

# **IGCSE English Literature Paper 3: Poetry Coursework**

## **Exemplars and Commentaries**

## SAMPLE A

How is the theme of Remembrance explored in the poems 'Piano', 'Poem at 39', 'Remember' and three other poems?

The theme of remembrance is something constantly explored in literature. It is truly a powerful force. It can bestow courage, feelings of warmth, or even overwhelm you. The poems 'Piano', 'Poem at 39' and 'Remember' are no exception to this. In 'Piano', the persona gets reminded by music of his childhood and weeps at his loss of it. Another loved and admired mother is described in 'To My Mother' by George Barker. In 'Poem at 39', the persona remembers her father and all the good things about him. The persona also remembers what his father was like when he was younger in two of Seamus Heaney's poems 'Digging' and 'Follower'. Finally in 'Remember', the persona seeks to be remembered after her death, but is conflicted by the fact that memories of her will cause sadness.

First on the list is the poem 'Piano', written by D.H. Lawrence. Structurally, it is written in quatrains with 3 stanzas. In short, it is an organised poem. The structure of 3 stanzas divides the poem into 3 different parts. The stanzas create a clear space in time. Through the use of stanzas, you see the emotional contrasts between his dwelling in his childhood memories and the aftermath. Also, the poem is clearly defined chronologically (first stanza = present, second stanza = past, third stanza = present). It is easy to understand. So, summarizing, 3 stanzas are used and each stanza presents different moments. With the change from the second to the third stanza, the persona's memories of bliss are juxtaposed with reality settling in. At that, the persona breaks down in anger, weeping the loss of his childhood.

Lawrence uses several language techniques, but the one that is most prominent is his choice of diction. With his choice of diction he brings out the maximum effect of his poem. The words that he chooses to use are very specific, even if he chose a word with the same meaning, it wouldn't be quite as effective in the poem. An example would be the phrase "vista of years". Lawrence could have used another phrase such as "train of thought" or "going back". However the other two phrases I mentioned are rather broad, as they could be memories of all sorts, ranging from memories of joy and bliss to those of pain and suffering. "In spite of the insidious mastery of song" is also a clear choice of diction as there is a hint of betrayal. It is as if the song is enticing him to remember the good old times, those "Sunday evenings at home" in the "cozy parlour". Finally Lawrence uses a semantic field of music. This is indicated with the words "piano" and "appassionato". Perhaps it was to add greater impact on the reader. For example, instead of loud, he uses "appassionato". For me as a reader I feel a greater impact of "appassionato" than loud due to the fact that it is related to music and it is more descriptive. The word "appassionato" adds to the fact that to the persona music doesn't matter any more and that he'd rather be with his mother. The singer is trying "in vain" so, no matter how hard she tries, or how much passion she puts in it, it is nothing compared to the bliss of the persona's memories.

In the literary sense, Lawrence uses a range of techniques as well. As an observer, I would say his strongest point is probably his usage of sound related devices, particularly sibilance. Firstly there is the woman singing to him "Softly, in the dusk". The "s" sounds similar to that of a whisper. By using sibilance, Lawrence has managed to set up an atmosphere for the poem. A soft, if not alluring, atmosphere. However, his use of sibilance is not just limited to generating a gentle effect. He uses sibilance in the phrase "In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song". Although it still generates an "s"

sound, it adds a sinister implication and harshness to the line. Lawrence also uses some onomatopoeia. The phrase "tinkling strings" adds to the distance of his "vista of memories" as "tinkling" is a rather faint sound. It shows that the persona has experienced rather a lot in life and that Lawrence is writing it from the point of view of a middle-aged man. Finally, I would like to go into the symbolism of the poem. Virtually everyone can relate to it, as everybody has something in their childhood that they remember. Like the persona, they see the "glamour" of the past and wish to be in it again. Also, when the persona's "manhood is cast", it shows that in his subconscious his childhood and adulthood are one, as he weeps "like a child for the past". In this there is a duality and a contrast.

Another poet who remembers his mother, though not from such a distance in the past, is George Barker in his poem 'To My Mother'. His mother is still alive but he appears to be away from her and possibly in danger fighting in a war, as in the second stanza of the poem he says she is too strong to hide away from the bombing around her home. He sends all his love to tell her that she is strong enough to survive if he should die "she will move from mourning into morning." He uses a lot of similes and metaphors to describe her as almost larger than life in all sorts of ways as well as her bravery. She is "as huge as Asia" so that, when she laughs, it is like an earthquake, she is "seismic with laughter". Yet she is tender towards weaker creatures. His continuing love and pride in his mother means he does not regret the loss of his childhood like Lawrence.

