English Literature

A Level | Eduqas and WJEC

Philip Larkin: *The Whitsun Weddings*

Comprehensive Guide for Eduqas and WJEC A Level English Literature

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Contents

Teacher's Introduction

This guide has been written for students and teachers studying Philip Lar
Whitsun Weddings. The resource is tailored to both the WJEC AS Level En
specification and WJEC Eduqas A Level English Literature Component 1.
series of notes linking *The Whitsun Weddings* to its prescribed 'partner text'
Time, in order to offer further preparation for the examinations. This guid
the basis for work on the text with a teaching group, or by individual stud
supported self-study.

The guide comprises the following sections:

- A biographical introduction to Philip Larkin and his work
- Sample critical reception of *The Whitsun Weddings* over time
- Detailed analysis of each poem, comprising:
  (i) A breakdown of the structural elements
  (ii) A stanza-by-stanza commentary on the poem
  (iii) Active Learning Tasks, Debate Prompts and Extended Essay Ans
- An 'Overview,' with consideration of some of the main themes and st
collection as a whole. A brief outline of some of the main historical, s
the writing of the poems in the collection is also included.
- 'Talking Points' on the collection as a whole, which could be used as t
- Guidance for the WJEC AS English Literature Unit 2 and WJEC Eduq
Component 1 examinations. This includes:
  (i) Thematic notes on the partner text, Carol Ann Duffy's *Mean Time*
  (ii) Notes about the structure of each examination
- A glossary of literary terms used in the guide
- Some general further reading suggestions

A Note on Typography

- In the analysis of certain poems, metre is analysed using the symbol /
and ~ to denote an unstressed syllable
- All quotations from the poems are taken from the Faber and Faber pa
Weddings collection, ISBN 0 571 097103

Specification Information

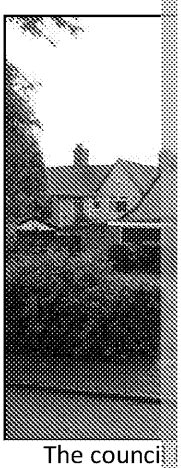
*This resource has been written to comprehensively meet the new 2015 Eng
WJEC AS Level English Literature Unit 2 and WJEC Eduqas A Level English Li*

Materials specifically designed to aid in the examination assessment for th
included on pp. 90–92, featuring:

- A look at the 'partner text' for *The Whitsun Weddings*, Carol Ann Duffy's *Mean Time*, providing ideas of good poems for comparison, and shared themes within the two poetry collections
- A complete explanation of the structure and requirements of each of these examinations

Biographical Background

Coventry and Oxford



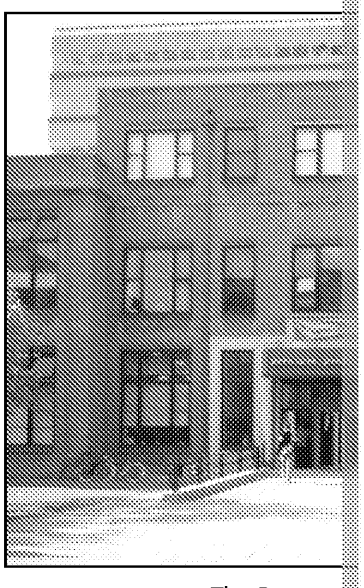
The counci
parents

Philip Arthur Larkin was born in Coventry (then part of Warwickshire, now in the county of West Midlands) on the 9th August 1922, the second child of Sydney and Eva Larkin. The older child was Catherine, or 'Kitty', who was already ten years old when Philip was born. Of his two parents, his father was, during his formative years, by some way the more dominant influence, Eva being quite a nervous, passive person in comparison to her husband. Sydney Larkin spent his professional career in local government and, in the same year as Philip was born, he was appointed Treasurer to Coventry City Council, having served as Deputy Treasurer before that. Sydney was himself a very organised person, as befitted his responsible position, and he valued a sense of order on society at large. During the 1920s and 1930s, he was an admirer of Hitler and the Nazi regi Germany in 1923. Sydney made a number of private visits to that country Nuremberg rallies, and took the teenage Philip with him on two occasions preferred not to talk about these visits or his feelings about them at the tim fascist sympathies, Sydney was a keen reader of modern literature and, ur introduced to writers like Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, TS Eliot

Philip was initially educated at home, before attending, successively, the ju School in Coventry and, from the age of eleven, the main school itself, whic excellent academic reputation and record. Throughout his schooldays and with a stammer, but this did not prevent him forming some close friendship come to be aware that the home lives of most of his school friends were con animated than his own, visitors to the Larkin house being few and not enco to the school magazine and later came to be a member of its editorial team. his contemporaries at the school, he developed a liking for jazz music, an in a lifelong passion. His parents encouraged him in this, buying him a drum his time in the sixth form, Larkin developed a taste for brightly coloured wa with tweed suits and brogues, this trait continuing well into his early adult always one of the school's most outstanding students, Philip did well in his was successful in his application for a place at St John's College, Oxford.

Larkin went up to Oxford in October 1940, having been exempted from m Two because of his poor eyesight. This was an unusual time to be a unive generation were away fighting for the duration of his stay at St John's. Co bombed in November 1940 and Larkin made an anxious trip back to his h his parents, who had, in fact, survived the attack. This and other aspects o form the basis of the plot of his first published work, the novel *Jill*, which Oxford that Larkin first met Kingsley Amis, who was to be a close friend, influence throughout the rest of his life. Amis himself would go on to bec British novelists of the post-war era, achieving popular success before Lar jazz in common, the pair shared an irreverent sense of humour, which wa they exchanged in later life, with other writers often the butt of their jokes different personalities, and Larkin envied his friend's social ease and succ many years. For his part, Amis was not above adapting some of Larkin's own fiction. In 1943, Larkin gained a first-class degree in English, which r own attempts at writing had often taken precedence over his academic stu

Professional Career



The Brynmo

Larkin was never a full-time writer, dedicating his professional life to librarianship. Shortly after graduating from Oxford, he was appointed librarian at the public library at Wellington in Shropshire. Here he studied to obtain qualifications in librarianship. It was at the library in Wellington that he first met Ruth Bowman, the model for the *friend in specs* in 'Wild Oats' and with whom he shared a relationship for a number of years. He became an assistant librarian at the then University College of Leicester in 1946, completing his professional studies three years later. In 1950, he was appointed to the post of Sub-Librarian at Queen's University in Belfast, where he stayed for some four and a half years. His time in Northern Ireland gave r poems in *The Whitsun Weddings* collection, 'The Importance of Elsewhere'. friendships amongst his colleagues at the university and this period was a early part-time career as a poet. In March 1955, he was appointed Librari position he filled for some thirty years right up to his death. During his ti significant expansion of the university library and, eventually, the openin Brynmor Jones Library, which boasted the most up-to-date facilities and a

Larkin the Writer

Though he contributed poetry for the school magazine at King Henry VIII ambitions centred on the writing of fiction. During the latter stages of his number of lengthy stories in a variety of styles which reflected the wide ra which he then destroyed. A selection of his early verse, which had appear outlets, was taken up by a sympathetic publisher and appeared in print in *Ship.* The same publisher was responsible for bringing out Larkin's first fu 1946, a novel entitled *Jill*, which he had drafted shortly after leaving Oxfo Kemp, a working-class student from the industrial north, who attends Ox years. John feels ill at ease amongst his public school contemporaries and invents a sister, the eponymous Jill, who attends an all-girls boarding scho letters, complete with her imagined answers. Then, one day in the middle is the very image of his own fictional Jill. They meet and things get a little autobiographically-inspired part in the novel describes John's journey to h bombed, to find out what has become of his parents. *Jill* did not receive a attention but a second novel, *A Girl in Winter* drew more positive reviews The main character in this novel is a young woman, Katherine, a native of country who has come to live in the English Midlands after the war, work visited the same part of the country before the war and had a brief liaison stayed with then. Later, during her second, more permanent stay, she me no romantic denouement. Both novels are still in print.

