outside world, because his world has come to an end.

The request in line 2 may seem a little odd at first. Why would he want the dog to stop barking with his juicy bone? The dog is doing something normal (barking) and enjoyable (juicy bone). The speaker wants all signs of normality to end, quite simply because he cannot deal with 'normal' when nothing about his life will be normal again.

The pianos in line 3 could refer to his working environment. He asks for absolute silence. He knows that the moment he has been dreading is about to come – the coffin has to be taken out of the house and brought to the church. He asks for drums to beat softly ('muffled') and for the mourners to come out. It is as if he needs dramatic momentum to get through the awful day.

Take note of the enjambment (see the definition on page 178) between lines 3 and 4. The run-on lines illustrate the movement of the coffin, the speaker and the mourners. The funeral procession is about to begin. They are leaving the domestic scene and moving out towards the church.

### ***Stanza 2 – the environment***

In this stanza the poet refers to everyday things that we would experience in the street. There is a plane flying overhead, there are doves in the trees and policemen are controlling the traffic. The speaker needs all these elements to reflect his intense sorrow. He wants the aeroplane to moan his loss and to scribble the message of his partner's death in the sky. Notice that 'moan' and 'scribble' personify the plane. The speaker's loss is so overwhelming that he transfers his emotions to everything he sees.

Lines 7 and 8 seem satirical – can you imagine doves wearing little white bows and the traffic officers wearing black gloves? The first stanza deals with domestic realities with which the poet can deal. As the poet moves out of his familiar environment, he needs the whole world to embrace his mourning and loss. The speaker does not, of course, mean these requests literally. His grief is all encompassing and he sees it everywhere.

### ***Stanza 3 – a personal loss***

In the third stanza the speaker reveals what his partner meant to him. His beloved was like a compass giving him direction. He was at the centre of his being and gave him direction. Line 9 is made extraordinarily emotional by the repetition of 'my'. It is as if the speaker is saying that he no longer exists now that his beloved is gone. 'My' is repeated in lines 10 – 11, emphasising their close relationship.

Line 12 is exceptionally touching. We all know the clichéd expressions like 'true love lasts forever' and 'love never dies'. The speaker has come to realise that love does not last forever because people die. It is a simple statement, expressing an overwhelmingly sad truth. 'I was wrong' is written as a separate sentence. Paradoxically the shortest sentence in the poem, it contains the saddest reality.

### ***Stanza 4 – universal implications***

People who have lost their partners struggle to adapt after the business of a funeral. In the silence after everybody has left, life can seem unbearable. The fourth stanza focuses on the enormity of loss. The speaker needs nothing. Stars are symbols of romance and dreams. For the speaker, there is no need for romance and dreams and the stars; 'every one' of them can be extinguished.

The moon and the sun are symbols of birth and life. These can be 'dismantled' – they can be taken out of the equation of life. The speaker feels abandoned by life and eternity.

The ocean and wood in line 15 refer to the essential elements of water and fire. The ocean is a symbol of life. The speaker asks that the ocean is 'poured out'. There is no need for wood because there is no need for fire. This hyperbole illustrates the poet's intense pain and his inability to imagine life without his beloved.



There is nothing good in this world now that his beloved has died: 'nothing now can ever come to any good.'



*Funeral Blues* is recited by John Hannah in the film, *Four weddings and a funeral*. Watch this touching performance, copied in the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDXWclpGhcg>

### Post-reading activities

You can find the answers to the questions on page 125 at the back of the anthology, on page 210.

You will also find an example of a typical exam question on page 234. The answer to the question is on page 256. The activity that follows will also enhance your understanding of the poem.



### Activity 5

1. Refer to lines 3 and 4. Do you agree that the speaker's request for a 'muffled drum' is in contradiction with the rest of the first stanza?
2. Account for the use of capital letters in line 6.
3. Discuss the effect of the repetition of 'my' in the third stanza.
4. How is the content of the fourth stanza different to the content of the rest of the poem?

### Suggested answers

1. In lines 1 and 2 the speaker asks for absolute silence so that he can gather his thoughts before the funeral starts. His request for a quiet drum beat is in contradiction with his request for silence, but it makes perfect sense. He needs silence to prepare himself, but the accompaniment of the quiet beating of a drum to help him move forward – to give him rhythm because he has no energy of his own.
2. 'He is Dead' is written in capital letters because it is the sentence that the poet would like the aeroplane to write in the sky.
3. The third stanza explores the poet's personal relationship with his partner. The repetition of 'my' emphasises that they had an intense relationship and he felt their interaction in every part of his working, spiritual and domestic life. The repetition of 'my' emphasises that, for the speaker, there is no longer a 'we' or 'us'.
4. The first three stanzas deal with the physical realities of death: the immediacy of a funeral, life at home and everyday actions. The fourth stanza deals with the helplessness and sense of loss on an emotional level. The fourth stanza reveals the sense of hopelessness and lack of vision for the future.

## Poem 6: A Hard Frost

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Your sixth poem is *A Hard Frost* by C. Day Lewis. Turn to page 139 in the anthology.

### About the poet

C. (Cecil) Day Lewis is one of the most celebrated poets in Britain. He struggled with maths at school, but excelled at sport and singing. He lectured at Cambridge and Oxford universities and wrote mystery stories under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake. He is the father of the Oscar award-winning actor, Daniel Day Lewis.

### Pre-reading activity

The changing seasons have a profound effect on the environment. Seasonal changes also affect us because they influence what we wear and what we eat. Take a few minutes to jot down the different ways in which your environment and habits change in spring, summer, autumn and winter.

### Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 139 to 142 of the anthology.



It is important to read the poem *out loud at least three times* before reading the analysis of the poem.

Frost forms when it is cold and dry. It usually falls overnight and covers the ground, trees and bushes with icy crystals.

Frost is personified in the poem. It is described as a thief that has come at night and stolen the winter landscape, leaving in its place a world that seems bright and beautiful, like a young bride dressed in white. The speaker is a little upset because he feels that the frost is teasing the earth. Spring is meant to be the time for beautiful blossoms to appear, and now all the trees and bushes seem to be covered in sparkling, crystal flowers. He knows that the beautiful crystal flowers will soon melt in the winter sun and the beauty of the frost will not last long.

Then he realises that the real change, the real miracle of the seasons, is not the pretty picture of a frost-covered world. Rather, the true miracle of winter lies deep underground, where the frost changes the temperature of the soil, and loosens the seeds that will grow and germinate in spring.

#### Lines 1 – 5

In folklore or fairy tales, the fairies would sometimes steal a sweet, well-behaved child and replace it with a changeling – a nasty, mean child. The first three lines read like an angry exclamation. 'A frost' has come and stolen the speaker's world – the winter landscape – and replaced it with a cheeky ('precocious') picture of spring. He feels fooled and teased. Winter is bare, dark and brown. There are no flowers, there are no leaves on the trees. That is how it should be. Now the frost has come and created an 'image of spring' that is 'too brilliant to be true'.

Note that what upsets him, the pretty, spring-like morning, is written separately as line 3.

#### Lines 6 – 9

The colon at the end of line 3 indicates that a description of the unbelievably beautiful image is to follow. Think about the following:

- 'White lilac on the window-pane'

- The glass in the windows is coated with a thin layer of ice. This gives the windows a light, purple colour.
- 'each grass-blade / Furred like a catkin'
  - A catkin is a tall, thin plant covered in small, spikey flowers. The blades of grass are covered in hard frost, making it appear as if small, white flowers are growing on them.
- 'maydrift loading the hedge'
  - The hedge is sagging under the load of heavy frost.
- 'The elms behind the house are elms no longer / But blossomers in crystal'
  - Elm trees are tall trees that lose their leaves in winter. The elms are no longer bare, but covered in crystals that look like bunches of white flowers.
- 'stems of the mist / That hangs yet in the valley below, amorphous / as the blind tissue whence creation formed.'
  - The mist is thick and heavy in the valley. It almost seems like the living, shapeless ('amorphous') matter ('blind tissue') from which the earth was created. It is as if the frost has created a whole new world.

