



KS4 English – Power and Conflict Poetry



Key Knowledge

The Prelude by William Wordsworth

Themes: Nature, Power of Humans, Childhood, Memory

Overview

- **Wordsworth's** experience of taking a rowing boat out at night and being overwhelmed by nature
- Poem is an extract from a much larger autobiographical work published posthumously
- **Power:** power of nature; power of memories
- **Conflict:** mental

Context

- **Wordsworth** was a Romantic poet, and was also critical of the Industrial Revolution – poem could be seen as an affirmation of nature's power
- Wordsworth was Poet Laureate, so his work has national significance

Language

- Personification of nature throughout: **'a huge peak, black and huge...upreared its head'; 'like a living thing...strode after me'**.
- Oxymoron **'troubled pleasure'** – nature is both impressive and terrifying
- Semantic field of light – **'glittering', 'stars'**
- Ends with **'trouble to my dreams'**

Structure

- Reads like an anecdote
- Enjambment and blank verse – Wordsworth was so moved by nature that his thoughts couldn't be structured regularly
- Caesuras reveal difficult/powerful memories

Storm on the Island by Seamus Heaney

Themes: Power of Nature, Humans, Fear

Overview

- **Heaney** describes the experience of a community on an unnamed island battling the onslaught of the weather
- The weather is presented as a military enemy
- **Power:** nature, the unknown
- **Conflict:** nature as an enemy; terrorism

Context

- Heaney was an Irish poet; letters in the title of the poem spell out STORMONT, the Irish assembly, where the representatives of the two opposing communities of Northern Ireland meet; could be a reference to conflict in Northern Ireland

Language

- Inclusive use of **'we'** throughout
- Plosives **'blows full blast'**
- Personification and personal effects of conflict **'pummels your house'**
- Martial language: **'we are bombarded by the empty air'**
- Oxymoron: **'exploding comfortably'**

Structure

- 1st person plural narration
- Reads like an anecdote – 'you know what I mean' with caesuras
- Change through the poem: begins with 'we are prepared', but ends with 'we fear'
- Enjambment reinforces the conversational tone of the poem
- Final two lines are end-stopped, showing candour about the difficulties faced.

Kamikaze by Beatrice Garland

Themes: Nature, Loss, Memory, Identity

Overview

- The daughter of a kamikaze pilot explains how her father, unlike most of his comrades, turned back from the target and came home. The pilot faced immediate rejection from his wife and, in time, his children.
- **Power:** nature; soldiers; memory; family
- **Conflict:** patriotism; family

Context

- Japanese kamikaze pilots were sent on suicide missions during WW2 to crash their planes into enemy targets, normally ships
- Exploration of how patriotism creates different perceptions of conflict – those at home don't understand the reality

Language

- **'Embarked at sunrise'** – sense of hope; reference to Japanese battle flag too
- **'One-way/journey into history'** – suicide mission, pilot wasn't supposed to return
- **'Cairns'** – reference to death, may make the pilot reconsider
- **'Translucent sea'** – adjective could also mean the pilot looks into himself

Structure

- Imagined 3rd person narrative
- The italicisation in the final three stanzas gives the mother a voice, showing her passing the story on to her children
- Only three stanzas – representing time change
- Volta 'which had been the better way to die' is its own sentence – key message

The Emigree by Carole Rumens

Themes: Loss, Memory, Identity

Overview

- **Rumens** writes an imagined 1st person narrative of an 'émigrée' recollecting her childhood memories of her original country. Though the narrator concedes that her country is controversial, she still retains positive memories.
- **Power:** memory, childhood, oppression
- **Conflict:** inner conflict, effects of war

Context

- Emigrée is specifically female, but the message could apply to anyone
- Context of modern refugee crises and mass migrations in the Middle East and Africa
- Relationship between migration and language – the narrator 'carried here' a 'child's vocabulary' is now banned

Language

- Opening is almost like a fairy-tale – **'there was once a country'**
- Contrasts of light and darkness: country is always associated with **'sunlight'**
- **'Branded'** – painful metaphor suggests the hold the country has over the emigrée
- Personification of the country **'I comb its hair and love its shining eyes'**

Structure

- Narrator is relying on childhood experiences, so the narrative may be unreliable; personal relationship – repetition of pronouns; ellipsis in the first line shows difficulty
- Enjambment in the first two stanzas gradually replaced by end-stopped lines in the final stanza, when memory is clearer