The next poem is 'Poem at 39'. This poem differs structurally from 'Piano'. Firstly it is written in free verse where as 'Piano' is written in 3 stanzas with quatrains. The free-verse structure adds a sense of remembrance as it emulates 'train of thought'. You tend to recall the memories that have most impact on you. This is further instilled by the use of caesura and enjambment. These two things provide 'staccato' and 'legato' to the phrasing of the poem. In this poem enjambment is used to emulate the memories coming back slowly or it could be a reflection of sadness. For example in the first stanza the spacing between the groups of words causes them to sound something like a stutter when recited. Memories don't usually just hit you, you usually slowly take them in. Walker leaves that for us to interpret ourselves. Even though this poem is written in free verse, there is still a clear divide between the two sections of the poem. That is shown in the repetition of the phrase "How I miss my father". The first time it seems like she is sighing, a sign of reflection and regret. This regret can also be tied in with the phrase "though many of my truths must have grieved him before the end." She now knows that what she told him might have hurt him. The second time with the exclamation mark, instead of a sigh, it seems more like a wail. At this point she really remembers and misses her father and remembers the fun things about him. Finally there is the stanza that wraps the poem up. It tells us that she has become the woman that her father wanted her to be.

A quality of language that I admire about Walker's work is the simplicity. It doesn't seem to be exaggerated or artificial in any sense. She doesn't seem to try to use fancy words so it seems that it is all written from the heart. I believe that there is nothing simpler than "escape the life he knew" or "cooking, writing, chopping wood". It seems that she is actually speaking to you not reciting something. This is one major difference from 'Piano'. Who would say, "Betray me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong" in an actual conversation?

In the usage of literary devices, Walker has quite a large amount of symbolism. The first one is "tossing this and that into the pot; seasoning none of my life the same way twice" like her father used to. In this phrase "seasoning" would be a symbol of the things that she does in life. She always does new things and is not a dull or boring person. The biggest symbols in this poem are the actions of "cooking, writing, chopping wood, staring into the fire". I see this as a symbol of independence, the ability to survive without

relying on a man and having spirit. "chopping wood" shows she can do what a man can do, thinning the line dividing the roles of male and female. Furthermore, Walker was a racial activist; she met Martin Luther King and states that he was the reason why she chose to become an activist. You could say that she is a modern woman, being able to be independent and fight for her beliefs. She's right. Any father "would have grown to admire" the woman she had become especially hers who had been a freed slave.

Seamus Heaney is another poet who compares what he has become with his father (and grandfather) in 'Digging'. Like Walker's persona describes the actions of her father, Heaney's persona describes his father digging potatoes 20 years before "The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft/ Against the inside knee was levered firmly" and also his grandfather cutting turf. Heaney uses a metaphor to compare his persona's work with theirs saying he is "digging with his pen". Walker's father is dead but Heaney's is still alive but this also can bring sadness. In 'Follower' the persona again remembers his father, this time when, as a child, he stumbled behind him ploughing. Now they are both older the roles are reversed and the father is too old to work and the persona seems impatient with him "But today it is my father who keeps stumbling/ Behind me, and will not go away."

The final poem is 'Remember'. It is structured in the form of a sonnet. There are 14 lines in the poem, with an octave (8 lines) followed by a sestet (6 lines). It is important to split the sonnet into these two parts, as there are huge differences in it. At first, the persona seeks to be remembered as she says, "Remember me when I'm gone away", but, in the sestet, she thinks rather differently. The word 'Yet' is the turning point. The line before the turning point is "Only remember me; you understand/ It will be late to counsel then or pray." And then, "Yet if you should forget me for while/ And afterwards remember, do not grieve" "Yet" changes everything. From that point, the persona wishes to be forgotten if the memory of her causes pain to others. She says, "Better by far you should forget and smile/ Than that you should remember and be sad." In this, the persona in this poem is a conflicted persona, torn between her will and the happiness of others. Another structural technique that is used quite effectively is enjambment, for example, in between the two lines above. It increases the sense of sacrificing your happiness of others because it is like when you have to say something and you don't really want to say it, you tend to say it as fast as possible just to get it over with. I believe Rossetti might have used that human tendency in her poem.