#### **Lines 10 – 14**

These lines contain an extended metaphor. The winter landscape is compared to a 'raw country maid' – a young, inexperienced virgin. Frost cruelly lends her 'bridal gear' – all the glamorous things that a young girl might want for her wedding: diamonds and a beautiful white dress. However, this is just a mockery – a dream. The diamonds and bridal gown all disappear when the sun rises. As the sun rises, the frost melts in the morning heat. All that the 'raw country maid' has left are the leftovers: the snowdrops that flower in winter, and aconite, a small purple flower.

The sun is personified in line 10 and seems to be in partnership with the charade brought about by the frost. The strong rays of the morning sun make the icy crystals 'blaze' (shine brightly), making the 'mockery' of spring more apparent.

#### **Lines 14 – 18**

In these lines the poet distinguishes between the appearance of death-like winter and the reality of the promise of new life in the coming spring.

The frost 'flounces' (shows off) by dressing death-like winter in temporary crystal flowers and grounds covered in lace-like ice ('filigree'). But there is something else that the eye cannot see. 'Deep below' the surface of the earth, there is change ('transformation'). As the earth freezes and heats up again, the seeds are released and can start to breath. There is a promise for the future: spring.

#### **Post-reading activities**

You can find the answers to the questions on page 142 at the back of the anthology, on page 213.

The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



## Activity 6

1. What is 'my world', referred to in line 1?
2. Explain why the speaker sees the frost-covered scene as 'precocious'.
3. Quote three separate words that imply that the scene of white frost was dazzling.
4. Discuss three images or ideas that are repeated in stanza 1 and stanza 2.

### Suggested answers

1. 'My world' is the winter landscape that the poet or speaker is accustomed to, at that time of the year.
2. A precocious child is too mature for its age. In the same way, the impression of a spring-like morning is too early. It is still winter; it is not yet spring.
3. The three words are: brilliant', 'crystal', and 'blaze'.
4. In line 1, frost is personified as a thief. In line 10, the sun is personified as it 'looks out' from the sky.

In lines 2 – 3 the speaker refers to 'a precocious / Image of spring'. In line 11, the image of blazing crystal icicles is a 'mockery' of spring.

In lines 7 and 8 the speaker refers to the 'amorphous ... blind tissue' used to create the world. In lines 17 and 18, the first beginnings of spring are unseen. The earth seems dead and purposeless, but the seeds are germinating underground.

You have now finished studying the first six poems – well done. We will look at the last six poems in the next term.

## Poem 7: An African Thunderstorm

Your seventh poem is *An African Thunderstorm* by David Rubadiri. Turn to page 155 in the anthology.

### About the poet

David Rubadiri had a successful political, academic and literary career. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in English literature and history in Uganda, and his teacher's diploma from the University of Bristol in England. He was Malawi's first ambassador to the United States and the United Nations. He has published poetry anthologies, a novel and a play. He is regarded as one of the most profound voices in African literature.

### Pre-reading activity

Thunderstorms are common in many parts of Africa. Vast areas in Africa experience droughts, and the rain accompanying thunderstorms is met with excitement and fear. Storms can wreak havoc, and flooding in rain-stricken areas is common.

Everybody has a weather-related story. Speak to neighbours and friends, and write down the words and phrases that they use to describe their experiences. Once you have studied the poem, you can see if any of the words or phrases match those used by the poet.

## Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 155 to 159 of the anthology.



Read the poem out loud *three times* before reading the analysis of the poem.

The poem is divided into three stanzas. The stanzas vary in length. There is no rhyme scheme and the lines differ in length. The structure of the poem is as unpredictable as a thunderstorm.

### Stanza 1

The first stanza focuses on the strong wind blowing from the west. The west wind promises rain and the poet mentions the clouds 'hurrying' towards the village. The present participle (the -ing form of the verb) is used to describe the action of the wind to create a sense of anticipation. This is a wild wind that is 'turning sharply', 'whirling' and 'tossing up' things. The poet uses a number of similes to warn the reader that the storm, although it brings welcome rain, can also bring about damage. It is like a plague of locusts that can destroy crops; it is like a wild beast wagging its tail; and it is like a madman running around without a purpose.

There are no punctuation marks in the first stanza. This mimics the frenzied action of the wind.

### Stanza 2

The second stanza has a more stately tone. It creates a pause before the storm reaches the village. The clouds are personified in lines 9 – 12. They seem royal and proud as they move slowly on the wind's back, like a queen on horseback. The word 'pregnant' implies that the rain is needed and will bring relief, and crops. The dark clouds gather on the top of a hill. 'Perch' creates tension and the impression that the rain is about to fall. 'Sinister' and 'dark' create a sense of drama. The sky is literally dark because the clouds are thick and heavy with rain, but the rain also brings discomfort because the people are unprepared for it.

The trees bend or bow as the wind blows strongly, finally bringing in the rain. The word 'whistles' is onomatopoeic, as it creates the sound of the strong wind blowing through trees. It also serves as a warning that the rain is about to fall.

### Stanza 3

#### Lines 16 – 19

These run-on lines can be read as a complete sentence. The sentence is divided into four lines to emphasise the wild action of the wind. The wind is whirling about (line 19) and as the children scream and shout in delight, their voices seem to be coming from all directions. The wind is loud ('din') because it is strong ('whistles') and because it carries the voices of the screaming children. The alliteration of the 't' sound in 'Toss and turn' creates a sense of excited activity and delight.

#### Lines 20 – 23

The women in the village have quite a task getting children, food and implements out of the rain. The dashes at the end of lines 20 and 21 effectively symbolise the babies the mothers are carrying on their backs. Take note of the rhyming couplet in lines 22 and 23. These two lines also have three syllables echoing the frenzied movement of the mothers rushing around.

### Lines 24 – 26

These lines repeat ideas. 'Madly' links to 'madman' in line 9 and lines 25 and 26 are almost the same as lines 14 and 15. The only different word is 'whilst'. 'Whilst' creates the impression that things are becoming more frenzied.

### Lines 27 – 29

As the storm draws closer the activity in the village becomes more intense. The comparison of the clothes waving about like 'tattered flags' is a subtle hint that the poet is describing an impoverished, rural community.

### Lines 30 – 33

The storm has arrived. The poet uses vivid images to describe the intensity of the storm. The flashes of lightning are described as 'jagged' and 'blinding'. 'Rumble, tremble and crack' is an example of onomatopoeia as it recreates the sound of the thunder. All senses are evoked as the poet even describes the smell of the dying food fires. The rain has arrived. It is falling heavily and sounds like soldiers marching through the village.

## Post-reading activities

You can find the answers to the questions on page 158 at the back of the anthology, on page 216. The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.

You will also find an example of a typical exam question on page 237. The answer to this question is on page 260.



### Activity 7

1. Refer to the first stanza. Account for the poet's use of three similes or metaphors in lines 6 – 9 to describe the wind's action.
2. What impression of the clouds is created by using the words 'pregnant', 'stately' and 'dark'?
3. Comment on the descriptions of the women described in the poem.
4. What tone is created by describing the storm as a 'pelting march'?

### Suggested answers

1. The poet is describing three different aspects of the impending storm. It has the potential to be as destructive as a swarm of locusts. The wind is strong enough to lift things off the ground ('tossing up things on its tail') and it has no fixed direction. It seems to be coming from all directions.
2. The clouds are big, dark and heavy. It is obvious that they are filled with rain and that there will be a heavy rain storm.
3. The women are clearly most concerned about the safety of their children. There is frenzied activity as they 'dart about' gathering essentials. They are not concerned about physical appearances as they have more urgent matters to attend to before the storm comes. Unlike the children, they cannot only be delighted that the rain has come. They know that the rain can also cause damage.
4. 'Pelting march' creates a warning tone. 'Pelting' is a harsh, aggressive action. 'March' is associated with the military. These words serve as a warning that the storm is potentially harmful and that the villagers can do little or nothing to protect themselves.

## Poem 8: An African Elegy

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Your eighth poem is *An African Elegy* by Ben Okri. Turn to page 45 in the anthology.

### About the poet

Ben Okri worked as journalist before becoming a writer. He published his first book before he turned 21, and has been awarded numerous prizes for his work. He has spent most of his adult life in England, but his work focuses on problems faced by many African countries, namely poverty, famine and corruption.

