



ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE ~ REVISED 2024

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SONNET 130 – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

- 1 My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
- 2 Coral is far more red, than her lips red:
- 3 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
- 4 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
- 5 I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
- 6 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
- 7 And in some perfumes is there more delight
- 8 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
- 9 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
- 10 That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
- 11 I grant I never saw a goddess go,
- 12 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
- 13 And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,
- 14 As any she belied with false compare.

BACKGROUND

This is sonnet number 130 in a series of 154 sonnets. It parodies the famous (and often over-the-top) Petrarchan sonnets in which poets described their partners in highly exaggerated and unrealistic ways. Although this poem contains similar themes as found in traditional sonnets (Female Beauty, Love and Admiration), Shakespeare does not idealise his beloved. He describes her in ways which are realistic and, therefore, more accurate and 'real'.

This is a Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnet. It consists of three quatrains (4 lines each) and a rhyming couplet (2 lines). The rhyming couplet serves as a final argument to drive home the speaker's point. There is a lot of hyperbole in the poem: all of the comparisons are exaggerated to emphasise the absurdity of Petrarchan ideals.

SUMMARY

Shakespeare uses eight 'anti-compliments' (negative comparisons) to describe the uniqueness and beauty of his beloved. However, in the couplet he states that BECAUSE she is normal and 'real', he does not need to exaggerate her looks or his love for her. He loves her just the way she is – perfect in her imperfection. In other words, she is perfect to HIM – he does not need an idealised and superficial woman.

Shakespeare is making fun of the clichés of love poetry that exaggerated and idealised comparisons to describe a woman's beauty. These comparisons are insincere and unrealistic. They do not show true love.

Although he seems critical and rather rude in the first 12 lines, the reader realises that he is, in fact, sincere in his love for her. He does not need exaggerated and unrealistic comparisons to declare his genuine love for her. In being so brutally honest, he has ironically given her a heightened beauty, simply because he does not dote on her outward appearance.

FORM/STRUCTURE

This is a Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnet. It consists of three quatrains (4 lines each) and a rhyming couplet (2 lines). The rhyme scheme is consistent with this format: abab cdcd efef gg. The couplet serves as a final argument to drive home the speaker's point. The rhythm of the poem is consistent, too, and follows traditional iambic pentameter. There are 10 syllables in each line.

LINE 1

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;

Mistress – this was a more general reference meaning "my love" or "my darling", and not as would use the term today. When we use the word "mistress," it's usually to refer to a woman who is dating a married man.

In this simile, the mistress' eyes are being compared to the sun. When Shakespeare was writing this sonnet it was common to compare a lover's eyes to the sun and sunlight. The sun creates the image of something bright and shiny. Shakespeare completely negates this, using the phrase '*nothing like*' to emphasise the fact that this female's eyes are not bright. The simile indicates that the woman's eyes are just plain and ordinary or nothing special.

LINE 2

Coral is far more red, than her lips red:

Coral – a hard stony substance, typically forming large reefs in warm seas. Known for its bright red or pink colour. This was the perfect colour for the perfect female.

Her lips are not as red as coral; there is nothing special about the colour of her lips. She has ordinary lips.

The speaker is questioning the obsession with physical beauty and criticizing poets who focus only on their lover's appearance rather than their inner qualities.

LINE 3

If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;

Dun – a dull, greyish-brown colour

At that time, it was a huge compliment to have your skin compared to snow. His mistress has a dull complexion. "Dun" is a word often used to describe the colour of a horse, and not something a woman would be thrilled to hear about. It makes her sound ugly.

This comparison is a reflection of the beauty standards of the time, where pale white skin was considered desirable, and it was a sign of wealth and leisure.

LINE 4

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

Ornamental headgear for females during Shakespeare's time often contained gold wires. It was quite normal to compare blonde hair with the gold wires in that headgear. Blonde hair was fashionable then. The mistress, however, has black and not blonde hair.

This metaphor compares her hair to black wires. It is not soft and flowing, but hard and spiky. She has frizzy black hair. The W-alliteration emphasises that she is not perfect.

The main reason of this poem is to challenge the traditional way used to describe women in poetry. Therefore, it's not necessarily bad that she has black frizzy/curly hair. This emphasises that she is not beautiful in the conventional manner.

LINES 5-6

*I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;*

Damasked – a pattern of mixed colours.

A woman's beauty and complexion were usually compared to roses. He has seen beautiful roses that are a mixture of red and white, but his mistress's cheeks don't remind him of them at all. He sees no such colour in his mistress's cheeks: Her cheeks are pale. This emphasises that his mistress is not the perfect female model, she is just an ordinary person.

LINES 7-8

*And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.*

reeks – a very strong, unpleasant smell

In the conventional love poem, the poet would say her breath was like perfume. The speaker says that some perfumes are far more fragrant than the smell of her breath. This is deliberately shocking and offensive, to emphasise that she is just an ordinary person, she is human. Her breath has the natural smell.

This idea of her being an ordinary person, and not a goddess, is further explained in lines 11-12

LINES 9-10

*I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:*

In lines 9 and 10, the speaker makes the first positive comment about his mistress. Comments. He starts by giving her a genuine compliment, expressing his love for listening to her talk. However, he undermines this complement by acknowledging that music sounds better than her voice. This shows the speaker does not use exaggerated compliments, he is honest in expressing his love and admiration. He admits that he enjoys hearing her speak, but the sound of music is better than the sound of her voice. He is not concerned about the sound of her voice.

LINES 11-12

*I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
Treads on the ground – she is not very graceful when she walks.*

It was part of the traditional love poem to declare (and believe) that the beloved was a “goddess” and had no human frailties or imperfections. He admits that he had never seen a goddess move. She is not a goddess that floats or glides when she walks.

Treads on the ground – she is not very graceful when she walks. She is human, grounded, and not a type of imaginary “goddess” with unreal characteristics. She walks in an ordinary way, with her feet on the ground.

She is a very real person who is just an average human being. He loves her despite the fact she does not meet the idealistic conventions of beauty in his society. By rejecting the comparison to a goddess, he normalises his beloved.

LINES 13-14

*And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,
As any she belied with false compare.*

And – introduces a change
yet, by heaven – He denies that she possesses any heavenly qualities, yet he swears by heaven that his love is sincere.

The speaker thinks that his mistress is as wonderful and unique (“*rare*”) as any woman (“*any she*”) who was ever misrepresented (“*belied*”) by an exaggerated comparison (“*false compare*”). She is as beautiful as any woman who is praised with false comparisons. He wants to show that true love is not superficial and goes beyond physical beauty.

The couplet drives home the speaker's main point, that unlike other people who write sonnets, he doesn't need flowery terms or fancy comparisons. He can just tell his mistress, plainly and simply, that he loves her for who she is. He embraces her flaws. He loves her just the way she is.

The poet states that he loves his mistress and that he would be doing her an injustice by using hollow and meaningless phrases to describe her or his feelings about her. In this way, he highlights the meaningless perceptions of beauty and states that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”, not something dictated by society. This is a genuine expression of love, unlike the false comparisons used in traditional love poems.

THEMES

- Escape from Idealism – Shakespeare does not idealise his beloved. She is unlike the Petrarchan ideal – she is “real”, and he loves her despite her imperfections. He states clearly in the couplet that people who describe their partners with idealised comparisons, are liars. This emphasises the absurdity of Idealism.
- Femininity – This sonnet addresses the problem of stereotyping female beauty by setting unreachable standards for it. The fixed ‘definition’ of beauty is unrealistic and will make females inferior by not achieving the ideal standards of beauty. He questions real love – we should love our partners in spite of their imperfections.
- Beauty and love - In "Sonnet 130," the speaker contrasts his lover's physical appearance unfavourably to various beautiful things, such as the sun, snow, roses, and a goddess, implying that she is not as beautiful as those things. However, despite this, the speaker concludes that his love for her is genuine and valuable, and that she is still beautiful in her own unique way. Through this, Shakespeare implies that true love and beauty should not be measured by conventional comparisons, but rather should be appreciated for its authenticity and imperfections. The speaker expresses his love for his beloved. He describes his values of love. He states that real love is not based on outwards appearances and idealised looks. His love is based on connection and emotion, not the superficial. Real love doesn't need false tributes, any woman can be beautiful.

TONE

- In the first 12 lines of the poem, the speaker uses an unflattering, almost-rude, tongue-in-cheek, mocking, satirical tone to describe his loved one.
- Then in lines 13-14 the tone changes to one of adoration/Sincerity/ Impassioned, showing the depth of his feelings for her; the exceptional love he has for her.

MOOD

- The poet creates a playful, humorous, teasing mood throughout the poem.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain how the structure and tone of this poem allows the poet to emphasise the central message. (3)
2. Are Shakespeare's observations in the quatrains cynical or not? Explain your answer. (2)
3. Who is the speaker ridiculing in the poem? Why does he do this? (3)
4. Explain what is meant by: "My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground." (2)
5. Refer to line 12. Comment on the effect pace has on the meaning of the line. (3)
6. Show how the last line completes his argument. Refer, in particular, to the word "false". (2)
7. Identify three sensory images in this poem and how they relate to the central theme. (3)
8. Identify the tone in lines 1-12 and how this contrasts with the tone in the last two lines. Is this an effective shift in tone? Justify your answer. (3)
9. Explain the use of "by heaven" in line 13. Why has this phrase been included? (2)

THE CHILD WHO WAS SHOT DEAD BY SOLDIERS AT NYANGA – INGRID JONKER

- 1 The child is not dead
- 2 the child raises his fists against his mother
- 3 who screams Africa screams the smell
- 4 of freedom and heather
- 5 in the locations of the heart under siege

- 6 The child raises his fists against his father
- 7 in the march of the generations
- 8 who scream Africa scream the smell
- 9 of justice and blood
- 10 in the streets of his armed pride

- 11 The child is not dead
- 12 neither at Langa nor at Nyanga
- 13 nor at Orlando nor at Sharpeville
- 14 nor at the police station in Philippi
- 15 where he lies with a bullet in his head

- 16 The child is the shadow of the soldiers
- 17 on guard with guns saracens and batons
- 18 the child is present at all meetings and legislations
- 19 the child peeps through the windows of houses and into the hearts of mothers
- 20 the child who just wanted to play in the sun at Nyanga is everywhere
- 21 the child who became a man treks through all of Africa
- 22 the child who became a giant travels through the whole world

- 23 Without a pass

BACKGROUND

Ingrid Jonker had written the poem following a visit to the Philippi police station to see the body of a child who had been shot dead in his mother's arms by the police in the township of Nyanga in Cape Town. It happened in the aftermath of the massacre of 69 people in Sharpeville, south of Johannesburg, in March 1960. They were marching to the police station to protest against having to carry passbooks.

Nelson Mandela read this poem in the original Afrikaans, during his address at the opening of the first democratic parliament on May 24, 1994.

THE TITLE

The Child – Metaphor for the struggle of freedom in South Africa. The child symbolises the oppressed and the struggle for freedom and all the innocent children who were killed by soldiers under Apartheid in SA because he only "wanted to play in the sun".

Shot Dead by Soldiers – emphasises the extreme brutality of the soldiers

The title evokes a sympathetic response. A child is vulnerable and helpless against armed soldiers. It shows the cruelty and senselessness of this death. The title makes it clear that this is protest poem against Apartheid. This child's death has inspired others to take up the cause of freedom & given new energy to the struggle against apartheid.

FORM/STRUCTURE

Five stanzas of differing length. The first four stanzas take on a chant like form. The words 'the child' has been repeated. (anaphora). The fifth Stanza is known as a coda (it is an epilogue that concludes a story/ a finale of a story)

Free verse (no definite rhyme scheme)

The isolated final line emphasises the poet's message: freedom is needed! The fifth stanza develops the idea of this child's wasted life – what he could have become, had he lived. There is a parallel structure in "not at" repeated in the third stanza. This rhetorical device gives examples of where police brutality occurred. It adds historical accuracy to the poem.

SUMMARY

The poem reflects on the pass laws of Apartheid South Africa. Jonker wrote this poem in reaction to the shooting of a young child in his mother's arms during a protest against the Pass Laws. This happened in Nyanga township, near Cape Town. The child was killed while on his way to the doctor with his mother – the senselessness of his death is a result of the senselessness of the Apartheid laws. This child remains nameless to represent all innocent lives taken during Apartheid.

The poem highlights the idea that violence within a country destroys innocent members of society (women and children) and damages the country and its future. This child's death has inspired others to take up the cause of freedom and given new energy to the struggle against Apartheid. Jonker yearns for a time when any child can grow and make his/her impact on the world, without restrictions of the Pass Laws.

STANZA 1

LINE 1

The child is not dead

The repetition of "the child" throughout the poem emphasises the age and innocence of the youth and highlights how many children were killed because of the apartheid laws. This repetition is called an anaphora.

is not dead – contradicts the title: metaphorically he will live on by becoming a symbol. The child is a symbol of the growing sense of freedom in the hearts of people against the Apartheid System. The child becomes a metaphor of resistance, hope and innocence.

LINE 2

the child raises his fists against his mother

The poet's diction conveys the distress of the child and others during the senseless Apartheid era.

"screams" and *"raises his fists"* highlights his anger.

fists – symbol of resistance and revolution: the diction conveys the distress and the anger of the child/the younger generation is rebelling.

Against his mother – the child is not happy with the parents'/the older generations submissive attitude – they did not fight hard enough. The resistance of the younger generation will not be passive. The child becomes a symbol of resistance and defiance. The child rejects the social and political system that oppresses them.

LINES 3-4

*who screams Africa screams the smell
of freedom and heather*

The repetition of "screams" emphasises his anger and frustration.

Personification: Africa is personified as a woman who screams, emphasising the emotional impact of the struggle for freedom.

S-alliteration – emphasises the urgency and desperate cries of the oppressed people.

The extended space (lines 3 & 8) is used instead of punctuation between *Africa screams*. The Space forces the reader to pause and emphasises the repetition.

Freedom – Aspirations of people struggling for liberation

Heather – a plant with small flowers that grows wild and abundantly. In the poem it gives the idea of an abundantly growing sense of freedom in everyone's heart. Jonker connects freedom to the smell of flowers; freedom will be like the sweet scent of flowers.

LINE 5

in the locations of the heart under siege

locations – pun: black townships associated with racial segregation or where something is located. The child's message (aspirations of the black population) will continue in the heart of the people.

heart under siege – people who are oppressed or segregated from the mainstream. Constant struggle against oppression. Conveys the speaker's belief that the fight for freedom is not over as it continues to rage on in the hearts of the people.

STANZA 2**LINE 6**

The child raises his fists against his father

Metaphor - The younger generation rebels not only against the system but also against the older generation. The reference to a different parent (line 2) emphasises the generation gap; that it is now the time of the youth to take up the fight.

LINE 7

in the march of the generations

march – alludes to military action

generations – the younger people were prepared to go further; they were prepared to use violence. Many joined the ANC military arm, uMkhonto we Sizwe. This emphasises the historical and ongoing struggle for justice and freedom. Also suggests that the struggle has been passed down from one generation to the next. This emphasises how long the people have been oppressed.

LINES 8-9

*who scream Africa scream the smell
of justice and blood*

The repetition of line 3 emphasises their anger, the desperate cries of the oppressed people and urgency to fight.

of justice and blood – The younger generation is willing to spill blood/sacrifice their lives for their freedom. Emphasises the sacrifices made in the name of freedom.

LINE 10

in the streets of his armed pride

in the streets – They are prepared to fight against the soldiers who patrolled the townships. Also symbolic of a popular revolt.

armed pride – tone is very passionate and inspiring. Emphasises that they were willing to fight to restore their dignity (*pride*).

STANZA 3**LINE 11**

The child is not dead

The repetition of line 1 emphasises that the child is physically & medically dead, but not spiritually or poetically. The refrain highlights the message of the poem: Despite the physical death of the child, the spirit and struggle for justice lives on.

LINES 12-13

*neither at Langa nor at Nyanga
nor at Orlando nor at Sharpeville*

Langa , Nyanga – Black townships in the Cape

Orlando , Sharpeville – Black townships in Gauteng

These were sites of violent protests against Apartheid. Also shows that protests had spread throughout the country. *Sharpeville* – allusion to the Sharpeville Massacre

LINES 14-15

*nor at the police station in Philippi
where he lies with a bullet in his head*

Philippi – Cape Flats township where Jonker saw the body of the child that prompted this poem.

The paradox highlights the fact that this child died physically, but he is still alive in the hearts of all Africans. He becomes the symbol of innocence, resistance, and hope. This is a reminder of the brutal reality of the child's death. It also reinforces the idea that the child's death was not in vain.

STANZA 4

LINES 16-17

*The child is the shadow of the soldiers
on guard with guns saracens and batons*

The metaphor compares the child to the shadow of soldiers on guard. This highlights that the child is a reflection of the violence and oppression.

This is also a warning/ reminder of the possibility of violence and that hope for change lies with the youth.

Saracens – An armoured car that is synonymous with Apartheid in South Africa. The child is powerless and unable to fight back against the violence and oppression. The soldiers were fully equipped, showing that they would use force to suppress the Blacks, not caring about who died, be it women or children. The authorities wanted to protect the status quo.

LINE 18

the child is present at all meetings and legislations

The child's presence is felt in all aspects of society. The child has become a symbol of Innocence and a better future

The death of the child is discussed by all people, the apartheid government and the Black people. The apartheid government tried to introduce new laws (*legislation*) while Black people were inspired to fight against the government.

LINE 19

the child peeps through the windows of houses and into the hearts of mothers

the child peeps through the windows – people will always remember and were determined that it would not happen again. The child's memory and legacy lives on. This suggests the universality of the tragedy.

LINE 20

the child who just wanted to play in the sun at Nyanga is everywhere

wanted to play – emphasises innocence of the child, he simply wanted to enjoy his childhood.

is everywhere – His spirit and memory are pervasive.

LINE 21

*the child who became a man treks through all of Africa
became a man* – he grew up too quickly by taking on the responsibility of fighting for freedom.

As a symbol, the child affects all aspects of life. The child, as a symbol, will become more powerful: will inspire the whole continent.

LINE 22

the child who became a giant travels through the whole world

Giant – the child has become larger than life. The death of the child and others who fought for freedom has had a massive influence on the growing sense of freedom, justice and resistance by all those who are oppressed.

travels through the whole world – What happened to the child will have a global effect: Child's influence extends beyond the borders of his homeland; many countries protested against the brutal and unjust system.

STANZA 5

LINE 23

Without a pass

The last line of the poem forms the coda. A coda is an epilogue that concludes a story. This could be an entire chapter, a few paragraphs, lines, or a single sentence.) This conveys the final message and irony of the poem: The dead do not require a pass; you first have to die to walk around freely.

Pass refers to the Apartheid ID document used to restrict movement of the black population. This was the main reason for violent protests at Langa, Nyanga and Sharpeville. The Pass system caused the death of the child, causing him to become a symbol, able to cross borders and continents unrestricted. You cannot control the minds of people.

THEMES

- Freedom – The poem emphasises the struggle of blacks for freedom and equality when they were denied their basic rights and dignity.
The child's raised fists and the cries of "Africa" emphasises the idea of freedom and their refusal to be silenced or oppressed. The child's resistance against the overwhelming violence, is a testimony to the fight for freedom and dignity.
The reference to the child's shadow being present at all meetings and legislations, and peeping into the hearts of mothers, implies that the struggle for freedom has not ended. Even though the child is dead, his spirit lives on, inspiring others to continue the fight for freedom and justice.
- Protest and Resistance – This child stands up for what he knows is right and he (the symbol) can never die. He is not a physical person, but an idea. There is resistance against the blatant brutality and barbarism against the innocents. His raised fist symbolises the yearning for freedom, identity, and protest. The child's raised fists and the cries of "Africa" and "justice" in the poem show that resistance is alive and well, even in the face of overwhelming violence and oppression. The injustices perpetrated by the government at the time needed to be vocalized and made known to all.
- Oppression and Violence – The poem emphasises the violence and oppression that the black population of South Africa faced under the apartheid system. The child's death is a symbol of the larger injustices perpetrated against black South Africans, and the pain and trauma inflicted upon them by the government.