Larkin drafted the early chapters of a third novel, set in the industrial Mid
and, after toying with the idea of writing a work of fiction set in a univers
it any further ambitions for writing fiction. A volume of his poems entitle
published in 1955 by the small Marvell Press, based in Larkin's adopted h
best known poems in the collection include the title poem, 'Church Going
Remember' and 'Poetry of Departures'. There was considerable critical re
it positive, and there were five reprints of the paperback edition within th

It was about this time that Larkin began to be associated with a perceived
an article on the topic in *The Spectator* magazine in 1955, came to be know
characteristics of Movement poets were, chiefly a desire to return to tradit
avoid the experimentation and obscurity of expression found in much pre
Larkin was one of nine poets (his old Oxford friend Kingsley Amis being a
included in an influential collection entitled *New Lines*, edited by Robert C
Observer newspaper in August 2009, Tom Chatfield remarks on this public
poets generally:

> *It was a remarkable volume, not least because of its blunt editorial declarat
> represented the 'restoration of a sound and fruitful attitude to poetry, of th
> written for the whole man'...To see this young pair [Larkin and Amis] as yo
> crusty couple of literary folklore, is to discover something quite radical in th
> against all notions of what it means to be 'literary' that today may seem co
> worked out from first principles with rigour and academic decorum...the cri
> simple question: what, now, was the legitimate subject for serious poetry if
> to read and enjoy it?...Movement poets believed that only a modest, ironica
> post-war world...Could literature still dare to sing out in public, even after
> you did still wish to celebrate love, nature, tradition, how could this be don
> pastiche or bathos? (1)*

In 1956, John Shakespeare was a young journalist working for the *Times E*
wrote a series of articles for the journal on a number of Movement poets.
Telegraph in April 2009, Shakespeare recalls his dealings with Larkin as pa
initial meeting, the poet sent the journalist a number of letters in which he
writing. In one such letter, Larkin attempts to define his approach to writ

> *Most people say that the purpose of poetry is communication: that sounds a
> contented simply by telling somebody whatever it is one has noticed or perce
> permanent communication better called preservation, since one's impulse in
> admit, painting or composing) is to my mind not 'I must tell everybody abou
> towards other people) but 'I must stop that from being forgotten if I can' (t
> the subject).*
>
> *When writing a poem I am trying to construct a verbal device or machine w
> render up the emotion I originally experienced to as many people as possible
> You'll remember I called it a slot machine...into which the reader inserts the
> attention...I forgot if you asked me whether I thought poetry important: I'
> would be about as valuable as that of a beaver upon dams. It's certainly im
> doubt if the world would miss it much. (2)*

Larkin's status as a major post-war poet was cemented by the publication
publishing house, of *The Whitsun Weddings* collection in 1964. Typical of it
the *Guardian* which declared that Larkin's first volume of poetry for nine y
The reviewer assured readers that, *although he has not broken new ground, he*

perceptiveness or verbal skill – or that lyrical quality that ran like mica through h
final volume of verse was the *High Windows* collection, published by Fabe
contains some of his most memorable, if bleakest, poems, notably 'The Bu
'The Old Fools', which reflected Larkin's fears of growing old. Larkin's p
in his latter years, though one significant poem, 'Aubade', in which the sp
dying, was published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1977.

Between 1961 and 1971, Larkin contributed articles and reviews on jazz fo
material formed the basis for a compilation entitled *All What Jazz*, which w
a two-term sabbatical from his post in Hull in order to concentrate upon t
Twentieth Century Verse, which was published in 1973. A collection of mis
appeared in 1983, with the title *Required Writing*. The definitive *Collected P*
number of more obscure pieces not found in the four volumes of verse, w
1988. A collection of his letters to various friends and associates was publ

Larkin's achievements as a writer were recognised in various ways. He w
was offered the position of Poet Laureate in 1984, which he declined, not
that he assumed would follow. In January 2008, he was named at the hea
British Writers Since 1945' in the *Times* newspaper (4).

Private Life and Public Image

> *In his appearance, Philip Larkin carries an English absence of the poetic. T*
> *chooses his clothes with care, only a favourite tweed fishing-hat suggesting*
> *pass unnoticed in a crowd. Though habitually serious, his expression is lit*
> *unkind amusement and faithfully portrays his outlook on life which has be*
> *vivacious melancholy'.*
>
> *He disclaims any religious or political beliefs, saying that when he tries to h*
> *get away', but thinks this less important in a writer than a continuous app*
> *people, situations and things...It would be hard to meet anyone more modes*
> *than Philip Larkin. He has only two ambitions, one for himself and one fo*
> *himself, he wants above all to 'write more, to write better and to have leisu*
> *for his fellow poets, he would like to see a more general realisation that the*
> *not entirely the fault of the public, and wishes they would set about makin*
> *entertaining. 'Poetry', he believes, 'should keep the child from its TV set an*
> *pub'. Philip Larkin may do both. (5)*

The above assessment of Larkin appeared as part of John Shakespeare's ar
Educational Supplement in 1956. The points made fit very comfortably with
accompanied Larkin – serious about poetry but not necessarily about othe
more accessible to the public; somewhat vague as to political and social id
people, situations and things; slightly quirky in terms of dress and combi
mordant sense of humour. What might appear strange is that every word
written by Larkin himself! He included this self-assessment in one of his l
who reproduced it verbatim in his article on the poet.

Larkin never wished to have a high public profile and, living and working
Hull, it was relatively easy for him to avoid literary circles in London. An
is derived solely from his poetry might understandably picture him as a c
revealed by the various speakers in his poems. He would be assumed, an
essentially solitary person, haunted by thought of his own mortality and c
disappointment and failure in his own life, not least in his relations with w
all these assumptions, the persona which Larkin presents in the poems, as
utterances, is not a totally accurate reflection of himself or his life. Andrew
the poet and the *Selected Letters* revealed a fuller picture of the man.

Readers of his poetry might, for example, be surprised to learn of Larkin's
of women in his lifetime. He met Ruth Bowman whilst working in his firs
Wellington in Shropshire, when she was still at school. Their subsequent
years and did include Larkin's proposal of marriage being accepted, thou
materialise. Whilst working at the university in Leicester, he met Monica
and his relationship with her, conducted mostly through extensive exchan
and shared holidays, lasted until his death in 1985. In Belfast, he had an a
colleague. At Hull, his relationship with Maeve Brennan, a colleague at th
developed into a close partnership and lasted for some seventeen years. S
the poem 'Broadcast', in *The Whitsun Weddings* collection. This relationshi
alongside the one with the Leicester-based Monica Jones, with both wome
situation and seemingly happy to share Larkin as a lover. In 1975, after hi
Brennan ended, Larkin began an affair with Betty Mackereth, his secretary
the model for the *loaf-haired secretary* of 'Toads Revisited'. A play based o
entitled *Larkin with Women*, was first produced at the Stephen Joseph Thea
has been performed at a number of theatres in the country since. Neither
ever part of Larkin's aspirations, as we might surmise from reading a num
Weddings collection.