### Pre-reading activity

Read the popular quote by Ben Okri below.

The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.



You can find this quote on a number of websites. The source has unfortunately not been identified. Take a look here:

[https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/31425.Ben\\_Okri](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/31425.Ben_Okri)

Spend a few minutes thinking about the things that cause you to suffer. What do you do to overcome your suffering? What guides you spiritually and what gives you hope? You can practise your writing skills by writing a reflective essay about your thoughts.

### Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 45 to 48 of the anthology.



Read the poem out loud *three times* before reading the analysis of the poem.

An elegy is a mournful poem written in response to the death of a loved one. *Funeral blues* by W. H. Auden is a good example of an elegy. An elegy explores three levels of response: grief, suffering and some form of resolution.

All countries on the African continent have endured suffering and grief on many levels: invasion by a number of western countries, political corruption of their leaders, ethnic warfare, famine and drought. In this poem Okri explores the spirit of the African people and celebrates a philosophy of endurance and hope. It is a deeply spiritual poem that explores the paradoxes (see the definition on page 181) of human existence.

The poem is written in six stanzas of five lines each. There is no rhyme scheme and no fixed rhythm. The speaker refers to 'we' and 'our', making him part of the African people. In line 8 he asks 'you' a rhetorical question. 'You' is never identified, but we can assume that he is speaking to a non-African audience – outsiders.

### Stanza 1

It makes sense that if 'We are the miracles that God made', 'We are precious'. The paradox of the first three lines is in line 2: we are made 'to taste the bitter fruit of Time'. Why, if we are precious, do we have to suffer?

'Time' is written in capital letters to lift the word above its ordinary meaning. Here time refers to the ravages of time: the historical, political and environmental events that shape us. We suffer as a natural consequence of living. The promise is that as the miracles of God's creation, our suffering will have meaning – it 'will turn into the wonders of the earth.'



## **Stanza 2**

In line 8, the speaker asks you, the reader, if you are able to see the 'mystery' of 'our pain'. What is the mystery? It is the paradox that the things that 'burn', harm and scar him, can also be 'golden' and enriching when his perspective changes – when 'I am happy.' The speaker is referring to himself, not his people. What are the 'things' that 'burn' him? Thoughts of his suffering people? The knowledge of what 'Time' has done to them? The mystery, the wonder, the miracle is that they can 'bear poverty' and still dream of 'sweet things'. Despite the reality of life's suffering, they still have hope and spirit.

## **Stanza 3**

'And' in line 11 creates a link with the question asked in line 8. What is the mystery of 'our pain?' The speaker uses 'curse' ironically. People usually curse the bad things that happen to them and eventually develop the habit of cursing most things – the habit of moaning about even the good things that happen to them. In lines 11 – 13 the speaker lists the things that bring joy – even to people who have to 'bear poverty' (line 9). Note the repeated phrase in lines 12 – 15: 'Or the ...' and 'We bless ...'. 'Even in our pain' we recognise and bless those things that give us sustenance and reprieve.

## **Stanza 4**

The second half of the poem focuses on unravelling the mystery of existence. The poet seems to understand why the African spirit is precious and why 'our suffering / will turn into the wonders of the earth.' 'Our music is so sweet' because 'we bless' our lives. The 'air remember' refers to the give and take of life. If you give blessings, blessings will be given to you. You reap what you sow.

The poet once again uses the words 'miracles' and 'Time'. The miracle of life is not immediate. Miracles lie in destiny and a hope for the future that will only be revealed in 'Time'.

In line 20 the speaker refers to himself – he has heard 'the dead singing'. He can be referring to folklore, a knowledge of history or the voices of his ancestors. The poet can also be referring to his own spiritual awareness of the mysteries of life.

## **Stanza 5**

What do the dead tell the speaker? 'This life is good'. The here and now is good, despite physical or emotional suffering. The key is to live it 'gently', without curses and anger. Live with passion ('fire') and 'always with hope'. Then there will be 'wonder' and miracles.

## **Stanza 6**

There are forces that shape our destiny, 'the unseen moves'. 'There is wonder' (line 25) and 'there is surprise' when you live with the knowledge and belief that 'destiny is our friend.'

Everything is connected. Everything we do is part of the 'unseen' destiny. The ocean, that surrounds and connects all life on earth, is full of songs. We are all connected by the music we make. 'The air remembers' and we become what we sing.

## **Post-reading activities**

You can find the answers to the questions on page 48 at the back of the anthology, on page 193.

You will also find examples of typical exam questions on page 225. The answers to these questions are on page 244.



The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



### Activity 8

1. Explain the paradox in the first stanza.
2. Refer to lines 6 – 7. What does the diction in these lines imply about the nature of perspective?
3. Refer to line 18. Account for the use of 'secret' in the context of miracles.
4. Discuss the speaker's tone in the last stanza.

#### Suggested answers

1. The poet announces that 'we are the miracles that God made', and then states that 'we' have been created to 'taste the bitter fruit of Time.' The two ideas appear contradictory. The miracle of creation does not imply a lack of suffering, it promises balance – the knowledge that suffering will turn into joy and wonder.
2. 'Burn' implies that a negative perspective can harm and scar your psyche. 'Golden' implies that changing your attitude can be rewarding and enriching.
3. The poet implies that 'miracles' are a result of a way of life, and not an immediate reward for a good deed done.
4. The speaker is optimistic and insightful. He believes in the future of the African people and knows that we are all connected to one another. 'Everything' is part of the unseen and unknown. 'Our music' is sweet and the 'air remembers'.

## Poem 9: somewhere i have never travelled

Your ninth poem is *somewhere i have never travelled* by E. E. Cummings.  
Turn to page 25 in your anthology.

### About the poet

At the time of his death, E. E. Cummings was the most widely read poet of his time. He broke away from traditional forms of poetry, grammar and punctuation rules. He wrote about simple, everyday things in wildly exciting ways. He played with typography and punctuation marks to create images for his ideas. He rearranged sentences for emphasis. He played with words and word forms to enhance and emphasise meaning. Expressions like 'the voice of your eyes' appear nonsensical, but on further analysis expose layers of meaning.

### Pre-reading activity

Describing the feelings you have for a loved one is often difficult. It is easy to become sentimental and clichéd. Think about your feelings for somebody special in your life:

- Write down the images you see when you think of that person.
- Write down a few words that describe your feelings.
- What colours do you associate with your feelings?
- Express your feelings in a poem of your own.

## Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 25 – 28 of the anthology.



Read the poem out loud *three times* before reading the analysis of the poem.



Listen to a beautiful reading of *somewhere i have never travelled* by Mark Coleman. It will greatly enhance your understanding of the poem.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66fUNBpk4ls>

*Somewhere i have never travelled* is a love poem. The speaker uses a number of extended metaphors to explain the nature of the love between him and his beloved.

Loving somebody is compared to travelling to distant countries and being absorbed by its colours and textures.

Love has the power to change somebody's nature in the same way that the seasons affect flowers.

The poet does not use any capital letters in the poem and there are no full stops. The lower case 'i' symbolises the speaker's submission to the power of his beloved to control his reactions and emotions. The lack of full stops symbolises that the shared love is never ending.

The poem is made of five stanzas of four lines each. There is no fixed rhythm or rhyme scheme and the poem is essentially written in free verse. The rhyme scheme in the last stanza echoes the balance and structure the speaker feels because of his beloved.

### Stanza 1

The speaker announces that he is satisfied ('gladly') that there is a 'somewhere' that he has never been able to reach – something that has never experienced before ('i have never travelled'). He will never be able to grasp the mysterious power of his beloved's love for him, or her soul.

The first two lines can be read in a number of ways:

- 'somewhere i have never travelled, gladly' I am glad that there are parts of you that are still a mystery to me
- 'beyond any experience,' It is more exciting to me than anything else I have experienced
- 'your eyes have their silence:' Your eyes are the window to your soul and I cannot read what is going on in your mind when I look into your eyes. You remain a mystery to me.

He is captured ('enclose') by 'things' in her 'most frail' or gentle gestures. He cannot 'touch' (understand or analyse) these 'things' because they are 'too near' – he is too close and emotionally involved with her.