TONE

- Defiance and determination.
- Despite the sadness about the innocent child's death, the tone is not sympathetic or sad.
- There is a sense of outrage and loss.
- Nationalistic – Jonker highlights the fact that even an innocent child understood the value of freedom and equality.
- The mood is angry, protesting, and unrelenting.

MOOD

- The mood of the poem is angry, protesting, and unrelenting.

QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the reference to 'the child' in the title of the poem. (2)
2. The title refers to the 'dead' child, yet in line 1 'the child is not dead'. Discuss the contradiction/dichotomy by referring to the rest of the poem. (3)
3. What does the altered repetition of "The child lifts his fists against his mother / father" reveal about the generation gap that is reflected in responding to the laws of apartheid? (2)
4. How does the diction in stanzas 1 and 2 highlight the difference between mothers and fathers? (3)
5. Comment on the effect of the denials in the third stanza. (2)
6. Critically comment how the imagery used in lines 20-23 contributes to the mood. (3)
7. Discuss the effectiveness of the last, short line of the poem. (2)
8. During the Parliamentary address, Nelson Mandela commented that "in the midst of despair, Jonker celebrated hope." Does this poem celebrate hope? Discuss your answer briefly. (3)
9. "The child" is repeated ten times in the poem. How does this repetition add meaning to the poem? (2)

AT A FUNERAL – DENNIS BRUTUS

(For Valencia Majombozi, who died shortly after qualifying as a doctor.)

- 1 Black, green and gold at sunset: pageantry
- 2 And stubbled graves: expectant, of eternity,
- 3 In bride's-white, nun's-white veils the nurses gush their bounty
- 4 Of red-wine cloaks, frothing the bugled dirging slopes
- 5 Salute! Then ponder all this hollow panoply
- 6 For one whose gifts the mud devours, with our hopes.

- 7 Oh all you frustrate ones, powers tombed in dirt,
- 8 Aborted, not by Death but carrion books of birth
- 9 Arise! The brassy shout of freedom stirs our earth;
- 10 Not death but death's-head tyranny scythes our ground
- 11 And plots our narrow cells of pain defeat and dearth:
- 12 Better that we should die, than that we should lie down

BACKGROUND

Brutus was born in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia on 28 November 1924 to South African parents. His parents moved back home to Port Elizabeth when he was aged four. He was a graduate of the University of Fort Hare. He taught English and Afrikaans at several high schools in South Africa after 1948, but was eventually dismissed for his vocal criticism of apartheid. Brutus was a co-founder of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), an organisation that was heavily influential in the banning of apartheid-era South Africa from the Olympics. In 1961, he was banned for his political activities as part of SANROC.

While in Mozambique, he was arrested and returned to South Africa where, while trying to escape, he was shot. After recovering from the wound, Brutus was sent to Robben Island for 16 months. He was in the cell next to Nelson Mandela's. After his release in 1965, Brutus left South Africa and went into exile in Britain. He settled in the United States in 1971 where he served as professor of African Literature at North-western University. He was eventually "unbanned" by the South African government in 1990 and returned to South Africa, based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He later settled in Cape Town, where he died of prostate cancer on 26 December 2009.

THE TITLE

Usually my poems don't have titles because I hope that the poem works sufficiently well that it doesn't need a kind of signpost to it. In this case, the poem "At A Funeral" needed a title because I don't think you could have guessed otherwise what it was all about. Also, I do think it needs some explication. –

The italics refer to the words of DENNIS BRUTUS: AN INTERVIEW By William E. Thompson

The dedication below the title suggests that the poem is a tribute to Valencia Majombozi. This makes it personal: he refers to a specific person and has a greater impact on the reader.

'shortly after qualifying' – Emphasises that all her dreams and hopes have been destroyed by death. Conveys a sense of frustration and aborted hopes.

'A' – creates an impersonal tone. This creates a contrast with the dedication which has a personal tone.

FORM/STRUCTURE

There are two equal stanzas and a specific rhyme scheme (aaabab, cccdd) in this poem.

The formality of the poem mirrors the formal rites and rituals of a funeral ceremony.

SUMMARY

It's about a young woman called Valencia Majombozi, an African woman who managed to qualify as a doctor after enormous hardship and sacrifice by her parents. Her mother took in washing and ironing, did the cleaning of apartment buildings, and put her through University. She got her medical degree and then, by an incredible irony, just after Valencia had completed her internship, she died. I went to her funeral. The poem is about the years of sacrifice that end in nothing, and you could read the poem entirely on that level, as just an expression of frustrated and aborted hopes.

But I am also seeing her as a symbol of the predicament of the Blacks as a whole in South Africa. Eighty percent of the people are voiceless, voteless, generally deprived of education. Their lives are controlled not so much by the police and the army, though those are there all the time, but the lives of Blacks in South Africa are controlled more by a "convention"- something which people agree on. This is a curious thing called a Pass Book, which every Black must carry from the age of 16, which controls your movement, and even determines where you will be buried when you die.

The poem is about her funeral ceremony. The speaker contrasts the vibrant colours of the scene with the mud in which the coffin is placed. He views the ceremony as 'hollow' and a 'pageant' in the face of the lost hopes and dreams of this woman and her family. Life's cruelties create further grief for the speaker, and he presents the funeral as an occasion to renew his commitment to the struggle for liberation. He extends this idea by comparing the burial to those people whose lives are being smothered by the oppression. Oppressed people cannot live their lives fully! He urges active resistance – "Arise!". He ultimately states that death is a better fate than yielding to "defeat and dearth".

The italics refer to the words of DENNIS BRUTUS: AN INTERVIEW By William E. Thompson

LINE 1

Black, green and gold at sunset: pageantry

Black, green and gold – The poem is also operating on a political level, and I'll touch on a few of those things. The resistance movement in South Africa has its own flag, as opposed to the State flag; the resistance movement's flag is black, green and gold.

The choice of those colours at the beginning of the poem is not an accident. Also, many of the colleagues of this doctor attended her funeral wearing their university robes; these were black caps and gowns, but often with a gold hood indicating an arts degree, green indicating a science degree; so again, you have a combination of black, green and gold.

The italics refer to the words of DENNIS BRUTUS: AN INTERVIEW By William E. Thompson

at sunset – the end of the day which is symbolic of death. Creates sombre mood. Connotations of darkness and sadness.

Pageantry – the flag is part of a ceremonial display, a formal ceremony with symbolic clothing and rituals. This creates the impression that the elaborate display is just for the show, because all of that does not matter now as all hopes and dreams are lost with her death.

A pageant is also associated with formality and rituals, just like a funeral.

LINE 2

And stubbled graves: expectant, of eternity,

stubble – stubble is the stalks of crops left sticking out after a harvest, or the remains of a person's beard left on their face after shaving. This implies that the graves were in a state of neglect and they looked untidy/unkept as they are covered in dead grass stalks. Even in death, there was not much respect shown by the government to the final resting places of the oppressed.

expectant, – The grave is personified and made to seem as if it is an expectant mother waiting for a child. However, it is for the dead. This emphasises that we all have to die.

of eternity – ambiguous: either dead will remain in their graves for an eternity, or the belief that the afterlife will not end.

LINES 3-4

In bride's-white, nun's-white veils the nurses gush their bounty / Of red-wine cloaks, frothing the bugled dirging slopes

In bride's-white, nun's-white veils the nurses gush their bounty / Of red-wine cloaks – Nurses from the hospital attended the funeral. In South Africa the nurses wear cloaks which are lined with bright red - the "red-wine." Other nurses at the funeral wore white, which echo the nuns in their habits "In bride'-white, nun 's-white veils."

The italics refer to the words of DENNIS BRUTUS: AN INTERVIEW By William E. Thompson

The old-fashioned nurse's outfit was a white dress, with a short white veil and a red cloak. The connotations of "brides" and "nuns" implies innocence, purity, holiness and a new life.

Repetition of white (*bride's-white, nun's-white*) – emphasises purity.

Gush – flow quickly

Bounty – refers to something in abundance. Many people are showing their grief.

nurses gush their bounty – The nurses at the hospital willingly give everything to save the lives of those hurt in the fight for liberation

"of red-wine cloaks" – The colour of the lining of the nurses' cloaks. The nurses in their red cloaks and white dresses look like frothing red wine surrounding the graveyard.

Frothing means to bubble over – Highlights the number of nurses who attended the funeral.

the bugled dirging slopes – *And away back behind the hill in the cemetery, on the edge of the ghetto, there's a Boy Scout with a trumpet, blowing the last Post, "the bugled dirging."* This suggests that it was a military funeral.

The italics refer to the words of DENNIS BRUTUS: AN INTERVIEW By William E. Thompson

Dirge refers to a song/ piece played at a funeral. In this case played on a bugle, usually associated with military funerals.

Slopes – means going up / down. This could be the volume of the bugle. The slopes around the graveyard are also personified, as though the land itself is mourning the young doctor.

LINE 5

Salute! Then ponder all this hollow panoply

Salute! – Gesture of respect in the military, means to honour, or literally salute the dead, as one would a soldier. The '!' emphasises that this is a command.

Ponder – to think about something deeply. Also, an instruction.

Hollow panoply – The meaningless ceremony with the flags and speeches. Meaningless because it will change nothing. The meaningless display cannot compensate for the loss of the person, her hopes and dreams.

The speaker asks the reader to contemplate the implications of this funeral, and death in general. He encourages the reader to look further than the display (funeral flowers, all the people, the sad music etc), which lacks sincerity.

LINE 6

For one whose gifts the mud devours, with our hopes.

For one whose gifts the mud devours, with our hopes – 'for one' refers to Valencia Majombozi. 'Gifts' refers to her ability as a doctor to heal and bring comfort to others. As a doctor, her training and skills would have been a contribution to the society. This is seen as a waste and is being thrown into the ground, along with the hopes they had for her.

Devour - eat greedily, hungrily or quickly. The mud of a graveyard is compared to a hungry mouth. The personification emphasises that all her hopes and those of her people are now buried in the earth. Tone of despair/sadness.

STANZA TWO - shifts focus to the meaningless deaths of the youth in general

LINE 7

Oh all you frustrate ones, powers tombed in dirt,

Frustrate – means to prevent the success of something or to cause irritation and anger by preventing things from happening.

Oh all you frustrate ones, powers tombed in dirt – The poet uses Apostrophe (Figure of Speech) as he addresses the dead directly. Those whose potential, goals or dreams have not been fulfilled because of the oppressive laws, which denied them opportunities.

The dead are described as *"powers tombed in dirt"* and as *"frustrate"* (a verb) NOT *"frustrated"* (an adjective) because they are powerful enough to cause frustration (to the government) rather than being passively frustrated.

Their potential is buried because of their deaths

LINE 8

Aborted, not by Death but carrion books of birth

Aborted, not by Death but carrion books of birth – I talk of "carrion books of birth, " saying that the life of the Black begins as a kind of death. From the moment of birth, you're given this Pass Book, so that you cease to be a human being from the point of birth. You are devoured. You become carrion. dead flesh. And this ties in with the notion of abortion.

The italics refer to the words of DENNIS BRUTUS: AN INTERVIEW By William E. Thompson

"Death" with a capital letter - Death is personified.

The poet regards the Black people as being dead, not because they died, but because their freedom is taken away due to oppression and the pass books. They are described as being *"aborted"* (i.e. killed before they could live), not by Death but by the apartheid government is even more cruel and deadly than death itself.

"books of birth" (a reference/allusion to the dompas or passbooks and the cruel apartheid laws.).

LINE 9

Arise! The brassy shout of freedom stirs our earth;

Arise! - literally - Stand up but also a call to arms – another command, defiant tone. The exclamation mark emphasises the urgency.

Arise! The brassy shout of freedom stirs our earth – the people are addressed directly and told to rebel or “Arise!” against the government. The rallying call to freedom is heard by all.

Brassy – loud

LINE 10

Not death but death's-head tyranny scythes our ground

Not death but death's-head tyranny scythes our ground – It's helpful to know the symbol of "death's-head tyranny." I saw a film in South Africa called "Judgement at Nuremburg." It begins with the tanks rolling through the streets of Berlin with the Panzer Divisions whose insignia was a skull and crossbones - the death's-head being wildly cheered by the audience. The Nazis are regarded as great heroes by the South African regime and people imitate them; the Nazis are the model for how one should behave if you are a white in South Africa.

The italics refer to the words of DENNIS BRUTUS: AN INTERVIEW By William E. Thompson

Death – is personified as the Grim Reaper with his scythe (a harvesting tool, used to “harvest” or collect the dead).

death's-head tyranny - The poet compares the South African apartheid government to the death-head wearing Nazis in World War Two. A human skull was the insignia of the German SS, who were responsible for many of the atrocities in World War 2, including those in the concentration camps. In doing this he likens the forces of the government to the German SS. This image emphasises the destructive effects of oppression.

Scythes – continues the allusion to the Grim Reaper, who wears a hood, carries a scythe, which he uses to harvest the souls of the dead. The people are cut down violently.

Metaphor: Oppression is the actual cause of death and destruction which destroys potential like a scythe cutting down crops.

Our ground – is a reference to the country, where the people were oppressed despite being born there.

LINE 11

And plots our narrow cells of pain defeat and dearth –

Plots – pun: a small piece of land (e.g. a plot where a grave is dug) or to “plot” - to plan something, often something evil.

cell – a very small room, a prison

Narrow cells of pain – could be the graves in a graveyard, the prison cells where prisoners of the apartheid government had been jailed, or the small houses in disadvantaged areas that people of colour had been forced to live in, as a result of the Group Areas Act.

The poet refers to the fact that many people were tortured, pain inflicted, whilst in prison and it destroyed their spirit.

Dearth – things that are in short supply (e.g. food or basic necessities).

The poet implies that pain, suffering and death was deliberately caused by the apartheid government.

LINE 12

Better that we should die, than that we should lie down –

lie down – if a person “lies down” when attacked or arrested, they show that they are surrendering or submitting. The poet ends with the ominous statement that it is better to die in the fight against oppression, than to accept it without a struggle to bring down the oppressors.

There is no full stop after “*we should lie down*”. This implies that there is no end to resistance and no surrender.

This line also implies that the poet has come to terms with the tragedy of the young doctor's death - she died, rather than choosing to “*lie down*” or surrender to apartheid, and the poet sees this as “*better*”.

The poet uses “*we*” and therefore identifies with the struggle against apartheid.

THEMES

- Criticise/highlight the plight of the oppressed.
- Call to arms: people should get up and fight
- frustrated and aborted hopes
- to voice his opposition to the apartheid regime
- Life is uncertain. The efforts and sacrifices of people can be in vain.

TONE

- Tone Stanza 1
 - Calm
 - Reverent
- Stanza 2
 - Angry
 - Contemptuous

MOOD

- Stanza 1 - Melancholic
- Stanza 2 - Vengeful

QUESTIONS

1. To what does "pageantry" refer in line 1? Discuss the effectiveness of this choice of word. (2)
2. What do the words "Black, green and gold" suggest? How does this shift the reading of the poem? (2)
3. Why would the graves be expectant of 'eternity' (line 2)? (2)
4. Explain the reference to "hope" as it is used in line 6. (2)
5. What are "carrion books of birth"? (2)
6. Comment on the tone in "Arise!" and "Salute!". (3)
7. Why does the speaker call on the reader to "ponder" (line 5)? (2)
8. What is the difference between "Death" and "death's head" and why is "scythes our ground" then an appropriate metaphor? (3)
9. Discuss the pun in the word "plots" in line 11. (3)
10. Describe the tone in and the effectiveness of the last line of the poem. (3)
11. How does the reader know that this poem is more than a tribute to Valencia Majombozi? Discuss the effectiveness of this added message/theme. (3)

POEM OF RETURN – JOFRE ROCHA

- 1 When I return from the land of exile and silence
- 2 do not bring me flowers.

- 3 Bring me rather all the dews,
- 4 tears of dawns which witnessed dramas.
- 5 Bring me the immense hunger for love
- 6 and the plaint of tumid sexes in star-studded night.
- 7 Bring me the long night of sleeplessness
- 8 with mothers mourning, their arms bereft of sons.

- 9 When I return from the land of exile and silence,
- 10 no, do not bring me flowers ...
- 11 Bring me only, just this
- 12 the last wish of heroes fallen at day-break
- 13 with a wingless stone in hand
- 14 and a thread of anger snaking from their eyes.

BACKGROUND

Angolan writer, poet and journalist, Jofre Rocha, is the literary pseudonym of Roberto António Victor Francisco de Almeida, was born in February 1941, in Kaxikana, municipality of Icolo e Bengo. Angola. In June 1961, Rocha left Angola for Lisbon, Portugal. A Nationalist, fighting for the independence of Angola, Rocha is detained in Aljube prison and returned to Luanda. His political activity saw him sentenced to eighteen months in jail.

A member of the MPLA, after the country's independence in 1975, he was called to hold various positions both in the government and in his party. He has been President of the Angolan Parliament since 1996. Rocha speaks about the colonial experience and focuses on the theme of war and the social and economic degradation that emerges from it,

THE TITLE

The speaker is returning to his country. At this stage he does not know whether it is a voluntary or forceful return. The title relates to the speaker's thoughts of his return to his country.

FORM/STRUCTURE

Note that even though this poem has 14 lines, it is NOT a sonnet. There is enjambment present (where one line runs onto the next to complete the thought. There is no punctuation at the end of the line. Refer to lines 5-6, 7-8, lines 11-14. It has the qualities of a song as reflected in the refrain 'do not bring me flowers.' The poem is divided into THREE stanzas of unequal length. In each one of them the speaker is expressing a different idea/s about what he anticipates when he gets home from exile.

SUMMARY

The speaker is contemplating his upcoming return to his home country. The speaker mentions his return from exile and the anguish associated with those who died whilst oppressed.

He has left his home, either by choice or forced. As an exile he has not heard or spoken to his "people". This may have been forced on him or he has done this for protection of himself or others.

Upon returning home, political activists who were in exile were received with a bouquet of Gladiolus flowers; a symbol of their strength, victory, and the pride the nation has for them. The speaker does not want such a heroic welcome. He feels unworthy of it.

The poem is written from the perspective of an exile, someone who has had to flee their country of birth. The poem captures the sentiment of loss, lost opportunity and lost experience. He describes his 'host country' as "land of exile and silence" – this suggests that he was not happy there. He lists the things he missed while he was away and it is clear that he feels guilty about 'escaping' whilst his countrymen/women suffered.

He makes it clear that he is not a hero and should not be welcomed or treated as one. He asserts that the real heroes are the ones who stayed and fought against oppression.

The poet is writing about the lost opportunities, mourning and sadness brought about by colonialism, exile and war.

STANZA 1 – The short first stanza makes the reader ponder these 2 lines.

LINE 1

When I return from the land of exile and silence

When – He is absolutely certain that he is going to return to his country. He has not yet returned, but there is an expectation of returning to his homeland.

land of exile – the country to which he fled. Conveys feelings of loneliness and suffering.

the land of exile and silence – is the place he is in now. A foreign place where there is no communication “*silence*” as he does not speak the language. He has no contact with his family and friends. This emphasises the pain and suffering he had to endure while in exile as he was isolated. He misses his people and the sounds of home. Being in exile also means that his protests have also been silenced.

LINE 2

do not bring me flowers.

do not – commanding tone

A person returning home will be the cause of excitement and celebration. However, he does not want the customary gifts and celebrations that are normally associated with the return of an exile.

This emphasises that the speaker feels guilty about fleeing his country while other people stayed behind to fight the system. He does not see himself as a hero deserving flowers. Flowers are usually associated with a celebration, and he feels that this is definitely not a time of celebration: He fled and left the others to fight. Hence, he feels guilty and does not deserve them.

STANZA 2 - the poet gives suggestions as to what can be brought to “celebrate” his return: tears, hunger and mourning, he wants us to remember the reason for his exile.

LINES 3-4

*Bring me rather all the dews,
tears of dawns which witnessed dramas.*

These two lines highlight the fact that he wants to know about the atrocities/ terrible things that people saw that caused pain, anger, heartache, and tears as they stayed and suffered

Bring me – imperative/commanding tone.

all the dews – an impossible demand. He knows that he cannot atone for leaving his people.

dawns which witnessed dramas – dawn is personified as a weeping witness to the tragedy that took place as a result of colonisation, exile and loss.