War Photographer by Carol Ann Duffy

Themes: Effects/Reality of conflict, Suffering

Overview

- **Duffy** describes a war photographer, 'finally alone', developing his pictures in the aftermath of visiting a conflict zone. The photographer finds the pictures difficult to look at. Duffy criticises how the photographers will receive little attention.
- **Conflict:** reception, remembrance
- **Power:** images, memories

Context

- Poet Laureate; context of wars
- Could be applied to any conflict
- References to modern conflicts all over the world, showing war is widespread – 'Belfast. Beirut'. Reference to a famous war
- photograph from Vietnam – 'running children in nightmare heat'

Language

- **'Darkroom'** sets a negative tone
- Colour imagery – **'red'** light suggests religious significance as well as bloodshed
- **'All flesh is grass'** – quotation from Isaiah suggests the photographer has a funerary function
- **'agonies in black-and-white'** – suffering is clear to see, as well as being distant

Structure

- 3rd person imagined description
- Sestets (6 line stanzas) – consistent message, so consistent theme
- Frequent caesuras – Duffy wants the reader to pause and think at specific points
- Enjambment shows the difficulty of the war photographer's job, and the negative effects of conflict



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Key Knowledge

Ozymandias by Percy Shelley

Themes: Power of Nature, Decay, Pride

Overview

- The narrator meets a traveller who tells him about a decayed stature that he saw in a desert.
- The statue was of a long forgotten ancient King: the arrogant Ozymandias, ‘king of kings.’
- The poem is ironic and one big metaphor: Human power is only temporary – the statue now lays crumbled in the sand, and even the most powerful human creations cannot resist the power of nature.

Context

- Shelley was a poet of the Romantic period
- Shelley disliked the concept of a monarchy and the oppression of ordinary people.

Language

- ‘sneer of cold command’- the king was arrogant, this has been recognised by the sculptor, the traveller and then the narrator.
- ‘Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair.’ - ironic – he is telling other ‘mighty’ kings to admire the size of his statue and ‘despair’, however they should really despair because power is only temporary.
- ‘The lone and level sands stretch far away.’ - the desert is vast, lonely, and lasts far longer than a statue

Structure

- A sonnet (14 lines) but with an unconventional structure... the structure is normal until a turning point (a volta) at Line 9 (...these words appear). This reflects how human structures can be destroyed or decay.

London by William Blake

Themes: Power of the state, Inequality, Loss

Overview

- The narrator is describing a walk around London and how he is saddened by the sights and sounds of poverty.
- The poem also addresses the loss of innocence and the determinism of inequality: how new-born infants are born into poverty.
- The poem uses rhetoric to convince the reader that the people in power (landowners, Church, Government) are to blame for this inequality.

Context

- The poem was published in 1794, a time of great poverty in many parts of London.
- Much of Blake’s work was influenced by his radical political views: he believed in social and racial equality.

Language

- ‘mind-forged manacles’ - they are trapped in poverty.
- Criticises the powerful: ‘each chartered street’ – everything is owned by the rich; ‘Every black’ning church appals’ - the church is corrupt; ‘the hapless soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down palace walls’ – soldier’s suffer and die due to the decisions of those in power, who themselves live in palaces.

Structure

- Dramatic monologue - narrator speaks passionately about what he sees.
- Simple ABAB rhyme scheme: reflects the unrelenting misery of the city
- First two stanzas focus on people; third stanza focuses on the institutions he holds responsible; fourth stanza returns to the people – they are the central focus.

My Last Duchess by Robert Browning

Themes: Power, Pride, Control, Jealousy

Overview

- The Duke is showing a visitor around his large art collection and proudly points out a portrait of his last wife, who is now dead. He reveals that he was annoyed by her over-friendly and flirtatious behaviour.
- He can finally control her by objectifying her and showing her portrait to visitors when he chooses.

Context

- Browning may have been inspired by the story of an Italian Duke (Duke of Ferrara): his wife died in suspicious circumstances and it was rumoured that she had been poisoned.

Language

- ‘Looking as if she was alive’- sets a sinister tone.
- ‘she liked what’e’r / She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.’ - hints that his wife was a flirt.
- ‘I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together’ -euphemism for his wife’s murder.
- ‘Notice Neptune, though / Taming a sea-horse’ - he points out another painting, also about control.

