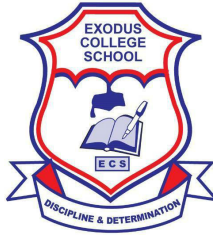


**EXODUS COLLEGE SCHOOL - WAKISO**  
**CAKE ON INTRODUCTION TO POETRY.**



**Literary aspects of poetry**

Poetry at ordinary level emphasizes aspects that enable the students to interact with the poem from a mutual and emotional perspective. It allows the student to be a part of the poem or to get absorbed in the poem. The aspects to be emphasized include: speaker, subject matter, character, themes, feelings, lessons, relevance and poetic appeal.

**The Speaker**

Also known as the 'persona', the speaker is the voice that speaks to us in a poem. Note that there is a clear difference between the 'speaker' and the 'poet'. The poet is the writer of the poem while the speaker is an individual/voice in the poem who communicates the poet's message.

In the poem 'From the outside' the poet is M.P. Gwala, while the speaker is a mourner or relative of Madaza. In 'A Freedom Song', the poet is Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, while the speaker is Atieno's uncle.

**Subject Matter**

Subject matter refers to what is happening in the poem. In explaining the subject matter of a poem, a student is expected to summarise the poem in one paragraph by paraphrasing it.

For instance we can say, the poem 'Building the nation' , is about a Permanent

Secretary who is driven to a state function at a classic hotel. While the PS enjoys himself at the function with plenty to eat and drink, the driver is left to starve in the car, waiting to drive him back. On the return journey the PS sarcastically asks the driver if he ate anything, to which the latter replies that he is 'slimming'. The PS pretends not to have eaten anything as well and complains of stomach ulcers.

### **Character**

In analyzing character, we focus on the traits or behaviour of individuals in the poem. Generally, we use adjectives which denote behaviour. Character thus can be identified as; loving, obedient, humble, rude, arrogant, proud, exploitative, hypocritical, insensitive/inhuman, irresponsible, etc.

For instance, we can characterize the PS in 'Building the nation' and Atieno's uncle in 'A Freedom song' as being: exploitative, insensitive/inhuman, hypocritical, irresponsible, etc.

### **Themes**

Just like in any text, themes in poetry refer to the core concerns of the poet. They are derived from the subject matter of the poem. Sometimes, students tend to confuse subject matter and theme. This is usually when a general question is posed such as; 'What is the poem about?' You will find students saying it is about love, suffering, poverty, etc. Such a question clearly calls for subject matter, not themes.

For instance, after analyzing the subject matter of 'Building the nation' and 'A Freedom song', we can say the themes therein include; exploitation, hypocrisy, child abuse/labour (in a A freedom song), etc.

### **Feelings and Attitude**

Poetry is one genre (branch) of Literature that appeals directly to our conscience. We are therefore more inclined to respond to poetry with our emotions rather than our thoughts (reasoning). These emotions may be directed at individuals or situations in the poem.

In expressing feelings or attitude, students should avoid stating; 'I feel...' This

creates monotony. Express the feeling by stating: 'I am ...' For instance one can say: I am disgusted, I am disappointed, I hate him, I sympathise with her or I am sympathetic to her, I am proud of him, etc. Sometimes students may be asked to explain the feeling or attitude of an individual in the poem, say the speaker. The response is the same, ie: he is disappointed, he is disgusted, he is sympathetic, etc.

## **Lessons**

As poetry appeals to our emotions, it is imperative that we draw moral lessons from the poems that we read. Note here that lessons are not themes. Themes are the poet's message in the poem. Lessons can be defined as: 'A collection of wisdom derived from phenomena, character, themes and events in a text/poem to be applied to related real life situations.'

Just as is the case with feelings, lessons should not be expressed with the monotonous phrase: 'I learn' or 'we learn'. Lessons are best expressed with proverbs, sayings or idioms. One can for instance say: 'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush', and then proceed to relate the saying to an appropriate example/situation in the poem.