Also there is Rossetti's usage of repetition. She constantly repeats the word "remember" instilling that idea into your head. "Remember" that! Finally there is the semantic field of death. This is shown in words such as "gone away", "silent land" and "grieving". Rossetti was a devout Anglican (she rejected 2 lovers due to religious differences) and constantly at death's door. As an Anglican she believed in the immortality of the soul and that death is not the end. Perhaps that is why she euphemised death as "gone away". "Silent land" would be something along the lines of Purgatory. She saw herself as a sinner who did not deserve heaven or the grace of God so she believed that she would go to Purgatory when she died. Furthermore her conflicted persona creates a situation many readers can relate to, though in a less extreme way - whether to put other people's happiness before your own. Rossetti's religion has forced her to regard the happiness of other people above her own.

Remembrance is truly something that is formidable. With it you can become happy but yet be pained by it. These poems show it all. 'Piano' shows its power to overwhelm a fully-grown man and drive him to the point of tears. 'To My Mother' and 'Digging' show the admiration it can arouse. 'Poem at 39', 'Digging' and 'Follower' all show how memories remain in the deeds of others. Last but not least 'Remember' shows that remembrance

can bring pain to others. Personally I believe in the power of remembrance. Through remembering the past and reflecting upon it, I see what I can do to improve myself and be a better person. I can draw upon my memories for happy times when I feel sad. Yet I have my regrets as well. Those memories hurt, keep me awake at night and cause fits of depression. It is a normal part of life. Live with it, do not seek to dwell in the past and create more memories worth remembering.

### Commentary for Sample A

The requirement for number of poems is met:

From the Anthology (in depth):

*Piano*

*Poem at 39*

*Remember*

Wider reading:

*To My Mother* by George Barker

*Digging* and *Follower* by Seamus Heaney

The candidate shows a sensitive and well-informed personal understanding of the poems, has looked in depth at those from the Anthology and has made links with the wider reading poems. *Poem at 39* and *Remember* are clearly put in their social, historical and cultural contexts.

There are personal insights into the use of language and style and some detailed analysis using technical vocabulary, though there are occasions when the analysis is incomplete, e.g. giving the precise literal meaning of *vista*, *seasoning* etc. would help to complete the analysis that follows.

Though the essay is longer than the guidelines suggest, there is no definitive word limit in the specification and no penalty for this.

**Overall the work meets the criteria to place it in the 23-26 band.**

In order for the work to earn an A\* grade the analysis would need to be complete at all times.

## SAMPLE B

How Are Love and Death Conveyed in the poems 'A Mother in a Refugee Camp', 'Remember', 'Poem at 39' and three other poems?

Love and death are conveyed in the poem 'Remember' by Rossetti creating the image of her persona in the poem, of being on the verge of death and asking the persona's lover to remember her. The poem also conveys love as well, by asking to be remembered after death. Hence the poem's name being 'Remember'. There is a clear link between the poem and Rossetti's constant illness and knowledge of her own death and this is probably where the idea of remembrance came from. Another poem by Rossetti 'Requiem' has a similar idea. Love and death is conveyed in the poem 'A Mother in a Refugee Camp' by Achebe, using human anatomy to show the death in the child that the mother is cradling. This is also conveying love because Achebe used the death of the child, as a way of creating the love the mother had for her dying child. Achebe refers to the refugees of the Biafran War in the poem. In 'Night of the Scorpion' Nissim Ezekiel also shows the love of a mother for her children but in this poem the children are saved. 'Poem at 39' conveys death and love by Walker using the death of her persona's father and how she has taken up many of his skills and habits. Walker uses the death of the father to show the love that the persona had for her father. The persona is most likely Walker because the time when the poem was written Walker was 39 and her father had passed away. 'The Lesson' by Edward Lucie-Smith is another poem where a father has died.

'Remember' conveys death through language devices by using many metaphors and similes. Rossetti uses the simile "Gone away to a silent land" to refer to her passing from earth to heaven. Passing into heaven is related to death and also to Rossetti's religious faith. Rossetti believed that when she died, she would go to heaven and live eternally in the presence of her God. Rossetti uses this simile not only to refer to her religious faith but also the passing of the persona. Rossetti also uses repetition to convey her message of love. She repeats the word "remember" throughout the poem. At many points in the poem, where "remember" is present, Rossetti talks about how the persona's lover is to remember her. However, later in the poem Rossetti changes her view on the persona's lover remembering her. Rossetti writes "Better by far you should forget and smile, than that you should remember and be sad." This is an indication that Rossetti has a change in heart and decides that it would be better if her lover's love for her would stop, and that he forgets her and lives a cheerful life, than to remember her and be sad.