D-alliteration – emphasises the fact that Nature, too, was horrified and sad at the oppression of her people.

dramas – Events of great significance.

LINES 5-6

*Bring me the immense hunger for love
and the plaint of tumid sexes in star-studded night.*

Bring me – Anaphora(repetition). Also a commanding tone.

Immense – huge

hunger for love – natural human connection that he has missed

Plaint – plea

Tumid sexes – arguments between lovers. This implies that the speaker missed the normal relationships of people while in exile

star-studded night – An image of romance, peace, and beauty. The opposite of fighting, bloodshed, and tears.

In these lines, the speaker emphasises the sense of separation from loved ones and the need for companionship; the poet highlights the losses experienced due to oppression. The speaker demands that he would rather know how, the people of his land were deprived of physical connection and may have lost the overwhelming love for each other, because of the fighting. We see the devastating effects of war on human relations. In this case, couples were separated; wives were left husbandless and husbands, wifeless due to the need to join the freedom fighters.

LINES 7-8

*Bring me the long night of sleeplessness
with mothers mourning, their arms bereft of sons.*

Bring me – The anaphora (repetition) / commanding tone emphasises what he wants

long – emphasises that their pain and suffering continued for a quite some time

night of sleeplessness – people were worried/concerned about the safety of their loved ones. Mothers are unable to sleep because they are mourning for their sons who have been killed or imprisoned or went into exile. Many did not know if their sons were alive or dead.

Bereft – to be deprived. Many young men (the sons) were imprisoned or killed. Some young men also went into exile. They were missed by their mothers.

In these 2 lines, the speaker needs to know what happened at home when he was in exile. This time he demands to be told about the losses mothers experienced as their sons died fighting for the liberation. He wants to share the grief from mothers who have lost their sons to the conflict.

STANZA 3

LINES 9-10

*When I return from the land of exile and silence,
no, do not bring me flowers ...*

These lines are a refrain. They emphasise the speaker's need not to be given flowers, as stated in lines 1-2, that his return must not be seen as a celebration. Exile was not a pleasant experience for him, but he did not suffer as much as those who had been left behind.

no, do not – forceful tone of the double negative emphasises that he does not regard himself as a hero; he does not deserve flowers. He feels guilty, he needs to acknowledge their suffering and pain.

The ellipsis creates a dramatic pause after he says that he does not want flowers. The reader wants to know what the speaker wants instead.

LINE 11

Bring me only, just this

Bring me – another command (imperative mood) shows his insistence.

only, just this – the redundancy is used to emphasize that he wants just one thing. Also emphasises his insistence.

LINE 12

the last wish of heroes fallen at day-break

the last wish – Above everything else, the speaker demands to know the actual dreams of those who died in the war of liberation, just before independence. This is what matters to the speaker and not the flowers.

day-break – the start of a new day. This is symbolic of change that the people wanted. He sees these fighters as heroes for the cause and they "*fall at day-break*", at the beginning of their lives.

These heroes could not see the change because they died before political change could happen. The speaker wants justice and recognition for people who lost their lives in the struggle for freedom. He wants their wishes to be fulfilled.

LINES 13-14

*with a wingless stone in hand
and a thread of anger snaking from their eyes.*

wingless stone in hand – This image shows that these men and women were still eager to fight for their country but did not get to do so right up to the end. It also hints at the fact that they died before using their weapons against the oppressors. He views these people as the real heroes as they fought a difficult and hopeless battle.

a thread of anger snaking from their eyes – Those who died fighting, died angry. Those who were not able to fight had the anger against the oppressors. Even though they do not fight, they still carry the anger in their hearts and it is seen in their eyes.

snaking emphasises their anger.

Their sacrifice needs to be remembered. That which made them angry enough to fight needs to be remembered, and that is the only “gift” he wants when he returns, because he is able to return.

THEMES

- The poet captures the sentiment of loss, lost opportunity and lost experience.
- A poignant poem about the return from exile and what should be celebrated is sadness, mourning and inevitably, anger. Rocha ends with a parting shock of anger at the lost opportunities and experiences that some young people suffered as a result of colonisation, civil war and exile.
- To highlight the fact that the true heroes in a war of liberation are those who remained in their land of birth and not those who left and sought refuge in foreign lands. Hence, he insists on not being given a heroic welcome.
- Political and social injustice

TONE

- Earnest tone:
 - To express feelings of alienation/estrangement when talking about what should happen when he returns home ‘from the land of exile and silence’.
- Nostalgic tone:
 - When he talks about those at home what he would like to hear from them instead of being given flowers.
- Humble tone:
 - When the speaker expresses the fact that he does not want a heroic welcome but needs information on the realities of what happened during his absence.

MOOD

- Pensive:
 - Engaging in, or reflecting on (thinking about) serious issues

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the speaker not want flowers upon his return? (3)
2. What does the speaker want instead of flowers? Why? (3)
3. Comment on the description of the speaker’s “host country” as the “land of exile and silence”. (2)
4. Identify and comment on the effectiveness of the figure of speech in “tears of dawns”. (3)
5. Why are the mothers “bereft of sons” (line 8)? (2)
6. Comment on the figurative interpretation of the “day-break” in line 12. (2)
7. Comment on the effectiveness of the anaphora (“When I return...”). (3)
8. Discuss the change in tone from stanza 2 to 3. Quote in support of your answer. (3)
9. How does the last stanza successfully convey the speaker’s intention? (3)

TALK TO THE PEACH TREE – SIPHO SEPAMLA

- 1 Let's talk to the swallows visiting us in summer
- 2 ask how it is in other countries
- 3 Let's talk to the afternoon shadow
- 4 ask how the day has been so far
- 5 Let's raise our pets to our level
- 6 ask them what they don't know of us
- 7 words have lost meaning
- 8 like all notations they've been misused
- 9 most people will admit
- 10 a whining woman can overstate her case
- 11 Talk to the paralysing heat in the air
- 12 inquire how long the mercilessness will last
- 13 Let's pick out items from the rubbish heap
- 14 ask how the stench is like down there
- 15 Let's talk to the peach tree
- 16 find out how it feels to be in the ground
- 17 Let's talk to the moon going down
- 18 ask if it isn't enough eyeing what's been going on
- 19 come on
- 20 let's talk to the devil himself
- 21 it's about time

BACKGROUND

Known as Bra Sid, Sipho Sepamla (1932 – 2007) was born in a township near Krugersdorp into a family of educators. He became a teacher but, after experiencing Sharpeville (1960) first-hand when teaching there, he left the profession. He founded FUBA – the Federated Union of Black Artists which gave voice to black artists of all disciplines. It functioned successfully until 1997. He also edited both a literary and a theatre magazine. Sepamla has an individual voice. His poems work on irony, satire and humour, qualities not often found in the poets of the era who were politically loud and emotionally consciousness-raising.

This poem was written during the Apartheid years. Sepamla uses it to voice his opinion on the political talks that took place between various parties before the formalised end of Apartheid. The negotiations between the various parties were ultimately successful and South Africa became a democratic state in 1994. The speaker's peace-making/peaceful attitude is clear in "it's about time", in the last line.

THE TITLE

The peach tree appears in several of Sepamla's poems. The Peach Tree is about the tree in his garden and in The Will. It is one of his possessions which he wittily bequeaths to his children, while making subtle comments about life under the apartheid system.

The significance of the 'peach tree' is that it was a place of gathering for people in the township where much discussion, sharing of opinions and information took place. This is also an example of personification

FORM/STRUCTURE

The poem consists of twenty-one lines. There is no rhyme scheme - "free verse".

It is a poem of protest against the Apartheid Government in South Africa. The first three stanzas and the last three stanzas follow the same pattern:

- o There is a similar pattern of diction and the arrangement of stanzas one to nine.

- o In stanza ten there are three lines. This is done to make it to stand out from the rest of the This is done to draw attention to the poet's message.

The repetition of the word 'talk' six times highlights the need for dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed.

The indents in the fourth and fifth stanzas are a commentary on the overall situation. The indent in the last stanza serves to visually highlight the message of the poem.

SUMMARY

The speaker wittily makes a series of rather odd (absurd, even) suggestions about with whom to discuss politics – from the birds, shadows, pets, the peach tree and the air itself. He ends the poem on a serious note and states that the "devil himself" should be addressed. This refers to the leaders of the Apartheid government.

In this poem, he highlights the cruelty of the apartheid system and the necessity to fight it peacefully, through negotiation.

LINES 1-6

Let's talk to the swallows visiting us in summer / ask how it is in other countries / Let's talk to the afternoon shadow / ask how the day has been so far / Let's raise our pets to our level / ask them what they don't know of us

talk to the swallow – Refers to the people who visit South Africa. Apostrophe: Speaking to objects that cannot answer.

ask how it is in other countries – Understand how people live in other countries.

talk to the afternoon shadow – Personification and Apostrophe

ask how the day has been so far – Reflect on the "state of affairs" in the community/ country

Let's raise our pets to our level – Refers to young people who might have radical ideas. He is asking that they should be included or listened to.

ask them what they don't know of us – Explain backgrounds, perspectives, history that may not be known or understood

The literal actions are quite absurd: talking to pets, the afternoon shadow and pets. It is amusing to expect 'our pets' who have been raised to human level to be able to answer the serious question: what do you know of us?

The absurdity creates humour.

However, the underlying message is serious: what do you (especially the whites) know about us? During Apartheid there was little or no opportunity to understand or communicate with people from other races. One group of people was always superior and had a 'voice', whilst the other had to remain silent.

LINES 7-10

words have lost meaning / like all notations they've been misused / most people will admit / a whining woman can overstate her case

The lines are indented to show that these stanzas are commentaries and indicates a difference. Also, the casual sounding repetitive 'Let's talk' of the previous lines has been dropped. These words must be taken seriously.

He states that '*words have lost their meaning*' – Due to censorship, propaganda and the political climate many words have lost their "true" meaning, talking has become useless. Attempts to negotiate change with the apartheid government had failed. Instead, more repressive measures had been introduced to suppress the Blacks.

'*Misused notations*' refers to Words, symbols - communication tools which have become so warped that their original intentions have become lost. Words have literally lost their meaning. Language has been twisted and used to convey lies, propaganda and cannot be trusted.

'*Whining*' has negative connotations of high-pitched complaining, without valid reason. The words of line 10 are a reminder of the saying: 'the lady doth protest too much'. When people complain about the same thing in the same way, their plight is often ignored.

LINES 11-12

Talk to the paralysing heat in the air / inquire how long the mercilessness will last

paralysing heat – Metaphor: The apartheid laws are compared to intense heat that prevents people from moving, the heat renders a person unable to do anything. This emphasises the harshness of the apartheid laws that were very restrictive with severe penalties if they were broken.

Merciless – Metaphor: the question emphasises the mercilessness of the oppressors: no empathy/mercy/compassion for the oppressed people. How long will they continue to be treated in such a harsh and unforgiving manner.

LINES 13-14

Let's pick out items from the rubbish heap / ask how the stench is like down there

stench – refers to a disgusting smell. It also refers to the effects of a “rotten” system – apartheid.

The words ‘*rubbish heap*’, ‘*stench*’ and ‘*down there*’ relate to the way Black people were regarded by the authorities: unwanted things that were to be thrown away, something that created a bad smell or ‘*stench*’. The tone is serious and the intention is to describe the reality of the situation of Black people who were regarded as lacking value and were disposable.

LINES 15-16

Let's talk to the peach tree / find out how it feels to be in the ground

Literally, the peach tree is rooted in a permanent place in the garden. The tree will tell him how it feels to be rooted and fruitful in a place you can call your own. The connotation of rooted creates a sense of belonging. The peach tree has land that it belongs to.

Figuratively, Blacks did not have land; they were not even regarded as citizens. They have no sense of belonging. They were not allowed to buy/own land during apartheid.

LINES 17-18

Let's talk to the moon going down / ask if it isn't enough eyeing what's been going on

moon going down – the light of the moon will disappear as it ‘goes down’. This is symbolic of them losing hope.

The moon is personified. It is aware of their situation (*eyeing*). The setting of the moon will lead to daylight. Daylight is associated with a new day, new hope. Their situation is visible to the whole world but nobody has done anything to effectively change their situation. The new day does not bring new hope for them.

LINES 19-21

come on / let's talk to the devil himself / it's about time

The lines are indented, just as lines 7-10 are, in order to make them stand out. The indents alert the reader to the fact that these lines are commentary on the overall situation.

come on – this is a call to action: he is encouraging himself and others to talk to those who can effect change. This is emphasised by the repetition of *let's talk*.

devil – the oppressors / the Apartheid System. People will have to talk to the ‘devil’ in order to bring about change. They have no option but to engage with the enemy.

it's about time – The time has come to speak directly to the powers who have been oppressing the Black people for too long. There is no time to waste. Action is necessary.

The final stanza creates a sense of urgency and a realisation that a solution had to be found, it was time for negotiations.

THEMES

- The opening of channels of communication is the overall theme in this poem. The speaker encourages the oppressed people to exhaust all peaceful forms of communication for them to address apartheid.
- The desire for change
- To create an awareness of the harsh realities of life in South Africa under apartheid rule.
- To highlight some of the unconventional ways in which politics was discussed during the apartheid era.

TONE

- Absurd, cynical
- Despair
- Frustration
- conversational

MOOD

- apprehensive
- anxious

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the underlying meaning of the actions/instructions in lines 1-6. (2)
2. Why would swallows be a good source of information about 'other countries'? (2)
3. Discuss what the speaker is saying in stanza 4. (3)
4. Discuss the connotations of the word "whining" (line 10). (2)
5. Why does the speaker describe the heat as "paralysing" and "merciless" (stanza 6)? (2)
6. Although similar in style to stanzas 1-3, how do lines 11-14 differ in tone and intent from lines 1-6? (3)
7. Discuss why the speaker chooses to "talk to the peach tree". Consider the other 'things' or concepts he talk to in the poem. (3)
8. Identify and comment on the tone in the last stanza. (3)
9. Who is the 'devil' in the last stanza? (1)
10. How is the register of the poem appropriate and effective in delivering its message? (2)

PRAYER TO MASKS – LÉOPOLD SÉDAR SENGHOR

- 1 Masks! Oh Masks!
- 2 Black mask, red mask, you black and white masks,
- 3 Rectangular masks through whom the spirit breathes,
- 4 I greet you in silence!
- 5 And you too, my lionheaded ancestor.
- 6 You guard this place, that is closed to any feminine laughter, to any mortal smile.
- 7 You purify the air of eternity, here where I breathe the air of my fathers.
- 8 Masks of markless faces, free from dimples and wrinkles.
- 9 You have composed this image, this my face that bends over the altar of white paper.
- 10 In the name of your image, listen to me!
- 11 Now while the Africa of despotism is dying – it is the agony of a pitiable princess,
- 12 Like that of Europe to whom she is connected through the navel –
- 13 Now fix your immobile eyes upon your children who have been called
- 14 And who sacrifice their lives like the poor man his last garment
- 15 So that hereafter we may cry ‘here’ at the rebirth of the world being the leaven that the white flour needs.
- 16 For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has died of machines and cannons?
- 17 For who else should ejaculate the cry of joy, that arouses the dead and the wise in a new dawn?
- 18 Say, who else could return the memory of life to men with a torn hope?
- 19 They call us cotton heads, and coffee men, and oily men.
- 20 They call us men of death.
- 21 But we are the men of the dance whose feet only gain power when they beat the hard soil.

BACKGROUND

Léopold Sédar Senghor was born in Senegal in 1906. He died in 2001. He studied and lived in France for many years. He developed and was a proponent of the idea of “Negritude” – a culture that is shared by all Africans. He believed that Africans should be proud of their culture but should also incorporate the best elements of other cultures into it. He was elected as the president of Senegal in 1960. He established a multi-party state and a strong educational system. At times a controversial figure, Senghor is viewed by some as symbolic of peace between France and its colonies while others think he encapsulates neo-colonialism. He believed strongly that union between all was possible.

Senghor wrote this poem at a time when Africa was shaking off its colonial rule. The process was lengthy and difficult. In many instances there were violent protests and fights. He calls colonial rule the “Africa of despotism”, referring to the fact that African people lacked any political power.

THE TITLE

prayers – appeal to a higher power / ancestors – positive connotation.

masks – traditional masks as worn in African culture / to hide real emotions / hide true intentions.

Masks are symbolic of culture and frequently used in religious rituals. The poem is an address to the spirits via the masks.

FORM/STRUCTURE

The poem is composed in a single stanza. The line lengths are varied. The short sentences emphasise the speaker’s intent. The speaker, at first, addresses the masks and then expands the message of the poem. The (rhetorical) questions are answered by the speaker at the end of the poem. The direct speech allows the reader to “eavesdrop” on the conversation the speaker is having with the masks. The speaker uses the 1st person pronoun “you” to engage the reader.

It has a distinct rhythm through line breaks at the end of sentences onto the next line and punctuation. The line breaks and punctuation allow sections to feel distinct and rhythmic. Long lines contrast with short ones, sometimes only one or two words, This encourages moments of pause and reflection while reading the poem.

SUMMARY

In the poem "Prayer to Masks", the poet appeals to his ancestors for guidance and inspiration in re-establishing African culture and proud traditions after a lengthy period of colonisation. He addresses the masks directly as they represent the ancestors:

- He refers to the glorious past of Africa when countries were ruled with pride by Africans.
- The process of invasion and colonisation changed the past.
- The image of Africa compared to a princess symbolises the nobility of traditional Africa
- Her death represents a decline of traditional African culture and the loss of political power of blacks to rule themselves.

The poet prays to the spirits of the masks to help speed the rebirth suggested by the image of the umbilical cord connecting Africa to Europe. The poem ends on a note of optimism:

- The African of the future will have a different relationship to the soil. They will be able to create new beauty and prosperity.
- These new Africans will absorb the powers of the natural spirits through the rhythm of dance, music, and poetry.

LINE 1

Masks! Oh Masks!

The poem begins with an "apostrophe," an address to an object or spirit. As the title indicates, this address is a prayer to the masks, which appear in the poem both as works of African art and as more general spirits of African culture, society, and history.

The exclamation mark emphasises a feeling of reverence.

LINE 2

Black mask, red mask, you black and white masks,

The different colour of the masks represents different rituals, ceremonies, gods.

Senghor pays homage to the spirits. He allows each one their due respect by acknowledging the colour of their masks.

LINE 3

Rectangular masks through whom the spirit breathes,

Rectangular – Shape of the masks, not resembling human characteristics

Spirit – reference to ancestors. The poet communicates with the spirits of his ancestors through the mask.

masks through whom the spirit breathes – The spirits breath through the masks, thus it is the masks that give them life

LINE 4

I greet you in silence!

I – uses the first person. This makes it personal, intimate and sincere.

greet you in silence! – He is filled with awe and respect for the spirits and because of this he cannot address them directly

! – emphasises the absolute silence.

LINE 5

And you too, my lionheaded ancestor.

Lionheaded – This refers to a traditional African mask in the shape of a lion's head. It could also be symbolic of strength, boldness and bravery. The Senegalese national anthem is also entitled "The Red Lion". Also praising the strength, boldness and bravery of the ancestor.

In this line, Senghor introduces his family's guardian animal, the lion. His father's name was Diogoye which means lion. The family is represented by a lion mask. It is the symbol of aristocratic virtues and courage.

LINE 6

You guard this place, that is closed to any feminine laughter, to any mortal smile.

You guard this place – the spirits protect the place of worship

is closed to any feminine laughter – Women not allowed to participate in the rituals or wear the masks - Male dominated society. The rituals are solemn and not to be taken lightly, hence no laughter.

to any mortal smile – the living cannot enter the world of the ancestors.

The ancestor with the lion head is called upon to maintain an aura of peace at the altar while Senghor prays. He reinforces patriarchal power: the lion guards the ground that is forbidden to women and to passing things, in favour of values, memories, and customs that stretch back into mythic antiquity.

LINE 7

You purify the air of eternity, here where I breathe the air of my fathers.

You purify the air of eternity – The ancestors cleanse their eternal resting place.

here where I breathe the air of my fathers – here refers to Africa. Senghor acknowledges the impact of the ancestors and their hardships and oppression.