More damaging to his reputation were the revelations of what appear to b
and racist views. These feature most obviously in his correspondence ove
Amis. There are issues here as to how seriously we can or should take thi
where the temptation to be outrageous, especially with Amis, was always
scrutiny of the private world of Larkin has, rightly or wrongly, caused son
both the man and his poetry in some circles. The poet and academic Tom
condemned the *Selected Letters* as *a revolting compilation which imperfectly re
monument that Larkin became* (6). Lisa Jardine, academic and broadcaster, c
to *a cultural frame within which Larkin writes, one which takes racism and sexis
of the British national heritage* (7). In a BBC television programme on Larkin
Professor of English Literature at Oxford University, made a sustained att
distinction between the man and his work, describing Larkin as *defeatist, li
implacably negative* and as someone who *raised boredom, emptiness and futilit*
have been keen to stress the distinction between the person and his poetry
broadcaster, has written:

> *Philip Larkin really was the greatest poet of his time, and he did say noxio
> say them in his poems, which he thought of as a realm of responsibility in u
> answer for what he said, and answer forever. He also thought there was a
> responsible realm called privacy. Alas, he was wrong about that. Always a
> of celebrity, he didn't find out enough about them, and never realised that b
> fame you not only don't have a private life any more, you never had one. (9*

Final Years

Apart from 'Aubade', his great poem on death, Larkin did not write much of significance following the publication of *High Windows* in 1974. His father had died in 1948 and Philip was thereafter a dutiful, if often privately resentful, son to his mother, Eva. She lived in a nursing home near Loughborough for some time until her death in 1977. In 1983 Monica Jones fell ill and moved to Hull to live with Larkin. This was the first time in his life he had lived with her – or any woman – on a permanent basis.

Somewhat ironically, Larkin never reached the state of old age which he had viewed with such trepidation, as one reads in a poem like 'The Old Fools' from the *High Windows* collection. In mid 1985, Larkin became ill and underwent an operation to remove a cancerous oesophagus. His health continued to deteriorate, however, preventing him from attending the ceremony at Buckingham Palace at which he was to be awarded the Order of the Companion of Honour by the Queen. He died on the 2nd of December 1985, aged 63.

At his funeral, Kingsley Amis spoke of the friend he had known for over f
of men, one who found the universe a bleak and hostile place and recognised very
human life. He continued:

> *...But there was no malice in it, no venom. If he regarded the world severel*
> *was a jovial astringency...We are lucky to have known him...thousands wh*
> *thousands in the future will be able to share those poems with us. They off*
> *cold comfort either. They are not dismal but invigorating. (10)*

Notes

(1) Tom Chatfield, *Observer*, 23.08.09

(2) John Shakespeare, *Daily Telegraph*, 25.04.09

(3) *Guardian*, 28.02.64

(4) *Times*, 05.01.08

(5) John Shakespeare, op. cit.

(6) Tom Paulin, *Times Literary Supplement*, 06.11.92

(7) Lisa Jardine, *Guardian*, 08.12.92

(8) Terry Eagleton, *J'Accuse: Philip Larkin*, BBC 2, 30.03.93

(9) Clive James, *The Meaning of Recognition: New Essays 2001–2005*, Picador, 2005

(10) Kingsley Amis, quoted in Richard Bradford, *First Boredom, Then Fear: The Life*

Critical Reception

Below, we have included three key reviews of *The Whitsun Weddings* since
see, the collection has received consistent praise over time:

> *In Larkin's poems a person speaks in his own voice, 'the true voice of feelin*
> *and yet also without hot intrusiveness. The best of his poems have all the a*
> *letter or a conversation, but they inflict on us none of the unease which we*
> *confessional poetry, the feeling that we are snooping or eavesdropping with*
> *connivance.*
>
> (Christopher Ricks, 'A True Poet', T

Ricks praises the poet for his ability to replicate the real thoughts and emo
do so in a way that transcends our everyday existence. Larkin, as the criti
balance between art and reality, achieving something that is both authenti
literary merit. Such positive feedback just one year after the collection's p
Larkin was able to capture the feelings of his time.

> *His art incorporates far more of that world than did Keats's exclusively 'sy*
> *the movement and details of 'The Whitsun Weddings' revitalize Keats's fo*
> *modern poet has used it so successfully?-as they criticize its purpose. Larki*
> *on a traditional form, and in doing so, has illuminated and probed some of t*
> *experiences of contemporary life. Far from selling poetry short, such an app*
> *for many readers, widens the boundaries of the art.*
>
> (John Reibetanz, '"The Whitsun Weddings": Larkin's Reinterpretation of Time

In this instance, the critic draws an association between Larkin's work and
predecessors, John Keats. He contends that Larkin essentially brings Keat
of the 1960s and 70s, adapting successful literary techniques to the issues o
seems to write of the poet's work far more explicitly as an art form than C
more attention to the artistic process and the levels of construction behind

> *The Whitsun Weddings collection includes some of Larkin's greatest poems*
> *Faith Healing, Reference Back, Love Songs in Age, An Arundel Tomb and*
> *them. But the title poem is its crowning glory. It achieves majesty through*
> *majestic. Like Hardy, Larkin had no time for the windy or the grand. Like*
> *that 'the ultimate aim of the poet should be to touch our hearts by showing*
> *Hardy, he is loved by thousands of people for whom poetry would otherwis*
>
> (Michael Henderson, 'Journey's End for Philip Larkin's Masterful Whits

This final review demonstrates the lasting appeal of *The Whitsun Weddings*
years ago. Like Reibetanz, Henderson compares Larkin to a successful po
time, Thomas Hardy. The reviewer's praise for Larkin stems primarily fro
translate his own emotions onto paper, inviting empathy and an emotiona
Similarly to Ricks, he recognises that the poet does so while using the lang
overall impression we gain from critical responses to the collection, then, i
with unique creativity to construct a powerful representation of human ex

Poem Analyses

'Here'

Summary

The speaker describes the approach to and arrival at what we can
where Larkin lived and worked for many years. The speaker the
the city which make it distinctive, highlighting its working-class
Beyond the city itself lies a rural hinterland, an unpopulated terra
from the bustle of the city and which evokes from the speaker a d
than the urban environment.