In other words, the speaker is overwhelmed by the mystery of love. He cannot find the secret by looking symbolically into his beloved's eyes; he only knows that love is there by analysing the smallest things she does.

There are a number of paradoxes in this stanza. The beloved's gestures are 'frail' but have the power to 'enclose' him. The poet cannot grasp ('touch') the mystery of love, precisely because he is so close, 'too near' to his beloved.

Note that 'experience,your' is written as one word. This is essentially referring to the destination he has arrived at in his metaphorical journey towards love – his experience of loving 'you', his beloved.

### **Stanza 2**

In Stanza 2 the speaker focuses on how his beloved treats him when he has shut himself off. He admits that at times he shuts himself off like fingers holding something tightly in a fist. Her 'slightest look' has the power to 'unclose' him, to open his fingers the way that flowers open 'petal by petal' when Spring arrives.

'(touching skilfully,mysteriously)' is written between brackets to illustrate two things. He has closed himself like words between brackets – and his beloved has the power to break through that barrier and 'skilfully,mysteriously' release him, 'unclose' him.

### **Stanza 3**

The speaker's beloved is very much in control of her emotions and, in a sense, the relationship, despite having 'frail gestures' (line 3). She may at times wish to withdraw from him 'wish ... to close me'. He responds naturally, like a flower closing in the cold, winter snow.

The enjambment or run-on line at the end of line 9 is clever. The poet uses 'i' and / my life to emphasise the two aspects of the speaker's existence. There is the 'i' who is submissive to the needs of his beloved and the part of him that has an external life.

Also note that 'beautifully,suddenly,' is written as one word to emphasise that he sees her need for withdrawal as an essential part of her mysteriousness. It is 'beautiful' because it is part of her.

Can you see how the poet plays with the different forms of 'close'? In line 3, the speaker is 'enclosed' by the mystery of love. In line 5 his beloved can 'unclose' him (open him) when he has 'closed' himself, cut himself off from love.

In line 9 the speaker refers to his beloved's desire to 'close' him off and to withdraw.

### **Stanza 4**

The speaker is clearly in awe of his beloved's 'intense fragility'. He does not mean that she is a fragile and weak woman. In fact, she has great power in their relationship. Her 'fragility' is the mystery that surrounds her, the mysticism of their love that he experiences intensely. She is interesting and exciting to him. Just as there are many countries and cultures in the physical world, filled with exciting traditions, cultures and art, his beloved has different layers to her personality. The different aspects of her character are like different colours and different textures. He feels driven ('compels') to be with her because she is more interesting than anything he has seen or experienced. She has no equal. Her breathing is life and death to him – it is all that matters.

### **Stanza 5**

The first three lines in this stanza have been written between brackets. The brackets enclose the essence of his beloved that the speaker does not understand – her mystery. Take note on the repeated use of 'closes' and 'opens'. He does not understand the nature of the love between them and her ability to reach him. He only knows that 'the voice of her eyes' – the actions of her soul – is more intense than anything he has ever experienced.

Rain is an essential component in the cycle of life. The speaker feels that his beloved is more essential and intense than rain. Her 'small hands' are beyond compare, and can touch and sustain him in a way that exceeds even the ability of the rain to sustain the earth. Also, the image of 'small hands' reminds us again of the power in her fragility, and of the poet's image of her opening him whenever he is 'closed ... as fingers'.

### Post-reading activities

You can find the answers to the questions on page 28 at the back of the anthology, on page 189.

The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



### Activity 9

1. Explain the meaning of 'your eyes have their silence', in line 2.
2. Refer to lines 5 – 8. What impression is created of the relationship between the speaker and his beloved in this stanza?
3. Refer to lines 14 – 15. Comment on the appropriateness of comparing the beloved's nature to different countries, colours and textures in the context of the poem.
4. Discuss the tone of the poem. Justify your answer by quoting from the text.

### Suggested answers

1. The eyes are known as the windows to the soul. They are more than just organs for sight, they reflect the workings of the soul. The speaker, however, cannot perceive the depths of his beloved's emotions or feelings – she remains a mystery to him.
2. They have a dynamic relationship. The speaker sometimes withdraws from his beloved and shuts her out. She has the ability to draw him back in. The poet uses a metaphor to illustrate this. He shuts himself off and closes himself 'as fingers'. His beloved has the power to change him – his closed hand, or fist, becomes a bud that opens with the gentle spring sunshine.
3. Line 14 suggests that finding love is like a journey to an unknown location. By comparing his beloved to 'countries' he suggests that she is more than just a single journey – she is the destination of all journeys.
4. This is a love poem. The tone is happy and excited as the poet 'gladly' experiences his emotions for his beloved. He is enraptured and enthralled by the mysteries of love that can 'skilfully' and 'beautifully' enhance his being.

Well done, you have completed half of the poems that you need to study for this term.

Now let's move on to the next poem.

## Poem 10: The Garden of Love

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Your tenth poem is *The Garden of Love* by William Blake.

Turn to page 159 in the anthology.

### About the poet

William Blake was a poet, painter and printer. One of five children, Blake left school at the age of ten and was educated at home by his mother. His parents recognised that he had an intelligent and enquiring mind, and he was encouraged to draw and read extensively.

Blake was seen as a rebel. He rejected all forms of institutions that failed to deliver mankind from its misery. He was critical of the Church for forcing people to find God by following set rules, instead of exploring spirituality, and for failing to protect the innocent. He was critical of government for failing to protect the poor.

Blake self-published his poems and illustrated them with his own drawings.

### Pre-reading activity

Reflect on your thoughts about religion. Are you religious, and do you attend a place of worship? What, in your opinion, is the role of the Church? Do you think that religion has a role to play in modern society?

If possible, share your thoughts with friends and family.

### Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 159 – 162 in the anthology.



It is important to read the poem *out loud at least three times* before reading the analysis of the poem.

The speaker returns to an area where he used to play as a child. He used to call it 'the Garden of Love' because he could play there freely, enjoying the 'sweet flowers', and explore his emotions and dreams. What he sees when he returns upsets him. A church has been built in the middle of the open area. The church doors are closed and 'Thou shalt not' has been written above the door. He decides to go further into the garden of his youth, and finds that there are no longer flowers there, but only tombstones. He sees priests dressed in black, guarding the garden gates.

The poem is written in simple language and is fairly easy to understand. In the first two stanzas, the second and fourth lines rhyme. There is no rhyme scheme in the last stanza.

### Stanza 1: the speaker returns to the Garden of Love

The speaker records his action in the simple past tense, as if he is simply supplying the facts. 'Saw' and 'had seen' are different forms of 'to see'. The repetition of this action emphasises his shocked reaction – he can hardly believe what he has seen.

'Garden' and 'Love' are capitalised. This could mean that he is not referring to a literal garden, but rather to a spiritual or emotional space in which he used to be able to think freely. It could also refer to the Garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve could exist without knowledge of sin or punishment.

'Chapel' is also capitalised. This could mean that the speaker is referring to religion as an institution. Churches are built by man; God created a Garden of Eden.

### **Stanza 2: the speaker investigates the changed scene**

The speaker is not able to enter the church because the gates have been shut. He can only see the first three words of each of the commandments written above the door: 'Thou shalt not'. It is as if the church is issuing a warning that only those who are free of sin may enter it. The poet returns to where the Garden of Love once was, hoping that he will once again see the 'many sweet flowers' of his memory.

Blake's criticism of the church as an institution is clear. Surely the church should be open to all, and not shut? Surely the church should allow everyone to enter freely, and not with a veiled threat as to what might happen if they do not follow the rules?

His return to the 'Garden of Love' reflects a spiritual need to return to the experience of unrestricted freedom in the Garden of Eden – a space where nothing prevented man's interaction with God – where the flowers were 'sweet', plentiful and beautiful.

### **Stanza 3: the speaker analyses what he has seen**

Take note that each line in the fourth stanza starts with 'and'. The speaker is overwhelmed by what he sees. He uses synonyms 'graves' and 'tombstones' to emphasise that the things that were living and created by God, the flowers, have been replaced by manmade graves and tombstones. The living have been replaced by the dead.