LINE 8

Masks of markless faces, free from dimples and wrinkles.

markless faces – Flawless / perfect

free from dimples and wrinkles – no imperfections due to age. Reflecting agelessness

LINE 9

You have composed this image, this my face that bends over the altar of white paper.

composed this image – The poet is a result of his past

altar – a place of worship. This implies that something that is being revered or worshipped.

white paper – The reading and writing of prayers. The poet sees his writing about his culture as sacred

LINE 10

In the name of your image, listen to me!

name of your image – The poet is referring to himself

listen to me! – He appeals to them to listen to him, for he needs help urgently. He is pleading to his ancestors for guidance. Tone of desperation

LINES 11-12

*Now while the Africa of despotism is dying – it is the agony of a pitiable princess,
Like that of Europe to whom she is connected through the navel –*

despotism is dying – colonial rule is coming to an end. Some countries had already gained their freedom.

pitiable princess – The princess is Africa – the exploitation of the continent, its resources and people have now made the once proud continent a place where people take pity on its inhabitants.

connected through the navel – Metaphor: This image reminds the reader of the connection of Africa to Europe, much like a baby is connected to its mother via the umbilical cord – nourishment, blood flow etc. The colonial powers in Europe were referred to as the 'mother country'. However, they did not act like a mother should: there was mass exploitation of people, resources and land. Greed and corruption by the colonisers left Africa damaged. The severing of the connection is necessary but difficult. The continent is not self-sufficient and is reliant upon the colonial powers.

LINE 13

Now fix your immobile eyes upon your children who have been called

immobile eyes – the eyes on the masks cannot move.

Who have been called – refers to the next generation that has fought and died for freedom and independence from colonialism

LINE 14

And who sacrifice their lives like the poor man his last garment

The simile compares those who fought for their freed to a poor person who gives up his last garment. This implies that they gave everything that they had in order to gain their freedom.

LINE 15

So that hereafter we may cry 'here' at the rebirth of the world being the leaven that the white flour needs.

Personification –the colonisers have left. The country now has the chance to be reborn, to start afresh. It can now create its own government, rules and direction for its future.

leaven – yeast is necessary for bread to rise as it is being baked. Those that seek freedom are seen as the yeast in the society that will force it to grow and transform

LINE 16

For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has died of machines and cannons?

For who else would teach rhythm to the world –These are those who will teach the songs and dances of peace to the world

world that has died – the end of colonialism; the old reality is now dead.

machines and cannons – industry and warfare have caused the spiritual soul to wither and die. The world has lost its ability to feel deeply and give expression to joy.

LINE 17

For who else should ejaculate the cry of joy, that arouses the dead and the wise in a new dawn?

Ejaculate – shouts of joy, excitement and jubilation

arouses the dead – Waking up the ancestors who are all-knowing and all-seeing (wise)

new dawn – refers to a new day: a new phase in their lives. A reborn Africa will lend its youthful energy to a senile Europe, bringing joy and hope where there has been isolation, exhaustion, despair, and death.

The rhetorical question conveys doubt, but it also suggests that the reader will be part of the new era. It is a challenge to the citizens of the country, to come forward and to co-operate in this new phase, under a new political dispensation.

LINE 18

Say, who else could return the memory of life to men with a torn hope?

who else – It is only the freedom fighters who are able to restore the dignity, pride and purpose to those who have been downtrodden for centuries.

'torn hope' suggests that there has been damage, destruction, violence but there is still some small element of optimism. There is still hope.

LINE 19

They call us cotton heads, and coffee men, and oily men.

they – the colonists

cotton heads, and coffee men, and oily men – insulting names the colonialists used when referring the natives of Africa Black people are often labelled with, such as "cotton heads" and "coffee men", according to their physical trades. Lack of identity creates an impersonal tone.

LINES 20-21

They call us men of death.

But we are the men of the dance whose feet only gain power when they beat the hard soil.

They call us men of death – the Europeans, view the Blacks as men who killed for freedom and were not afraid to die for freedom

But – introduces alternative view

We – The people of Africa, The speaker is also an African

the men of the dance – Those who express themselves and their emotions through action

feet only gain power when they beat the hard soil - The “new” Africans will absorb power through the land, through their culture and their ancestors, and through the rhythms of Africa. The music and dance will symbolise the hope and dreams of a better future for all who have suffered oppression and how they will regain their identity and take pride in their culture. They will share this culture and pride with the rest of the world.

THEMES

- The oppression and discrimination of the black people.
- Role/ Honouring of the Ancestors
- The desire for freedom/ New beginnings
- To build a sense of pride in one’s African heritage and identity
- To create an awareness of the effects of colonialism in Africa

TONE

- Oppression
- Suffering
- Hope
- Tone
- praise
- respect
- reverent

MOOD

- hopeful
- meditative

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly explain the connotations of the words “Prayer” and “masks” as used in the title. (3)
2. Why does the speaker greet the masks “in silence”? (2)
3. Why does the speaker use the first person “I”? (2)
4. How could an ancestor be “lionheaded” (line 4)? (2)
5. Discuss the choice in diction in metaphor “altar of white paper” (line 8). (3)
6. Identify the tone in “In the name of your image, listen to me!” (1)
7. What does the speaker mean when he states that Europe and Africa are “connected through the navel”? (3)
8. Identify the figure of speech and explain the effectiveness thereof in the phrase “rebirth of the world” (line 14). (3)
9. How has the world “died of machines and cannons”? (2)
10. Is there any optimism in this poem? Quote in support of your answer. (2)
11. Discuss the effectiveness of the last two lines of the poem as a conclusion. (3)

THIS WINTER COMING – KAREN PRESS

1 walking in the thick rain
2 of this winter we have only just entered,
3 who is not frightened?

4 the sea is swollen, churning in broken waves (violent continual motion)
5 around the rocks, the sand is sinking away
6 the seagulls will not land
7 under this sky, this shroud falling (something that covers or conceals)
8 who is not frightened?

9 in every part of the city, sad women climbing onto buses,
10 dogs barking in the street, and the children
11 in every doorway crying,
12 the world is so hungry, madam's house is clean
13 and the women return with slow steps
14 to the children, the street, the sky tolling like a black bell;
15 these women are a tide of sadness
16 they will drown the world,
17 who is not frightened?

18 on every corner men standing
19 old stumps in the rain, tombstones
20 engraved with open eyes
21 watching the bright cars full of sated faces (more than satisfied)
22 pass them, pass them, pass them,
23 who is not frightened?

24 into the rain the children are running
25 thin as the barest twigs they kindle a fire
26 to fight the winter, the bare bodies
27 a raging fire of dead children
28 and the sky collapsing under centuries of rain
29 the wind like a mountain crying,
30 who is not frightened of this winter
31 coming upon us now?

BACKGROUND

This poem was published in 1986, a tumultuous time in South Africa under the Apartheid regime. This poem, on its surface level, seems to be about the people's fear about the impending Winter. However, upon closer inspection, it is clear that this poem is an extended metaphor for the current and coming violence in the country.

THE TITLE

The use of the pronoun *this* suggests that something is going to happen very soon.

Winter is usually associated with death. However, it is also an extended metaphor for the impending state of emergency and the restrictions it would bring the poet sees it as a time of hardship and death

coming – suggests that the looming arrival of this season and what it represents, cannot be averted.

FORM/STRUCTURE

This poem consists of 5 stanzas of differing lengths. Each stanza deals with a different aspect of the situation. Each section is linked by the refrain/rhetorical question: "who is not frightened?" This repetition/anaphora highlights the point that everyone fears what might happen.

The poet breaks the usual writing convention mainly by the lack of capital letters and use of minimal punctuation:

- This is known as stream of consciousness writing. It illustrates the way the speaker is thinking.
- There is enjambment throughout the poem. The lines run into each other mimicking how our thoughts run into each other.

SUMMARY

The speaker in this poem is concerned about the world she occupies and believes that she is justified to feel fear for how matters will evolve. She states that we have “only just entered”, implying that worse times are to come. The descriptions of the “churning”, “broken” and “sinking” sky further highlight her fear and Nature’s hostility.

The misery of the people is made clear in stanza 3. People are hungry and suffering. The distinction between the haves and the have-nots, is clear: “madam’s house is clean” while men stand on the street corners, jobless and hungry. The “bright cars full of sated faces” drive passed the people most affected by poverty and hunger.

The children, despite being ‘thin’ (fragile/vulnerable) are not scared of the ‘rain’. They are confronting it. They are going to defeat the apartheid regime which had dominated them and subjected them to suffering for so many centuries.

STANZA 1

LINES 1-3

walking in the thick rain / of this winter we have only just entered, / who is not frightened?

The poem begins with somebody walking in the rain. The poet does not mention a specific person and he has protection from the elements.

thick –relates to the rain, very heavy rain. This weather serves to create a mood of foreboding, gloom and an oppressive atmosphere.

this winter – specific reference to the winter that is approaching, not winter in general.

only just entered create an ominous tone. The “hard times” are just beginning, and no one will escape the hardships. Things will become worse before they get better. There is an allusion to possible violence / uprising against the oppression.

who is not frightened? – The rhetorical question, highlights the fact that these are frightening times. It does not provide an explanation for the cause of the fear. This suggests a universality to the experience of fear. The poet is referring to all South Africans. Everybody should be afraid as there will be violence in response to oppression.

STANZA 2

LINES 4-5

the sea is swollen, churning in broken waves (violent continual motion) / around the rocks, the sand is sinking away

At first glance, that stanza is describing the speaker’s observation of the natural environment. However; the imagery, sound devices and diction suggest an atmosphere of hostility and destructiveness that is broader than the literal reading of the lines.

The sea is swollen, churning in broken waves – Rough and stormy sea, usually brought on by weather conditions. It is moving roughly and the waves crash against the rocks. This emphasises that it is dangerous.

the sand is sinking away – The land is not safe to stand on as it is unstable. Therefore, there is reason to be afraid.

LINES 6-8

the seagulls will not land / under this sky, this shroud falling (something that covers or conceals) / who is not frightened?

seagulls will not land – the seagulls (symbolic of the natural element) will not land. They can sense the impending danger and violence, adding to the ominous mood. Nature is in turmoil.

under this sky – the present conditions

this shroud falling – Metaphor: The clouds are likened to shroud used for covering dead bodies. Emphasising the sense of impending doom and intensifies the feelings of fear, anger and helplessness.

who is not frightened? – anaphora; repetition of the line emphasises the fear caused by the impending violence amongst the people. The figurative element compares winter to a time of political and social hardship in South Africa. Those left unprotected (non-whites) will be exposed to hardship and possibly death.

STANZA 3

LINES 9-11

*in every part of the city, sad women climbing onto buses,
dogs barking in the street, and the children / in every doorway crying,*

There is feeling of tiredness, unrest, hunger and sadness. In this stanza, the speaker moves from an observation of nature, to an analysis of the social texture of the city.

The stanza describes the return of domestic workers to their families, at the end of their work day.

The stanza emphasises the inequality created by the apartheid policy which also segregated the areas where people could live.

sad women – The women work in the city in the homes of the whites. They are going home to their families in the townships which are in stark contrast to the suburbs where they work.

children / In every doorway crying – the children do not have food, care, etc. This is the situation in every home. Hyperbole emphasises the contrast between the rich and poor.

LINES 12-14

the world is so hungry, madam's house is clean / and the women return with slow steps / to the children, the street, the sky tolling like a black bell;

the world is so hungry – Hyperbole - their 'world is so hungry' (both literally and figuratively). They suffer from poverty, do not have sufficient food. Also, they are deprived of their rights.

madam's house is clean – they do everything for their employers. They work for a pittance, whilst neglecting their own homes and families. They do not have time to take care of their own homes and families.

return with slow steps – The women return home disillusioned and exhausted. Also they do not have anything to look forward to in their homes because of their desperate plight.

Their shacks and little houses

the sky tolling like a black bell – The simile compares the sounds of the storm to a black bell ringing for the dead. A bell is rung at funerals, to announce a death or a sad event. Foreboding of impending death.

LINES 15-17

these women are a tide of sadness / they will drown the world, / who is not frightened?

Metaphor: the women are moving to and from home to work like a sea moving with the tides. Their sadness is so great that it can be compared to a sea. Just as a sea can drown anything, their tiredness will drown anything in its path. There so many they will overwhelm everyone.

who is not frightened? – the anaphora (repetition of the rhetorical question) emphasises the fear all and provides an explanation for people to be afraid of this winter.

STANZA 4

LINES 18-23

on every corner men standing / old stumps in the rain, tombstones / engraved with open eyes / watching the bright cars full of sated faces (more than satisfied) / pass them, pass them, pass them, / who is not frightened?

on every corner men standing / old stumps in the rain – Metaphor: The men stand and do nothing; they are stumps of trees. The men have no jobs and are standing at street corners.

tombstones / engraved with open eyes – the double metaphor compares the men to tree stumps and tombstones. They are more dead than alive. The living trees are now 'dead stumps' and resemble 'tombstones'.

The men have no feelings, they are emotionally dead. They "see" but do not feel anything. "Zombie like"

watching the bright cars full of sated faces (more than satisfied)

The rich in their fancy cars, having everything they want. They are well fed, actually overfed, unlike the townships' hunger so dominant in Stanza 3.

The stanza continues with the idea of social breakdown, and describes the despair and dehumanization of the men. The stanza reinforces a social divide, in which the lives of the privileged few is juxtaposed alongside the hunger and deprivation of the masses.

pass them, pass them, pass them – They just ‘pass them, pass them, pass them’. This repetition stresses how terrible the situation is for the half dead men and their families and how invisible they have become to those passing them by each day.

The repetition of *pass them* is suggestive not just of fear – but also of guilt and a refusal to confront the visible reality of social inequality. The sense of urgency conveyed in the repetition is ironic: one may pass “them”, but one is unable to escape the all-pervading sense of fear.

who is not frightened? – the repetition of the rhetorical question (anaphora) is a reminder that something has to change.

STANZA 5

LINES 24-31

into the rain the children are running / thin as the barest twigs they kindle a fire / to fight the winter, the bare bodies / a raging fire of dead children

into the rain the children are running – The reaction of the children differs from that of the adults who are fearful. The children run freely, they are active and alive. Children are symbolic of innocence, but they are also victims of apartheid. The children enjoy the rain (literal meaning).

thin as the barest twigs they kindle a fire / to fight the winter – The children are extremely thin, emphasising their extreme poverty. The simile compares them to twigs. Literally, the children are making a fire to fight the winter. They do not have sufficient clothing to keep themselves warm. This is the result of their poor living conditions, unemployment and oppression.

fight also conveys a struggle to survive the oppressive regime. (figurative)

the bare bodies raging fire of dead children – Metaphor and personification: The children will sacrifice themselves and will provide the fuel to fend off the “winter”.. The word ‘raging’ suggests the passion of the children and the ugliness of the system oppressing them. Children died when trying to bring about change during the Apartheid era.

LINES 28-39

and the sky collapsing under centuries of rain / the wind like a mountain crying,

centuries of rain – emphasises their pain and suffering that they had to endure for so long. The system of apartheid, legalised or not, has become untenable. The system has been operating for many centuries but in South Africa the time for change has arrived.

collapsing under centuries of rain – Figurative meaning: The sky will be seen after centuries of domination and oppression. The people sense that their oppression is going to end soon.

the wind like a mountain crying, - Simile: The children are seen as the wind of change that will change the society. The mountain is the giant that represents the children pressing for change.

LINES 30-31

who is not frightened of this winter / coming upon us now?

The single repeated line ending each stanza becomes two lines with the addition of the idea that ‘this winter’ is going to arrive very soon. The purpose is to conclude with a strong warning of what lies ahead.

The children are the future and they will fight for freedom that will ultimately end the “winter”.

THEMES

- The effects of apartheid, oppression and exploitation
- The desire for change
- Impending danger - social upheaval, and a foreshadowing of the writer’s view of change, accompanied by violence, death and destruction
- Resistance
- Hope

TONE

- Repressed anger
- Undertone of rebellion
- Defiance
- Fear
- sombre
- solemn

MOOD

- anxious
- restless
- frightened

QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the poet's choice of the word "thick" in line 1. (2)
2. How does line 2 create an ominous tone? Refer to the extended metaphor in your answer. (3)
3. Who is the speaker addressing in line 3? What is the effect of this address? (2)
4. How is a sense of violence portrayed in lines 4-5? (2)
5. Comment on the inclusion of the word "shroud" in line 7. (2)
6. Suggest a reason why people would fear winter? Refer to the literal and figurative meanings of the word. (3)
7. Identify and explain the figure of speech in "these women are a tide of sadness". (3)
8. Explain the effectiveness of the metaphor, "tombstones/engraved with open eyes". (2)
9. How does the reaction of the children to the rain differ from the adults? (2)
10. To what does the "raging fire of dead children" (line 27) refer? (3)
11. Discuss how the "sky" has changed throughout the poem. What is the implication of it in line 28? (3)
12. Comment on the effectiveness of the anaphora ("who is not frightened?") in the poem. (2)
13. The last two lines of the poem breaks the 'pattern' of the rest of the poem. Why did the poet write these lines differently to the anaphora in the rest of the poem? (3)

SOLITUDE – ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

- 1 Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
- 2 Weep, and you weep alone.
- 3 For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
- 4 But has trouble enough of its own.
- 5 Sing, and the hills will answer;
- 6 Sigh, it is lost on the air.
- 7 The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
- 8 But shrink from voicing care.

- 9 Rejoice, and men will seek you;
- 10 Grieve, and they turn and go.
- 11 They want full measure of all your pleasure,
- 12 But they do not need your woe.
- 13 Be glad, and your friends are many;
- 14 Be sad, and you lose them all.
- 15 There are none to decline your nectared wine,
- 16 But alone you must drink life's gall.

- 17 Feast, and your halls are crowded;
- 18 Fast, and the world goes by.
- 19 Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
- 20 But no man can help you die.
- 21 There is room in the halls of pleasure
- 22 For a long and lordly train,
- 23 But one by one we must all file on
- 24 Through the narrow aisles of pain.

BACKGROUND

This poem, much like Wilcox's other works, contains her observation about the world around her. Her interest in spiritualism reflects effectively in this poem.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote "Solitude" after she had travelled to Madison, Wisconsin, to attend the Governor's inaugural ball. On her way there, she sat opposite a young widow, who was dressed in black and crying. The poet sat with her and tried to comfort her for the rest of the journey. When they arrived at the ball, the poet was so depressed she could hardly enjoy the party. When she saw her own face in a mirror, Wilcox remembered the crying woman and wrote this poem, where she thinks about the world's response to sadness.

THE TITLE

"Solitude" means alone/ a sense of loneliness or away from other people. Sadness breeds solitude

The tone of the title ("Solitude") is not obvious. "Solitude" can imply a state of being alone by choice and is not automatically negative. It can also have connotations of isolation and loneliness.

SUMMARY

The speaker addresses the reader directly. She states certain universal truths – "laugh, and the world laughs with / Weep, and you weep alone". The poem speaks of the universal human condition in sharing joys and 'good times' but that a person is alone/solitary in their tough times/sadness.

In the first stanza the speaker states that one must face one's problems instead of seeking happiness through others.

The poet repeats the idea that happiness will attract more happiness and sorrow will take us away from enjoying happy moments. This will make us lonely and we will have to enjoy our own company.

A complaining man or sad person will be forced to live his life in loneliness. There will not be anyone to share his sorrow. Towards the end of the poem, the poet magnifies the idea of solitude by saying that we all go alone to face death which is the saddest thing that can happen to a person.

FORM/STRUCTURE

This poem follows a strict structure. The three stanzas consist of 8 lines each and the same rhyming pattern is used throughout. Each stanza begins with two lines that compare positive and negative emotions. The next two lines provide a commentary. The second half of each stanza then repeats this pattern.

The first two stanzas focus on attitude, behaviour and actions. The last stanza focuses on the end of one's life and suggests a particular approach to deal with this inevitability.

STANZA 1

LINES 1-2

Laugh, and the world laughs with you; / Weep, and you weep alone.

World – synecdoche (a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa) for people.

