



Pearson  
Edexcel

# A level English Literature

Unseen Poetry  
Preparation  
Anthology II

Can be used to prepare for  
Component 3 Section A





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## Introduction

When we chose *Poems of the Decade, an Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2001–2010* as a prescribed text on our A level English Literature, we wanted A level English Literature students to be immersed in the writing of their own time, as well as the work of long-established writers. This has led to many of you experiencing English Literature first-hand, through live and online performances by the poets themselves. You will continue to witness the live growth of this body of poetic work, as you move through this course. Many students and teachers have enjoyed finding new poets to read, to extend their knowledge of poetry. This resource will provide you with yet more opportunities for doing that.

The prescribed Forward anthology captured work from the first decade of the twenty-first century. Since then, both you, as students, *and* our contemporary poets, have lived through a time of intense political and social change: the global pandemic and its related lockdowns; a heightened awareness during that time of the presence of nature; related concerns about climate change; the Black Lives Matter movement; the Grenfell Tower disaster; the #MeToo movement and the vigils and speeches that have come about as a result of violent crime and a desire for equality.

It seems fitting, if not urgent, therefore, that we capture and share some of this recent important writing, as well as widen your knowledge of new contemporary voices in the world of poetry. This resource includes a range of voices that today's literature students should read and know about. These poets are carrying poetry forward in the twenty-first century and their work is for you to take forward in your own literary journey.

Our consideration of contemporary poetry and indeed, these poets' writing, builds on knowledge of established cultural foundations. At times this is explicit and direct, such as Turnbull's reflections in 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn' on its relationship with Keats's writing and Inua Ellams's poem 'Fuck / Drums' which considers the relationship between past and present music culture. Contemporary poets continue to build on the poetic voices that have preceded them, using poetry as a vehicle to make political comment. Notable here is the work of Roger Robinson in his writing about the Grenfell Tower disaster, and Jay Bernard who has revisited the events of the New Cross fire of 1981 and considered the human and political cost that still reverberates today. There are a range of writers here who are exploring sexual or cultural identities which offer rich poetic reading.

The prescribed *Poems of the Decade* are merely the starting point for your thinking. Wider reading in contemporary poetry is a crucial part of the independent reading required of all our A level English Literature students. This resource will prepare you for the unseen element of the examination but, more importantly, immerse you in the Literature of your own time – here and now. The list here offers you a springboard for your wider reading. The activities will help you secure confidence in reading and writing about poems. At this level, poetry will often present you with ambiguity and resistance to a single fixed reading.; this is a challenge to be welcomed and relished. We urge you to read and listen to more of the poets included here, most of whom are very active online and have recent new collections you can read. The suggestions at the end of each poem will help you with this.

We wish you well in your preparation for the examinations but more than this, hope that this element of the course will fuel a passion for the writing of the poets around you.



Special thanks to Judith Palmer, Director and Julia Bird, Learning and Participation Manager from The Poetry Society and Chris McCabe, the National Poetry Librarian The South Bank Poetry Library for their collaboration in putting this resource together.



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## Section A

This section of the resource provides you with a range of contemporary poems alongside some questions to support your skills in reading and responding to poetry.

You will read a range of contemporary poems and work through some activities to extend your knowledge of contemporary poetry.

After each set of activities, you will find a pairing of exam-style questions, linking the unseen poem you have studied with a poem from your prescribed text *Poems of the Decade, an Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2001–2010*.



## **'The Missing', Roger Robinson,**

*(For the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire disaster)*

As if their bodies became  
lighter, ten of those seated  
in front pews began to  
float, and then to lie  
down as if on  
a bed. Then pass down the  
aisle,  
as if on a conveyor belt of  
pure air, slow as a funeral  
cortege,  
past the congregants, some  
sinking to their knees in  
prayer.  
One woman, rocking back and  
forth, muttered, *What about me Lord,*  
*why not me?*

The Risen stream slowly, so  
slowly out the gothic doors  
and up to the sky, finches  
darting deftly between them.

Ten streets away,  
a husband tries to hold onto the  
feet of his floating wife. At times  
her force lifts him slightly off the  
ground,  
his grip slipping. He falls  
to his knees with just her high-  
heeled shoe in his hand.



He shields and squints his  
eyes as she is backlit by  
the sun.

A hundred people start floating  
from the windows of a tower  
block; from far enough away  
they could be black smoke  
from spreading flames.

© 'The Missing', Roger Robinson, Peepal Tree Press



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. Whilst this poem arises from a real event, it presents a surreal perspective, straddling the harsh reality of the Grenfell disaster and the fantastical.
  - Identify the words and phrases that reflect reality and the surreal.

Consider the effect of this combination.

2. Pinpoint the tone of this poem.  
You might like to choose from the words below or select your own:
  - melancholy
  - celebratory
  - religious
  - angry
  - hopeful
  - tragic.

Do you identify any change in tone at any point in the poem? Think carefully about the evidence for this and its effect.

**\*TIP\*** Take care to identify the tone of a poem. It is easy to make assumptions based on the topic of a poem. Just because a poem is about loss does not mean it is sad. Just because a poem focuses on a topic that has raised political anger, does not mean that the poem itself is angry and indignant. Look at the web of words in the poem itself to gain the evidence.





3. An elegy is a poem associated with death and is a public acknowledgement of loss. It has no fixed form but offers a style of lament which tends to represent its culture or community.

This term could be used for the poem 'The Missing'. 85% of those who died in the fire were from ethnic minorities.

Identify patterns of language in Robinson's poem which may reflect the multi-ethnic community of those who perished. Discuss their effect.

4. Consider the theme of movement in the poem and how it contributes to the overall impact of this poem.

### **Exam-style questions**

EITHER

Read the poem 'The Missing' by Roger Robinson and reread the anthology poem 'Effects' by Alan Jenkins. Compare the methods both poets use to explore death.

OR

Read the poem 'The Missing' by Roger Robinson and reread the anthology poem 'History' by John Burnside. Compare the methods both poets use to explore human loss.

### **Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets**

Roger Robinson's 2021 collection 'A Portable Paradise', won the prestigious T.S. Eliot Poetry prize. A number of the poems in the collection, including 'The Missing'; refer to the Grenfell Tower tragedy of the 2017 in West London.

You can listen find several readings of Roger Robinson reading from this collection online. Go to [his website](#).

A reading from 'A Portable Paradise', at the T.S. Eliot Prize shortlist readings held on 12 January 2022 at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall is [available on YouTube](#).

For students interested in the crossover between poetry and music, you might like to hear Robinson as the lead vocalist for the musical crossover project [King Midas Sound](#).



