



# PAPER 1: POETRY AND MODERN PROSE TEXTS

## Assessment Objective 1

Demonstrate a close knowledge and understanding of texts, maintaining a critical style and presenting an informed personal engagement

## Assessment Objective 2

Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects

## Assessment Objective 3

Explore links and connections between texts

## Assessment Objective 4

Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written

A01 – is worth 13% of marks

A02 – is worth 23% of marks

A03 – is worth 10% of marks

A04 – is worth 13% of marks

This chapter focuses on Paper 1: Poetry and Modern Prose Texts of the English Literature course. Working through these lessons and activities will help you develop the reading and writing skills you will need for the Paper 1 exam.

The chapter is split into the following sections:

- Reading poetry
- Poetry anthology
- Modern prose

Paper 1 is worth 60% of the total marks for the course and is split into three sections:

- Section A: Unseen poetry
- Section B: Anthology poetry
- Section C: Modern prose

In sections A and B of your exam you will need to be able to meet assessment objectives A02 and A03.

In section C of your exam you will need to be able to meet the assessment objectives A01 and A04.

## BLESSING IMTIAZ DHARKER

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Imtiaz Dharker was born in Pakistan in 1954 and grew up in the UK. In addition to being a poet, she is also an artist and a documentary film maker. It is possible to see the influence of her filmmaking and her painting in the poem *Blessing*, through its focus on striking visual images and pictures. *Blessing* is set in the city of Bombay (known today as Mumbai) in India during the dry season. It describes the effect of water being given to the people through a burst pipe. It is a political poem about poverty and drought, as well as a beautiful description of the physical experience of water.



▲ Drought-stricken earth

like a pod(1) the voice of a kindly god(6) crashes to the ground(9) use of figurative language such as simile and metaphor

drip(3) splash, echo(4) roar(11) screaming(19) highlights(20) light(21) sings(22) use of sense experience, for example, sound, touch, taste

The skin cracks like a pod.  
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,  
the small splash, echo  
in a tin mug,  
the voice of a kindly god.

the voice of a kindly god(6) the flow  
has found / a roar of tongues(10/11)  
personification of the water

tin(5) silver(9) brass, copper,  
aluminium(15) polished;(21)  
flashing(21) use of imagery related  
to metal

kindly god(6) congregation(12)  
blessing(22) religious imagery

#### GENERAL VOCABULARY

**municipal** owned and operated by the  
government

**congregation** a religious gathering of  
people, often an audience attending a  
church service

Sometimes, the sudden rush  
of fortune. The **municipal** pipe bursts,  
silver crashes to the ground  
and the flow has found  
a roar of tongues. From the huts,  
a **congregation**: every man woman  
child for streets around  
butts in, with pots,  
brass, copper, aluminium,  
plastic buckets,  
frantic hands,

10

and naked children  
screaming in the liquid sun,  
their highlights polished to perfection,  
flashing light,  
as the blessing sings  
over their small bones.

20

#### UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Notice the unusual structure that Dharker uses, dividing the poem into four stanzas all of different lengths. This seems to be done in quite a random way, with no obvious reason for the position of the breaks between stanzas. Perhaps this apparently random structure reflects the idea of the water bursting out and spreading itself across the earth in a free and disordered way. Another possible reason for the irregular stanza length (very short- long- slightly shorter) is to reflect the idea of the water dripping out slowly before bursting into a huge torrent and then falling away again.

Look at the way that sentences are organised to reflect the experience that the poem describes. The opening lines use a lot of very short, simple sentences such as 'There is never enough water'. The third stanza, however, uses much longer sentences that very quickly add more and more things, frantically describing 'pots, brass, copper, aluminium, plastic buckets, frantic hands'. This reflects the idea of moving from a state where very little is happening and the water only comes in small drips, to a state where the water rushes out very fast.

Dharker uses lots of different images to describe the water, but they are all designed to make it feel exciting and powerful. Figurative language is used to describe water as being like a god, like money, like precious metal and like the sun. Techniques that make something that is not alive seem like it is and gives it a personality are called **personification**. This idea of the water as a living force, is crucial to the effect of *Blessing*. List the techniques which are used in this poem to bring to life the world it describes.

#### SUBJECT VOCABULARY

**personification** DEFINITION TO BE ADDED

#### LINKS WITH OTHER POEMS

In this course, and in particular in the examination or the coursework essay (Route 2), it is important to think about how different poets deal with similar ideas or themes.

This poem is about poverty. In the last stanza it also focuses on the importance and experience of children and in particular on children who are suffering. *Blessing* is also a very sensual poem, focusing extensively on the significance of vivid experiences of sight, sound and touch. In addition, *Blessing* is a poem that makes something that might not seem very important at first (for example, a water pipe bursting) seem very significant and beautiful. All of these features provide strong potential links with other poems.

### SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Look closely at the first image in the poem, the 'skin [which] cracks like a pod', and think about how it communicates the themes and images of the poem as a whole. Does the skin belong to the people or the land, or both? A pod (another word for a seed) needs water from the soil in order to grow and give life to a new plant. How is this significant within the poem?
- ▶ If something is 'municipal' it means that it is owned by the government and should therefore belong to the people. However, in *Blessing* the people have to rely on an accident in order to get the water that they desperately need from the municipal pipe; they are not entitled to it or given it by the government. What is the significance of this?
- ▶ Look specifically at words in the poem which refer to sounds, for example, 'drips' or 'roar'. What is the significance of sound in *Blessing*?
- ▶ What might Dharker be trying to communicate to the reader about the children in her description of them in the final stanza? Why does she focus on the children rather than the men and women mentioned earlier in the poem?
- ▶ Alliteration is an effect where a poet repeats a consonant sound within a line or cluster of words, for example, 'small splash'. Highlight all the places where alliteration is used in *Blessing* and think in each case about why the poet has chosen to use it.

### EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

- 1 Explore how poverty is presented in *Blessing* and *A Mother in a Refugee Camp*.

In your answer, you should consider the poet's:

- descriptive skills
- choice of language
- use of structure and form.

Support your answer with examples from the poems.

- 2 How do the poets present sense experience, such as sound, sight, touch and smell in *Blessing* and one other poem from the Anthology?

In your answer, you should consider the poet's:

- descriptive skills
- choice of language
- use of structure and form.

Support your answer with examples from the poems.