The first line tells a reader that if one were to laugh then the world would *laugh with you*. Happiness within oneself creates happiness in others.

The second line describes the opposite emotion, sadness displayed through weeping. If you were to *Weep*, you would do so alone.

Opposite images happiness vs. crying. This is emphasised by stating that joy is a shared experience, sorrow is experienced alone. People do not flock to the side of someone who is upset, human beings are not attracted to negativity.

LINES 3-4

For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth, / But has trouble enough of its own.

mirth – laughter caused by happiness.

The poet argues that the earth (which is personified) has so much trouble and sadness of its own. There is enough sorrow and sadness around us. No one really wants the burden of another's pain if it can be avoided.

However, happiness (*mirth*) is rare, so the earth must *borrow* happiness from elsewhere. Wilcox implies that sadness is the natural state of the world.

LINES 5-8

Sing, and the hills will answer; / Sigh, it is lost on the air. / The echoes bound to a joyful sound, / But shrink from voicing care.

These lines convey the same idea as lines 1-4.

Personification and hyperbole. Hyperbole because she is exaggerating the impact. If you were to "*sing*" then the "*hills*" would "*answer*." You will receive a response from the world or society, and happiness would be multiplied.

Sigh, it is lost on the air – Sorrow is ignored or is seen as insignificant. If you were to "*Sigh*" (symbolic of problems) it would be "*lost on the air*." The sound and the emotion dissipate without anyone acknowledging, or certainly repeating it.

The echoes bound to a joyful sound – Echoes are personified as being happy, to bounce (*bound*) or skip in response to happy sounds. The sounds of joy spread, reverberate around the world.

shrink from voicing care – people move away to avoid expressing sadness; the world will not share your problems/issues/concerns

The first stanza concludes that people share joy happily but prefer that suffering is not shared.

STANZA 2

LINES 9-10

Rejoice, and men will seek you; / Grieve, and they turn and go. /

Opposite images: celebrate and mourn

If you rejoice then others will "*seek you*" out and want to spend time with you. People associate with you when there are joyful events. They turn away when there is sorrow or pain. (*Grieve*)

Wilcox once again presents a contrast, that if you "*Grieve*" then the same people will "*turn and go*." These people do not want "your woe" but are happy to take on "your pleasure."

Lines 11-12

They want full measure of all your pleasure, / But they do not need your woe.

full measure – complete/all

People want to be with you in good times, but they do not want to be around you in the bad times.

LINES 13-14

Be glad, and your friends are many; / Be sad, and you lose them all.

Opposite emotions: happiness and sadness

Lots of friends around in the good times. When things get tough friends desert you.

LINES 15-16

There are none to decline your nectared wine, / But alone you must drink life's gall.

nectared wine - sweet, delicious wine drunk at a celebration

life's gall – Metaphor: bad times compared to Gall, a bitter tasting extract. sadness, poverty, loneliness – all things that make us bitter. No one is around during the sad trying, negative times.

In the last two lines of this stanza, happiness is compared to “*nectared wine*” and sadness is compared to “*life's gall*”. The poet uses this extended metaphor to explain how everyone wants to share as much of a person's happiness as possible (a “*full measure*” of “*nectared wine*”) but they will be forced to experience their sadness (“*life's gall*”) alone.

STANZA 3

LINES 17-18

Feast, and your halls are crowded; / Fast, and the world goes by.

The speaker presents her final set of comparisons between a happy life and a sad one and the reactions they provoke. She uses another comparison: a *feast* (celebration) can bring people together. Opposite actions: eating/ banquet and abstaining from food/ there is no food available or provided.

halls are crowded – emphasises that everyone will join in the celebrations. Many people come when there is food provided.

Fast – fasting is private. People may not be aware that you are fasting, therefore the whole world would not take notice or join you. When there is nothing provided, no one is bothered. There is a sense of alienation/ being excluded.

These two examples are metaphors for everyday life. Welcoming community, companionship, and happiness are going to inspire even more of the same. The poet argues that if you do not participate in life and happiness (if you “*fast*”), people will ignore you, they will not want to spend time with you. (“*Fast, and the world goes by*”).

LINES 19-20

Succeed and give, and it helps you live, / But no man can help you die.

The speaker refers to life and death and the way that humans deal with pain.

Success and sharing the fruits of success gives purpose to life. If you are successful and give generously to others (not only material goods, but also if you give of yourself emotionally), you will live a good life (“*it helps you live*”).

no man – nobody. The poet says that literally, we all go through the process of death alone, but also implies that withdrawing from others is a metaphorical death and one that we always go through alone. Failure is associated with death.

LINES 21-24

There is room in the halls of pleasure / For a long and lordly train, / But one by one we must all file on / Through the narrow aisles of pain.

Happiness is metaphorically compared to a house with big rooms (“*roomy halls*”) that can hold many guests (“*a large and lordly train*”), where people enjoy having parties (“*halls of pleasure*”) while pain is compared to a “*narrow aisle*” which implies a corridor that people have to move through alone.

There is always room when celebrations occur. Prosperity brings friends. An image of a large gathering of selected people (lordly). Train in this sense implies a lot of people following.

In these lines, the poet says that happy people attract others and have large and loyal groups of followers. This contrasts with the next two lines.

one by one – individually

we must all – implies that everyone will suffer pain, and that the journey through pain is ultimately one that everyone will have to make on their own.

file on – Go alone in single file, in an orderly manner, moving through the pain that makes up our life's experiences.

aisles – a narrow passage between rows of seats.

This metaphor implies that people can only survive pain on their own. Others can only watch them, but cannot experience their pain with them.

THEMES

- Happiness/Pain – throughout the poem the speaker states that one must face one's problems head-on and not seek comfort in others in lieu of addressing one's problems/issues. She states that we cannot run from our problems forever.
- Individual vs outside world – the relationship between these two concepts is clear in this poem. This poem acts as a 'map' to the individual and how to create your own happiness and face the realities of the world. Wilcox makes it clear that she believes that all people exist in a state of solitude. Life needs to be tackled with practicality and self-reliance.
- This poem is about how people react to positivity and negativity and respond to the emotional state of others: happy people tend to attract the company and friendship of many others; sad people tend to become isolated and lonely because people tend to shy away from negative emotions.
- In the final stanza, the poet explains how everyone must ultimately go through pain and suffering alone - although others can bear witness, this experience is inevitably a solitary one. The poet is not necessarily saying that people are selfish - just that a person can observe others' deepest feelings but cannot actually experience them.

TONE

- On the whole, the tone is melancholy/sad/depressed. Although the poet reminds us that happiness is possible (this is the connotations of words and phrases like "laugh", "sing", "rejoice", "nectared wine" and "halls of pleasure") the poet contrasts these words and phrases with their opposites ("weep", "sigh", "be sad", "life's gall" and "narrow aisles of pain").
- satirical
- sarcastic

MOOD

- indifferent (apathetic)
- reflective
- melancholic

QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the personification in stanza 1. (3)
2. Describe the reaction of the 'echoes' (line 7) to the prompts given. (2)
3. What does "shrink" mean as used in line 8? (2)
4. Suggest a possible example of "life's gall". (2)
5. Why does the speaker suggest that "pain" is travelled through "narrow aisles"? (2)
6. Paraphrase and explain the line: "Succeed and give, and it helps you live." (3)
7. Discuss the effectiveness of the title of the poem in relation to its contents. (3)
8. Is the speaker in this overly cynical? Discuss your opinion. (3)
9. Would "Loneliness" have been a better title for the poem? Discuss your answer and make reference to the connotations/denotations of both words (solitude and loneliness) in your answer. (3)

THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING – OLIVE SCHREINER

- 1 The morning sun is shining on
- 2 The green, green willow tree,
- 3 And sends a golden sunbeam
- 4 To dance upon my knee.
- 5 The fountain bubbles merrily,
- 6 The yellow locusts spring,
- 7 Of life and light and sunshine
- 8 The happy brown birds sing.
- 9 The earth is clothed with beauty,
- 10 The air is filled with song,
- 11 The yellow thorn trees load the wind
- 12 With odours sweet and strong.
- 13 There is a hand I never touch
- 14 And a face I never see;
- 15 Now what is sunshine, what is song,
- 16 Now what is light to me?

BACKGROUND

Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) was born at a mission station called Wittebergen near Herschel in the Eastern Cape. She is best known for her critically acclaimed novel *The Story of an African Farm*, initially published under the pseudonym Ralph Iron because of a contemporary prejudice against women authors. After achieving recognition as a writer, Schreiner wrote extensively on a range of political and social issues as an opponent of racism and an early feminist. Her book *Women and Labour*, written in 1911, was considered the bible of the women's emancipation movement in England and America. She was also a pacifist and did not agree with British imperialism in South Africa or with the South African (Anglo-Boer) War that was fought to achieve it.

This poem conveys a strong sense of place and the natural environment, as often found in Schreiner's works.

THE TITLE

The title introduces a positive image – we associate a bright, sunny morning with warmth and happiness. However, there is a figurative irony: Her sun (child) is no longer shining (has died).

The title and the first 12 lines of 'The Morning Sun is Shining' invite the reader to see the beauty of Olive Schreiner's Karoo, blessed with green willow trees, golden sunshine, bubbling fountains, springing locusts, birdsong and the scent of the thorn trees' yellow flowers.

We realise in line 13, however, that the speaker is mourning someone's death: 'There is a hand I never touch/And a face I never see'. Because of this, she writes, 'Now what is sunshine, what is song, /Now what is light to me'. What begins as a lyrical celebration of nature ends up as a lament for the loss of a loved one.

SUMMARY

The speaker praises the beauty of Nature around her. She describes various aspects and uses many auditory 'images' to engage the reader. The last four lines step away from the natural scene. The sadness in these lines (to do with loss) are surprising, given the tone and content of the preceding lines.

Happiness is real when shared". The poet comments on the beauty of a morning in which the sun is shining. She highlights the various elements that make the morning so beautiful, but then she changes track/ direction and asks, rhetorically, what is the purpose of a beautiful morning if it cannot be shared with anyone. A nature poem that shows the beauty of nature, but highlights her loneliness as she has no one with whom to share it.

Olive Schreiner's only child, a daughter, died within a day of being born. The juxtaposition between the beauty and abundance of Nature, and the immense loss suffered by the speaker, is poignant and incredibly sad.

FORM/STRUCTURE

A 16-line Romantic poem (contrasts the permanence and beauty of nature) made up of 4 distinct parts. In line 1-4 she discusses the sense of sight, 5-8 hearing and 9-12 smell. All these senses enjoy the morning with the sun shining. There is a regular rhyme scheme and rhythm throughout lines 1-12. This creates a rhythm, which captures the attention of the reader. It is written in lyric form. This creates a musical quality.

The last four lines deviate from this pattern. This 'break' in pattern increases the impact of the unexpected ending in the last four lines.

LINES 1-2

The morning sun is shining on / The green, green willow tree,

Lines 1-2 set the scene: The poet is sitting in the early morning sun enjoying the sight of the “world” awakening and the speaker reflects on the beauty of the morning.

The morning sun is shining on – The sun rises and gives life and colour to nature

The repetition of ‘green’ reinforces the beauty of nature, emphasising the intensity and vibrant colour of the willow tree. Green is a colour that is associated with life, synonymous to freshness, lush vegetation and health. The sun is also symbolic of life.

LINES 3-4

And sends a golden sunbeam / To dance upon my knee.

The personification of how the sun blesses the earth and provides joy and entertainment reinforces the beauty of the morning and helps create a mood of joy / enjoyment / happiness / cheerfulness.

It is a benevolent sun “golden” that causes happiness and has connotations of riches and wealth and beauty.

Dance – Connotations of life and joy

These two lines can also be an allusion to an affectionate term of endearment for a child, an indirect reference to her child that died in infancy.

LINES 5-8

The fountain bubbles merrily, / The yellow locusts spring, / Of life and light and sunshine / The happy brown birds sing.

These lines expand on the beauty of nature on a sensory level.

The personification in line 5 gives the fountain the human quality of being joyful and reinforces the mood of happiness / cheerfulness. The personification succeeds in providing an idyllic view of the beautiful morning which emphasises the sense of well-being and happiness.

Onomatopoeia is used to describe the action of the fountain as the water spurts out of it. Creates a carefree mood.

The various hues of the colour yellow continue with the “yellow locust”, just like the “golden sun” in line 3.

The word ‘spring’ relates to energy, adds vibrancy to the elements of nature and has a connotation of excitement

The repetition of ‘and’ (line 7) alludes to the spontaneous expression of emotions and reinforces the beauty of the speaker’s surroundings. The alliteration in line 7 (The repetition of the “l” sound: *life and light*) gives a sense of freedom and unburdened life in the happy morning.

Another indication of joy and happiness, this time in the birds, is amplified by the description of ‘brown birds’ in line 8. The onomatopoeic word “bubbles” creates a happy sound.

This contributes to the idea that the natural world is celebrating life. It is as if the plants, insects and birds are all rejoicing in the morning sunshine.

LINES 9-12

The earth is clothed with beauty, / The air is filled with song / The yellow thorn trees load the wind / With odours sweet and strong.

clothed – the earth is personified wearing the beautiful clothing, highlighting the fact that the earth is dressed in beautiful finery. Every part of the world is covered (*clothed*) and “filled” with a beauty that makes the poet happy.

The air is filled with song – Sounds of the birds

load the wind with odours sweet and strong – The usually barren thorn trees are also full of flowers and the sense of smell is used to show how their smell is pervasive. Also, the wind has strain to drive through them

sweet and strong – the alliteration is used to reinforce the strength of the smell.

The sibilant ‘s’ in “song”, “sweet” and “strong” contribute to the lyrical quality of the poem. This poem celebrates the beauty and sounds and scents of Nature.

LINES 13-16

There is a hand I never touch / And a face I never see; / Now what is sunshine, what is song, / Now what is light to me?

The poet's tone/attitude changes in these lines. This quatrain reflects a stark contrast in both tone and mood in comparison to the first three quatrains.

Someone she loves is not with her and will never be with her because of death. The word "never" indicates that there is absolutely no possibility of her being able to touch or see her child. The speaker changes to a tone of despondency / sadness / grief / dejection / hopelessness when reflecting on the loss that she has suffered.

The speaker is filled with despair because she has lost someone important to her. 'Touch' suggests a very close relationship with this person. It is someone she believes she will never see again, and this thought makes her so unhappy she cannot appreciate the natural beauty around her.

Now what is – repetition emphasises tone of bitterness as she questions the purpose and meaning of this beauty if she cannot share it with her loved one. The use of the present tense implies that despite the passage of time, the speaker still grieves. This describes the extent of the speaker's pain at the loss of a loved one.

The poem ends with the speaker questioning all she has praised and the value of it. She "forces" the reader to do the same using a rhetorical question at the end of the poem. The rhetorical question engages the reader to consider her situation; a beautiful day all alone, with no hope of company. She finds no solace in her beautiful surroundings. It implies that the beauty of the morning / the beauty of nature cannot overshadow the pain / emotional trauma the speaker experiences.

There is no sense of resolution or closure.

THEMES

- "Happiness is real when shared". The poet comments on the beauty of a morning in which the sun is shining. She high-lights the various elements that make the morning so beautiful, but then she changes track / direction and asks, rhetorically, what is the purpose of a beautiful morning if it cannot be shared with anyone.
- A nature poem that shows the beauty of nature, but highlights her loneliness as she has no one to share it with.
- Permanence of nature
- Despair/Loneliness
- Futility of human relations
- The transience (brief) nature of human life

TONE

- The tone of the first 12 lines is cheerful/happy/positive/joyful. Nature is beautiful and celebrated.
- The last 4 lines changes to a tone of despair, negativity, sadness, hopelessness. She is describing her sorrow and how the beautiful morning makes her sadness even greater, more poignant.

MOOD

- The joyous/cheerful tone (lines 1-12) creates a celebratory mood as the speaker admires the bustling beauty of nature in the morning.
- In lines 13-16, the mood changes to a sombre one as the speaker expresses the loss associated with human experiences.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the mood of the first four lines of the poem. Pay attention to imagery and diction in your answer. (3)
2. Identify the tone in the first 12 lines. Now state the tone in the last 4 lines. Why does it change? (3)
3. How does the poet use colour to create the mood of the first stanza? (2)
4. What figure of speech is used in "And sends a golden sunbeam / To dance upon my knee"? Explain the effectiveness of this figure of speech. (3)
5. Discuss the effectiveness of the personification in lines 5-8. (3)
6. Comment on how the poet's use of sound contributes to the impact of the poem. (3)
7. Lines 13-14 bring forth a change in tone and mood. Discuss this change. (3)
8. Discuss the effectiveness of the poem's final question as a conclusion to the poem. (3)
9. What, do you think, was the poet's intention in the writing of this poem? (2)

IT IS A BEAUTEOUS EVENING, CALM AND FREE – WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

- 1 It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
- 2 The holy time is quiet as a Nun
- 3 Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
- 4 Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
- 5 The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;
- 6 Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
- 7 And doth with his eternal motion make
- 8 A sound like thunder—everlastingly.
- 9 Dear child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
- 10 If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
- 11 Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
- 12 Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
- 13 And worshipping'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
- 14 God being with thee when we know it not.

BACKGROUND

William Wordsworth was born in the United Kingdom in 1770. He died in 1850. He was one of the founders of the Romantic Movement in poetry. He had a great love for Nature.

As many of Wordsworth's other poems, this poem is a reflection on Nature and a (sort of) conversation with (presumably) his daughter. It is suffused with religious overtones.

THE TITLE

The speaker is struck by the physical beauty of the evening and the mood it creates. The speaker views the scene through a spiritual lens and assures his young companion (believed to be his daughter, Caroline) that God's presence is everywhere, even if we are not fully conscious of it.

SUMMARY

The speaker in this poem is awestruck by the beauty of Nature, specifically the evening time. He expresses his appreciation for the feeling of tranquillity he experiences in Nature. He views the scene through a (Christian) religious lens and assures his companion (presumably his young daughter) that God's presence is omnipotent. He states that even if/when she does not express devotion to God, or spend time in a physical place of worship, God is always present. (This reaction stems from her being seemingly unaffected by the incredible scene in front of them.) He ultimately praises God for the creation of Nature.

FORM/STRUCTURE

This is a Petrarchan (or Italian) sonnet consisting of 14 lines. The octave (first 8 lines) describes the breath-taking, peaceful atmosphere of the countryside. The octave follows a rhyme scheme of ABBA ABBA. This means the first, fourth, fifth, and eighth lines all rhyme with one another. The second, third, sixth, and seventh lines similarly rhyme with one another. The rhyme scheme in the sestet is CDECD.

The poem then switches from a description of nature to the speaker directly addressing his daughter in the sestet. This switch is referred to as a Volta or turn in a Petrarchan sonnet.

The sestet serves as the speaker's comment on the beauty and spirituality of the scene. He addresses his companion (his daughter) directly in the sestet and focuses on the spirituality of life in general.

LINE 1

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,

beauteous – beautiful

The atmosphere is very peaceful and tranquil. A person is completely at ease; no worries or stress.

evening – is often the most gentle and quiet time of day.

calm – suggests a mood that is peaceful, tranquil and utterly quiet.

free – implies free of stress/worries/pain.

LINES 2-3

The holy time is quiet as a Nun/ Breathless with adoration; ...

Personification and simile add a religious element to the poem: "holy time" (the quietness and respect for nature) is compared to a Nun who is quiet as she is in prayer. She is close to God.

Breathless – cannot even hear her breathe. This emphasises the silence. Just as the nun is '*breathless with adoration*', the poet's breath is taken away by the beauty of God's creation. It is so beautiful that it is almost impossible to breathe.

LINES 3-4

... the broad sun / Is sinking down in its tranquility;

the broad sun – As the sun sets it seems to become a large orange-red ball and the colours of sunset stretch out across the horizon. This adds to the serene, peaceful atmosphere at the end of the day.

Alliteration- repeating "s" emphasizes the serene atmosphere

LINE 5

The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;

Personification – Image of God calmly watching over the world. He is seen as a gentle, calm God. This adds to the peaceful atmosphere

The gentleness of heaven –God

Broods – Contemplates deeply: heaven seems to watch over the sea below. Figuratively God is watching over the world

This line marks the beginning of the link of God and nature in the poem.