Alternatively, one can simply use plain statements for example: 'Children should not be used as house helps, as is the case with Atieno', or 'Bosses should show concern for their employees and not neglect them the way the PS does with his driver'.

## **Relevance**

Just like it is with other texts, poetry draws comparison with society. This is its relevance. In other words, what we see in the poem is also evident in society. Poems, like other texts, reflect on the evils, challenges and other aspects of life in society. They are a reflection of what goes on in society.

Therefore, when analyzing the relevance of a poem, we should relate it to what happens in society. For instance, there are so many employees who are mistreated by their bosses just like the driver in 'Building the nation'. There are also many young girls in society who suffer the fate of Atieno in 'A Freedom song'.

We should not confuse relevance with lessons. Some students, when asked for the

relevance of a poem, instead talk about lessons. You will thus find one who says: 'The poem is relevant because it teaches us about the consequences of mistreating children.' This is wrong because it changes the question or response from relevance to lessons.

### **Poetic Appeal**

After analyzing poetry through the various aspects discussed above, we are expected to appreciate it. Poetry is essentially meant to entertain us and humour us, as it educates us in the process. Therefore, we are always expected to find every poem we read appealing or interesting.

What makes a particular poem interesting or appealing depends on you the reader. However, aspects of interest can include:

The title being captivating

The structure of the poem (short stanzas or lines); easy to memorise

The language (simple/plain)

Vocabulary/diction/choice of words

Some poems use local words

Poetic devices such as; metaphors, similes, repetition, irony, etc

Lessons learnt

Relevance to society

Subject matter (easy to interpret/understand)

etc

### **Conclusion**

Poetry should therefore be treated as a hands-on experience in which learners interact with poems, appreciate poems and live the poems. The notion that poetry is hard or complicated needs to be demystified to encourage learners to appreciate the beauty of poetry.

## **SAMPLE POEMS AND RESPONSES**

**1. Read the poem below and answer the questions which follow.**

### **Africa**

Africa my Africa  
Africa of proud warriors in the ancestral savannahs  
Africa of whom my grandmother sings  
  
on the banks of the distant river  
  
I have never known you  
  
But your blood flows in my veins  
  
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields  
  
The blood of your sweat  
  
The sweat of your work  
  
The work of your slavery  
  
The slavery of your children  
  
Africa tell me Africa  
  
Is this you this back that is bent  
  
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation  
  
This back trembling with red scars  
  
And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun  
  
But a grave voice answers me  
  
Impetuous son that tree young and strong

That tree there  
In the splendid loneliness amidst white and faded flowers  
That is Africa your Africa  
That grows again patiently obstinately  
And its fruit gradually acquires  
The bitter taste of liberty.

*David Diop (Senegal)*

**Questions:**

What is the poem about? (05 marks)

Identify the themes in the poem. (04 marks)

What are the speaker's feelings in the poem? (05 marks)

What do you like about the poem? (06 marks)

**Response:**

**a) What is the poem about?**

The poem is about **an African** who **laments** about his **motherland Africa**. He **reminisces an Africa** with its **gallant warriors and beautiful terrain**. He then laments about the **slavery** that Africa was subjected to, and the **weight of colonialism**. Yet even in independence, **suffering still reigns**.

(Any 5 x 1 = 05 marks)

**b) What are the themes in the poem?**

Possible themes include:

Colonialism

Exploitation  
Slavery  
Struggle for independence  
Injustice  
Suffering

(Any 4 x 1 = 04 marks)

**c) What are the speaker's feelings in the poem?**

The speaker feels:

Nostalgic  
Frustrated  
Emotional  
Disappointed  
Angry/angered (at the suffering of Africa)  
Lonely  
Proud (of Africa)

(Any 5 x 1 = 05 marks)

**d) What do you like about the poem?**

The following are likeable:

the title  
structure (one stanza poem)  
imagery  
repetition (of the word 'Africa')  
vocabulary/choice of words  
use of metaphors  
subject matter  
relevance of the poem to society

(Any 6 x 1 = 06 marks)

**TOTAL = 20**

**MARKS**

**2. Read the poem below and answer the questions which follow.**

**Thoughts after work**

Clear laughter of African children  
Rings loud in the evening:  
Here around this musty village  
Evening falls like a mantle,  
Gracing in all a shroud of peace.  
Heavily from my office  
I walk  
To my village,  
My brick government compound,  
To my new exile.  
In this compound  
I would no longer intrude.  
I perch over a chasm,  
Ride a storm I cannot hold,  
And so must pass on quietly –  
The laughter of children rings loud  
Bringing back to me  
Simple joys I once knew.