Structure

- The poem consists of four octaves, stanzas each of eight lines
- Most of the lines in the poem have ten syllables, though there
have more than this number and others which have fewer.
- There is an iambic metre underpinning the verse, though this
total consistency.
- The rhyme scheme varies within the poem. Taking each stan
follows:

  Stanzas 1 and 3: ababcddc

  Stanzas 2 and 4: abbacdcd
- There are fifteen instances of enjambment within the poem, i
Stanza 3 and 4. In addition, two of the lines in Stanza 2 end w
- Three of the lines in the final stanza contain internal full stop
- Overall, there is a considered, measured tone to the poem, su
the stanza form, length of line, metre and rhyme. The freque
give the impression of, first, movement within the city and, i
and expanse. The internal punctuation in Stanza 4 also helps
weighty thoughts and impressions.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The speaker describes the approach – probably by rail – to what we will ass
Larkin lived for nearly three decades – Hull. The word *Swerving* in the ope
that to reach the city involves a deviation from the main north-south routes
population. Hull's distinctiveness as a city is strongly influenced by its bei
from a geographical point of view. Whilst the *traffic* goes *all night north*, the
scrubland, passing the occasional *harsh-named halt,* the harshness deriving,
origins of place names. The sibilance in the fifth line, together with the repe
feeling of movement veering sharply in one direction, whilst the reference t
haystacks, hares and pheasants captures something of the flatness and expans
surrounding the Humber estuary. Similarly, the long vowel sounds in the
themselves contribute to our being able to picture the breadth of the river to
Sky and land meet here without intermediary buildings to distract one's ga

Stanza 2

When the city is reached, the description creates a sense of bustling activit features of its life. The urban landscape described includes, in the second crowded horizon, whilst the double use of hyphenated words in the follo of the dynamism inherent in the scene. The inhabitants of the city live – o *raw estates*, their journey along the *dead straight miles* to the city centre mad *faced trolleys*, this last a reference to the method of public transport which electric cables. The object of their journey is to satisfy *their desires* for cons *through* the accommodating *plate glass swing-doors* in the relentless pursuit lists in the last two lines of the stanza. At the time of the publication of *Th* such items were only beginning to be within reach of the newly prosperou class, so we can imagine the middle-class speaker observing this sudden h consumerism with a mixture of wonder and, no doubt, a little snobbish di

Stanza 3

The speaker, continuing in detached observer mode, describes the people *urban yet simple,* meaning that their perceived needs and aspirations are, in urban, but they are not urbane. The city's geographical isolation ensures t good reason to visit do so – *salesmen and relations.* It is *terminate* in that it i (railway) line, yet with docks and ships from around the world in the very links to the wider world are reflected in the references *the slave museum* – W 1833), who campaigned successfully for the abolition of slavery in the nin of the city and served as its MP – and the *consulates*, which serve the wide the sailors. The local culture, however, with its *Tattoo-shops* and *grim head* depressed backwater, with new private estates for those with more middl keeping their distance on the edge of the conurbation. Before the end of t the *wheat fields* which *Isolate* villages of the rural hinterland of the port.

Stanza 4

The enjambment continues the reference to the villages where *removed live* varying length of sentences and the internal punctuation add to the effect somewhat apart from the rest of the poem, just as the territory it describes east of Hull) is very different to that encountered in the city. The diction – *thicken...Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken* – creates a picture of u nature untouched by human intervention, the air charged with the seeds The visual perspectives here lack the small-scale definition of the urban la *neutral distance* creating a picture of acres of flat fields on which there is lit imprint, and which stretch on to the beach and the sea. The poem ends o the picture and idea of *unfenced existence: / Facing the sun, untalkative, out of* of awe and a depth of response which is far removed from the detached, a stanzas. It is as if the speaker needs the silence, the stillness, the absence c the broad sweeps of landscape in order to connect with vital elements of h experienced in this environment is, it appears, more satisfying and authen alienation from one's fellow beings encountered in the urban setting.

Debate Prompts

1. Do you think Larkin is criticising the people of Hull in his poe
   statement about the nature of modern consumerism?
2. Are Larkin's descriptions of the rural areas beyond the bustle
   Or is his message more ambiguous than this?

Active Learning Tasks

In some key regards, 'Here' shares a number of features which ca
collection. Larkin's engagement with aspects of the culture of po
rapidly increasing consumerism, is apparent also in 'Sunny Prest
while he writes in the guise of the detached observer of groups of
Weddings', 'The Large Cool Store', 'Ambulances' and 'Afternoon
approaches, 'Here' also introduces a number of features which re
collection.

In pairs or small groups, pick out two other poems from the colle
Identify the thematic and stylistic features that these two poems s
ways in which they differ.

Extension: Now pick out one poem from Carol Ann Duffy's *Mean*
compare with 'Here', again identifying key points of stylistic/ther

'Mr Bleaney'

Summary

The speaker is shown a room previously rented by a man named
details of this person from the landlady, he goes on to imagine th
house and beyond. It is a picture of a constricted, joyless existenc
implies, reflects his own situation. For both, occupying the rente
limited nature of their ambitions and achievements.

Structure

- The poem consists of seven quatrains, stanzas each of four li
- Each line contains ten syllables, with the exception of the ope
the second line of Stanza 4, which has eleven.
- There is a basic underlying iambic metre to the verse – iambi
applied with total consistency.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are fourteen instances of enjambment in the poem, incl
and 3; 3 and 4; 4 and 5 and 6 and 7.
- The sentence which begins in the second line of Stanza 3 is co
later, in the final line of Stanza 5.
- There are five commas in the final sentence of the poem, whi
- As in many of the poems in the collection, there is a balance b
tend towards regularity – stanza form, metre and rhyme in th
the use of enjambment and the two long sentences in the poe
fluidity in the expression and help to give the impression of s

Commentary

Stanza 1

The poem opens with the quoted speech of the landlady, as she shows the
tells him of the previous occupant, the eponymous Mr Bleaney, who appe
some time. As David Timms points out, *Bleaney's very name combines the n
ends in a diminutive 'ey'* (1). The mention of his staying the *whole time he wa
him* has puzzled many commentators. This is, first, a reference to the car b
manufacturing plant, the term having been current in the West Midlands i
automobile industry in the 1950s and 1960s. Though the landlady is almo
Bleaney's first working at such a section and then eventually being transfe
words have rather morbid connotations, suggesting a dead body being m
Meanwhile, the speaker observes details of the room in question, includin
which don't come near to being the right length.

Stanza 2

The survey of the surroundings takes in a miserable view from the windo
to inform the speaker of Mr Bleaney's help in keeping the garden in check
hoping his successor will also be inclined to make. The speaker's silent, d
notes the austere nature of the room itself, which, presumably, did not bot
extended stay.

Stanza 3

Another detail noticed is the lack of space, not least for books, which leads
is, unlike the previous tenant, something of a reader himself. Despite the
we have gained of the room and its surroundings, the speaker does not he
Whether this points to a lack of funds or a lack of ambition on the speaker
Very soon, he finds himself doing the kind of things he imagines his prede
on the bed, stubbing *fags / On the same saucer souvenir.* Everything points t
existence spent in surroundings devoid of material or spiritual comfort.

Stanza 4

One added feature of life in the room which the speaker quickly discovers
in his ears because of the noise emanating from the landlady's radio, whic
imagines, Mr Bleaney himself *egged her to buy*, the possibility arising of the
evenings together by the new set. The speaker begins to feel that he can in
Bleaney's limited existence, including his predictable time of arrival at the
culinary tastes.

Stanza 5

The enjambment takes us straight into this stanza, as the speaker extends
predecessor's 'lifestyle' as including his attention to the weekly football po
cheap form of gambling before the advent of the National Lottery. On an
have been a holiday in the demure Essex resort of Frinton and *Christmas a*
Bleaney's *plugging at the four aways* evokes a picture of a man doggedly de
attempt to change his fortunes, whilst the reference to the *yearly frame* sug
limits. The *Frinton folk / Who put him up* are made to sound as if they put u
sufferance, whilst the fact that the visit to the sister is made only once a ye
necessarily very close. The sentence which ends in the last line of this stan
lines, encompassed details of the speaker's actual circumstances and his o
former tenant, as if their two lives are already intertwined.