## **‘To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn’t Find Me Identifiably Indian’, Arundhathi Subramaniam**

You believe you know me,  
wide-eyed Eng Lit type  
from a sun-scalded colony,  
reading my Keats – or is it yours –  
while my country detonates  
on your television screen.

You imagine you’ve cracked  
my deepest fantasy –  
oh, to be in an Edwardian vicarage,  
living out my dharma  
with every sip of dandelion tea  
and dreams of the weekend jumble sale...

You may have a point.  
I know nothing about silly mid-offs,  
I stammer through my Tamil,  
and I long for a nirvana  
that is hermetic,  
odour-free,  
bottled in Switzerland,  
money-back-guaranteed.

This business about language,  
how much of it is mine,  
how much yours,  
how much from the mind,  
how much from the gut,  
how much is too little,  
how much too much,  
how much from the salon,  
how much from the slum,  
how I say verisimilitude,  
how I say Brihadaranyaka<sup>1</sup>,  
how I say vaazhapazham<sup>2</sup> –  
it’s all yours to measure,  
the pathology of my breath,  
the halitosis of gender,  
my homogenised plosives  
about as rustic  
as a mouth-freshened global village.



Arbiter of identity,  
remake me as you will.  
Write me a new alphabet of danger,  
a new patois to match  
the Chola<sup>3</sup> bronze of my skin.  
Teach me how to come of age  
in a literature you've bark-scratched  
into scripture.  
Smear my consonants  
with cow-dung and turmeric and godhuli.  
Pity me, sweating,  
rancid, on the other side of the counter.  
Stamp my papers,  
lease me a new anxiety,  
grant me a visa  
to the country of my birth.  
Teach me how to belong,  
the way you do,  
on every page of world history.

### Glossary

<sup>1</sup>Brihadaranyaka – a Sanskrit word for great wilderness.

<sup>2</sup>vaazhapazham – a Tamil word for banana.

<sup>3</sup>Chola – one of the most important longest-ruling dynasties of South India which conquered many countries outside of India and was a key ancient empire.

© 'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Find Me Identifiably Indian' from *Where I Live: New and Selected Poems*, Arundhati Subramaniam, Bloodaxe Books, 2009



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. What do you understand by the following terms:
  - the literary establishment?
  - the academic establishment?

How has the established literary canon been developed?

- What kind of people have held the power to define that from medieval times to the present day? Has that change and if so how?
  - What has the role of gender and race been in that?
2. Consider the experience of reading words in Indian languages (Tamil and Sanskrit) and English in this poem.
    - How does that make you feel as a reader? How might your experience of reading the poem aloud be different from the poet's?
    - Is there a difference between reading it on the page and aloud?
    - Consider the effect of the poet's combination of these words.
  3. Think carefully about the title of the poem in relation to the points above. This is a poem written to address a reviewer or academic critic.
  4. Pinpoint the tone of this poem.  
Which stanza in particular most strongly reflects the tone you have identified?

**\*TIP\*:** when a poem deals with important political topics you must take care not to jump to unsupported conclusions. You cannot assume what the poem conveys or the poet's intention, by relying on societal truisms and assumptions. You must instead look for a pattern of evidence in the poem itself.



## Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Consider Me Identifiably Indian' by Arundhati Subramaniam and reread the anthology poem 'Look We Have Coming to Dover' by Daljit Nagra. Compare the methods both poets use to explore identity.

OR

Read the poem 'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Consider Me Identifiably Indian' by Arundhati Subramaniam and reread the anthology poem 'Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass' by Simon Armitage. Compare the methods both poets use to explore power.

## Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

A good place to start exploring Subramaniam's poetry is her collection *Where I Live* which contains both newer and selected poems from her other collections.

For students interested in India and spirituality, you might like to try her non-fiction essays on independent Indian women who have taken spiritual journeys, *Women Who Wear Only Themselves*.



## **‘The Perseverance’, Raymond Antrobus**

‘Love is the man overstanding’

PETER TOSH

I wait outside THE PERSEVERANCE.

*Just popping in here a minute.*

I’d heard him say it many times before  
like all kids with a drinking father,  
watch him disappear  
into smoke and laughter.

*There is no such thing as too much laughter,*  
my father says, drinking in THE PERSEVERANCE  
until everything disappears —  
I’m outside counting minutes,  
waiting for the man, my *father*  
to finish his shot and take me home before

it gets dark. We’ve been here before,  
no such thing as too much laughter  
unless you’re my mother without my father,  
working weekends while THE PERSEVERANCE  
spits him out for a minute.  
He gives me 50p to make me disappear.

50p in my hand, I disappear  
like a coin in a parking meter before  
the time runs out. How many minutes  
will I lose listening to the laughter  
spilling from THE PERSEVERANCE  
while strangers ask, *where is your father?*



I stare at the doors and say, *my father*  
*is working*. Strangers who don't disappear  
but hug me for my perseverance.  
Dad said *this will be the last time* before,  
while the TV spilled canned laughter,  
us, on the sofa in his council flat, knowing any minute

the yams will boil, any minute,  
I will eat again with my father,  
who cooks and serves laughter  
good as any Jamaican who disappeared  
from the Island I tasted before  
*overstanding* our heat and perseverance.

I still hear *popping in for a minute*, see him disappear.  
We lose our fathers before we know it.  
I am still outside THE PERSEVERANCE, listening for the laughter.

©'The Perseverance' from *The Perseverance*, Raymond Antrobus, Penned in the Margins,  
2018



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the title of the poem.
  - How does this work with the story of the poem?
  - How is it used to support structure in the body of the poem?
  - Name the poetic device that is being used here.
2. In considering the typography of the poem, you should have noticed the use of italics.
  - What do they represent?
  - How are they used to present the relationships between the boy, the community and the father?
3. The poem appears to be about the poet's relationship with his father.
  - Do we know this is autobiographical?
  - Is the 'I' of the poem definitely the 'I' of the poet?
  - How can you write about this using tentative language, to ensure you are not making assumptions when you are responding to an unseen poem in exam conditions, since you are not expected to have knowledge of the poet's biography?

**\*TIP\*** remember that for the purposes of classwork and this collection you may want to find out more about poets and specific events. However, in exam conditions context (AO3) is not examined for this component. If you are aware of specific events or details that will support your analysis of the poem in focus, these might indeed support your AO2 analysis and may form part of the judgement for AO2.





4. Consider the final two lines of the poem.
- How does the meaning and tone turn on these two powerful lines?
  - How does the poem shift from the personal to the universal?