The priests, as the guardians of religion, are wearing black, a colour usually associated with death. The alliteration of the 'b' sound in 'binding with briars' emphasises that they are not playing a liberating, spiritual role, but rather using Christ's crown of thorns – the Christian symbol of redemption and forgiveness – to bind and control people. The irony is clear: an institution that represents God's love and forgiveness has become an institution of punishment and control. Here there can be no joy and no 'desire' for spiritual growth and godliness.

### **Post-reading activities**

You can find the answers to the questions on page 162 at the back of the anthology, on page 217.

The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



#### **Activity 10**

1. Summarise the literal and symbolic interpretations of *Garden of Love* by William Blake.
2. List the contrasting images in *Garden of Love*.
3. Explain why the 'Chapel' can be interpreted as a symbol of imprisonment.
4. Compare the tone of the title to the tone of the poem as a whole.



## Activity 10 (continued)

### Suggested answers

1. On a literal level, the poem explores the speaker's inability to deal with a changed environment. He struggles to accept that development, or what we commonly refer to as progress, can have a negative effect on the environment.  
  
The Garden of Love symbolises the Garden of Eden, where mankind had an open and direct relationship with God. In this state, man was able to 'play' and enjoy a 'sweet' relationship with God. The church has destroyed this relationship by trying to control and punish mankind.
2. The green meadow or field is contrasted with the black gowns of the priests.  
  
The flowers are contrasted with the graves, tombstones and briars.  
  
Playing freely is contrasted with the priests doing their rounds.
3. The entrance to the chapel has been locked. The rules of the institution are referred to above the door. There are priests doing their rounds, controlling activity in the chapel grounds.
4. The title suggests that the poem that follows is filled with peace and contentment. The reader, like the speaker, is disappointed. The poem has a deflated and frustrated tone.

## Poem 11: Felix Randal

Your eleventh poem is *Felix Randal* by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Turn to page 112 in the anthology.

### About the poet

Gerard Manley Hopkins came from an intellectual and artistic family. His father was also a poet, his mother loved music and literature, and seven of his eight siblings had careers connected to the arts. At university he became friends with Christina Rossetti, who would later write *Remember*.

When Hopkins converted to Catholicism, he was rejected by his family. He became a lonely man, desperate to find a balance between his religious ideals and his passion for poetry.

### Pre-reading activity

We often stay away from people who are seriously ill and cannot deal with the thought that they may die. Do some research among your friends and family. Talk about the ways in which people react to illness and death.

Use this information to write a short magazine article advising people how to deal with the sick and the dying.



## Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 112 to 116 of the anthology.



Read the poem out loud *three times* before reading the analysis of the poem.

The poem was written in 1880 when Hopkins was serving as a Jesuit priest in Liverpool, Ireland. It is based on a real character, called Felix Spencer, who Hopkins ministered to on his deathbed.

The speaker, who in this case is the actual priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, receives the news that 'Felix Randal' has died. He recalls how he has watched the strong young man slowly waste or pine away and lose his physical strength. He takes pleasure in knowing that he has helped Felix to accept his impending death and to receive God as his saviour. He reflects that, as a priest, he has touched Felix Randal. He also admits that he has been affected by Felix. Finally, he imagines Felix in his earlier years, when he was healthy and strong, one of the strongest men amongst his peers, and how he would hammer away making horseshoes. Hopkins could not have known it then, but he too would pine away and die a few years later.

The poem is written in the form of an Italian or Petrarchan sonnet. The first two stanzas form the octave, in which the speaker recalls the details of Felix Randal's death. The last two stanzas form the sestet, in which the speaker reflects on how he has been affected by his interaction with Felix.

The rhyme scheme is Petrarchan: abba, abba, ccd, ccd.

### **The octave**

The octave records the facts surrounding the death of Felix Randal.

#### *Lines 1 – 4*

The first line reads like a line in a conversation. The speaker has been informed that Felix Randal has died. The speaker comments 'O? ... is ... my duty all ended?' It would appear, though, that the interaction between the speaker and Felix Randal was more than just 'duty'.

The description 'the farrier' seems an unnecessary qualification. The speaker knows exactly who Felix is. He was more than just 'a farrier'. He was a big man, moulded into a huge 'hardy-handsome' form. It is with shock that the speaker recalls how the big, healthy man wasted and pined away. 'Pining' is repeated, emphasising the slow and awful physical decline. The alliteration of the 'r' sound in 'reason rambled' emphasises the harsh reality of Randal starting to lose his mind until his body eventually succumbed to his illnesses. The poet uses the alliteration of the 'f' sound in 'fatal four' to emphasise how extremely ill Randal was, and by implication, how terrible his death.

#### *Lines 5 – 8*

Line 5 opens with a simple statement: 'Sickness broke him.' Felix Randal's reaction to his illness seems normal. He was impatient with his weakened body and cursed his illness and impending death. In lines 6 – 8 the speaker remembers Randal's spiritual journey. He remembers how 'months earlier' he had given Felix Randal Holy Communion that helped him grow a 'heavenlier heart.' The alliteration of the soft 'h' sound adds spiritual gravitas to the memory.

The speaker also recalls how Felix was blessed with holy oil, 'anointed' and was prepared for heaven. The speaker has peace knowing that God will bless him, no matter how much he may have offended others in his lifetime.



### **The sestet**

The sestet explores how the speaker has been affected by his interaction with Felix Randal.

#### *Lines 9 – 11*

The speaker comments that they, as priests, develop feelings while they are 'seeing the sick' – ministering to the ill. They become close to the people in their care. The alliteration of the 's' sound in 'seeing the sick' creates a sinister tone that is in contrast to 'endears'. The poet does this on purpose to illustrate that the affection between minister and patient comes as a surprise. The repetition of 'us' highlights the point that something else also happens while 'seeing the sick'. The priest starts to recognise the good he has done. He has used his words 'my tongue' to soothe and comfort Randal. He had laid his hands on the sick man, comforting him when he cried. The tears of suffering have touched his heart – like the tears of a child pull at the heart strings of the parent. The poet once again uses alliteration to illustrate the tender moment that 'tears ... touched (his) heart'. The repetition of the name, Felix, suggests that the speaker interacted with Randal on a personal level.

#### *Lines 12 – 14*

In these lines the speaker tries to imagine what Randal was like in his younger, 'boisterous years'. He imagines what Randal must have been like as he sweated in the forge, battering on a horseshoe for a big, grey horse.

The image is an implied comparison. Felix Randal was powerful and strong when he was healthy. When he became ill and had lost his physical strength, he needed the priest to make him spiritually strong. The image of the sick Felix Randal is 'far from' the image of the healthy man.

### **Post-reading activities**

You can find the answers to the questions on page 116 at the back of the anthology, on page 208.

You will also find an example of typical exam questions on page 228. The answers to these questions are on page 246.

The activity that follows will also enhance your understanding of the poem.



#### **Activity 11**

1. Refer to lines 2 – 3. Describe the two contrasting images of Felix Randal.
2. Refer to lines 5 – 8. What do the words 'heavenlier heart' and 'sweet reprieve' suggest about the speaker's attitude towards his work as a priest?
3. Refer to line 9. Explain the two results of ministering to the ill as expressed in this line.
4. What point is the speaker making in lines 12 – 14?



## Activity 11 (continued)

### Suggested answers

1. When he was healthy, Felix Randal was 'big-boned' and 'hardy-handsome'. When he became ill he 'pined' away and became weak and fragile.
2. The speaker is clearly devoted to his vocation and takes pleasure in knowing that Felix Randal has made peace with God, that his heart is geared towards heaven. He sees the taking of Holy Communion as 'sweet' because it clears Randal's path to God.
3. The priest develops a close relationship with the patient in his care. He also learns to recognise the good he does and becomes 'endeared' to himself – the process of self-love and self-acceptance starts afresh.
4. While he was healthy, Felix Randal paid little attention to his spiritual needs. He was the strongest amongst his peers, he worked passionately and vigorously as a farrier and he did not care much if he offended others (line 8). Physical strength and status amongst our peers means little, however, when faced with the prospect of dying. Physical attributes are temporary. The soul has more value and is the link to eternity.

Now let's look at your twelfth and final prescribed poem.

## Poem 12: Vultures

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Your twelfth poem is *Vultures* by Chinua Achebe. Turn to page 48 in the anthology.