Stanzas 6 and 7

Comprising one complex sentence and linked by enjambment, these two s
identification of the speaker with his predecessor. The former goes on to s
possible state of mind as he contemplates the bleakness of his surrounding
them. The diction highlights the sense of both physical and emotional dis
the clouds; fusty bed; grinned, / And shivered. The reference to the room as *or*
if the room were an ante-chamber to death, and echoes the image of the bo
room in Stanza 1. The sentence, with its numerous subordinate clauses, fi
speaker admitting that he cannot see this far into Mr Bleaney's psyche. Be

expression in the poem, which culminates in these last two stanzas, is sure *dread* of perceiving all too clearly how being the successor to Mr Bleaney i itself a mark of failure and inadequacy.

Extended Essay Answer Question

Sisir Kumar Chatterjee summarises the poem as follows:

'Mr Bleaney' is effectively a neutral, objective documentary on an ordinary unimaginative, unadventurous, low-keyed existence of a modern middle-cla alienation. (1)

According to your own reading of the poem, discuss how far you view. You may also choose to support your answer by comparin poems in Duffy's *Mean Time* collection.

Notes

(1) Sisir Kumar Chatterjee, *Philip Larkin: Poetry That Builds Bridges*, Atlantic Publ

'Nothing to be Said'

Summary

All human beings, no matter their background, the speaker sugge
engaged in the process of dying. All human activities, however d
in nature, lead to the same end – death. Some are not troubled by
thought, whilst, for others, the consciousness of the inevitability o
overwhelming.

Structure

- The poem consists of three sestets, stanzas each of six lines.
- The number of syllables per line varies between four and eig
there are six syllables in each of the first three lines, there is n
- There is no consistent application of a metrical scheme as suc
- There is no rhyme scheme.
- There are ten instances of enjambment in the poem.
- In relatively short lines within the loose structure, there is a k
speaker covers a wide range of peoples and activities, before
conclusion.

Commentary

Stanza 1

In the stanza, the speaker lists four examples of human cultures or commu
slow dying. From those who have only the haziest awareness of nationhoo
urban, working-class people, the common thread amongst all this diversit
extended prelude to death. The use of the familiar Larkin feature of hyph
description of people so otherwise dissimilar as *Small cross-faced tribes* and
towns emphasises their commonality in this regard. The placing of the sul
at the end of the stanza and in a relatively short five-syllable line gives a s
a reading, complementing the idea that death is the equally anti-climactic
cultures detailed in the previous lines.

Stanza 2

From types of human communities, the speaker now goes on to give exam
activities which individuals or groups might be engaged in at any time. D
connotations of the words *building* and *benediction*, and the touch of ironic
love and money, the dead-end conclusion is that all such pursuits are merel
cataloguing of human endeavours and pastimes continues in the last two
suggesting the basic search for food of a more primitive culture and the *g*
a more sophisticated society.

More examples of human activity follow, with another touch of drily ironi
Hours giving evidence or birth, carrying with it the sense that even such verb
and useless in the context of the indisputable fact of death. The speaker ac
to such a consciousness of death is itself varied amongst those who are ne
process. Some are able to carry on without being unduly disturbed or dis
their inevitable end. Others, including, no doubt, the speaker, are left alm
consciousness of the finite nature of life. No religious or philosophical sys
are effective in dispelling their sense that all of life is an ultimately meanin
is *Nothing to be said*.

Active Learning Tasks

'Nothing to be Said' is the first example of a number of poems in
expresses his abiding consciousness of death as the common end
factor which puts in question the value of any and all human acti

1. In 'Ambulances', the speaker claims that the onlookers witnes
being taken to hospital *sense the solving emptiness / That lies jus*
Venn diagram of the two poems, comparing the features of la
within each of them to reflect the theme of mortality.
2. In 'Dockery and Son', thoughts of the diverse paths taken by
redundant by the reminder that old age awaits everyone, follo
Write a short paragraph comparing the final stanza of 'Nothin
'Dockery and Son'.
3. Compare the representation of the theme of death in 'Nothing
poem's from Duffy's *Mean Time* collection.

'Love Songs in Age'

Summary

A woman comes across examples of sheet music which she used to play in her younger days. The printed music and lyrics remind her of how it felt to be on the threshold of life, looking forward to and expecting much of romantic love, especially. Now, in widowhood, she is forced to admit to herself that these hopes and expectations have not been fulfilled and that it is now too late to try again.

Structure

- The poem consists of three octaves, stanzas each of eight lines
- Most of the lines contain ten syllables, though the second and shorter. Some lines have eleven syllables and the first line of
- A basic iambic metrical pattern underpins the verse.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are fourteen instances of enjambment in the poem, incl Stanzas 1 and 2.
- The first sentence in the poem concludes in the final line of S
- The regularity of stanza form, metre and rhyme give the poe contributes to the haunting tone of the poem overall, whilst t and the long sentences help give an impression of the memo back to the woman.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The opening of the poem is relatively low-key, the speaker telling us how th the pages of sheet music, no doubt seeing them as pleasing reminders of sin friends. These items had come to bear marks of the life of the household, as past phase of life. They have *waited* to be valued once again. The repetition successive lines conveys a sense of how the woman, having now come acro had been stored away, is examining them individually, each one having a p

Stanza 2

The opening sentence of the poem continues to the very last line of this se the sheet music inspires a cascade of memories of earlier days. The *frank s* become music with the skilful application of the performer, so different fr human relationships. The long vowel sounds in the third line give us a pi the joys of romantic love. Above all, the sheets take the woman back to a experiences of life lay before them, the natural image of the *spring-woken t* potential and fertility amidst *the unfailing sense of being young...That certaint*

Of all the phenomena and experiences which were eagerly anticipated in t
and song, it was romantic love which stood out as the greatest prize. The
line highlights the monosyllable placed at the end – *love*, whilst the allitera
mentioned gives an energetic, tripping sound to the modifier of *brilliance,* w
aspect of love evoked by the songs is its *bright incipience*, the heady openin
first sight, first moves, first kiss. Love itself (and real love leads to marria
much – romance, sexual satisfaction and companionship. It would provid
in life. The sibilance in lines 5 and 6, like the repeated *and*, suggests the sn
stability which love seemed to guarantee. The closing lines, in keeping wi
rest of the poem, do not present a dramatic refutation of these ideals, but r
lamely and with some reluctance by the woman, that reality had not match
done so in her marriage and, she feels, it is too late to expect in middle-ag
and ardour. We are left with an impression that life, including marriage a
necessarily been unhappy experiences for the woman, but nothing has qu
billing, especially love.

Debate Prompt

It could be argued that the poem deals with a particularly moder
popular culture in songs, films and paperback romances, one wh
sentimental picture of love and relationships.

In small groups, discuss how far you agree with this view.

'Naturally the Foundation Will Bear Your

Summary

The speaker, an academic, is on his way to a conference in India. He has been held up in traffic on his way to the airport and only when on the plane does he remember the ceremony to be held that day in London's Whitehall, the annual commemoration in November of the dead of the two world wars of the twentieth century. He dismisses this and such events as signs of England's immature clinging on to tradition. He is glad to be leaving the country and looks forward to meeting his Indian contact on arrival in India.