LINE 6

Listen! the mighty Being is awake,

Listen – is a command and the exclamation mark intensifies it and indicates the excitement of the speaker . A very quiet moment is broken by this imperative order. The poet wants his companion to be an active participant in the scene.

mighty Being – Capital letter signifies God

LINES 7-8

And doth with his eternal motion make/ A sound like thunder - everlastingly.

doth – does

eternal motion – God who controls the *constant movement of the waves*

A sound like thunder - Simile: breaking waves sound like thunder. Indicates power of nature and God. The thunderous sound of waves contrasts with the calm and quiet of lines 1-3.

The dash creates a pause and emphasises the word which follows – *everlastingly*. Without the pause there would not be such a strong emphasis. It is the end of the octave but it indicates that God's creation, and, by inference, God, is forever.

LINE 9

Dear child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,

Dear child! dear Girl! – Repetition of "dear" makes the reader focus on the subject: His daughter, highlighting his love for his daughter. The exclamation marks show the tone and depth of his love

LINES 10-11

If thou appear untouched by solemn thought, / Thy nature is not therefore less divine:

untouched by solemn thought – His daughter seems uninterested and seems to show a lack of reverence for the beauty of God's creations.

solemn – serious

Thy nature is not therefore less divine: Just because she is not showing her feelings towards the scenery and seemingly is not verbalising her wonder for the Creator, does not mean that she has lost her reverence for God.

Even if she doesn't know or understand it now, she is still made of the same '*divine*' material as all creation. Even if she is not touched by the beauty of the scene, it does not mean she is removed from God or less spiritual.

LINE 12

Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;

in Abraham's bosom – Metaphor – In God's presence. Like a father holds a baby to protect it, the girl is unknowingly protected by God.

all the year – at all times. God is always present to protect her.

LINE 13

And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,

the Temple's inner shrine – Reference to nature: even if she does not express devotion to God or spend time in a physical place of worship (like a church), God is always present in nature.

LINE 14

God being with thee when we know it not.

Assonance (repetition of the 'e' sound in *being, thee, we*) emphasises God's presence.

God is with you, even if you are not aware of it.

THEMES

- The Holiness of Nature – the speaker celebrates the majestic and holy beauty of Nature. He describes Nature in reverent terms. The poem urges an appreciation for the beauty and power of Nature and God. The poem 'takes place' during "holy time" – the time of evening prayers. The speaker's language portrays the world as a divine creation capable of admiring its own handiwork. Human beings are a part of Nature and thus part of the Divine.
- Childhood and Faith – the speaker addresses his "Dear child" directly when she does not seem as awestruck as he is. He reasons that it is due to her age and innocence. Children are always close to God; they maintain a natural sense of faith and wonder at all times, so they do not react with the same solemn awe as adults do. So, he ultimately states that through her reaction, he rediscovers what children feel all the time. Her outward lack of reverence does not mean that she is any less holy or pious or capable of reverence. The speaker states categorically that children are the most holy and reverent of God's creatures and we lose this as we grow/mature. Children are perpetually in "Abraham's bosom" – in God's presence. (Abraham is a central patriarch and prophet.)
- The beauty of nature reveals God. The poet describes and expresses his appreciation for the beauty of God's creation in the natural world, particularly, the tranquillity of the sea and the setting sun. Wordsworth believes the sunset is so beautiful because heaven is present in the sky at this time.
- Relationships – the relationship between father and daughter /between man and God /between man and nature.

TONE

- Amazed / awe / tranquillity
- Reverent/ Respectful
- Affectionate

MOOD

- Meditative
- Calm/serene

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the mood in the opening line of the poem. Use your own words. (2)
2. Why is the simile "quiet as a nun" a particularly effective figure of speech? (2)
3. How can the sea have "the gentleness of heaven" on it? (2)
4. How and why does the beginning of line 6 change the atmosphere? (3)
5. What is the purpose of the capital letter in "Being" (line 6)? (3)
6. What is the function of the dash in line 8? (2)
7. How does the tone of "Dear child!" differ from "Listen!"? (2)
8. Explain the comparison used in the metaphor "Abraham's bosom". (3)
9. Discuss how the structure/form of the poem supports its contents. (3)

FERN HILL – DYLAN THOMAS

1 Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
2 About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
3 The night above the dingle starry,
4 Time let me hail and climb
5 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
6 And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
7 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
8 Trail with daisies and barley
9 Down the rivers of the windfall light.

10 And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
11 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
12 In the sun that is young once only,
13 Time let me play and be
14 Golden in the mercy of his means,
15 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
16 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
17 And the sabbath rang slowly
18 In the pebbles of the holy streams.

19 All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
20 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
21 And playing, lovely and watery
22 And fire green as grass.
23 And nightly under the simple stars
24 As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
25 All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
26 Flying with the ricks, and the horses
27 Flashing into the dark.

28 And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
29 With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
30 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
31 The sky gathered again
32 And the sun grew round that very day.
33 So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
34 In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
35 Out of the whinnying green stable
36 On to the fields of praise.

37 And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
38 Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
39 In the sun born over and over,
40 I ran my heedless ways,
41 My wishes raced through the house high hay
42 And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
43 In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
44 Before the children green and golden
45 Follow him out of grace,

46	Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
47	Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
48	In the moon that is always rising,
49	Nor that riding to sleep
50	I should hear him fly with the high fields
51	And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
52	Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
53	Time held me green and dying
54	Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

BACKGROUND

Dylan Thomas was born in Wales in 1914. He died in 1953. He left school at the age of 16 to pursue a literary career. He was famous for his original and lyrical poetry and radio broadcasts.

THE TITLE

This poem speaks of the beauty of an actual place named Fern Hill, where Thomas spent time as a child. It is essentially a reflection on his happy times at this place. The farm reminds the speaker of his joyful, innocent memories of his childhood, The memories have been forgotten as he grew up. The farm is now only a part of his memories.

SUMMARY

The speaker reflects on and celebrates the joy he experienced during his youth in the countryside. He reflects on the freedom he felt and the beauty that surrounded him. It is a nostalgic poem – the speaker, once an innocent child, is aware of his loss of innocence and fantasy freedom.

In “Fern Hill,” Thomas presents an idyllic view of childhood on a farm, filled with vivid imagery which presents a child’s view of the world. This is contrasted in the final stanzas with the regret of the adult as he recalls the loss of the innocence and splendour of childhood.

FORM/STRUCTURE

This poem consists of six stanzas, each comprising nine lines. There is a strict syllabic count in each line which is repeated in each stanza: 14,14,9,6,9,14,14,7,9.

Despite the strict syllabic count/rhythm, there is no specific form to this poem. The poem is song-like in its rhythm. The poem can be divided into two parts: the first 3 stanzas are related to the poet’s experience as a child and the last 3 stanzas focus on the awakening in the child which signifies the loss of innocence.

The lack of structure is used to great effect, as it evokes and mimics the way memory wanders and recalls the past in small pieces at a time.

STANZA 1 - The poem begins with the speaker happily reminiscing spending time on Fern Hill

LINES 1-2

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs / About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,

Now – He is, as an adult, speaking in the present tense but is reflecting on the past

apple bough – Lying under the branches/ “boughs” of the apple tree

young and easy – carefree

lilting – The house is personified and given emotions, reflecting the house had magical qualities: singing merrily

as the grass was green – Simile: used to highlight that just as it is a fact grass is green. It’s a fact the house was “alive”. This emphasises his youth, innocence, inexperience and naivety, the child had no worries and no cares, hence the freedom he felt.

The speaker describes his blissful delight when he was a child who enjoyed nature.

He recalls how he enjoyed living in the arms of wild nature, playing under the apple trees.

LINES 3-4

The night above the dingle starry, / Time let me hail and climb

dingle – valley with forests

starry – the night sky was filled with stars. He focuses on its beauty as he is captured by its charm.

Time let me hail and climb - Time is personified as a parent that allows him to do things. The reason for this freedom and happiness is that the child was not yet worried about time. Time is personified as the friend and ally of a child, unlike adults who are constantly pressed and tormented by time.

LINE 5-6

Golden in the heydays of his eyes, / And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns

Golden has connotations of something extremely special/valuable.

heydays – Prime/best days. These precious childhood days are the golden times when all was perfect and good

honoured among wagons – he was honoured by all the inhabitants of the area. He was the

"prince of the apple towns" Metaphor – compares himself to a prince. The world of that farm was his dominion. In his childlike imaginings he sees himself as a king over all he sees

LINES 7-9

And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves / Trail with daisies and barley / Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And once below a time - Similar to once upon a time

I lordly had the trees and leaves – Metaphor – Compares himself to a lord. This place made him feel like royalty.

Trail with daisies and barley – creates an idyllic time

Windfall – an apple blown down from a tree or a large amount of money arriving unexpectedly (fortune/luck).

Down the rivers of the windfall light – Metaphor – The apples that have fallen reflect light as they roll down the hill, like a river.

The landscape around him is rich with flowers, fields of barley and rivers of light. It is indeed a paradise and he felt like he was a prince and a lord ruling this paradise.

STANZA 2 - He elaborates on his adventures as a "green and carefree" boy, his greenness (or youth) matching that of the landscape.

LINES 10-11

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns / About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home, /

And as I was green and carefree – He continues to revisit his happy childhood in a series of flashbacks. He recalls how naïve, innocent and inexperienced he was then, but also how he lived without any worries or cares. As an adult, he thinks he was "green" as a child. Being naïve or green is a small cost of being happy and carefree. Unlike children, adults are care-worn, unhappy and struggle daily to make ends meet.

famous among the barns – He is famous among country people and he is master of the animal world. He continues with the imagery as "ruler over all he sees".

About the happy yard and singing – Place and time of overwhelming happiness in the poet's life

farm was home – he had a sense of belonging. Also, he was oblivious of the adult world.

LINES 12-14

In the sun that is young once only, / Time let me play and be / Golden in the mercy of his means,

In the sun that is young once only – Time is personified. We are all at the mercy of time because we cannot stop time. We are young only once; a time of innocence and joy, when the sun shines and all is perfect.

Time let me play and be – "Time" is personified. It allowed to live like this and not be disturbed by the "real world".

Golden in the mercy of his means – “Time” only allows people as much childhood as their lives allow. And as he was young, he felt everything around him was just as young including the sun under which he played freely and merrily. These times are a golden and precious gift that Time gave him out of its kindness and mercy.

LINES 15-16

And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves / Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,

And green and golden – Innocent and perfect

I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves . . . and cold – Metaphor – compares himself to a hunter and herdsman. The child imagines that he was the hero. Sometimes he was a huntsman blowing his horn, going after wild animals and foxes and hunting them the way first human beings did; other times he was a herdsman/ shepherd tending his cattle. In his mind, all the creatures obeyed or were subject to him

LINES 17-18

And the sabbath rang slowly / In the pebbles of the holy streams.

sabbath – Biblical allusion creates a mood of reverence (deep respect).

rang – refers to church bells.

sabbath rang slowly / pebbles of the holy streams – Metaphor: compares the ringing of the bells to the sound of the water running across the stones in the stream. It is as if the very streams sing a song of praise to God (in the sound of the water running over the pebbles) in the beauty and glory of this rural childhood. Fern Hill is not only seen as a place of childhood adventure, but as a sacred place.

STANZA 3 - He continues his detailed elaboration on the landscape, getting caught up in his descriptions as he lists thing after magical thing

LINES 19-21

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay / Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, ...

All the sun long it was running – The unusual word order creates a personification. The long summer days were beautiful and seemed to never end. The child is still speaking, about his memories. He is still that playful, innocent child who has no cares and no worries.

the hay / Fields high as the house – signifies the passing of time. It is autumn and the harvest is done. The hay stacks stand in piles as high as house (Simile).

the tunes from the chimneys – Everything is so magically perfect that even the chimneys sing. The smoke puffs seem to be beating time as in music

LINES 21-24

... it was air / And playing, lovely and watery / And fire green as grass. / And nightly under the simple stars

it was air / And playing, lovely and watery – These words make the air seems like a kind of water - full of wonderful things. It also suggests that the child's play is flowing and fluid; something that feels easy and endless.

And fire green as grass – The speaker states that the fire itself is as green as the grass. This simile captures his vivid childhood memories of.

And nightly under the simple stars – the nights were clear, beautiful, pure

LINES 25-27

As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away, All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars / Flying with the ricks, and the horses / Flashing into the dark.

As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away – As he drifts off to sleep, the farm “disappears”, this adds to the dreamlike quality of his memories. He imagines that the entire farm is carried away into ‘dreamland’ by the owls whose call is heard in the night.

All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars – Throughout the night (*all the moon long*) he heard the singing of birds like the nightjars. The use of the word “blessed”, subtly hints at a religious undertone. The nightjars are “blessed” by God as he looks after them.

and the horses / Flashing into the dark – The horses move around in the stables, in the dark and in the shadows, there seems to be flashes of light or colour. He can see the eyes of horses flashing in the darkness.

At the end of Stanza 3, the child's symbolic sleep ends in a flashing light in the dark. This flash is the light of awareness and signals the loss of paradise, freedom, and innocent bliss.

STANZA 4 - He compares witnessing the coming of the day to Adam and Eve in Eden and God creating the universe.

LINES 28-30

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white / With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all / Shining, it was Adam and maiden, /

And – introduces a change. The waking child in Stanza 4 is symbolic of maturity.

the farm, like a wanderer white / With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: – Personification: The farm awakens as light shines on it. The speaker personifies the farm as "a wanderer white. Here the farm is personified as a traveller returning with the dew and a rooster

He wakes up to the sound of the rooster crowing.

With the dew – time has passed. It is now winter. Winter is symbolic of the end of his childhood and innocence.

Shining – the light of the morning sun reflects off the dew has settled on the leaves and ground.

it was Adam and maiden – The speaker creates a biblical allusion. This refers to the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible. By using this allusion, the speaker implies that Fern Hill is like the Garden of Eden, a paradise where a child feels at one with the natural surroundings before the loss of innocence.

LINES 31-33

The sky gathered again / And the sun grew round that very day. / So it must have been after the birth of the simple light

The sky gathered again / And the sun grew round that very day – The sun rises the next day and was shining brightly.

that very day – he remembers this day as it was of great significance to him. Also symbolic of his growing up; he was no longer a child.

So it must have been after the birth of the simple light – Alluding to the story of creation: *The separation of light and darkness* Birth of the world/the first light in Eden.

LINES 34-36

In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm / Out of the whinnying green stable / On to the fields of praise.

spinning place – The Garden of Eden

the spellbound horses walking warm / Out of the whinnying green stable – Referring to the horses of the previous stanza. Representing the freedom of childhood. The horses are entranced (*spellbound*).

the whinnying green stable – Onomatopoeia – sound of horse. Brings the scene to life.

On to the fields of praise – The fields are seen as a form of praise to the beauty and perfection of Fern Hill as he remembers it. Comparing it again to the Garden of Eden. This creates a mood of reverence.

STANZA 5 - The poem ends with a tone of regret, as the speaker begins, with the phrase "nothing I cared," to describe himself as "heedless," indicating his later regret.

LINES 37-38

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house / Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,

pheasants – a large bird with a rounded body and long tail, that spends a lot of time on the ground and is hunted for sport.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house – It is a happy place, and he felt that he had control over everything, including the wildlife. He felt as if the foxes, the pheasants and other animals were his friends and they loved him and honoured him as they wandered around the happy and merry house (*gay*) of Fern Hill.

Gay – happy/playful. The house is personified to reflect how the child felt about the house. It was lively and happy and filled with merriment and joys.

Under the new made clouds – Clouds of the new day.

and happy as the heart was long – Simile emphasises that his heart was filled with joy and happiness

LINES 39-40

In the sun born over and over, / I ran my heedless ways,

In the sun born over and over – Endless days that seemed to carry on throughout the summer

I ran my heedless ways – He admits that he was “heedless” as a child and how the farm gave him all that he needed and made him feel complete. He was able to run freely, without any concerns or worries about his life

LINES 41-43

My wishes raced through the house high hay / And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows / In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs

My wishes raced through the house high hay – Dreams and imaginations are running wild. His wishes seem to be fulfilled as quickly as the stacks of hay grew high in the house.

house high hay – Alliteration of “h” sound, emphasises the breathlessness and excitement of the poet.

And nothing I cared – There were no worries or concerns

sky blue trades – activities. He was too occupied to care that time was passing by and did not realise that his childhood paradise would end.

In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs – This happy situation will not continue indefinitely, and he did not realise how few days he would actually have.

LINES 44-45

Before the children green and golden / Follow him out of grace,

children green and golden – children who were still young and naïve. They did not have any worry and were in complete harmony with time. The child-speaker talks proudly and happily about his adventures in Fern Hill farm.

Follow him out of grace – indicates a fall from grace or innocence. As we grow older, we lose the wonder and innocence of childhood and the ability to feel the excitement that children feel. The embrace of reality brings with it regret and a loss of freedom.

Follow him – This is symbolic of Adam and Eve leaving Eden. His carefree world has been left behind.

STANZA 6 - The poet laments his carelessness and mourning the loss of his childhood and innocence

LINES 46-47

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me / Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,

The speaker returns to the present. The child becomes an adult and leaves behind the innocence of his past.

Nothing I cared – emphasises his complete freedom in his childhood.

lamb white days – symbol of innocence and purity. Emphasises his carefree attitude as a child.

time would take me / Up to the swallow thronged loft – Time is personified. The speaker's trip to the “swallow throng loft” (i.e. an attic full of birds), suggests initiation/ transition that leads the speaker into the world of adulthood. The swallows could symbolize any number of experiences that begin to alter a child's innocence. This, emphasises that he is being led into adulthood (*by the shadow of my hand*).

LINES 48-51

In the moon that is always rising, / Nor that riding to sleep / I should hear him fly with the high fields / And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.

Nor that riding to sleep / I should hear him fly with the high fields – Literally, even when he is going home after nightfall, he could hear the swallows flying high over the fields which are also high as they sit on the hill.

Figuratively – How he goes to sleep without worries and without cares. All he thinks of is to wait for the morning so that he would have another playful and joyful day.

And wake to the farm forever fled – The speaker wakes up one morning and all the joy has been sucked out of the world. Looking back on one's life, it can feel like childhood suddenly ended, especially if adult life seems especially miserable. That's how the speaker feels. There is a huge difference between being a child and being an adult, all the magic of childhood is gone.

LINES 52-54

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means, / Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Oh – A cry of regret, sorrow. Child has disappeared.

as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means, / Time held me green and dying – The poet mourns the end of childhood, it was wonderful but short. The speaker is still "green," inexperienced, this suggests that people do not necessarily become wiser even though they grow older.

Though I sang in my chains like the sea – Simile: The poet struggles against the restrictions and responsibilities of adulthood (*chains*). The simile "like the sea" shows the vastness of his feelings and the depth of his despair.

The use of the verb "*sang*" creates hope: The losses can be captured through his memories. The green and golden joy of childhood and the shadowy sorrow of maturity become the joy of art (poetry). In this manner, the loss to time is not total; it is possible to use art to recapture the happiness of innocent youth.

THEMES

- Childhood joy and innocence – this poem is at its core a celebration of childhood. The speaker was a happy and innocent child and part of a harmonious world. Children experience the specialness and harmony of the world through their freedom and, paradoxically, their security. They believe that they are safe to explore and experience joy. There are no severe restrictions and responsibilities on them.
- Harmony and the Wonder of Nature – The speaker's childhood joy is closely connected to playing outside. The poem suggests that real joy comes from a sense of connection with the natural world. To be young and innocent is to be one with nature. Nature is a place filled with wonder, peace and harmony. As the young speaker explored the landscape, the personified elements of Nature seemed to be his playmates. The speaker plays a role in the environment he visits - he is both hunter and shepherd. (He is not actually killing animals here.) His joy stems from the fact that he is a part of nature and the landscape, rather than apart from it. Adults are incapable of accessing the sense of peace and harmony that comes from being one with Nature.
- Time – throughout the poem, time looms like a godlike presence. Time grants the speaker a brief period of childhood happiness. However, time also ensures that nothing lasts forever and that childhood joys comes to an end. Time is ultimately an all-powerful and unstoppable force with ultimate control over humans.
- The end of childhood grace – the poem implies that when children grow up, they lost the 'grace' of childhood and its joys. The Christian concept of Grace is to experience God's love. For the speaker, childhood best represents such an experience, and the end of childhood is thus a painful, yet inevitable, fall from Grace. The references to the Garden of Eden parallels childhood as akin to the Garden of Eden. As people age, they lose their Grace, just like Adam and Eve lost theirs. Just as Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden, the speaker "wakes to the farm forever fled from the childless land". It is as if one day the speaker woke up, no longer a child, and all the happiness has disappeared from the world.
- Nostalgia – The sense of nostalgia is intense in the poem "Fern Hill." The longing to return to a state of innocence and security is a common thread throughout the entire work.
- The joys of childhood and regret associated with growing up

TONE

- The tone in the first five stanzas illustrate joy and happiness
- In the last stanza it shifts dramatically from joy to lament.