### About the poet

Chinua Achebe is a Nigerian poet and novelist. The novel, *Things fall apart*, is regarded as his best work. Achebe lived through the horrors of the Nigeria-Biafra war and witnessed the cruel treatment of his people and the starvation of children.

Achebe is a celebrated author who has won numerous awards for his writing. He has also received honorary degrees from over 30 universities.

### Pre-reading activity

Open any newspaper and you will see reports on different acts of violence: murder, rape, genocide, warfare and acts of terrorism. You will also see some heart-warming stories showing the good side of humanity. What makes a person capable of violence? What gives somebody the ability to love? Can a person be capable of love and violence at the same time? These are the questions that the poem *Vultures* presents us with. Do you think there is there an answer?

Also do some research online into the Nazis' Bergen-Belsen camp, where people from several countries died of starvation and disease or were murdered. Having been set up as a POW (prisoner of war) camp where thousands of Soviet POWs would die, in 1943 parts of Bergen-Belsen were turned into a concentration camp mainly for Jews.

### Analysing the poem

Read these notes in conjunction with the notes on pages 48 to 53 of the anthology.



Remember to read the poem out loud *three times* (at least) before reading the analysis of the poem.

The poem is written as a single stanza, but is divided into four sections indicated by the indentation of a line. The poem is written in free verse and there is no rhyme scheme. The lines run-on into one another, creating friction and intensity. The images in the poem are graphic and horrific. They shock the reader into considering mankind's capacity for both evil and good.

### ***The title***

Vultures are birds of prey, scavenging off the carcasses of dead animals. They have bald heads, an angular body shape, huge claws and sharp beaks. Vultures, generally, do not have positive associations. They are associated with evil, excess and greed.

The title of the poem, *Vultures*, sets the tone. We assume that the poem will be an exploration of evil and horror.

### ***Lines 1 – 21***

It is a grey morning. The dawn is personified as being 'despondent' – without hope. It is drizzling and there is no indication that the sun will shine through the clouds.

If you take out all the words with negative connotations in lines 4 – 13, you will find a rather gentle interaction between two vultures. Let's place these lines in a standard sentence, using all the correct punctuation marks:

A vulture, perching high on ~~broken bones of a dead tree~~, nestled close to his mate, his smooth ~~bashed-in head~~, ~~a pebble on a stem rooted in a dump of gross-feathers~~, (is) inclined affectionately to hers.

The vultures seem to be taking comfort in one another's company on a cold, drab morning. The descriptions that have been deleted in the box above supply the subtext. The horror lies beneath the surface:

- 'broken bones of a dead tree'
  - Vultures feed off the dead. Their association with death is so strong that the branches of the tree are described as 'broken bones'.
- 'bashed-in head'
  - Vultures have flat, bald heads. The poet describes the heads as 'bashed in' because they are, essentially, violent animals.
- (a head that looks like) 'a pebble on a stem rooted in a dump of gross feathers'
  - We do not generally describe feathers as 'gross'. The poet, however, compares the feathers to the gross things we find in a dump. The small 'pebble' head suggests a lack of thought or insight. The vultures simply exist.

The horror of what they did the day before is revealed in lines 13 – 17. 'Trench' in line 16 implies that the vultures are feeding off corpses in a country ravaged by war. To the vultures, the different body parts are simply 'things' to eat.

'Full' (line 17) and 'gorged' (line 18) graphically illustrate how much the vultures have eaten. They have chosen their spot in the tree so that they can keep their eye on the leftovers of what they have just eaten.

The words 'in easy range of cold / telescopic eyes' (lines 20 – 21) can be seen as a metaphor. They are like long-range sharp-shooters, ready to aim for the next victim. The description creates a link between the animal and human worlds.

This link between the animal and human worlds begs us to ask the question: Who is violent and cruel? Is it the vultures, who are simply playing their part in the eco-system? Dead animal carcasses have to be eaten.

The corpse in the trench is a victim of war. But, while living, he may have shot and killed people. Is man an animal? Has man lost his spirituality and ability to reason and his sense of goodness to such an extent that he can no longer be classified as human?

#### *Lines 22 – 29*

'Strange' in line 22 suggests a shift in focus. The poet personifies love as a woman surrounded by corpses in a charnel-house. Unable to face the horror of her situation, she tidies and rearranges the corner in which she is lying and turns her face to the wall. Here she can pretend that the horrors are not happening around her. She can, in fact, sleep peacefully.

This section forces the reader to ask another question. Is this what love does? Does love blind us to the truth of what we are? Does love make us pretend that everything is alright?

#### *Lines 30 – 40*

The concentration camps of the Second World War are horrific examples of man's capacity for evil.

The image of an officer stopping at a sweet-shop to buy chocolates for his 'tender offspring' because they are 'waiting at home for Daddy's / return', is innocent and sweet.

The love that the Commandant has for his children allows him to set aside the horror of what he is doing at Belsen Camp. He is oblivious to the 'fumes of / human roast' that are still 'clinging / rebelliously to his hairy / nostrils'.

On the one hand, the Commandant is a loving and caring father who wants to buy chocolates for the little ones at home. On the other hand, he is a cruel monster, presiding over the death of Jews, Gypsies, political prisoners, homosexuals and POWs in the name of the Reich.

#### *Lines 41 – 51*

The poet's tone is cynical. We have two choices:

- If you want to, you can praise God ('bounteous / providence') that even a monster, ('an ogre') has a tiny glimmer ('glow-worm') of tenderness tucked away in a cold, cruel heart.
- The other option is to despair and give up hope. At the core of every loving human heart lies the seed of hatred – the ability to bring about evil that will last forever.

### **Post-reading activities**

You can find the answers to the questions on page 52 at the back of the anthology, on page 194.

You will also find an example of a typical exam question on page 238. The answer to this question is on page 261.

The activity that follows will enhance your understanding of the poem.



## Activity 12

1. Refer to lines 1 – 4. Discuss the images that create a dark and sombre mood.
2. Refer to lines 22 – 24. Explain the paradox of love implied by 'love in other / ways so particular'.
3. What is ironic about the Commandant's behaviour in lines 30 – 40?
4. How do lines 41 – 51 affect the tone of the poem?

### Suggested answers

1. The morning is described as grey. There is a cold drizzle and no hope that the sun will shine at all.
2. We are very particular when we choose 'just the right one' to love. We often insist that the people we love behave in a certain way. We tell the truth in the name of love. Yet here, in the horror of a terrible war, love forces us to turn a blind eye. The woman tidies her little corner and turns her back on reality.
3. The Commandant clearly knows the value of love and wants to treat his children with chocolates. He ignores those values when he works in Belsen camp. There he can kill parents who have children that they love. He can kill children who are loved by their parents.
4. The first three sections of the poem force the reader to react with horror and disgust. The poet aims to shock the reader into facing reality. In the last section the tone becomes more contemplative. The reader is required to make an intellectual decision. The poem is a warning that everyone has the capacity for evil on a grand scale.

That brings us to the end of Lesson 2, our discussion of your prescribed poems.

## Summary

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You have to know all 12 prescribed poems well for your literature exam. We have discussed those poems in detail in Lesson 2.

You learnt how poets use poetry to comment on, and react to, society and world events. For example, several of the poems that you have studied were written in response to apartheid. Some poets use poetry to analyse and comment on the human condition, and on how we view the world and ourselves.

You also learnt how to use the format of a poem such as the sonnet to help you to analyse its meaning.

In the next lesson we will discuss how to study unseen poems.

## LESSON 3: ANSWERING QUESTIONS ON UNSEEN POEMS

### Poetry questions that you will need to answer in the final exams

In your final exams, you will be presented with a choice of four seen poems. You must answer questions on *two* of these *seen poems*.

In addition to questions about the poems that you have studied, you will be tested on a poem that you have not studied, in order to see whether you have acquired the basic skills needed to analyse poetry. The 'unseen' poem question is compulsory.

You will be presented with *one unseen poem* question that you have to answer. You can answer this unseen question either in the form of an essay or in the form of contextual/short questions.

To sum up: You must answer questions on **a total of three poems** in Section A of the literature paper – and **one of these poems must be unseen**.