Structure

- The poem consists of three octaves, stanzas each of eight lines. Each stanza represents a distinct phase in the speaker's thoughts.
- The number of syllables per line varies from six to eight.
- There is an iambic metrical pattern to the verse.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are ten instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The regular iambic metre and very obvious rhyme create the very self-confident, even stubborn, in his pronouncements. T to give the impression of spontaneous thought in the lines of

Commentary

Stanza 1

The speaker tells us of his being in a hurry to catch his *Comet*, this being th long-haul routes in the 1950s and 1960s. It is November and he is on his w his academic background from his references to *Berkeley*, the prestigious c California, to *Chatto* [and Windus], the publishers, and to the *Third*, a shor Programme, a forerunner of the present BBC Radio 3. It seems that the pa is one he has already read in the United States and will, he hopes, be the b allusion to St Paul's *Epistle to the Corinthians*, where the apostle speaks of h of God, who will be revealed fully in heaven:

> *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought a became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am know*

The impression we receive of the speaker in this stanza is one of a highly c perhaps a little too pleased with himself and his academic lifestyle. The m sense of his being self-confident, whilst the abbreviated allusions are the n home in his world of letters.

Stanza 2

Once in the air, he realises that the crowds which had delayed his journey
the Cenotaph in Whitehall for the annual memorial service for those who
the twentieth century, held on the Sunday nearest to November 11th, Armi
the end of hostilities in 1918). The speaker dismisses this event as *solemn-*
sees the participation of the Queen, politicians and the military as being p

Stanza 3

The speaker expresses further distaste for such *mawkish nursery games*, the
the nation's unwillingness or inability to act in a mature fashion. It is, pre
only ceremonial tradition but to a past role and status as a world power w
feels that, unlike most of his fellow countrymen, he has, to echo the words
childish things. He consoles himself with the thought of his now flying hi
journey to Bombay to meet his pal, Professor Lal, a man who once met EM
the famous English novelist, who himself spent some time in India and wr
Passage to India (1924). The speaker seems to revel in his self-image as an i
whose breadth of vision allows him to *outsoar* what he would see as the pe
compatriots. His reference to *Auster*, a word, based on Roman mythology
another self-consciously academic touch, whilst its rhyming with *Forster* m
somewhat glib.

Debate Prompt

Sisir Kumar Chatterjee expresses the following view about the po

> *Egocentric, self-aggrandising and callous, he reneges on those values which*
> *associated with scholarship and humanistic studies – passion for truth, rev*
> *a love of humanity. The speaker betrays his genteel crassness in the implied*
> *between his scornful dismissal of the conventional mentality of the crowds*
> *hackneyed bearing of a merely different kind. His smug intellectual superio*
> *juxtaposed to the clichéd nature of his demeanour – anger about underlings*
> *inconveniences, recital of places and people known. His contemptuous dism*
> *Day Remembrance Service as 'mawkish nursery games', in other words, bet*
> *standard, the limitation of which is further reinforced by the lilting, nurser*
> *which he speaks throughout, and which adds to the reader's amused enjoym*

In groups, discuss how far you agree with this view.

Notes

(1) St Paul's *Epistle to the Colossians*, King James Authorised Version

(2) Sisir Kumar Chatterjee, *Philip Larkin: Poetry That Builds Bridges*

'Broadcast'

Summary

The speaker is listening to an orchestral concert being broadcast on the radio and thinking of his loved one who is attending the event. As the concert progresses, he finds it increasingly difficult to retain his image of her in the hall, whilst he is surprised to find himself so moved by the music itself.

Structure

- The poem consists of three sestets, stanzas each of six lines.
- The number of syllables in each line varies from nine to twel
- There is no metrical pattern applied consistently to the verse.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are twelve instances of enjambment in the poem, inclu line of Stanza 2 and the first line of Stanza 3.
- The stanza form and the rhyme scheme provide a framework expresses the increasing inner turmoil of the speaker. The va absence of regular metre and the frequent use of enjambmen nature of the expression.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The poem opens with the speaker's description of what he hears of the rad as it presents itself to his imagination. There is the familiar sound of the e performance, while the mention of the *organ-frowned-on spaces* and the star give us a picture of a municipal hall at some time in the 1950s or 1960s. Th instruments – *the scuttle on the drum* and the *snivel of violins* – is curious, as distaste for orchestral music. In the final line of the stanza, he drops this i of the woman sitting in the concert hall, her *face amongst all those faces*.

Stanza 2

As the sentence continues, extending the poignant tone of the previous lin as *devout* suggests a reverential absorption in the experience, like a worshi Again the nature of the music itself is reflected in the language – *Cascades* which perhaps indicates that the speaker himself is immune to its attracti on the woman. In his imagination, he sees details of her, the mention of h providing evidence, perhaps, of the relaxed intimacy and gently ironic hu relationship. Before the end of the stanza, however, a slightly unsettling n falls outside and a negative note is struck with the use of the word *witheri* next stanza.

The enjambment takes us straight into the new stanza, completing the des
emptied trees. The dying of the year in the natural world parallels a wither
on the image of the loved one. Instead, and seemingly to his surprise and
himself emotionally overwhelmed by the music. The diction here suggest
troubled in the extreme, as the power of the music prevents him from sust
the woman as an individual, despite his desperate efforts to refocus his m
of her *hands, tiny in all that air, applauding* is, by now, not so much a mark o
an image of the vulnerability of their relationship.

Active Learning Tasks

1. Maeve Brennan, a sub-librarian at the University of Hull and
shared a romantic relationship with the poet for some years.
'Broadcast':

> *This poem was first published in 'The Listener' in January 1962.*
> *wrote: 'To Maeve who would rather listen to music than listen to*
> *'Afternoons' the previous November, the BBC Symphony Orchest*
> *City Hall, Hull which was simultaneously broadcast on the radio.*
> *the live performance, Philip listened to it at home...I was amused*
> *my shoes which had been the object of a shared, private joke that a*
> *with stiletto heels and pointed toes, popularly known as winkle p*
> *in vogue several months. Philip loved them. Never one to be ahea*
> *just lagging behind it, I said in mock exasperation one day: 'I don*
> *such a fuss of these shoes. They've been in fashion for at least six*
> *shouldn't be wearing them.' He laughed and said: 'Well, I still ad*
> *are slightly outmoded', which is how they came to be described in*

If we were to base our understanding of 'Broadcast' purely on Br
assume the tone of the poem would be an entirely positive one –
Select two quotations from the poem that suggest a negative view
explain how/why they do so.