MOOD

- The mood of the poem creates a nostalgic, almost wistful (a feeling of vague or regretful longing).
- The poem was written by someone older who understands that childhood does not last forever ("In the sun that is young once only").

QUESTIONS

1. What does the speaker mean by “As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away” (line 24)? (2)
2. Describe the tone in the first four stanzas. (2)
3. Where and how does the tone alter? Explain your answer. (3)
4. What is the significance of the references to colours? (3)
5. Discuss what Thomas says about time in this poem. (2)
6. What realisation does the speaker have in line 51 when he says, “And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land”? (2)
7. How does the speaker suggest the beauty and innocence of the beginning of the world in stanza 4? (3)
8. What does this poem suggest about Thomas’ view of the relationship between humankind and Nature? (2)

THE SHIPWRECK – EMILY DICKINSON

- 1 Glee! The great storm is over!
- 2 Four have recovered the land;
- 3 Forty gone down together
- 4 Into the boiling sand.

- 5 Ring, for the scant salvation!
- 6 Toll, for the bonnie souls, --
- 7 Neighbour and friend and bridegroom,
- 8 Spinning upon the shoals!

- 9 How they will tell the shipwreck
- 10 When winter shakes the door,
- 11 Till the children ask, 'But the forty?
- 12 Did they come back no more?'

- 13 Then a silence suffuses the story,
- 14 And a softness the teller's eye;
- 15 And the children no further question,
- 16 And only the waves reply.

BACKGROUND

Emily Dickenson was born in the United States of America in 1830. She died in 1886. She wrote close to 2000 poems but only 10 were published in her lifetime. She is deemed one of America's most important and influential poets.

References to storms and shipwrecks appear in quite a few of Emily Dickinson's poems as ships were not as sturdy as they are today, and storm warning equipment did not exist.

This is not surprising as news of shipwrecks, a common occurrence in those days, would have reached even those living far from the ocean. Also, classical poetry and literature is steeped in stories of shipwrecks – some which Dickinson herself would have read or heard as a child.

THE TITLE

The – tells the reader that this poem is about a specific shipwreck.

Shipwreck – implies a tragedy, usually involving the loss of lives, grief and mourning. This sets the tone for the poem.

SUMMARY

This poem is about a shipwreck during a severe storm. It describes the joy experienced when the storm is over and it is discovered that there are four survivors from the shipwreck. However, there is also great sorrow and mourning for the forty people who have lost their lives. The poet makes a comment about the fame and glory survivors receive after a disaster, and how we often overlook the great tragedy of the loss of lives.

We often focus so much on the people who survive these tragedies without paying tribute to the people who died. The poem then goes on to the children who ask about the people who died. There is a silence in the speaker. At the end, only nature still speaks (through the waves), This evokes the sense that nature has the final word, and that nature is inexplicable.

FORM/STRUCTURE

This poem has 4 stanzas of 4 lines each. It follows a strict rhyme pattern: abcb defe ghij jklk. It is close in form to a ballad but does not have the prerequisite refrain characteristic of this form.

The first two stanzas focus on the positive news of the survival of four people. The last two stanzas focus on the grief of the loss of 40 lives.

STANZA 1

LINE 1

Glee! The great storm is over!

Glee! – Happiness, showing great delight. Emphasis on joy and celebration. This is emphasised by the !
Great – alludes to a terrible storm.

The great storm is over! – conveys a sense of relief. The ! emphasises their huge relief that the storm is over, and they have survived.

The first line is ironic. While the people are relieved that the storm is over, 40 people died as a result of this storm.

LINE 2

Four have recovered the land;

recovered the land – Four people have made it to shore and survived the sinking of their ship. This small number of survivors implies that there were others who did not survive.

LINE 3

Forty gone down together

gone down – Euphemism for died. Forty drowned due the ferocity of the storm

LINE 4

Into the boiling sand.

Metaphor: The sand on the seabed has been churned up by the waves of the storm, the result of this is it seems as if the sand is moving in circular motion. The turbulent, whirling motion of the rough sea is similar to the bubbling of boiling water. This emphasises the violent nature of the storm and terror of the 40 people. The metaphor emphasises the power of nature.

There is a complete change in the tone to that in line 1: celebration turns to grief, mourning.

STANZA 2

LINE 5

Ring, for the scant salvation!

Ring – They ring the town bell to draw the attention of the people.
Scant – very few

scant salvation! – they are thankful that 4 survived through the grace of God. The ! emphasises their gratitude.
It also implies that they cannot really celebrate those who survived because it will be tainted by the loss of so many others.

LINE 6

Toll, for the bonnie souls, -

Toll – refers to the ringing of the church bell. This is a funeral bell for the forty who drowned. This evokes the sound of a bell ringing slowly and repetitively, usually a sign that someone has died. This contrasts with line 5: '*Ring!*' evokes the sound of bells ringing in celebration

bonnie souls – The beloved, good people who have died

The dash after *souls* provides a description of who died.

LINE 7

Neighbour and friend and bridegroom,

These words acknowledge the close and varied relationships that exist in the community. This makes it more personal, thus intensifying their loss – the deceased were members of the community who were known to all. The people who drowned, were close to the poet as is highlighted in the relationships she speaks about.
Bridegroom increases the shock of their death. He had just started a new life.

LINE 8

Spinning upon the shoals!

shoals! – refers to a part of the sea that is shallow, but very dangerous. This is emphasised by the !

Spinning – the people are being tossed around helplessly in the shallow waters. The irony is that they did not die in the middle of the ocean. They were close to the shore. However, the people had no control of their movement because of the extremely violent storm and the mountainous waves that sent them *spinning*.

This emphasises the uncontrollable power of nature.

STANZA 3**LINES 9-10**

How they will tell the shipwreck /When winter shakes the door,

What explanation will they give. The survivors or others giving their account will not be able to explain what happened. They will tell the stories on cold winter nights. It becomes a time of introspection.

Winter is associated with death. Literally, the personification refers the door shaking because of the cold and windy conditions. “*Winter*” is shaking the door to get inside.

Figuratively, the personification refers to the death of the forty people; *door* is symbolic of their life.

LINES 11-12

Till the children ask, ‘But the forty?’

The initial celebration to offer thanks for the survival of the four will stop when children start asking questions. The children are asking about those that died. Where are they? Will they return? These are innocent questions which focus attention to the dead.

LINE 12

Did they come back no more?’

Emphasises that they could not give the children a suitable explanation. The disbelief of the children is evident in this question: Are you sure that they will not return?

STANZA 4**LINE 13**

Then a silence suffuses the story,

Alliteration: Repetition of the “s” sound, this creates a quite melancholic mood.

When the children questioned what had happened, silence gradually spread (*suffuse*) among the adults as they could not offer any explanation that would help the children come to terms with their loss.

There is a mournful tone at the loss of so many innocent people.

LINE 14

And a softness the teller’s eye;

This creates a sombre tone as the storyteller’s eyes fill with tears of compassion for those who will not be coming back. It is a painful reminder of the deaths and how they have all lost a loved one.

LINE 15

And the children no further question,

Children sense the difficulty of the adults. The children stop asking questions when they get no reply. This implies that the children have understood that there is no way of explaining a natural disaster that has claimed so many lives. This emphasises the pathos (sense of pity/grief).

LINE 16

And only the waves reply.

Personification: The waves are answering the questions. Only the sea knows what has really happened in the storm. This conveys the finality of death and that nature is a powerful force that cannot be controlled. People are at the mercy of nature. Some things cannot be explained as they are beyond our comprehension.

THEMES

- Contrasts evident throughout:
 - Joy vs Grief
 - Celebration vs Mourning
 - Saved vs Lost
 - Living vs Death
- the response to the loss of life.
- Death and mortality.
- Survival in the face of disaster
- The power of nature is inexplicable

TONE

- Stanzas 1 and 2
 - celebratory
 - euphoric (intense excitement and happiness)
 - ecstatic (overwhelming joy)
- Stanzas 3 and 4
 - sorrowful
 - mournful (expressing grief and sorrow)

MOOD

- Stanzas 1 and 2
 - cheerful
 - jubilant (happiness and triumph)
- Stanzas 3 and 4
 - brooding (in deep thought about something that makes one sad)
 - gloomy (dark)
 - sombre (serious and sad)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the effect of the exclamation marks in lines 1 and 5? How does this contrast to the exclamation mark used in line 8? (3)
2. What are the two reasons for “glee” in the opening lines? (2)
3. Explain what “recovered the land” means. (2)
4. Critically discuss the effectiveness of the imagery in “Forty gone down together/Into the boiling sand”. (3)
5. Why would “scant salvation” be celebrated? (2)
6. Explain the two ways in which the bells ring in this poem. Quote in support of your answer. (4)
7. Identify and comment on the effectiveness of the figure of speech in “When winter shakes the door”. (3)
8. How does the final stanza evoke pathos? (3)
9. Discuss the effectiveness of the alliteration/sibilance in line 13. (2)

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

Sonnet 130

William Shakespeare

1. Explain how the structure and tone of this poem allows the poet to emphasise the central message. (3)
(The Shakespearean/Elizabethan sonnet consists of 3 quatrains and rhyming couplet. The quatrains deliver his exaggerated anti-compliments, and the couplet drives home his sincere love – he loves her despite her imperfections. The tone in the quatrains – sarcastic/sardonic/frank. Tone in couplet – sincere. Learner MUST mention structure and tone in both.)
2. Are Shakespeare's observations in the quatrains cynical or not? Explain your answer. (2)
(No – no mark. Women, like men, are not perfect. He is not cynical, he is realistic. He loves her despite her shortcomings/imperfections. She is real!)
3. Who is the speaker ridiculing in the poem? Why does he do this? (3)
(He ridicules the Petrarchan poets of the time who used exaggerations to describe their lovers. He proves that the idealised woman does not exist AND makes it clear that his beloved does not have to be perfect for him to love her genuinely.)
4. Explain what is meant by: "My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground." (2)
(She is REAL – she does not float above the ground, as described by Petrarchan sonnets, she walks. She is human, not an idealised and mythical goddess.)
5. Refer to line 12. Comment on the effect pace has on the meaning of the line. (3)
(The pace slows down with commas and monosyllabic words. It indicates the heavy treading/walking of his mistress' gait. She walks like a normal person, she doesn't float like a goddess.)
6. Show how the last line completes his argument. Refer, in particular, to the word "false". (2)
(He does not need to make false/untrue/exaggerated comparisons to let her know he loves her. Or to love her!)
7. Identify three sensory images in this poem and how they relate to the central theme. (3)
(Sight – he sees her features; touch – her 'wiry' hair; smell – her breath; hearing – her voice. Learners must quote and explain. All relate to the theme of her imperfections making her 'perfect' in his eyes. She does not fit the mould of the idealised Petrarchan woman. She is real)
8. Identify the tone in lines 1-12 and how this contrasts with the tone in the last two lines. Is this an effective shift in tone? Justify your answer. (3)
Tone in 1-12: sardonic, sarcastic, critical. Last two lines: sincere, heartfelt. Effective shift – he states very clearly what she is NOT and then says that he loves her DESPITE her imperfections.)
9. Explain the use of "by heaven" in line 13. Why has this phrase been included? (2)
(It is a reference to God – he swears by the Almighty to prove his sincerity.)

The child who was shot dead...

Ingrid Jonker

1. Comment on the reference to 'the child' in the title of the poem. (2)
(It evokes a sympathetic response. A child is vulnerable and helpless against the armed soldiers. It shows the cruelty and senselessness of this death – this child did not live long enough to realise his potential.)
2. The title refers to the 'dead' child, yet in line 1 'the child is not dead'. Discuss the contradiction/dichotomy by referring to the rest of the poem. (3)
(The contradiction/dichotomy leaves the reader pondering: how can the child be both dead and "not dead"? The speaker introduces the idea that the child is a symbol of innocence/hope/resistance. None of the lives lost will be forgotten, as they are 'everywhere'. They will be remembered in history in the struggle for freedom. The child will always be present to drive the struggle and ultimately reap the rewards of freedom by travelling 'without a pass'.)
3. What does the altered repetition of "The child lifts his fists against his mother / father" reveal about the generation gap that is reflected in responding to the laws of apartheid? (2)
(The child is unhappy with the parents' submissive attitude – they did not fight hard enough. He (as a synecdoche of the youth) will now take up the fight, literally. The child seeks a quick and possibly violent solution to the end of Apartheid as he 'lifts his fists'; whereas the protests of his parents would have been more peaceful as previous 'generations who are shouting Afrika' campaigned against Apartheid in this way. The youth is filled with rage at the Apartheid world they are forced to inhabit, the legacy of previous generations who 'allowed' matters to reach this intolerable point. Active and passive resistance)

4. How does the diction in stanzas 1 and 2 highlight the difference between mothers and fathers? (3)
(The image of the mother refers to pain and suffering – they “scream” and their screams of anguish are heard far and wide. The image of the father refers to warriors and pride. It refers to “justice and blood” – the call to arms to regain their lost pride.)
5. Comment on the effect of the denials in the third stanza. (2)
(The frequent use of denials and negatives emphasises just how frequently these events occurred during those brutal years in the fight for freedom. The reader understands that there are innocent victims in all these places, and the denials – indicative of officialdom – come across as blatant lies.)
6. Critically comment how the imagery used in lines 20-23 contributes to the mood. (3)
(The child playing in the sun creates a carefree mood without the violence of ‘bullets’ and ‘rifles’ and ‘batons’. ‘Treks’ and ‘travels’ suggest freedom and no more restrictions and confinements of ‘pass’ laws. The image of a ‘giant’ show that the child is now grown and has embraced his potential. This contributes to a mood of hope, optimism and confidence.)
7. Discuss the effectiveness of the last, short line of the poem. (2)
(The concluding image is particularly poignant because it reflects a child who did not want any part of the violence he grew up in but instead wanted to follow innocent pursuits. He wanted the opportunity to become an independent adult with no restrictions on where he could go. The pass book implies restrictions and oppression.)
8. During the Parliamentary address, Nelson Mandela commented that “in the midst of despair, Jonker celebrated hope.” Does this poem celebrate hope? Discuss your answer briefly. (3)
(Jonker remained desperately hopeful of a better future. The last line implies a future without restrictions. The repetition of “Not dead” implies hope and optimism. AVA)
9. “The child” is repeated ten times in the poem. How does this repetition add meaning to the poem? (2)
(The repetition emphasises the age and innocence of the child. The effect is to highlight the number of innocent people who were killed in the fight against Apartheid.)

At a Funeral

Dennis Brutus

1. To what does “pageantry” refer in line 1? Discuss the effectiveness of this choice of word. (2)
(Pageantry refers to a splendid scene filled with colours and costumes, movement and sound. It is an effective choice of word if one considers that the poet feels that this funeral is all just for “show”.)
2. What do the words “Black, green and gold” suggest? How does this shift the reading of the poem? (2)
(These are the colours of the ANC and makes the reader see the poem in a political light. The poem is both personal and political.)
3. Why would the graves be expectant of ‘eternity’ (line 2)? (2)
(The graves are ‘waiting’ for the dead bodies who will be buried and stay there forever.)
4. Explain the reference to “hope” as it is used in line 6. (2)
(Hopes for the future – the fulfilment of life by Valencia. Could also suggest a sense of hopelessness – “what was all of this for?” The poet speaks of “our hopes” – inclusive of the reader.)
5. What are “carrion books of birth”? (2)
(Passbooks carried by all non-white people. Carrion (meat/dead being) - refers to the people not actually being dead, but dead-like due to oppression.)
6. Comment on the tone in “Arise!” and “Salute!”. (3)
7. Why does the speaker call on the reader to “ponder” (line 5)? (2)
(The speaker asks the reader to contemplate the implications of this funeral, and death in general. He encourages the reader to look further than the ‘showcase’/display.)
8. What is the difference between “Death” and “death’s head” and why is “scythes our ground” then an appropriate metaphor? (3)
(Death is personified – it is the mortal end of life. Death is often portrayed as a cloaked skeleton carrying a scythe – the cutting of life. A death’s head is a skull. Here it refers to the tyranny of a system that cuts down the lives of black people. So ‘scythes’ is an effective metaphor.)
9. Discuss the pun in the word “plots” in line 11. (3)
(It can be a verb – to plot is to make a secret plan to destroy someone or something. In this context the political system makes plans to contain the black people in ‘narrow cells’. These could be prison cells or graves. Plots could also refer to literal graves.)

10. Describe the tone in and the effectiveness of the last line of the poem. (3)
(It is a commanding/defiant tone. He states that it is better to die than to "lie down" – to submit to oppressive powers. He encourages the reader/his people to fight against oppression. It is forceful and honest conclusion in response to the funeral of Valencia.)
11. How does the reader know that this poem is more than a tribute to Valencia Majombozi? Discuss the effectiveness of this added message/theme. (3)
(There is a definite mourning for this specific individual, but the speaker encourages the reader to think beyond that. He addresses the concept of death in general and the waste of life if a life is cut short, before a person reached full potential. He also uses the second stanza as a "call to arms" of sorts. He states that it is better to die than to submit to the powers of oppression.)

Poem of Return

Jofre Rocha

- Why does the speaker not want flowers upon his return? (3)
(Flowers are superficial. He does not want superficial things, he wants emotion. He also does not believe himself to be hero who deserves flowers or accolades upon his return. He fled and left the others to fight.)
- What does the speaker want instead of flowers? Why? (3)
(He wants tears, hunger, intimacy, mourning and sleeplessness. Flowers are generally celebratory, and this is definitely not a time for celebration. He wants, instead, an acknowledgement of suffering. His return is indicative of something much bigger than just himself.)
- Comment on the description of the speaker's "host country" as the "land of exile and silence". (2)
(exile – he fled there to escape from oppression; silence – perhaps he did not speak the new country's language. He could also have been alone there / isolated / unhappy / no communication with home country or his people.)
- Identify and comment on the effectiveness of the figure of speech in "tears of dawns". (3)
(Personification – even the "dawn" is crying. Even Nature is upset at the atrocities committed by people.)
- Why are the mothers "bereft of sons" (line 8)? (2)
(Due to the political strife of the time, many young men (the sons) were imprisoned or killed. Some young men also went into exile. Some mothers also couldn't have sons because their husbands/partners were killed or imprisoned. Thus mothers were denied the presence of sons.)
- Comment on the figurative interpretation of the "day-break" in line 12. (2)
(The brink of change – the new day symbolises his hope that things will change / they will get justice / freedom. It could refer to those who died so shortly before the oppression ended.)
- Comment on the effectiveness of the anaphora ("When I return..."). (3)
(The title is echoed in the anaphora, "When I return". This emphasises the context of an individual who probably had been forced to flee his home country and had to live in a foreign country for a while. This emphasises the prospect of coming home and his anticipation at the welcome he would get. It is clear that the speaker feels guilty about having gone into exile whilst his compatriots fought the oppressive system.)
- Discuss the change in tone from stanza 2 to 3. Quote in support of your answer. (3)
(In stanza 2 there is a tone of longing and yearning – the grief is immense. He cries out for the homeland to meet him with 'real' emotions, not flowers, nothing superficial. In the 3rd stanza the tone shifts to anger and bitterness. Although he is happy to be home, he realises the enormous sacrifice made by some in the struggle for liberation.)
- How does the last stanza successfully convey the speaker's intention? (3)
(Cleverly chosen diction – "anger" and "snaking" – implies that although the speaker is happy to be home, he still carries an enormous amount of anger and resentment towards their oppressors. He is definitely not forgiving. He seeks and demands justice for all those who were scarred/killed in the fight for freedom. "Snaking" alludes to something dangerous and poisonous – he will expose the atrocities and get justice for all. There is definitely an ominous tone.)