### **Exam-style questions**

EITHER

Read the poem 'The Perseverance' by Raymond Antrobus and reread the anthology poem 'To My Nine-Year-Old Self' by Helen Dunmore. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the relationship between past and present.

OR

Read the poem 'The Perseverance' by Raymond Antrobus and reread the anthology poem 'Material' by Ros Barber. Compare the methods both poets use to explore relationships between parents and children.

### **Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets**

Raymond Antrobus's collection *The Perseverance* won the Ted Hughes poetry award 2019. It is a collection well worth reading.

You can hear Antrobus read his own poems online. A great place to start is the beautiful version of his poem 'Happy Birthday Moon' on the album of poetry and music 'We Come From the Sun,' which you can find on Spotify.



## **‘Fuck / Boys’, Inua Ellams**

It starts early / A man compliments the tight nut of his grandson's fist / Hit Me / he says / holding open his palms / The boy strikes and winces/ The man says/ Shake it off/ We are men/ We feel nothing/ The boy tucks the tiny fracture into the sleeve of himself and strikes again / The fracture burrows deeper / Over the years others join I This when older boys squash butterflies I This when the teacher ridicules his painting / This when the fairy's light dims in the film / They swarm inward / a shoal of needles through meat / shredding the vicissitudes of himself/ At twenty they are a nest of thorns around his heart / They flatten to a hard shell / They close and crush him in / At thirty he is imprisoned for a fight he can't justify/ His heart is a gnarled knuckle now/ but holds a spot of light / thin as spiritskin / in which the boy he was and the man he could have been / whisper / in hushed starlight / in dimmed symphonies I of other ways of being

© 'Fuck/Boys' from *The Actual*, Inua Ellams, Penned in the Margins 2020



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the poet's method of noting line divisions.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the title of the poem.
  - How does this work with the story of the poem?
  - How is it used to support structure in the body of the poem?
  - Name the poetic device that is being used here.
2. Ellams has been described as a storyteller in much of his literary work. This poem outlines the story of a boy.
  - What is that story?
  - Why do you think it is presented using the third person?
3. There is a contrast in the poem between the delicate and the harsh.
  - How is this conveyed by the language and imagery of the poem? Pick out specific examples to reflect the delicate and the harsh.
  - What is the effect of this opposition, in relation to the poet's concerns?
4. Ellams's poetry is noted for the way it draws on rap. Aspects of rap include alliterative techniques and rhythm.
  - Speak the poem aloud and consider where you would emphasise particular words. Mark up the words you would emphasise in each line of delivery.
  - Compare your mark-up with another student's. Discuss any differences in your responses.



### Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Fuck / Boys' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'From the Journal of a Disappointed Man' by Andrew Motion. Compare the methods both poets use to explore masculinity.

OR

Read the poem 'Fuck / Boys' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'Ode to a Grayson Perry Urn' by Tim Turnbull. Compare the methods both poets use to convey the relationship between youth and society.

### Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Inua Ellams's collection *The Actual*, from where 'Fuck / Boys' is taken, contains a range of poems that use this word structure for all the titles. They address a range of contemporary issues from Batman to Donald Trump.

You can hear Ellams discuss his poetry on [his website](#).



## **‘Stamping Grounds (Later)’, Zaffar Kunial**

*Could I behold those hands which span the poles...*

– JOHN DONNE, 'Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward

My English grandfather. Stanley. Stan.

The first ground I ever held was yours.

I can see the earth leave my fist, beneath a sleeve  
of my first school blazer. Further west, twenty years  
after, the only other handful of earth I've let go  
was for Mum, who you raised behind the counter

of the Polesworth post office on Bridge Street  
in that village you'd be buried in. The same village  
John Donne saddled up in, one Good Friday,  
riding westwards towards the Welsh Marches –  
where Mum would be buried – in days  
when messages went on the hoof, and by hand.

In these unsaddled, unsolid, quickened times  
I read the words POST OFFICE with the POST  
first meaning 'after'; post-millennial, post-dated ...  
In the blank, unsorted space between other thoughts  
something has occurred to me I picture you  
signing your name on what passes across a small changed

counter -Stanley Arthur Evetts – and there it is, writ large  
in your imagined hand SAE To you and Mum  
it must have been as familiar as old weather in the sky  
but those first letters are new ground to me. As I stand  
on a planet you've both passed from, it's like a present  
in the post -a coin of earth -held up to this day.

© ‘Stamping Grounds (Later)’ from *Us* by Zaffar Kunial, Faber & Faber 2018



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the poet's method of noting line divisions.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the title of the poem.
  - How does the title work with the story and setting of the poem?
  - Name the poetic device that is being used here.
  - What is the effect of the bracketed word 'Later'?
2. The theme of time runs through this poem. Track its development and significance through the poem.
3. Consider the poet's use of proper nouns throughout the poem.
4. Consider the final two lines of the poem.
  - How does the meaning and tone turn on these two powerful lines?
  - How does the poem shift from the personal to the universal?

## Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Stamping Grounds (Later)' by Zaffar Kunial and reread the anthology poem 'History' by John Burnside. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the idea of history.

OR

Read the poem 'Stamping Grounds (Later)' by Zaffar Kunial and reread the anthology poem 'Material' by Ros Barber. Compare the methods both poets use to explore family bonds.



## Extending your knowledge of contemporary writers

Read the skilful analysis of another poem about identity, 'Us' by Zaffar Kunial, in *The Guardian* newspaper: The analysis is written by the poet Carol Rumens. See what you can learn from the way she analyses the poem.

Underline the three sentences in this analysis that you are most impressed with. Notice her precise written expression, use of literary terminology, and the quality of the reading. Discuss your sentence choices with a partner.



## **‘Our Parents’ Children’, Selina Nwulu**

April 21, 2016

*All immigrants are artists – re-creating your entire life is a form of reinvention on par with the greatest works of literature.*

Edwidge Danticat

Theirs was the first gamble.  
Hopes stitched into suitcase linings  
before being searched at customs.  
An airport poster:  
*We cannot assume responsibility for lost belongings.*  
Many will not speak of what was lost and found.  
How tectonic plates shift the roots of home,  
how their cracks give birth to:  
border control  
the smack of periphery  
a dangerous refuge.  
They will not speak of this,  
of the daily artistry needed to survive,  
of how home is hard to grow  
on barren ground.  
But we carry this journey through our veins.  
Their footsteps are woven into our birthmarks;  
their struggles, the skin under our nails.  
This is our inheritance,  
passed down like guilt heirlooms  
we carry this through to  
the other side of reinvention.  
They will not speak of this,  
yet we know these truths through  
the cracks on the ground we try not to walk on.  
They will put their hopes into our hands,  
the pain is in letting them go.