The literary devices in the poem 'Remember' also help convey love and death. The first eight lines of the poem convey death, as they portray the image of death through metaphors and similes. The first eight lines, or octave, use the word "remember" when Rossetti's persona is telling her lover to remember her after death. She shows no real love for her lover in this part of the poem. However in the last four lines of the poem, Rossetti concentrates more on her persona's love for her lover and instead of telling him to remember her tells him to forget her and be happy.

The structure of the poem is iambic pentameter. This means there is a stress on the syllable every other syllable. This helps convey death and love by making us stress the "REM" of every "remember". The poem is also written as a Victorian sonnet as Rossetti wrote it in the Victorian period. Victorian sonnets are considered to be graceful and gentle and very rarely refer to death or wars. This is what made Rossetti's poem stand out the way she used a Victorian sonnet to write about and convey love and death.

In another poem 'Requiem' Rossetti also conveys love and death and does not make up her mind whether she wants her lover to remember her or not "And if thou wilt, remember And if thou wilt, forget." In 'Requiem' she does not seem sure what heaven will be like. She thinks she will not be able to feel but is not sure whether she will remember or forget.

'A Mother in a Refugee Camp' uses many language devices to convey death and love. Achebe uses the human anatomy to convey the image of death. Achebe uses phrases like "a ghost smile" and "humming in her eyes" to convey the image of death and love. The latter conveys love as it is used in a context in which the mother "combed the rust coloured hair" showing that the mother still has a lot of love for her child, even if her child is dying in her lap. The phrase "a ghost smile" is used to convey death. Ghosts are associated with death while smiling is associated with life and combining them shows that death is present.

The literary devices that are used are lots of caesura, end stops and a few similes. The caesura and end stops convey the idea of death as a caesura is a stop, or pause, and Achebe uses a stop after he has talked about the child's living anatomy when the mother combed the child's hair and "began carefully to part it." This shows an end stop ending the line indicating that his life has ended. The simile "like putting flowers on a tiny grave" conveys love as Achebe is using the tradition of putting flowers on a grave to remember and show love to dead relatives. Achebe used this simile here to show the mother is parting the child's hair as if she was putting flowers on his grave and this conveys love.

The structure of the poem starts from being a lively poem with many syllables in the first couple of lines. This number starts to die down as the poem progresses and eventually comes down to 5 in the last line. The number of syllables and how they reduce conveys death as they show the child's life and when the poem ends and the syllables are only 5 in a line this is indicating the death of the child.

Nissim Ezekiel also conveys the love of the mother for her children in 'Night of the Scorpion' as she is happy to suffer the agony of the scorpion sting instead of one of her children. The idea of death is conveyed because if the scorpion had stung a small child it would be likely to have been killed.

'Poem at 39' conveys love and death mainly through comparisons and repetition. Walker uses comparisons such as "Now I look and cook just like him" to convey love between the daughter and the father's persona in the poem. Walker uses this phrase to show that the daughter has taken the skills from her father, whom she deeply loved, and used them for her own benefit, hence conveying the image of love for her father. Walker also uses "How I miss my father!" twice in the poem, to show that he has passed away and that the daughter misses him deeply. Walker uses this to convey not only death but also love at the same time.

The literary devices that are used in the poem are many, for example, oxymoron is used when Walker uses the phrase "He cooked like a person dancing in a yoga meditation." This is oxymoron because Walker has written about something that is usually associated with a calm and relaxed nature, while the other is associated with being rowdy and active, the latter being the dancing. This conveys death as well as love, as Walker uses it as a memory of the daughter's persona, to show that she loved her father for what he did but misses him because he is dead and she can no longer see him.

The structure of the poem is free verse. This means that Walker could write however many words, on however many lines, and the poem could be in whatever rhythm that it wanted. This helps convey the image of death and love as a free verse poem can express

more ideas and opinions much like a book and this helps because more points can be made in the structure that Walker would want them to be in to create a stronger image of the daughter's love for her father.

In 'The Lesson' Lucie-Smith conveys love and death when a 10 year old child is told at school that his father has died but this is mixed with guilt because when he cries it is partly because he thinks the news will stop the bullies picking on him for a bit and also he is proud of the all the attention his crying gets him.