Talk to the Peach Tree

Sipho Sepamla

- Explain the underlying meaning of the actions/instructions in lines 1-6. (2)
(Although the literal actions are quite absurd, the underlying message is serious: what do you know about us? During Apartheid there was little or no opportunity to understand or communicate with people from other races. One group of people was always superior and had a 'voice', whilst the other had to remain silent.)

2. Why would swallows be a good source of information about 'other countries'? (2)
(Swallows migrate for the summer. They would be able to 'talk' about the other countries.)
3. Discuss what the speaker is saying in stanza 4. (3)
(He states that 'words have lost their meaning' – this means that talking has become useless. 'Misused notations' refers to communication tools which have become so warped that their original intentions have become lost. Words have literally lost their meaning. Language has been twisted and used to convey lies, propaganda and cannot be trusted.)
4. Discuss the connotations of the word "whining" (line 10). (2)
(‘Whining’ has negative connotations of high-pitched complaining. This would be unpleasant.)
5. Why does the speaker describe the heat as "paralysing" and "merciless" (stanza 6)? (2)
(paralysing – implies that the oppression (the heat) renders a person unable to do anything. 'merciless' implies exactly that – no empathy/mercy/compassion for the oppressed people.)
6. Although similar in style to stanzas 1-3, how do lines 11-14 differ in tone and intent from lines 1-6? (3)
(Stanzas 1-3 were light-hearted and humorous in their absurdity. Lines 11-14 is anything but humorous. The heat is 'merciless' which alludes to the oppression faced by Black people during Apartheid. The tone is harsh and unforgiving. The words 'rubbish heap' and 'stench' implies the attitude towards black people. The tone is serious and the intention is the describe the reality of the situation for black people under white oppression.)
7. Discuss why the speaker chooses to "talk to the peach tree". Consider the other 'things' or concepts he talk to in the poem. (3)
(The peach tree is rooted in a permanent place in the garden, unlike the other items/things he proposed with which to have a conversation. The tree will tell him how it feels to be rooted and fruitful in a place you can call your own. The connotation of rooted is permanence and fruitful implies productive and successful.)
8. Identify and comment on the tone in the last stanza. (3)
(The tone could be one of relief – for so long there has been no communication. Now the speaker looks forward to a conversation between the two parties. This conversation, albeit with the devil himself, is long overdue and needs to happen to facilitate change. The speaker implores the reader to have the needed conversation.)
9. Who is the 'devil' in the last stanza? (1)
(Oppressors / Apartheid System)
10. How is the register of the poem appropriate and effective in delivering its message? (2)
(The colloquial register is lighter and less demanding than formal register. It gives the poem a tone much like a casual conversation. The poet addresses the reader directly and engages them with the pronouns "us" in "Let's". Sepamla's style of criticism is subtle and accessible to all readers. The message is clearly that decent conversations need to happen between white and black people and that all should be treated fairly and equally. People must see all things from BOTH perspectives.)

Prayer to Masks

Léopold Sédar Senghor

1. Briefly explain the connotations of the words "Prayer" and "masks" as used in the title. (3)
(prayers – appeal to a higher power / ancestors – positive connotation. 'masks' – traditional masks as worn in African culture / to hide real emotions / hide true intentions. The title implies a 'thank you' to those who have been wearing the masks and to the masks themselves for being able to hide true feelings.)
2. Why does the speaker greet the masks "in silence"? (2)
(Words are unnecessary in this instance – a slight gesture will suffice.)
3. Why does the speaker use the first person "I"? (2)
(It adds a personal, intimate and sincere element to the poem. It is subjective.)
4. How could an ancestor be "lionheaded" (line 4)? (2)
(This could refer to a traditional African mask in the shape of a lion's head. It could also be symbolic of strength, boldness and bravery. The Senegalese national anthem is also entitled "The Red Lion".)
5. Discuss the choice in diction in metaphor "altar of white paper" (line 8). (3)
(white paper could refer to bureaucracy – it takes an immense amount of paperwork to create laws / set up political alliances etc. The 'altar' suggests that something is being worshipped/praised.)
6. Identify the tone in "In the name of your image, listen to me!" (1)
(A pleading, desperate tone. Or a respectful command filled with authority.)

7. What does the speaker mean when he states that Europe and Africa are “connected through the navel”? (3)
(This image reminds the reader of the connection of Africa to Europe, much like a baby is connected to its mother via the umbilical cord – nourishment, blood flow etc. The colonial powers in Europe were referred to as the ‘mother country’. However, this connection is a negative one – Europe colonised many countries in Africa. There was mass exploitation of people, resources and land. Greed and corruption by the colonisers left Africa damaged. The severing of the connection is necessary but difficult. Colonisers would not want to sever this connection – then they lose their wealth/resources/land/labour force etc.)
8. Identify the figure of speech and explain the effectiveness thereof in the phrase “rebirth of the world” (line 14). (3)
(Personification – now that the colonisers have left / have no more power over the country, it has the chance to be reborn, to start afresh. It can now create its own government / future.)
9. How has the world “died of machines and cannons”? (2)
(Our over-reliance on technology and machinery has caused the spiritual soul to wither and die. The world has lost its ability to feel deeply and give expression to joy.)
10. Is there any optimism in this poem? Quote in support of your answer. (2)
(“world that has died” – shows that the old reality is gone/dead. There is a semblance of hope (“torn hope”) despite the damage, destruction and violence.)
12. Discuss the effectiveness of the last two lines of the poem as a conclusion. (3)
(These lines are emphatic and strongly connected to the earth. The people are involved in a traditional dance and they appear strong and resilient. This dance symbolises their new-found freedom and how they will regain their identity and take pride in their culture. They will share this culture and pride with the rest of the world.)

This Winter Coming

Karen Press

1. Comment on the poet’s choice of the word “thick” in line 1. (2)
(This word relates to the rain – it is thick, like a blanket. Textured. A very heavy rain.)
2. How does line 2 create an ominous tone? Refer to the extended metaphor in your answer. (3)
(This figurative winter – oppression – will only get worse – “only just entered”. Things will get far worse before they get better. There is an allusion to possible violence / uprising against the oppression.)
3. Who is the speaker addressing in line 3? What is the effect of this address? (2)
(All readers, in fact, all South Africans. All people should be afraid to of the Resistance. There will be violence in response to oppression.)
4. How is a sense of violence portrayed in lines 4-5? (2)
(The sea is described as ‘swollen, churning in broken waves’ – this is a destructive ocean, not a peaceful and serene ocean. It is a dangerous place to be.)
5. Comment on the inclusion of the word “shroud” in line 7. (2)
(A shroud is a cloth traditionally used to cover dead bodies in preparation for a funeral. The word intensifies the feelings of fear, anger and helplessness in the face of the weather conditions. This rain and cold can kill those unprotected from it.)
6. Suggest a reason why people would fear winter? Refer to the literal and figurative meanings of the word. (3)
(Homeless people or people living in shacks would fear winter because they are exposed to the elements all the time. It is cold and wet. They can fall ill and possibly die. This is the literal interpretation. The figurative element compares winter to a time of political and social hardship in South Africa. Those left unprotected (non-whites) will be exposed to hardship and possibly death.)
7. Identify and explain the figure of speech in “these women are a tide of sadness”. (3)
(Metaphor – the amount of sadness is so great that if it were in liquid form, it would make up a sea. It would drown anything in its path.)
8. Explain the effectiveness of the metaphor, “tombstones/engraved with open eyes”. (2)
(The stillness of the men is such that they seemed to be carved from stone. They have become so hardened that they seem dead, if it were not for the open eyes. They look dead but are alive.)
9. How does the reaction of the children to the rain differ from the adults? (2)
(The adults are fearful. The children run wildly, they are active and alive. They use a fire to warm themselves, because they are so thin. Here the rain is positive – it is negative in the rest of the poem.)
10. To what does the “raging fire of dead children” (line 27) refer? (3)
(This seems to refer to the children who died in violent uprisings (like Sharpeville, Soweto etc.). The word ‘raging’ suggests the passion of the children and the ugliness of the system oppressing them. Children died when trying to bring about change during the Apartheid era.)
11. Discuss how the “sky” has changed throughout the poem. What is the implication of it in line 28? (3)
(Rain comes from the sky and is now “collapsing under centuries of rain”. At first the sky is just that – a sky. It then intensifies to a sky “tolling like a black bell” and in the final stanza it is falling. The Apartheid system has become unbearable. The time for change has arrived. BUT things are going to get worse before they get better.)

12. Comment on the effectiveness of the anaphora ("who is not frightened?") in the poem. (2)
(Includes all readers and South Africans. It serves as an emphasised warning to the oppressors – a revolution is coming. Things have to change. Remember – this poem was printed in 1986.)
13. The last two lines of the poem breaks the 'pattern' of the rest of the poem. Why did the poet write these lines differently to the anaphora in the rest of the poem? (3)
(At first the anaphora was one line. Now it is extended over two lines. This adds to the idea that the 'winter' is about to arrive. It is ominous. It acts as a warning of what is to come.)

Solitude

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

1. Comment on the personification in stanza 1. (3)
(the world 'laughs' – when you are happy the world around you is happy. The earth also "borrows" mirth – joy/humour – there are enough sadnesses/problems. The hills "answer" your happiness – literally an echo and figuratively like the earth "laughing" with you. NOT AT YOU! The echoes "shrink" back from issues/problems/worries.)
2. Describe the reaction of the 'echoes' (line 7) to the prompts given. (2)
(In reaction to the 'joyful sound' the echoes will repeat the sound eagerly. However, there will be no reaction if the sound is not happy – expression of 'care', concern or worry.)
3. What does "shrink" mean as used in line 8? (2)
(pull back – the world will not share your problems/issues/cares.)
4. Suggest a possible example of "life's gall". (2)
(sadness, poverty, loneliness – all things that make us bitter.)
5. Why does the speaker suggest that "pain" is travelled through "narrow aisles"? (2)
(Narrow aisles are confined – not enough space for more than one person at a time. When we suffer, we do so alone. We must learn to create our own happiness.)
6. Paraphrase and explain the line: "Succeed and give, and it helps you live." (3)
(A person who succeeds in life and then shares his good fortune with others, will derive most joy from the act of giving. They will have a more rewarding life. Their life will be better.)
7. Discuss the effectiveness of the title of the poem in relation to its contents. (3)
(Although solitude can mean loneliness, it is not always a bad thing. However, as made clear in this poem, people will only be with you if you are happy. We are alone in our sorrows and misfortunes. We also die alone – solitary/ in solitude. An appropriate title. Solitude is a choice. Unhappiness/loneliness is not a choice.)
8. Is the speaker in this overly cynical? Discuss your opinion. (3)
(I believe so – not all people are as 'mean' and uncaring as she states. Think of your own best friend – there for you in good times and bad??)
9. Would "Loneliness" have been a better title for the poem? Discuss your answer and make reference to the connotations/denotations of both words (solitude and loneliness) in your answer. (3)
(Perhaps a better choice. Loneliness is not a choice, just like to person would CHOOSE to be left alone in their worst times. Solitude is a chosen state. Not necessarily a bad thing.)

The Morning Sun is Shining

Olive Schreiner

1. Describe the mood of the first four lines of the poem. Pay attention to imagery and diction in your answer. (3)
(A bright, sunny, idyllic morning has a positive connotation. It creates a positive/happy/joyful mood. The image of the sunbeam "dancing" on the speaker's knee creates happiness and joy. The word 'golden' has a connotation of riches and beauty. The repetition of the word 'green' implies vitality and youth. There is an almost tactile sense of happiness.)
2. Identify the tone in the first 12 lines. Now state the tone in the last 4 lines. Why does it change? (3)
(The tone of the first 12 lines is cheerful/happy/positive/joyful. Nature is beautiful and celebrated. The last 4 lines changes to a tone of despair, negativity, sadness, hopelessness. She is describing her sorrow and how the beautiful morning makes her sadness even greater, more poignant.)
3. How does the poet use colour to create the mood of the first stanza? (2)
(The mood is cheerful, happy, optimistic, celebratory. "green" has connotations of youth and vitality. "Golden" has connotations of riches and wealth and beauty.)
4. What figure of speech is used in "And sends a golden sunbeam / To dance upon my knee"? Explain the effectiveness of this figure of speech. (3)
(Personification – the sunbeam is moving freely, perhaps through the leaves and trees. This evokes a joyful and playful mood and atmosphere.)

5. Discuss the effectiveness of the personification in lines 5-8. (3)
(The fountain bubbles "merrily" and the birds are "happy". This creates a sense of cheerfulness and happiness. The natural world is celebrating beauty and joy. Life is celebrated. All rejoice in the beauty of the morning.)
6. Comment on how the poet's use of sound contributes to the impact of the poem. (3)
('Bubbles' is an example of onomatopoeia – a happy/active/'alive' connotation. The alliteration in "green, green" and "golden" – connotations of youth and wealth. Assonance and alliteration in "life and light" connect these words – life is good! The sibilant 's' in "song", "sweet" and "strong" contribute to the lyrical quality of the poem. This poem celebrates the beauty and sounds and smells of Nature.)
7. Lines 13-14 bring forth a change in tone and mood. Discuss this change. (3)
(The tone and mood change from joyful and celebratory to one of grief and sorrow. Although the speaker states that Nature is beautiful and to be celebrated, her grief is larger than that. She does not find solace in the beauty.)
8. Discuss the effectiveness of the poem's final question as a conclusion to the poem. (3)
(The speaker points out that all the beauty in nature is of no value in this situation. She finds no solace in her beautiful surroundings. In fact, the beauty of the scene is so jarring, as it is at odds with her depressed state. There is someone whom she has lost and this loss induces a depression that no lovely day can lessen.)
9. What, do you think, was the poet's intention in the writing of this poem? (2)
(The poet praises Nature but also expresses her sorrow at her very personal loss. She is unable to find happiness. Even the beautiful morning does not comfort her in her grief. The abundance of life makes her even sadder. She is very sad and inconsolable.)

It is a beauteous evening...

William Wordsworth

1. Describe the mood in the opening line of the poem. Use your own words. (2)
(The mood is peaceful, tranquil and utterly quiet. The word "calm" suggests this. The word "free" implies free of stress/worries/pain/busyness. There is a slow pace to the line.)
2. Why is the simile "quiet as a nun" a particularly effective figure of speech? (2)
(This simile adds a religious element to the poem. A "quiet" nun is probably in prayers. She is close to God. The speaker links the beauty of Nature to God – the (Christian) creator of Earth and its beauty.)
3. How can the sea have "the gentleness of heaven" on it? (2)
(The sea is reflecting the skies/Heaven. It is calm and gentle. It is beautiful and Godly.)
4. How and why does the beginning of line 6 change the atmosphere? (3)
(Listen is a command and the exclamation point emphasises it. The otherwise quiet and peaceful atmosphere is broken by this interjection/order. The speaker wants his companion to be part of this moment with him.)
5. What is the purpose of the capital letter in "Being" (line 6)? (3)
(Although the speaker is referring to the sea, the capital letter links the sea to God, the almighty Being. Both the sea and God are 'awake' and 'eternal' and neither stop moving.)
6. What is the function of the dash in line 8? (2)
(The dash creates a pause and emphasises the word which follows – 'everlastingly'. This states again that God, like the ocean, is forever.)
7. How does the tone of "Dear child!" differ from "Listen!"? (2)
("Listen!" is an imperative, a command. It is forceful and has a commanding tone. "Dear child!" is said in a loving tone. He expresses his love and adoration for his daughter.)
8. Explain the comparison used in the metaphor "Abraham's bosom". (3)
(Just as a father holds his precious child close to protect and cherish him/her, the girl is unknowingly protected and cherished by Abraham as one of God's children.)
9. Discuss how the structure/form of the poem supports its contents. (3)
(The octave of this Petrarchan sonnet describes the breath-taking beauty of the scene. The sestet acts as a commentary of the speaker's understanding of the spirituality of life in general.)

Fern Hill

Dylan Thomas

1. What does the speaker mean by "As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away" (line 24)? (2)
(As the speaker falls asleep he imagines that the entire farm is being carried away into dreamland with him. The farm "is carried" by the owls.)
2. Describe the tone in the first four stanzas. (2)
(There is a tone/feeling/atmosphere of joy and happiness. Youth and Nature are celebrated. The speaker is happy and carefree.)
3. Where and how does the tone alter? Explain your answer. (3)
(In stanza 4 the speaker mentions that he "awakes" – this is the turning point. He is no longer young and carefree. He reflects on happier times and the nostalgia is apparent. He is aware of his loss of innocence – like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.)

4. What is the significance of the references to colours? (3)
(He makes many references to the colours green and golden. Green implies youth and vitality. New grass in Spring, new leaves, rebirth. Gold has connotations of wealth and beauty and Autumn – leaves turning and sunlight and yellow flowers. Golden also has connotations of glory.)
5. Discuss what Thomas says about time in this poem. (2)
(Time is personified. It allows the speaker to have this special time in his life. The passage of time is clear throughout the poem and the speaker appreciates Nature at different times of day. The child is oblivious that he has limited time. It is the adult who realises time's worth.)
6. What realisation does the speaker have in line 51 when he says, "And wake to the farm forever fled from
7. the childless land"? (2)
(He speaker realises that, as an adult, his childhood is gone. His youth is gone.)
8. How does the speaker suggest the beauty and innocence of the beginning of the world in stanza 4? (3)
(The reference to Adam and his maiden refers to the Garden of Eden and creation of Man. He suggests that his time at Fern Hill is comparable to Adam and Eve's time in the Garden BEFORE the loss of innocence. It is idyllic and beautiful and free. He was very happy there.)
9. What does this poem suggest about Thomas' view of the relationship between humankind and Nature? (2)
(There is complete harmony between humankind and Nature. The boy and Nature are never in conflict. They live harmoniously together. Each day is like the creation of Earth – guiltless, relaxed, calm, idyllic.)

The Shipwreck

Emily Dickenson

1. What is the effect of the exclamation marks in lines 1 and 5? How does this contrast to the exclamation mark
2. used in line 8? (3)
(The exclamation marks in lines 1 and 5 are celebratory – there are survivors! The exclamation mark in line 8 brings a sense of sorrow and shock. So many died in the shipwreck.)
3. What are the two reasons for "glee" in the opening lines? (2)
(The storm is over and there are some, if only 4, survivors.)
4. Explain what "recovered the land" means. (2)
(They made it back to land/shore. They survived the shipwreck.)
5. Critically discuss the effectiveness of the imagery in "Forty gone down together/Into the boiling sand". (3)
(Forty people died, together, in the shipwreck. The "boiling sand" implies a tumultuous sea – great waves – that sent the drowned people straight to the bottom of the ocean. This increases the shock.)
6. Why would "scant salvation" be celebrated? (2)
(Although 40 people perished in the storm, there were at least 4 survivors. Scant refers to few. It could also imply that the celebration of those who survived will be tainted by the loss of so many others.)
7. Explain the two ways in which the bells ring in this poem. Quote in support of your answer. (4)
(The first 'ring' in line 5 is celebratory for the four who survived. The second 'ring' ("toll") is like a funeral bell for the forty who drowned.
8. Identify and comment on the effectiveness of the figure of speech in "When winter shakes the door". (3)
(Personification – it is so cold and windy that it seems that Winter is shaking at the door. Emphasises the coldness and wind.)
9. How does the final stanza evoke pathos? (3)
(Pathos – pity – the story is told to other people and they all feel sorrow for the loss of the forty people. Even the children are speechless at the story. Great pity and pathos. No empty cliches are offered. There is just silence.)
10. Discuss the effectiveness of the alliteration/sibilance in line 13. (2)
(The alliteration/sibilance slows down the pace of the line. It evokes sadness/pity/pathos. There is a mournful tone at the loss of so many innocent people.)