© <http://www.selinanwulu.com/poetry/2016/4/30/our-parents-children>





## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the epigraph the poet has chosen.
  - Explain the meaning of the quotation in your own words.
  - Consider its relationship with Nwulu's craft and poem.
2. Explain how the theme of movement links to the topic of first and second generation immigrants.
  - Track the development and significance of this theme through the poem.
3. Consider the poet's use of pronouns throughout the poem.
  - Where is the poet positioning 'they' and 'we' and what is the effect of this?
4. Consider the final two lines of the poem.
  - How does the meaning and tone turn on these two powerful lines?

## Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Our Parents' Children' by Selina Nwulu and reread the anthology poem 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn. Compare the methods both poets use to explore past and present generations.

OR

Read the poem 'Our Parents' Children' by Selina Nwulu and and reread the anthology poem 'Look We Have Coming to Dover' by Daljit Nagra. Compare the methods both poets use to explore immigration.



## Extending your knowledge of contemporary writers

Find out more about this young contemporary British writer via [her website](#). Her work is powerful and thought provoking, about contemporary issues such as race, mental health, world politics and the environment.

Select one of her poems, poem films or non-fiction pieces that resonates with you and discuss what you find interesting with someone in your class.



## **‘Girls are Coming out of the Woods’, Tishani Doshi**

for Monika

Girls are coming out of the woods,  
wrapped in cloaks and hoods,  
carrying iron bars and candles  
and a multitude of scars, collected  
on acres of premature grass and city  
buses, in temples and bars. Girls  
are coming out of the woods  
with panties tied around their lips,  
making such a noise, it's impossible  
to hear. Is the world speaking too?  
Is it really asking, *What does it mean  
to give someone a proper resting?* Girls are  
coming out of the woods, lifting  
their broken legs high, leaking secrets  
from unfastened thighs, all the lies  
whispered by strangers and swimming  
coaches, and uncles, especially uncles,  
who said spreading would be light  
and easy, who put bullets in their chests  
and fed their pretty faces to fire,  
who sucked the mud clean  
off their ribs, and decorated  
their coffins with briar. Girls are coming  
out of the woods, clearing the ground  
to scatter their stories. Even those girls  
found naked in ditches and wells,  
those forgotten in neglected attics,  
and buried in river beds like sediments  
from a different century. They've crawled  
their way out from behind curtains  
of childhood, the silver-pink weight



of their bodies pushing against water,  
against the sad, feathered tarnish  
of remembrance. Girls are coming out  
of the woods the way birds arrive  
at morning windows—pecking  
and humming, until all you can hear  
is the smash of their miniscule hearts  
against glass, the bright desperation  
of sound—bashing, disappearing.  
Girls are coming out of the woods.  
They're coming. They're coming.

© 'Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods' from *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods*, Tishani Doshi, Bloodaxe Books 2018



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. Consider the notion of girls and woods in fairytales.
  - Explain the connection between the girls in traditional tales and those presented by Doshi?
2. This poem was written just before the rise of #MeToo, but nevertheless encapsulates an uprising of female anger in response to violence against women.

The poem has been described as a 'call to arms'. What evidence can you find to justify that in this poem? Think about language, tone and form as well as ideas.

3. This poem considers the nature of power and the physical body.
  - Listen and watch [the reading](#) given by Tishana Doshi during her TED talk in India which is accompanied by her performance of Indian dance.
  - As you watch, consider the words of the poem and the relationship between words, music and the physical body in this presentation.
  - What impact do you think it has on the audience of that talk and why?
4. Can you identify tension in this poem between the fragile and the assertive?
  - Where does this reside?
  - Trace these threads through the poem and discuss the relationship between the two.



## Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods' by Tishani Doshi and reread the anthology poem 'Guiseppe' by Roderick Ford. Compare the methods both poets use to explore violence in society.

OR

Read the poem 'Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods' by Tishani Doshi and reread the anthology poem 'Eat Me' by Patience Agbabi. Compare the methods both poets use to explore power and submission.

## Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

In her essay [Breast or Tooth?](#) Doshi writes about the context of this poem: 'In December 2012, after Jyoti Singh was brutally raped on a bus in Delhi, the international spotlight was turned to gender violence in India. Laws around sexual assault were tightened, cases were fast-tracked, and rape became part of mainstream conversation. I wrote a poem 'Girls are Coming Out of the Woods', imagining all the mutilated girls and women coming out of the forests, crawling out of attics and river beds, clearing a ground to scatter their stories, making so much noise the world would have to listen.'

The poem was written as a battle cry, clarion. An act of reclamation for our past, present, future. A way of shifting horror back to the perpetrators in the way those naked protestors shifted the gaze back onto those who mete out the broken spine, broken tongue, broken body.'

Read the rest of this essay for your own education about the politics of the body in India. There are some shocking facts in the essay about sexual violence and the politics of the body so be aware of this and its suitability for you personally, before choosing to do this reading.



## **‘Adventure Flight’, Lemn Sissay**

Third planet from the sun, this spinning earth.  
Thousands of football cups but only one is first.  
Here comes the light to break the pitch: the new day.  
Crowds wake! Clouds break! The adventure is under way.

I will not waiver. I will not fall. I will not cower.  
When under great pressure the great overpower.  
We are equal in dreams – underdogs and over achievers.  
We are nothing without adventures and believers.

There's everything to gain: everything to prove.  
Touch and be touched, move and he moved.  
Summon all resources, steal chance, take risk.  
The challenge, the adventure, the grit.

One game, one destiny, one goal, one curved ball of Earth.  
One and all, young and old, more than gold is worth.  
All four corners, this field this cup – our number one –  
When against all odds carry on, shout, 'Carry on.'

Make wings of your arms with the heart. At its centre  
The challenge, the flight, the adventure.

© ‘Adventure Flight’ by Lemn Sissay from *Gold from the Stone*, Canongate Books; 2016



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. You should have already considered the layout and structure of this poem.
  - Think carefully now about the tone of the poem.
  - How is this supported by the orderly structure and carefully punctuated writing?
2. Consider the poet's use of repetition in this poem. What is the effect of this?
3. This poem was used for the Football World cup.
  - Trace the language and ideas that are relevant to this specific context. (Remember, in an exam context you wouldn't have this information and are not tested on context anyway. Might you have picked up this language without being told?)
4. The poem also encompasses the more general idea of achieving against the odds.
  - Track this idea through the poem. What evidence can you find?
  - Write about how the poem addresses both the specifics of football and the broader notion of life and achievement.