*David Rubadiri (Malawi)*

**Questions:**

Explain the subject matter of the poem. (5 marks)

Why does the speaker feel like he is in exile? (5 marks)

What expressions show that the speaker is an outsider? (4 marks)

What do you like about this poem? (6 marks)

**Response:**

**What is the poem about?**



The poem is **about a civil worker/servant** who **has an internal conflict of feelings**. He is **faced with the bitter realities** when he compares his village to the kind of life that he is living at the government compound. It explains **his life as a hermit/outsider** who misses his village yet **does not seem to fit in**.

*(5x1 = 5 marks)*

**Why does the speaker feel like he is in exile?**

he is looked at as an intruder in the village

he is no longer welcomed by the happy laughter of the children

he calls his house his new exile

he must quietly pass without intruding on other people's lives

he recalls the joys of his childhood.

*(5x1 = 5 marks)*

**Which expressions show that the speaker is an outsider?**

"I would no longer intrude"

"simple joys I once knew"

"ride a storm I cannot hold"

"to my new exile"

*(4x1 = 4 marks)*

**What do you like about this poem?**

the title is self explanatory

the structure of the poem: short lines, one stanza

the language is simple

the choice of words which are metaphorical

the lessons learnt

the subject matter which is relevant to society

*(6x1 = 6 marks)*

**TOTAL = 20**

**MARKS**

**3. Read the poem below and answer the questions which follow.**

### **Gossips (Maaka)**

Gossips have neither head nor tail, back nor front  
They create a clay cow  
until it cries 'moos' lows  
And at sunrise you 'kotela' its calf;  
its milk fills pails,  
that make your children's cheeks glister

Dipotso came out with the words last night  
When meeting her on the road.  
Mpho clapped her thigh  
'I want to know since when Molefi  
became my lover.'  
The entanglement of words was brought about by whoever;  
whoever had caught them, as they flew, from so and so;  
so and so had heard them from such and such  
who had been whispered to by guess who?

Gossip is the 'diketo' of females  
A game with which they distract themselves  
Men's talk makes them impatient  
They are the ones who want to tatter  
A man who gossips smells to them like a skunk

*Grace Setalekgosi (Botswana)*

### **Questions:**

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| What is the poem about?                                    | (06 marks) |
| Describe the character of gossips as depicted in the poem. | (05 marks) |
| What is the speaker's attitude towards the gossips?        | (04 marks) |
| How relevant is this poem to your society?                 | (05 marks) |

### **Response:**

**What is the poem about?**

The poem is about women who gossip too much about others. They create and circulate falsehoods about fellow women, which scandalizes the victims and creates conflict. Gossiping is mainly done by women and men who gossip are scorned.

*(Any 6x1 = 06mks)*

**Describe the character of the gossips as depicted in the poem.**

The gossips are portrayed as being:

Jealous

Liers

Rumour-mongers

Talkative

Sadistic/callous

Insensitive

*(Any 5x1 = 05 mks)*

**What is the speaker's attitude towards the gossips?**

Contemptuous/scornful

Disappointed with them

Angry with/at them

Hateful

Despises them

*(Any 4x1MARKS*

*mks)*

**How relevant is this poem to your society?**

Many marriages/relationships/friendships have been broken through gossiping.

Most women who gossip are idle/unemployed

Many of them spread falsehoods about others

Some women end up fighting those who gossip about them

Men are not known to engage in gossip

It is a common practice in villages and slums

*(Any 5x1 = 05mks)*

**TOTAL = 20 MARKS**

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