In this lesson, we will give you a few guidelines on how to approach unseen poems. We will start with really easy poems and work towards more difficult ones.

### How to approach an unseen poem

To analyse an unseen poem, you need to do the following:

- Step 1: Read through the whole poem *at least twice*, and determine what the poem is about on a literal (face-value) level.
- Step 2: Look for words or phrases that have been used in an interesting way.
- Step 3: Try to determine whether the poem has a deeper meaning.
- Step 4: Read through all the questions and let them guide you to a deeper understanding of the poem.

Let's now think about each these steps in turn, as we analyse unseen poems.

**Step 1: Read through the whole poem at least twice and determine what the poem is about on a literal level**

Let's try this step by working through a poem by Linda Pastan.

#### ***To a daughter leaving home* by Linda Pastan**

When I taught you	
at eight to ride	
a bicycle, loping along	
beside you	
as you wobbled away	5
on two round wheels,	
my own mouth rounding	
in surprise when you pulled	
ahead down the curved	
path of the park,	10
I kept waiting	
for the thud	
of your crash as I	
sprinted to catch up,	
while you grew	15

smaller, more breakable  
with distance,  
pumping, pumping  
for your life, screaming  
with laughter,  
the hair flapping  
behind you like a  
handkerchief waving  
goodbye.

20

Within the first three lines, the speaker clearly refers to the day she taught her daughter how to ride a bike. Her daughter was eight years old and the speaker, her mother, was running beside her. They were both uncomfortable. She writes that her daughter 'wobbled' and that she herself was 'loping'. The speaker was therefore surprised when her daughter suddenly 'pulled / ahead' and road off down the 'curved / path' on her own.

The mother kept waiting to 'hear a thud'. She was expecting her daughter to fall. However, all that happened was that the little girl was getting smaller and smaller, in other words, she was riding away. Her flapping hair looked like a handkerchief that was being used to wave goodbye.

**Step 2: Look for words or phrases that have been used in an interesting way**

One of the first interesting examples comes in lines 5 – 7: 'as you wobbled away / on two round wheels, / my own mouth rounding / in surprise'. The image is quite easy to understand, isn't it?

Another touching image is the speaker's description of her daughter becoming smaller in the distance; she feels that she is 'more breakable'. But the daughter is not really breakable, is she? She is screaming with laughter. Who is feeling fragile? It is the mother, isn't it?

Can you find any other interesting words or phrases? Jot them down.

**Step 3: Try to determine whether the poem has a deeper meaning**

We may forget to look at the title of the poem when we read it for the first time. The title often holds the key to the meaning of the poem. What do you notice about the title of this poem in relation to its content?

The title suggests that the poem is about a daughter leaving home, while the content of the poem is about a mother giving her daughter a bike-riding lesson. Does this make sense? Let's think about it.

What did the mother learn about herself and her daughter when she was teaching her how to ride a bike? She realised that she was being over-protective and worrying too much, as her daughter was fine and could manage on her own. Perhaps the poet was writing this years later, when her daughter really was leaving home, and she was reminding herself not to keep worrying about her. She would be perfectly fine!

**Step 4: Read through all the questions and let them guide you to a deeper understanding**

Read through all the questions asked about the poem before you start answering them. The questions can guide you to a deeper understanding of the poem.

Let's now use this approach to analyse another unseen poem.



Follow all four steps as you read the poem *Ukuhlwa* (Nightfall) by B. W. Vilakazi, below.

***Ukuhlwa* (Nightfall) by B. W. Vilakazi**

I watch the darkness falling  
And hills withdraw their shadows:  
The sun, like ochre, reddens.  
The swallows are at rest,  
The sea-wind still and silent;                    5  
Above me fly the bats.

Now, as the streets are lit,  
I fear the lurking thieves  
Who seek their prey like hunters.  
Here, there is no grass,                                10  
But dust from the mine-dumps  
Like smoke is drifting skyward.

Here there is no river  
To shelter lurking frogs  
And harbour water-fowl.                            15  
Here are only people  
Jostling home from labour,  
Herded by dusk, together.

In the light of the poem as a whole, what does the use of the word 'reddens' (line 3) suggest? Remember that we need to refer to the title of the poem too. The title of this poem is *Ukuhlwa* (Nightfall), and the first line tells you that 'darkness (is) falling'. It is obvious then that the word 'reddens' is suggesting that the sun is setting.

Now look at lines 4 – 5: 'The swallows are at rest' and 'The sea-wind [is] still and silent'. Note the contrast in line 6: 'Above me fly the bats.' What might be the significance of this contrast?

To answer this question, we must look at the contrast between the first and second stanzas. If you have followed Step 2 and read the poem twice, you will have noticed that the first stanza gives a lovely description of the setting sun and the approaching night. You will also have noticed that in the second stanza the focus of the poem shifts to the danger 'lurking' in the streets. So what is significant about the bats? Being both unattractive and creatures that come out at the night, bats are often associated with unpleasantness. Here, at the end of the first stanza, they introduce and hint at the sinister mood of the rest of the poem.

What is important about the difference between 'lurking thieves' (line 8) and 'lurking frogs' (line 14)? Let's consider this question.

What does the poet think of the 'lurking thieves'? He is scared of them. What does he feel for the 'lurking frogs'? He feels sorry for them because they have no place to hide. The thieves are dangerous and are looking for people to attack. The frogs, like the speaker, are potential victims.

Next, let's consider the contrasting of 'grass' (line 10) and 'dust' (line 11).

Remember that while the questions based on the poem will guide you to what is important in the poem, not all of the answers will be in the poem: you may need to use your own reasoning and logic too. So what do we know about grass, and about dust? What do we associate with grass? What do we associate with dust? The poet associates dust with mine dumps. There is no grass, which we would associate with life growing naturally and abundantly. Here nothing can grow: 'Here, there is no grass' and 'Here there is no river.' (Note that the poet uses a comma after the first 'here', but not the second 'here'.) Nature, normally so resilient, cannot exist in this damaged environment.

What is implied by the use of 'Herded' in 'Herded by dusk' in the last line (line 18)?

Let's think about the context in which we might normally use 'herded' as a verb, as in line 18. We use it mainly to refer to the act of rounding up and physically urging groups of livestock such as sheep to move in a chosen direction, by making them nervous about breaking away from the group. How does this apply to the people walking home? Who or what is herding them? 'Dusk' is herding them; but of course this is not meant to be taken literally! The dusk, a metaphorical sheepdog, is rounding the nervous people up and urging them to stick together and move in the same direction. The people are walking together because they are afraid of the coming night.

Let's now try another poem – *Hunger*, by Gabeba Baderoon.

### ***Hunger* by Gabeba Baderoon**

All day I watch the cooking shows, perhaps  
for the company of the colours. I have slow,  
apricot memories. I think I seek in them  
a grandmother and a kitchen heavy  
with years. I think I watch  
for beginnings, perhaps all beginnings.  
A girl learning to keep from crying  
when she slices an onion, when  
she remembers the country she has left.  
All day I watch to keep from crying.

5

10

It should be quite easy for you to visualise the setting in this poem. As you work through the questions, you will be guided into a deeper understanding of the poem.

The title of the poem is *Hunger*. What kind of hunger is the poem about, in particular?

You will have realised that the poet is not referring to the actual recipes or to the food she sees in the poem. She quite clearly says that she watches the shows for the 'company of colours'. She refers to her memories of her grandmother in her kitchen. So how do you answer this question? The poet hungers for the warmth of her own country and the people she has left behind.

Refer to lines 1 – 2. What does the fact that the speaker 'watch[es] the cooking shows' (on TV) and needs the 'company of the colours' suggest about her state of mind?

One part of this question is easy – if she watches television because she needs company, she is obviously feeling lonely. The more difficult part of the question lies in the words 'company of colours'. If she feels her life to be without colour, she could be depressed as well.

How do you answer this question? The poet is lonely and misses her family. She is depressed and lives in her memories of a past life.

What might be suggested by the adjective 'apricot' (line 3)?

Apricot is a warm colour and the apricot fruit is sweet, rich and juicy. Apricots usually grow in warm countries. Apricot memories would be warm, sweet and rich memories.