**\*Tip\*:** As you write your answer, focus on your academic writing to address the poem being about more than one topic at the same time. This is an important skill for writing about poetry which often resists one fixed meaning.





## Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Adventure Flight' by Lemn Sissay and reread the anthology poem 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the value of human experience.

OR

Read the poem 'Adventure Flight' by Lemn Sissay and reread the anthology poem 'History' by John Burnside. Compare the methods both poets use to consider how to live well.

## Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Listen/watch two very different presentations of this poem. The first you will find on Sissay's [own blog](#) and shows the world cup official film of the poem.

The second is [on Spotify](#), using Sissay's own reading of his poem. It suggests a very different setting from the first.

Look and listen very carefully.

- Notice any differences in the reading of the poem.
- Consider how sound and voice are used to convey different interpretations.
- Discuss the different interpretations with your partner. Which do you prefer and why?



## ‘Mother Tongue 母语’, Nina Mingya Powles

I wake to the sound of  
blue mosque morning prayers  
I have never known what the words mean  
but I can hear the ache  
in the kitchen every morning  
I peel jackfruit with my fingers  
while they talk over and around me  
in a language so familiar but so far away  
in the kitchen every night  
I eat pink rice cakes with my hands  
the powdered sugar sticks to my lips  
and popo says *is it good?*  
*yes, it is good* I reply in hakka<sup>1</sup>  
because it is all I can say  
and we sit there with the quiet burning  
of the mosquito coils  
she hands me a paper napkin  
she gestures towards her mouth  
she touches my hand without speaking

what if my mother never left this place  
where the heat pours down  
between the coconut palms  
if I had grown up here  
I would have different-coloured hair  
and different-coloured eyes  
I would speak to popo all the time  
we would chop vegetables together  
and peel the shells off quail eggs  
on blue evenings we would sit  
looking out for distant lightning  
above the hills where plastic flowers  
fall against coloured graves  
see how it lights up her face  
as the rain cools off the surface  
of my skin  
of this dream  
where I am not trapped  
in any language

### Glossary

<sup>1</sup>hakka – a Chinese language spoken by the Hakka people.

© ‘Mother Tongue: A poem in two voices’ from *Magnolia*, Nina Mingya Powles, Nine Arches Press 2020



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. Consider how the descriptive details of the poem convey the setting.
  - How does this convey the speaker's experience in this place?
2. This poem focuses on communication and speech.
  - Trace the patterns of language in the poem that support this and consider what they suggest.
3. Consider the balance of silence and speech in the poem. How is this conveyed?
4. You have already looked at the form of this poem on the page.
  - How does the poet exploit the split form of the poem and the relationship between the two stanzas to convey meaning?

**\*Tip\*:** to consider this, look at the 'story' of each stanza and why they have been placed in parallel, on the two sides of the page with space in between. What possibilities does this present for the reader and why? What similarities and differences are clear between the two stanzas?



## Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Mother Tongue' by Nina Mingya Powles and reread the anthology poem 'Genetics' by Sinéad Morrissey. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the links between family.

OR

Read the poem 'Mother Tongue' by Nina Mingya Powles and reread the anthology poem 'On Her Blindness' by Adam Thorpe. Compare the methods both poets use to consider human relationships.

## Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Nina Mingya Powles is a New Zealand poet and nonfiction writer of Malaysian-Chinese and Pākehā descent now based in London.

Her first poetry collection, from which this is taken, is called *Magnolia*, 木蘭. Read more of her poems on [her website](#):



## 'ETA'<sup>1</sup>, Ella Frears

Bastard  
grey road.  
Empty sky.  
Radio – dull.  
dull songs.  
Even you,  
who I love  
fiercely, are  
fucking me  
off. On our  
way to a party.  
Family party.  
Obligatory.  
Last time  
I saw Uncle  
I shouted *you*  
*are the patriarchy!*  
Driving home  
post summit  
post pride –  
swallow  
I talked  
and talked.  
Exeter Services.  
cried :again.  
You, tired,  
told me  
    I was right.  
    Didn't help.

Box of bad  
cocktail sausages,  
Diet Coke.  
Now, it's  
Taunton Deane.  
the present.  
no  
less tired.  
Coffee smell.  
The urge  
to punch  
a nice old  
man, a child.  
Cry  
uselessly  
at 60mph.



Watching  
your eyes  
watch  
the road.  
Indicator,  
tick, tick, tick.  
off.  
T-minus ten.  
In the flip-  
down mirror.  
Fixing  
mascara,  
my smile.

### Glossary

<sup>1</sup>ETA – stands for estimated time of arrival

© 'ETA' from *Shine Darling*, Ella Frears, Offord Road Books 2020



## Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
  - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
  - One reading might note the line breaks.
  - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
  - Notice the space between stanzas.
  - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
  - It's important to establish this foundation.
  - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

## Thinking/talking points

1. The poem combines a journey now and a past experience.
  - Mark up, on the poem, where the poet's description of a past event begins and ends.
  - Why might this be placed at this point in the poem?
2. Pinpoint the overall mood and tone of this poem. Identify evidence in the poem to support this.
3. Read the poem aloud in sentences, deliberately removing the line breaks crafted by the poet. This will remove the slight pauses and delays of the line breaks, as the eye of the reader moves round to the next line.
  - Select 2 examples where the poet's use of caesura effectively support the poem's tone and mood.
  - What are the effects of the poet's frequent line breaks in this poem? How do caesura and end stops support the poet's intentions?
4. Consider the final three lines of the poem and explain their meaning. Consider their relationship between the previous two lines.



## Exam-style questions

### EITHER

Read the poem 'ETA' by Ella Frears and reread the anthology poem 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn. Compare the methods both poets use to present journeys.

### OR

Read the poem 'ETA' by Ella Frears and reread the anthology poem 'Please Hold' by Ciaran Carson. Compare the methods both poets use to explore human emotion.

## Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Listen to the YouTube recording of Ella Frear's Forward Arts ['Meet the Poet' session](#) (begin listening at 5.45).

You will hear reading a range of her poems from her collection *Shine, Darling* addressing such topics as violence, relationships and sex as well as talking about the process of poetry.





## Section B

The poems in this section unseen poems are collected for you to read and then create your own questions. Use the questions in Section A as a model for this work.

Creating your own questions requires you to think carefully about the key methods used by the poets as well as the poems' meanings.

You might like to choose a poem that immediately appeals to you or share out these poems within your class.

You might work in pairs, or independently, to consider the key issues and then develop a set of questions accordingly.