Structure

- Dramatic Monologue in iambic pentameter. 1st person imagined narration.
- Enjambment: rambling tone, he’s getting carried away with his anger. He is a little unstable.
- Heavy use of caesura (commas and dashes): stuttering effect shows his frustration and anger

Tissue by Imtiaz Dharker

Themes: Power of Nature, Control, Identity

Overview

- Two different meanings of ‘Tissue’ are explored: firstly, the various pieces of paper that control our lives; secondly, the tissue of a human body.
- The poet explores the paradox that although paper is fragile, temporary and ultimately not important, we allow it to control our lives.
- Although human life is much more precious, it is also fragile and temporary.

Context

- ‘Tissue’ is taken from a 2006 collection of poems entitled ‘The Terrorist at My Table’: the collection questions how well we know people around us.

Language

- Semantic field of light: ‘Paper that lets light shine through’ - emphasises that light is central to life, a positive and powerful force that can break through ‘tissue’ and even monoliths (stone statues).
- ‘Fine slips [...] might fly our lives like paper kites’ - this simile suggests that we allow ourselves to be controlled by paper.

Structure

- The short stanzas create many layers, which is a key theme of the poem
- The lack of rhythm or rhyme creates an effect of freedom and openness.
- All stanzas have four lines, except the final stanza which has one line (‘turned into your skin’) - this line focuses on humans, and addresses the reader directly to remind us that we are all fragile and temporary.

Checking Out Me History by John Agard

Themes: Protest, Identity, Childhood

Overview

- Represents the voice of a man from the Caribbean colony of British Guiana, who was frustrated by the Eurocentric history curriculum that he was taught at school – which paid little attention to black history.
- Black history is in italics to emphasise its separateness and to stress its importance.

Context

- John Agard was born in the Caribbean in 1949 and moved to the UK in the 1970s.
- His poetry challenge racism and prejudice.

Language

- Uses non-standard phonetic spelling
- ‘Dem tell me wha dem want’, to represent his own powerful accent and mixes Caribbean Creole dialect with standard English.
- ‘I carving out me identity’ - metaphor for the painful struggle to be heard, and to find his identity.

Structure

- Dramatic monologue. 1st person narration.
- Stanzas concerning Eurocentric history (normal font) are interspersed with stanzas on black history (in italics to represent separateness and rebellion).
- Black history sections arranged as serious lessons to be learned; traditional history as nursery rhymes, mixed with fairytales (mocking of traditional history).
- The lack of punctuation, the stanzas in free verse, the irregular rhyme scheme and the use of Creole could represent the narrator’s rejection of the rules.



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Key Knowledge



Storm on the Island by Seamus Heaney

Themes: Power of Nature, Fear

Overview

- The narrator describes how a rural island community prepared for a coming storm, and how they were confident in their preparations.
- When the storm hits, they are shocked by its power: its violent sights and sounds are described, using the metaphor of war.
- Final line reveals fear of nature's power

Context

- This poem was published in 1966 at the start of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland: a period of deep unrest and violence between those who wanted to remain part of the UK and those who wanted to become part of Ireland.
- The first eight letters of the title spell 'Stormont': this is the name of Northern Ireland's parliament. The poem might be a metaphor for the political storm that was building in the country at the time.

Language

- '**Nor are there trees which might prove company**' - the island is a barren place.
- Semantic field of war: '**Exploding comfortably**', '**We are bombarded by the empty air**'
- '**spits like a tame cat turned savage**' - simile compares the nature to an animal that has turned on its owner.

Structure

- 'We' (first person plural) creates a sense of community.
- The poem can split into three sections: Confidence: 'We are prepared:' (ironic) The violence of the storm: 'It pummels your house' Fear: 'it is a huge nothing that we fear.'
- There is a turning point (a volta) in Line 14: 'But no:' Reflects the final calm before the storm.

Kamikaze by Beatrice Garland

Themes: Conflict, Patriotism, Childhood

Overview

- In World War 2, Japanese Kamikaze pilots would fly manned missiles into targets such as ships.
- This poem explores a kamikaze pilot's journey towards battle, his decision to return, and how he is shunned when he returns home.
- As he looks down at the sea, the beauty of nature and memories of childhood make him decide to turn back.

Context

- Cowardice or surrender was a great shame in wartime Japan. To surrender meant shame for you and your family, and rejection by society.
- The Japanese word 'kamikaze' means 'divine wind' or 'heavenly wind', and has its origin in a heaven-sent storm that scattered an invading fleet in 1250.