In line 4 of the poem, consider the meaning in context for the word 'heavy'. Here the word 'heavy' is clearly not meant to be taken literally. Something that is 'heavy / with years' is old.

In line 6 consider why the poet emphasises 'beginnings'.

What 'beginning' does the poet refer to in the poem? She refers to a memory of a little girl learning how to cook. What kind of 'beginning' are you looking for when you move to a new country?

How do you answer this question? The speaker is trying to work out how her life began, or how life used to be in her home country, so that she can work out how to start a new life wherever she is now.

Refer to lines 7 – 8. Why does 'a girl' try 'to keep from crying /when she slices an onion'? She does not want the superficial tears that come from slicing onions to start flowing, because then she will start crying about everything that she is missing.

Are you ready to try a poem on your own? We think so.



### Activity 13

Read the poem below carefully and then answer the questions that follow.

#### ***Sitting on the balcony*** by Charles Mungoshi

Sitting on the balcony  
fingering a glass of beer  
I have bought without  
any intention to drink –  
I see a little boy 5  
poking for something  
in a refuse dump –  
looking for a future?  
I am afraid, the stars say  
your road leads to another 10  
balcony just like this one  
where you will sit fingering  
a beer you have bought without  
any intention to drink.

1. What do you find odd about the speaker in the first four lines of the poem?
2. Refer to lines 3 – 4 and 13 – 14: 'bought without / any intention to drink'. What do these words suggest about the state of mind of the speaker?
3. Explain the implication of 'looking for a future' (line 8) in the light of the phrase 'in a refuse dump' (line 7).
4. Why is there a reference to 'the stars' (line 9)?
5. Which *two* of the words below most accurately describe the attitude of the speaker? (Write only the two words.)

melancholy / methodical / nostalgic / pessimistic / flippant

#### **Suggested answers**

1. He went to the trouble of buying a drink knowing that he was not going to drink it.
2. He is at a loose end and not in a celebratory mood. He feels the need to keep up appearances and that is why he is pretending to have a drink.
3. The boy's future is bleak.
4. The stars are often regarded as indicating the future. Many people study the stars in search of guidance.
5. The two words are 'melancholy' and 'pessimistic'.

## Summary

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In Lesson 3 you learnt how to approach unseen poems in exams, following four useful steps. By now you should have a basic understanding of how to answer questions on unseen poems. Try to analyse one or two other poems yourself, as practice for the unseen poetry question in your exam. Remember that many poems have both a literal and a deeper, underlying meaning.

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## LESSON 4: EXAM SKILLS: CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS AND POETRY ESSAYS

Paper 2 – English literature – consists of three sections:

- SECTION A: Poetry (30 marks);
- SECTION B: Novel (25 marks); and
- SECTION C: Drama (25 marks).

You have to answer THREE questions in Section A:

- Answer TWO questions in the *prescribed poetry* section.  
You will be given four poems, and you have to answer questions on *two* of them.
- You must answer the ONE question that has been set on an *unseen poem*.

You have been given ample examples of exam-style questions to work through. All the questions in this study unit have been based on questions from past exam papers. The same applies to the questions in the *Imagined Worlds* anthology.

Study the introduction to the assessment activities on pages 220 – 223 in the anthology. Then work through the self-assessment questions below. Remember not to look at the suggested answers until you have finished writing down your answers!



### Self-assessment questions

Test your knowledge of the poems you have studied by completing the self-assessment questions below. When you answer the questions, don't look at the suggested answers that we give. Look at them only after you've written your answers and then compare your answers with our answers.

1. What type of poem is *Remember* by Christina Rossetti?
2. Write down the euphemism for death that Rossetti uses in her poem *Remember*.
3. What 'war' is referred to in the title of the poem, *First Day after the War* by Kunene Mazisi?
4. Explain the extended metaphor used in lines 1 – 8 in the poem *First Day after the War* by Kunene Mazisi.
5. What is the setting of *The Zulu Girl* by Roy Campbell?
6. Summarise the implied promise in the last stanza of *The Zulu Girl* by Roy Campbell.
7. How do the two characters in *Motho ke motho ka batho babang* by Jeremy Cronin communicate with one another?
8. Account for the use of Afrikaans in *Motho ke motho ka batho babang* by Jeremy Cronin.
9. What type of poem is *Funeral Blues* by W. A. Auden?
10. Why does the speaker in *Funeral Blues* say 'I was wrong'?

11. Explain the concept of appearance versus reality in *A Hard Frost* by Cecil Day Lewis.
12. Summarise the extended metaphor in the second stanza of *A Hard Frost* by Cecil Day Lewis.
13. Why does David Rubadiri compare the approaching storm in *An African Thunderstorm* to a 'plague of locusts'?
14. The women and children in *An African Thunderstorm* by David Rubadiri react differently to the approaching storm. What is the difference between their responses?
15. Refer to *An African Elegy* by Ben Okri. Why is this poem called an elegy?
16. What does 'Time' symbolise in the poem *An African Elegy* by Ben Okri?
17. What or who is the 'somewhere' referred to in the title of the poem, *somewhere i have never travelled* by E. E. Cummings?
18. Explain why 'i' is written in the lower case in the poem, *somewhere i have never travelled* by E. E. Cummings.
19. What changes have taken place in *The Garden of Love* by William Blake?
20. What impression is created of the priests in *The Garden of Love* by William Blake?
21. Who is Felix Randal in the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins?
22. Explain what the speaker in Felix Randal by Gerard Manley Hopkins means by 'us too it endears' (line 9).
23. What is the theme of *Vultures* by Chinua Achebe?
24. Account for the reference to Belsen camp in *Vultures* by Chinua Achebe.



### **Suggested answers to self-assessment questions**

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1. It is an Italian sonnet.
2. Rossetti refers to death as 'going away' (to the 'silent land').
3. The war refers to the struggle against apartheid.
4. South Africa is compared to a bride on her wedding day. The birth of democracy is symbolised by the wedding ceremony. It is a joyous occasion, celebrating the fruitful new beginnings, associated with a marriage.
5. The setting is a commercial farm somewhere in (South) Africa. A group of labourers is working in the fields.
6. The implied promise in the last stanza is that there is a 'coming harvest', when the suppressed tribes will battle to regain their dignity and be free.

7. The speaker reads the hand signals made by the other prisoner by looking at the reflection of his hands in a mirror.
8. Afrikaans is spoken by the prison warder. The poem is set in the apartheid era in South Africa, when most prison warders (and people in positions of authority in government institutions) were Afrikaners.
9. It is an elegy.
10. He naively thought that the love between him and his partner would 'last forever.' He did not take into account the possibility that his partner could die.
11. The poet is at first upset that the frost-covered world appears as beautiful as spring, when in fact it is in the middle of bare winter.
12. The bare winter landscape is compared to a 'raw country' girl. The 'frost' lends her a diamond-covered white bridal gown, promising a beautiful wedding. But 'frost' is temporary and the young girl is soon left with nothing but a memory.
13. A storm can be as destructive as a plague of locusts.
14. The children are delighted and excited. The woman run around frantically trying to collect their children and household items.
15. The poem explores the many forms of suffering of African people. It then goes on to praise the human spirit of endurance and hope.
16. 'Time' symbolises the events that shape human beings. It refers to environmental, political or social ills. It also refers to the future that we help create through our own actions and beliefs.
17. 'Somewhere' refers to the most important destination in life's journey – the discovery of love.
18. The 'i' is written in lower case to emphasise that the speaker is not the topic of the poem. He is subservient and submissive to the power and mysteries of love.
19. There is no longer a garden. A chapel and graveyard have been built in its stead.
20. The priests are dark and forbidding. They are doing 'their rounds' like prison guards, ready to 'bind' the disobedient.
21. Felix Randal is a farrier in the speaker's parish. He becomes gravely ill and the speaker, a priest, has to attend to his spiritual needs as he prepares for death.
22. Felix Randal had a profound effect on the speaker. The speaker is reminded of the value of his work and is warmed by his ability to interact on a personal level.
23. The poem warns of humans' capacity for evil. The poet implies that we all have the capacity for evil.
24. Belsen camp is notorious for being one of the most sickening concentration camps of the Second World War (World War II). It serves as an example of humans' capacity for evil.



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