Some of these poems might encourage you to look up a couple of references or words, such as the references to popular culture in the Ellams' poem if you are unfamiliar, or the glossed words for 'Cynghanedd' and 'Balikbayan Box'.

In the actual exam, glossaries and further references would not be required, but you might want to do a little of this for a couple of these poems as part of your independent work.

### Activities

1. Read the poem.
2. Identify the key areas of poetic method for the given poem, on which to focus questions. Write four questions that will help other students access the poem.
3. Consider links and connections with the prescribed poems from *Poems of the Decade* anthology. Then craft your own comparative question, using the format of the Pearson Edexcel exam questions.
4. Answer a set of questions on a different poem, authored by someone else in your class.



## **'Cynghanedd'<sup>1</sup>, Robert Minhinnick**

*for Robert Hopes*

Fathers?

Is this what they did?

Built walls?

Maybe around themselves.

But mine had an eye for stones  
and understood, yes,

the souls of stones  
and the cynghanedd that stones

demand. No, not for Albert  
an exquisite jointing

and pointing, but stones'  
mineral surfaces upon his palms

stones and stonedust  
and then how his wall might look

and whether its line  
would read well.

So who were his walls for?  
Other builders, of course,

those few privy to the language  
with an instinct for stones,

builders who might scan and then  
reread and maybe

memorise his wall  
and understand its baffling

syntax, the harmonies  
they heard within his craft.

Porthcawl, Wales: 5 April 2020

### Glossary

<sup>1</sup>Cynghanedd – a traditional complex form of patterning of consonants, accents, and rhyme used in Welsh-language poetry.

© Robert Minhinnick



## **‘The First Time you Hold a Gun’, Caleb Femi**

I held it in my hands: it was soft  
like my mother's teet. My gums  
still remembered that sensation,  
and gave my hands the memory.

Amid the dull chiming of an evening light  
I sat as a beggar boy would, knowing

the press of metal heavy in my palms,  
near my own as a new-born; my spine  
remembered the weight of my infant body  
and gave my hands the memory.

As I moved to tuck it into a corner  
dark enough to muffle its blushing coat,

I sensed it glint between my fingers, shimmering  
like my mother's skin during a cradle song;  
my eyes remembered the view from a cot,  
and gave my hands the memory.

One thing must be given for one thing:  
that is the nature of bartering.

Now all that is	soft
	weighted
	shimmering
carries the echo of a	gun
and not my	mother.

© ‘The First Time you Hold a Gun’ from *Poor*, Caleb Femi, 2020



## **'How I Abandoned my Body to his Keeping', Kim Moore**

What happened sits in my heart like a stone.  
You told me I'd be writing about it  
all my life, when I asked  
how to stop saying these things to the moon.  
I told you how writing it makes the dark  
lift and then settle again like a flock of birds.

You said that thinking of the past like birds  
who circle each year will make the stone  
in my chest heavy, that the dark  
that settles inside me will pass. You say it  
is over, you say that even the moon  
can't know all of what happened, that to ask

to forget is to miss the point. I should ask  
to remember. I should open myself to the birds  
who sing for their lives. I should tell the moon  
how his skin was like smoke, his hand a stone  
that fell from a great height. It  
was not what I deserved. The year was dark

because he was there and my eyes were dark  
and I fell to not speaking. If I asked  
him to leave he would smile. Nothing in it  
was sacred. And I didn't look up. The birds  
could have fallen from the sky like stones  
and I wouldn't have noticed. The moon

was there that night in the snow. The moon  
was waiting the day the dark  
crept into my mouth and left me stone  
silent, stone dumb, when all I could ask  
was for him to *stop, please stop*. The birds  
fled to the trees and stayed there. It



wasn't their fault. It was nobody's fault. It  
happened because I was still. The moon  
sung something he couldn't hear. The birds  
in my heart silent for a year in the dark.  
This is the way it is now, asking  
for nothing but to forget his name, a stone

that I carry. It cools in my mouth in the dark  
and the moon sails on overhead. You ask  
about birds, but all I can think of is stones.

© 'How I Abandoned my Body to his Keeping' from *The Art of Falling*, Seren 2015



## **‘Losers’, Jay Bernard**

We losers are winning now that the losers have lost.  
The moaning is getting annoying, let's get back to the winning.  
The thing that we won when the losers were kneeling and begging,  
before they came with their losing and coming to us with the cost.

The loser it is the riper it is for the losing. My sorrow lets loose  
on the nation, opens its arms to the weeping, a basket of beans  
for the wounded, nappies and sugar and fish cakes and coupons  
are paving the road for the moving: we winners with winners  
And losers out there with their losing.

To lose and to lose. To be last in the lotto of loss. I send my sorrow  
to mingle with yours. To meet at the pub and lessen the pain of your losing. It's the only  
question we ask. Will anyone lessen the losing?  
Will anyone lessen the loss?

You can't make the boss listen to us, the boss never spends  
lunchtime with us, only when profit and cost and money or  
money or us comes into the balance and toss of a coin is enough.  
I have school but I don't have a house. My mother's confused

as to how I can shout the answers to Mastermind but nothing  
is working out. "The English have won in the lotto of life"  
aren't we all English now? This coast is great 'cos our cots were in it, our passport as good  
as it got. Now someone else wins the lot.

You're either or neither or not. There's no middle ground,  
there's no way round and some of us gave all we got.  
Get lost with your truth and your news which never speaks for our lot. We lessen the loss  
with a curry, a pint and a curry for mummy,

who can't understand all the fuss, she can't understand why we must.

© ‘Losers’ from *Surge*, Jay Bernard, Chatto & Windus; Illustrated edition 2019



## **‘My Mother's Wedding Shoes’, Liz Berry**

I try on your silver stilettos; ones you bought  
Before I was born, to wear at a wedding perhaps.

I can see you at nineteen, dancing  
in the disco lights of the Working Men's Club,

your hair still long then, loose for the night.  
Not knowing these shoes would send you dancing.

Still a kid yourself, to that mithering bed of marriage;  
Six months later, you'd be stepping in them again

from the Mini's front seat to the registry office  
a handful of flowers from the back garden

standing in for confetti, your mom crying  
through her make-up, your bump not showing yet.

As a girl I longed to be fairytaled by shoes like these  
while you kept me in lace-ups, classroom brogues

you'd polish each Sunday so your face shone back.  
Now I understand what those plain soles meant;

*Walk away, mah wench, from this town, that wedding.*  
*Tek yer books an' yer sense an' keep on walking.*

*Even if you hear me blarting, dow ever turn back.*

© 'My mother's wedding shoes' from *Black Country*, Liz Berry, Chatto & Windus 2014



## ‘Notes Inside a Balikbayan Box’, Romalyn Ante

Dear son,

In my place, here is a Balikbayan box<sup>1</sup>.