Language

- '**dark shoals of fish flashing silver**' - image links to a Samurai sword – conveys the conflict between his love for nature/life and his sense of duty. Also has sibilance.
- '**they treated him as though he no longer existed**' - cruel irony – he chose to live but now must live as though he is dead.
- '**was no longer the father we loved**' - the pilot was forever affected by his decision.

Structure

- Narrative and speaker is third person, representing the distance between her and her father, and his rejection by society.
- The first five stanzas are ordered (whilst he is flying on his set mission). The final two are in italics and have longer lines to represent the fallout of his decision: his life has shifted and will no longer be the same.
- Direct speech gives the poem a personal tone.

War Photographer by Carol Ann Duffy

Themes: Conflict, Suffering, Reality of War

Overview

- Tells the story of a war photographer developing photos at home in England: as a photo develops he begins to remember the horrors of war – painting a contrast to the safety of his dark room.
- Duffy conveys both the brutality of war and the indifference of those who might view the photos in newspapers and magazines: those who live in comfort and are unaffected by war.

Context

- Duffy was inspired to write this poem by her friendship with a war photographer. She was intrigued by the challenge faced by these people whose job requires them to record terrible, horrific events without being able to directly help their subjects.
- The location is ambiguous and therefore universal: ("Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh.")

Language

- '**All flesh is grass**' - Biblical reference that means all human life is temporary – we all die eventually.
- '**blood stained into a foreign dust**' - lasting impact of war – links to Remains and 'blood shadow'.
- '**he earns a living and they do not care**' - 'they' is ambiguous – it could refer to readers or the wider world.

Structure

- Enjambment – reinforces the sense that the world is out of order and confused.
- Rhyme reinforces the idea that he is trying to bring order to a chaotic world – to create an understanding.
- Contrasts: imagery of rural England and nightmare war zones.

The Prelude by William Wordsworth

Themes: Power of Nature, Fear, Childhood

Overview

- The story of a boy's love of nature and a night-time adventure in a rowing boat that instils a deeper and fearful respect for the power of nature.
- At first, the boy is calm and confident, but the sight of a huge mountain that comes into view scares the boy and he flees back to the shore.
- We should respect nature and not take it for granted.

Context

- Published shortly after his death, The Prelude was a very long poem (14 books) that told the story of William Wordsworth's life.
- Like Percy Shelley, Wordsworth was a romantic poet and so his poetry explores themes of nature, human emotion and how humans are shaped by their interaction with nature.

Language

- '**One summer evening (led by her)**' - 'her' might be nature personified – this shows his love for nature.
- '**an act of stealth / And troubled pleasure**' - confident, but the oxymoron suggests he knows it's wrong; forebodes the troubling events that follow.
- '**Upreared its head**' and '**measured motion like a living thing**' - the mountain is personified as a powerful beast

Structure

- First person narrative – creates a sense that it is a personal poem.
- The extract can be split into three sections, each with a different tone to reflect his shifting mood: Lines 1-20: (rowing) carefree and confident Lines 21-31: (the mountain appears) dark and fearful Lines 32-44: (following days) reflective and troubled

The Emigree by Carol Rumens

Themes: Conflict, Identity, Protest,

Overview

- 'Emigree' – a female who is forced to leave their country for political or social reasons.
- The speaker describes her memories of a home city that she was forced to flee. The city is now "sick with tyrants".
- Despite the cities problems, her positive memories of the place cannot be extinguished.

Context

- Emigree was published in 1993. The home country of the speaker is not revealed – this ambiguity gives the poem a timeless relevance.
- Increasingly relevant to many people in current world climate.

Language

- '**I left it as a child**' - ambiguous meaning – either she left when she was a child or the city was a child (it was vulnerable and she feels a responsibility towards it).
- '**I am branded by an impression of sunlight**' - imagery of light - it will stay with her forever.
- Personification of the city: '**I comb its hair and love its shining eyes**' (she has a maternal love for the city)
- '**My city hides behind me**' - it is vulnerable and – despite the fact that she had to flee – she is strong.

Structure

- First person.
- The last line of each stanza is the same (epitrophe): "sunlight": reinforces the overriding positivity of the city and of the poem.
- The first two stanzas have lots of enjambment – conveys freedom.
- The final stanza has lots of full-stops – conveys that fact that she is now trapped.