Overall, all of the poems convey love and in their own ways, making the impact of each poem different. However the poems mainly convey death and love through the literary devices used and in the structure of the poem, as this is where the authors can use more imaginative views or ideas to express the idea of love and death.

### Commentary for Sample B

The requirement for the number of poems is met:

From the Anthology (in depth):

*Remember*

*A Mother in a Refugee Camp*

*Poem at 39*

Wider reading:

*The Requiem* by Christina Rossetti

*Night of the Scorpion* by Nissim Ezekiel

*The Lesson* by Edward Lucie-Smith

The candidate shows a sound and relevant knowledge of the three poems from the Anthology and some insight into the social and historical contexts, particularly of *Remember*. There is a clear understanding and appreciation of meaning and tone, though this feature is at times slightly weakened by repetition. The wider reading poems are integrated with the use of valid comparisons.

The candidate has an appreciation of the poets' use of language in the Anthology poems, though tends to paraphrase or repeat quotations and claim effect rather than analysing them. There is a clear focus on the terms of the question throughout and, while personal opinion is not offered, engagement with the poems is clearly demonstrated.

The work is at the upper end of the length guidelines given in the specification.

Overall the work meets the criteria to place it in the 15-18 band.



## SAMPLE C

For my poetry essay I will be analysing and comparing a range of poems on childhood.

The first poem is called half past two written by U.A.Fanthorpe. Half Past Two is a poem in which Fanthorpe describes how a young child is given a detention for an unspecified sin and is forgotten by the teacher. Fanthorpe draws on her experience as a teacher to describe the scene as seen through the child's eyes. The poem begins with "once upon a school time". This sets the tone of the poem and you can tell its addressing people of a younger age. The poem has very short stanzas with only three lines in each. The poem goes on to say "he did something very wrong". This is giving us the impression that he did something really bad but the poem goes on to say in brackets "I forgot what it was". This tells us that it couldn't have been that bad or the teacher is a very forgetful person. The poem goes on and tells us how the boy in detention remembers time not by a clock but by words he has made up. Some of his words consist of: "gettinuptime, timeformykisstime, and tvtime". This tells us that he is very young and quite immature.

The next poem is called Piano. The poem is not really about a piano and also rhymes. The poem Piano, by D.H.Lawrence describes his memories of childhood. Hearing a woman singing takes him to a time when his mother played piano on Sunday evenings. In the present, this woman is singing and playing the piano with great passion. However, the passionate music is not affecting him, because he can only think about his childhood. The poem is very touching and is at times and has a very nostalgic tone to it. There is nothing that links Half Past Two to this. Half Past Two is based on a child not knowing how to tell the time and Piano is based on a man whose childhood keeps haunting him. The poem has a very sad feeling. The poem makes it clear that the man is getting a lot of emotional recall from this woman singing to him.

Another poem about childhood is 'My Parents kept me from Children Who Were Rough'. It is by Stephen spender. It is about a boy who longs to be part of a group of children who he looks up to. The poet gives the idea that the other children have a reckless and bullying nature. In another poem Digging by Seamus Heaney he remembers watching his father digging and his grandfather ploughing when he was a boy.

My final poem from the Anthology is A Mother in a Refugee Camp. The theme of this poem is about a mothers love for her child in refugee conditions. The language is very descriptive about the horrible conditions of the children and sets a really sad tone to the poem. "Putting flowers on a tiny grave". The child is dying. The voice of the poem is the writer talking about someone else which also adds effectiveness to the poem.

In Night of the Scorpion the mother loves her children so much that she is happy to be bitten by the scorpion instead of them.

All these poems are about childhood. I think the poem that affected me most was Half Past Two as I can relate to this poem.

## Commentary for Sample C

The requirement for the number of poems is met:

From the anthology (in depth):

*Half-past Two*

Piano

A Mother in a Refugee Camp

Wider reading:

My Parents kept Me from Children who were Rough *by Stephen Spender*

*Digging* by Seamus Heaney

*Night of the Scorpion* by Nissim Ezekiel

The candidate does show knowledge of parts of the poems and a general understanding of the meaning; however coverage of those for study in depth is patchy. The poems chosen bring some focus on the assignment and, while it is not always explicit, there is evidence of response to the poems.

The work is shorter than the specification guidelines suggest but the length is fairly typical for this level.

Overall the work meets the criteria to place it in the 4-6 band.