Here are the LeBron James rubber shoes (size 9)  
and the video game tapes to replace all the palm cakes  
I owe you for every Simbang Gabi and PTA meeting  
I could not attend. I promise I'll be there for Christmas.  
I know I've been saying this for a decade now.

Find the E45 cream for your grandma's tissue-dry skin,  
a stack of incontinence pads and tubes of barrier balm.  
Between you and me: every time I roll old people  
onto their sides and lift their knees to their chests  
for suppositories, I ask myself, *Who does this for her?*

Tell Tita to leave her husband. Her *school sweetheart*  
whose mistresses are *mah-jong* and *sabong*. Tell her  
not to bear the stink of his armpits. In the box  
find the Gucci Bloom perfume and scar creams. Tell her  
I haven't forgotten our vows when we were young  
and our fingers smelled of *li hing mui* candies.  
Our *Walang Iwanan* oath to never leave each other.

Dear son,

In my place, here is a Balikbayan Box.

Rip all the packaging tape – every gift inside is yours.

Work your hands hard until there's nothing left.

Learn that to survive we must have strong arms.

To carry a tray full of medicine and not let one  
drop, to push a hyperventilating woman (with speed  
and care) to the Maternity Wing, to lift and sit  
a skin-and-bone man down on his chemo chair,  
to gauge the weight of a rose before you lay it  
onto a coffin. Take this box inside our house –  
that is all I ask you to carry, for now, my son.





## Glossary

<sup>1</sup>Balikbayan box – a box of gifts sent by Filipino adults working abroad to their children, left back at home. These adults were often working in nursing roles.

© 'Notes Inside a Balikbayan Box' from *Antiemetic for Homesickness*, Romalyn Ante, Chatto & Windus 2020



## **‘7’, Bhanu Kapil**

Night garden + two coca plants. The soft green leaves are like pleats in a complex skirt. Though it rained this morning, the mullein is still pressing out multiple tiny, papery lemon-yellow blossoms. My son is with his dad, and so I don't have to make a proper dinner, and so I don't. Stilton, grapes.

Night has fallen in fact and so there's nothing to abate, stop, prevent: the night's rose, which is blossoming now.

I am trying to write about something that is private to my family.

Someone I love is gone.

I can't write about this here, but I want to mark it.

To press it in this poem.

Just as the night eats every flower.

Just as memory resembles floral output or energy.

And as I write these words, my son bursts through the gate and we end our evening like this: drinking tea from tall glasses in the glittering shade.

This is the zero where the beloved once was.

It's time to go to bed.

Rose, close your beak.

Night, stop writing your name in silver ink on the dark brown paper.



Who are we when we are not with each other?

Who are we when we are not alone?

© First published in Mal Journal.



## Section C

This final section is focused on providing unseen poems and exam-style questions, that have comparisons with *Poems of the Decade anthology*

It is for use in timed conditions or for independent homework. These will consolidate the skills you develop in the first two sections of this resource, using poems by key contemporary poets.



## 'Fuck / Drums', Inua Ellams

When I claim hip hop as afrofuturist expressionism / Exhibit A  
is the ancient West African Sankofa symbol / of a bird walking  
forward whilst looking back / like a rapper following a beat's  
forward progression / whilst recalling lyrics / anticipating the  
future whilst conjuring the past / and the rapper is the gasp of  
stillness between / the ghost in the time machine / Say time is  
marked by drums / and each strike stakes its signature / The  
rapper's task is to find within its solid lines / equilibrium / to fuck  
up the drum's ubiquitous significance by rhyming / on / within /  
or off its beat / to render it inaudible / invisible / fluid as if a bird  
dancing through a stave of barbed wires / its wings aflutter / like  
a tongue between gritted teeth / twirling urban narratives into  
timeless myth / shit / it's the stuff of science fiction / ain't it / each  
rapper's mouth a Quantum realm / a Tardis / a Delorean / and the  
beat maker a mad scientist / Y'all don't see how all electricity is  
Sango's lightning pulse / that Dr Emmet Brown is Grand Master  
Flash in disguise / that Andre 3000 is the greatest Time Lord /  
who grabbed a mic / to spit

© 'Fuck / Drums' from *The Actual*, Inua Ellams, Penned in the Margins 2020

### Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem 'Fuck / Drums' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'To My Nine-Year-Old-Self' by Helen Dunmore. Compare the methods both poets use to present the relationship between past and present.
2. Read the poem 'Fuck / Drums' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn' by Tim Turnbull. Compare the methods both poets use to consider modern culture.



## ‘The Wasps’, Mona Arshi

Suddenly they were on him. He was ten, the cricket game abandoned, but already they drizzled over his limbs, plunging into his ears, his eyes, trying to break into his body. The children stood around him screaming, stamping them out though he didn’t howl or stagger even, he was shaking his head moving his arms – swiping in wide semi circles in some horrible dance, just blind panic, adrenaline.

His hair was on fire. His dark boy-fringe lit by their frenzy as these maniacal creatures, this colony, loaded with pheromones ruffled around his neck. I was crying held back by an aunt till someone brought the hose-pipe and drowned them all. His lips were blue, red, swollen, the ball still in the nest as the sober boy stood dripping into the soil, into their soused bodies, spent.

© ‘The Wasps’, Mona Arshi, Liverpool University Press

### Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *The Wasps* by Mona Arshi and reread the anthology poem *The Lammas Hireling* by Ian Duhig. Compare the methods both poets use to present a violent event.
2. Read the poem *The Wasps* by Mona Arshi and reread the anthology poem *Chainsaw versus the Pampas Grass* by Simon Armitage. Compare the methods both poets use to examine the power of nature.