2. The poem should, perhaps, be read alongside 'Talking in Bed
intimacy with another is thwarted by the speaker's actual aw
between them, despite their physical closeness to each other.
which the messages of these poems are similar, and two way

Note

(1) Maeve Brennan, *Philip Larkin Society*, July 2002

'Faith Healing'

Summary

The poem describes a faith-healing event featuring an American evangelist. Various middle-aged women approach him and are spoken to individually by the faith healer for a short while. They then lapse into the background, but their facial expressions and posture indicate that many are undergoing some profound experience. The speaker suggests that this is essentially a releasing of pent-up emotions and an expression of their deep need to be loved, rather than the result of any religious experienc

Structure

- The poem consists of three stanzas, each of ten lines.
- There are ten syllables in most of the lines, though some have
- There is a basic iambic metre underpinning the verse (iambic not applied with total consistency.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are eighteen instances of enjambment in the poem, inc Stanzas 1 and 2.
- The sentence which begins in the last line of Stanza 1 continu
- Seventeen of the lines include internal punctuation.
- There is a tension between the more formal elements – stanz other elements which allow for spontaneity in the expression enjambment, the varying length of sentences and the interna reflects that between the ceremonial nature of the event and experienced by the women.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The speaker relates in the present tense details of the faith-healing event a who is at the centre of proceedings. It is as if we were listening to a live co is the immediacy of the approach. The evangelist himself cuts a dapper fi *rimless glasses, silver hair, / Dark suit, white collar.* The women who approac be encouraged by the stewards before they stand before him, receiving so individual attention. The positive feeling each of the women experiences captured in the reference to *the warm spring rain of his loving care,* the poten image. The evangelist behaves as if he regards himself as a direct conduit and the specific bodily weaknesses of the women. His final gesture with clasps their heads, before releasing them back into the *exile* of their indivi

Stanza 2

The focus of this stanza is firmly on the women and upon their reaction to with the evangelist, with the speaker moving beyond description to interp what he sees. None of them appears untouched, though some merely ling straight back to their pre-event lives. Others are more obviously and mor if suffering some kind of fit or convulsions. The description of their being *deep hoarse* tears points to the painful nature of what they are going throug speaker, the source of this reaction is their feeling that the evangelist has i and channel for a radiant love which surrounds them still. The language l *awake at kindness... lift and lighten...such joy* – as the women look and act as mention of their *thick tongues* and the onomatopoeic *blort* portray them as faculties, with feelings of grief and joy in conflict within them.

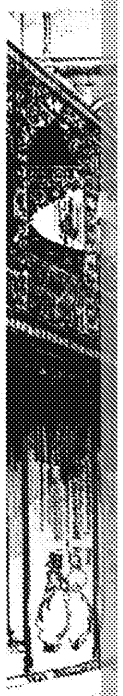
Stanza 3

The stanza opens with an exclamation, an ironic echo of the evangelist's q Stanza 1, the speaker now firmly in the role of interpreter. The bright patt disguise the physical unattractiveness of the *Moustached* women. The nex the slow and painful stirring of the consciousness that their lives have bee love – for some the love they could have given, for most the love they feel way, the women all feel that their lives would have been so different had t speaker's comment – *That nothing cures* – indicates that he is much less co bogus claims of faith healing than with this enduring, fundamental need w women who have put themselves forward for a miracle cure. The final de manifestations of their turmoil again highlights the ambivalent nature of w reference to a *slackening ache* suggests both a process of relaxing and a chr comparison is made to *the rigid landscape* which *weeps,* as they open up on albeit illusory, which they have never encountered in their lives till now. in the long run, prove beneficial to these women is, one feels, extremely d

Extended Essay Answer Question

This is not the only poem in the collection in which Larkin explor Compare and contrast the use of religious context/setting in two p of these can be 'Faith Healing' if you wish) and two from Duffy's

'For Sidney Bechet'



Summary

The speaker is listening to a recording of the music of the legendary jazz instrumentalist, Sidney Bechet. He imagines that this music might, for others, evoke images – mostly false – of Bechet's New Orleans home, its old French Quarter or the jazz clubs of the red light district. The speaker, however, feels that he has a particular understanding of and feeling for Bechet's music, admitting to being deeply moved by his unique style of playing.

Structure

- The poem consists of six stanzas, the first five of which are tercets, with three lines each, and the last one a couplet, with two lines.
- The number of syllables in each line is either ten or eleven, in no particular pattern. The last two syllables in *Orleans* in line 2 of the first stanza would be elided in pronunciation.
- The lines are made up of a random distribution of iambic (~ /) (~ ~ /) metrical feet, with either four or five stresses per line.
- The rhyme scheme is complex, linking some stanzas: aba bcb
- There are seven instances of enjambment in the poem, includ and 4.
- In many ways, this is an unusual poem in terms of its organi regularity in terms of stanza form (up to the final stanza), len the rhyme scheme, other features tend towards a more fluid latter include the variations in metre; the use of enjambment; exclamation mark (Stanza 3) and parenthesis (Stanzas 3/4). T conflicting elements reflects the way the speaker responds to and raw emotion being both in evidence.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The speaker, in his mind, is addressing his much admired jazz hero, the American saxophonist and clarinettist, Sidney Bechet (1897–1959). He tall of a particular note resonating like the reflection in the water of Bechet's native New Orleans, a city synonymous with jazz music. The music, he claims, inspires *appropriate falsehood,* fantasy images which perhaps say more about the listeners than about the realities of life in the city.

Stanza 2

For some, the music would evoke pictures of the old French Quarter of Ne
famous balconies and the Mardi Gras festivities which take place there ev
masked balls are held over a two-week period leading up to the beginnin

Stanzas 3 and 4

Stanza 3 opens with an exclamation from the speaker, as if he were not on
but feeling it too as an intense emotional experience. He continues to spec
the music for others, mentioning *Mute glorious Storyvilles*, this being a refe
New Orleans, where prostitution and brothels were tolerated for some tim
twentieth century and where there were many jazz clubs. The speaker hir
stanzas linked by enjambment, how the scene would appear in the minds
prostitutes described as *circus tigers*, seeming to be wild creatures but, in r
biddable, ready to indulge their clients, at a price. There are also *scholars*
obsessively for facts and stories connected with jazz music and its practitio

Stanza 5

The speaker claims that, unlike other devotees of Bechet, for whom the mu
fantasies of New Orleans, he has a particular appreciation of the jazz musi
music has the same effect as falling in love, though he seems to imply that
latter phenomenon. It arouses overwhelmingly positive responses from h
the speaker, his own particular image of New Orleans, *My Crescent City* –
position straddling the Mississippi River – is the only setting which can d
though he were appropriating Bechet as a personal possession. This is, pe
sentiment. Many devotees of a particular musician, writer or artist feel th
understanding and appreciation of the works they so admire.

Stanza 6

In this two-line conclusion to the poem, the speaker develops this homage
tells us, has a moral dimension, its being *the natural noise of good*. It has the
negative thoughts and memories which are troubling his mind.

Active Learning Tasks

As mentioned in the Biography section to this guide, jazz was an
developed from his schooldays and which remained important th
contributed articles on jazz for *The Daily Telegraph* for a number o

Do some further research (10–15 mins.) into Larkin's love of jazz
that you think might be relevant to this poem.

'Home is So Sad'

Summary

Home is personified as being saddened by the departure of those who have lived within its walls. The furniture and other domesti items remain as reminders of hopes and ambitions which have no been fulfilled.

Structure

- The poem consists of two quintains, stanzas each of five lines
- Each line contains ten syllables.
- There is a basic iambic metre to the verse, though this is not applied with total consistency.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is ababa.
- There are three instances of enjambment in the poem, includi stanzas.
- In four of the lines there is an internal full stop.
- The reflective tone of the poem is enhanced by the regularity rhyme. The internal punctuation and enjambment help give thought taking place within the poem.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The concept of *Home* is personified as a kind of ageing parent who is sadd members to live their lives elsewhere. It retains the marks and tastes of th though this faithfulness to the past might entice them to return. Like a pa life has gone with the departure of the children, *Home* is *bereft of anyone to* too demoralised to make a new start.