## **‘The Little Miracles’, Malika Booker**

*After 'A Winter Night' by Thomas Tranströmer (trans Robin Roberston)*

Since I found mother collapsed on the kitchen  
floor, we siblings have become blindfolded mules

harnessed to carts filled with strain, lumbering  
through a relentless storm, wanting to make

our mother walk on her own again, wanting to rest  
our palms on her left leg and arm like Jesus, but

constellations do not gather like leaves in a teacup,  
so what miracle, of what blood, of what feeble wishes

do we pray, happy no nails hammer plywood, building  
a coffin, to house her dead weight, happy her journey

crawls as we her children hold on like drought holds out  
for rain, learning what it is like to begin again, start

with the, the, the dog, the cat, the date, the year, the  
stroke, the brain, the fenced in walls, she struggles

to dismantle brick on brick. *She cannot break this,*  
we reason, watching her left hand in her lap, a useless

echo. We chew bitter bush, swallow our howling storm,  
reluctantly splintering under the strain of our mother's

ailing bed-rest. We smile at each of her feats: right hand  
brushing her teeth in late evening, head able to lift



without the aid of a neck-brace, her off spring's names  
Malika, Phillip and Kwesi are chants repeated over

and over as if staking us children as her life's work,  
her blessings, showing how much we are loved. The days

she sings *walk with me oh my Lord*, over and over, *walk*  
*with me oh my Lord, through the darkest night...* and I sing

with her, my tones flat to her soprano, *just as you changed*  
*the wind and walked upon the sea, conquer, my living Lord,*

*the storm that threatens me*, and we sing and sing until  
she says, *Maliks, please stop the cat-wailing before*

*you voice mek rain fall, and look how the weather nice*  
*outside eh!* Then we laugh and laugh until almost giddy,

our mood light momentarily in this sterile room, where  
each spoonful of pureed food slipped into her mouth

like a tender offering takes us a step away from feeding  
tubes, and we are so thankful for each minuscule miracle.

© 'The Little Miracles' by Malika Booker <https://magmapoetry.com/archive/magma-75/>

### Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *The Little Miracles* by Malika Booker and reread the anthology poem *A Minor Role* by Ursula Fanthorpe. Compare the methods both poets use to present caring for others.
2. Read the poem *The Little Miracles* by Malika Booker and reread the anthology poem *On Her Blindness* by Adam Thorpe. Compare the methods both poets use to present disability.





## **‘Tame’, Sarah Howe**

It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters.

- CHINESE PROVERB

This is the tale of the woodsman's daughter. Born with a box  
of ashes set beside the bed,  
in case. Before the baby's first cry, he rolled her face into the cinders -held it. Weak from  
the bloom  
of too-much-blood, the new mother tried to stop his hand. He dragged her out into the  
yard, flogged her  
with the usual branch. If it was magic in the wood, they never  
said, but she began to change:

her scar-ridged back. beneath his lashes, toughened to a rind; it split  
and crusted into bark. Her prone  
knees dug in the sandy ground and rooted, questing for water,  
as her work-grained fingers lengthened  
into twigs. The tree - a lychee - he continued to curse as if it  
were his wife - its useless, meagre  
fruit. Meanwhile the girl survived. Feathered in greyish ash,  
her face tucked in, a little gosling.

He called her Mei Ming: No Name. She never learned to speak. Her life  
maimed by her father's sorrow.  
For grief is a powerful thing - even for objects never conceived.  
He should have dropped her down  
the well. Then at least he could forget. Sometimes when he set  
to work, hefting up his axe  
to watch the cleanness of its arc, she butted at his elbow - again,  
again - with her restive head,



till angry, he flapped her from him. But if these silent pleas had meaning, neither knew.

The child's only comfort came from nestling under the lychee tree. Its shifting branches whistled her wordless lullabies: the lychees with their watchful eyes, the wild geese crossing overhead. The fruit, the geese. They marked her seasons. She didn't long to join the birds, if longing implies

a will beyond the blindest instinct. Then one mid-autumn, she craned her neck so far to mark the geese wheeling through the clouded hills - it kept on stretching - till it tapered in a beak. Her pink toes sprouted webs and claws; her helpless arms found strength in wings. The goose daughter soared to join the arrowed skein. kin linked by a single aim and tide, she knew their heading

and their need. They spent that year or more in flight, but where - across what sparkling tundra! wastes - I've not heard tell. Some say the fable ended there. But those who know the ways of wild geese know too the obligation to return, to their first dwelling place. Let this suffice: late spring. A woodsman snares a wild goose that spirals clean into his yard - almost like it knows. Gripping its sinewed neck

he presses it down into the block, cross-hewn from a lychee trunk. A single blow. Profit, loss.

© 'Tame' from *Loop of Jade*, Sarah Howe, Chatto & Windus; UK ed. edition (7 May 2015)



### Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *Tame* by Sarah Howe and reread the anthology poem *The Deliverer* by Tishani Doshi. Compare the methods both poets use to present infanticide and its consequences.
2. Read the poem *Tame* by Sarah Howe and reread the anthology poem *The Lammas Hireling* by Ian Duhig. Compare the methods both poets use to present fantasy and folklore.



## **'what was said at the bus stop', Danez Smith**

*lately has been a long time*

says the girl from Pakistan, Lahore to be specific  
at the bus stop when the white man  
ask her where she's from & then  
says *oh, you from Lahore?*  
*it's pretty bad over there lately.*

*lately has been a long time*

she says & we look at each other & the look says  
*yes, i too wish dude would stop*  
*asking us about where we from*  
but on the other side of our side eyes  
is maybe a hand where hands do no good  
a look to say, *yes, i know lately has been*  
*a long time for your people too*  
*& i'm sorry the world is so good at making*  
*us feel like we have to fight for space*  
*to fight for our lives*

"solidarity" is a word, a lot of people say it  
i'm not sure what it means in the flesh  
i know i love & have cried for my friends  
their browns a different brown than mine  
i've danced their dances when taught  
& tasted how their mothers miracle the rice  
different than mine. i know sometimes  
i can't see beyond my own pain, past black  
& white, how bullets love any flesh.  
i know it's foolish to compare.  
what advice do the drowned have for the burned?  
what gossip is there between the hanged & the buried?



& i want to reach across our great distance  
that is sometimes an ocean & sometimes centimeters  
& say, look. *your people, my people, all that has happened to us*  
& still make love under rusted moons, still pull

*children from the mothers & name them*  
*still teach them to dance & your pain is not mine*  
*& is no less & is mine & i pray to my god your god*  
*blesses you with mercy & i have tasted your food & understand*  
*how it is a good home & i don't know your language*  
*but i understand your songs & i cried when they came*  
*for your uncles & when you buried your niece*  
*i wanted the world to burn in the child's brief memory*  
*& still, still, still, still, still, still, still, still, still*  
*& i have stood by you in the soft shawl of morning*  
*waiting & breathing & waiting*

© 'What was said at the bus stop' from *Homie*, Danez Smith, Graywolf press 2020

### Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *what was said at the bus stop* by Danez Smith and reread the anthology poem *Genetics* by Sinéad Morrissey. Compare the methods both poets use to present identity.
2. Read the poem *what was said at the bus stop* by Danez Smith and reread the anthology poem *From the Journal of a Disappointed Man* by Andrew Motion. Compare the methods both poets use to present observing human interaction.



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