Stanza 2

The enjambment continues the idea of the *Home* as lacking the will to asse identity it enjoyed in earlier times, when it represented the ambitions and *joyous shot at how things ought to be.* Subsequent experience has revealed th have been misplaced, the early hopes having *long fallen wide.* The items of decorations are now merely sad reminders of a phase in the life of the fam unutterably distant. It is as if we were there in the speaker's former home domestic details, each one having a particular significance for him. The fi unexplained, the object seeming to embody especially, perhaps, the previc attempts to give the room an air of refinement and sophistication, but now taste and judgement.

Debate Prompts

1. The identification of the *Home* with the personality and attitu
perhaps not surprising, given that, as A T Tolley points out (
immediately after Larkin had spent the Christmas of 1958 wi

   Do you think Larkin is reflecting his mother's real emotions,
them to him, or merely speculating upon how she feels? Dis

2. As Tolley remarks, the final images in the poem *have a static,*
with the statement in the first line (2). The poem can be seen as
though, whereas many still-life pictures feature fruit or flowe
fertility, there is a dead or defeated quality to the objects deta

   How far do you think the poem might also be read as a reflec
partner.

Notes

(1) A T Tolley, *Larkin at Work*, University of Hull Press, 1997

(2) Ibid.

'Toads Revisited'

Summary

The poem is essentially a follow-on from the poem 'Toads', which appeared in the earlier volume entitled *The Less Deceived*. In 'Toads', the speaker wonders why he is so in thrall of the notion of having to work for his living, especially when he sees that there are those who seem to get by without being tied down in this manner. Eventually, he concedes that the dull compulsion to regular paid employment matches something equally *toad-like* within his own psyche.

In 'Toads Revisited', the speaker imagines being one of those people who, for whatever reason, are not at work and thus free to walk about the park during the day. He does not find the prospect enticing, however, regarding these people as victims of circumstance, rather than objects of envy. He realises that he needs the dull predictability of work, if only to provide distractions from questions about life and death which he would prefer not to face.

Structure

- The poem consists of nine quatrains, stanzas each of four line
- The number of syllables per line varies between five and eigh
- There is no fixed metrical pattern within the poem.
- There is no regular rhyme scheme as such, though there are h stanza and a pattern of abab in the final stanza.
- There are seven instances of enjambment within the poem, w with a hyphen.
- Only two lines contain internal punctuation.
- The main structural element in the poem is the regular stanza metre and the absence, until late in the poem, of rhyme, allow expression of the speaker's thoughts and observations.

Commentary

Stanzas 1 and 2

In this opening phase of the poem, the speaker considers the attractions of the bonds of work – the natural features of lake, sunshine and grass, the sc too near!) and the strangely alluring sight of *black-stockinged nurses*. Despi speaker confesses that he is not drawn to such a life.

Stanzas 3 and 4

As a way of explaining this disinclination to being free to wander, the spe
type of person one would encounter during the day in such an environme
psychological injuries or disabilities. The use of hyphenated diction in ref
enhances the impression given of them as being somehow strange, as if no
describe them. Their being at leisure is all too clearly the result not of cho
circumstances.

Stanzas 5, 6 and 7

In these stanzas, the speaker speculates further on the life led by such peo
mainstream world. His attitude and tone might appear callous, seeing the
being stupid or weak. The exclamation in Stanza 5 expresses his horror at th
number. He imagines them getting through the day by passively observin
mark the passage of time, the choice of municipal garden or empty house
which to live out their despair.

Stanzas 8 and 9

Recoiling from such a prospect, the speaker finds refuge in the predictable
The hyphens and the half-rhymes in Stanza 8 help suggest a full schedule
of the day organised for him by the *loaf-haired secretary*. Status and purpos
shortening days remind him of the passing of yet another year, he is, than
full significance of this. The *toad work* is, above all, a welcome distraction
thoughts and perspectives. It makes the journey *down Cemetery Road* to th
distressing.

Debate Prompt

As noted in the Commentary section above, the speaker's attitude
park seems harsh, but this is perhaps to be seen as a reflection of
prospect of being one of them, rather than an expression of genui
think the poem reflects Larkin's own self-consciousness, particula
employment and mortality?

Notes

(1) Philip Larkin, 'The Old Fools', *Collected Poems*

(2) Philip Larkin, 'Aubade', *Collected Poems*

'Water'

Summary

The speaker imagines being commissioned to start a new religion. He would use the traditional Christian symbol of water in its liturgy, but for new, secular ends.

Structure

- The poem consists of three tercets, stanzas each of three lines, followed by a final quatrain, a four-line stanza.
- The number of syllables per line varies between five and seven,
- There is no strictly applied metrical scheme as such, but there is stressed syllables. The sequence of stressed syllables per line is Thus there is a common pattern in the tercets, though the distrib different in each stanza.
- There is no rhyme scheme in the poem.
- There are eight instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The regular pattern of stressed syllables gives a certain gravity t the variations in line length and absence of rhyme allows for a c expression. The final stanza is set apart from the previous three stressed syllables, helping to make it the most serious part of the

Commentary

Stanza 1

The speaker sets up a rather curious imaginary situation, whereby he has bee *religion*. He would, in this case, use water, itself a traditional symbol in the Cl ceremony of baptism, which symbolises the cleansing of the soul of the marks acceptance into the community of believers.

Stanza 2

In the speaker's new religion, worshippers would put on *dry, different clothes* a As Don W King points out, there is an echo here of a classic religious text, Joh *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), in which the hero, Christian, must undergo many tri City, which represents his heavenly home:

> *The most famous example of this fording occurs in John Bunyan's 'The Pilgrim comes within sight of the Celestial City, but blocking him is a deep, bridgeless ri ford the river, his feeble faith wavers, and he starts to sink. However, he recall from Isaiah xlii, 2: 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and will not overflow you.' Accordingly, Christian, inspired by his recollection of S sacramental power, finds 'ground to stand upon' and is able to ford successfull*

Any intended symbolism in the fording of water and the donning of new appare obvious. Nor is it clear as to what spiritual or existential ideas the practice envisa the notion of making a new start, without the religious connotations. It is possibl mischievous here, satirising the traditional Christian symbolism by creating a del

Stanza 3

Again, the significance of the proposed new practice is not clear, the word *sou*
cookery or gardening, whilst the juxtaposition of *devout* and *drench* links imag
Again, there is the suspicion of an element of irony in this aspect of the new *li*

Stanza 4

Just as this final stanza is set apart from the rest of the poem by its having an
poem changes as the speaker concludes with his final proposal. A glass of wa
as a kind of counterpart to the raising of the chalice containing wine during th
Eucharistic services of Protestant denominations. The language of the last tw
different to the rather simplistic references of the previous two stanzas. The f
used as a symbol of infinity and of the immeasurable complexity of human ex
Larkin's biographer, Andrew Motion, the image represents *an imaginative app*
knowledge of time and its constraints, and of self and its shortcomings, is set aside (2

Debate Prompts

1. With the metaphor of water, is Larkin suggesting that all reli
meaningless? Or do you think his message is more complex
partner.
2. The poem is a good example of conceit (extended metaphor)
poems in the collection that use conceit effectively? Discuss

Notes

(1) Don W King, 'Sacramentalism in the Poetry of Philip Larkin',
http://www.montreat.edu/dking/General%20essays/SacramentalismintheP

(2) Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, Faber and Faber, 1993

'The Whitsun Weddings'

Summary

On a train journey south, presumably from Hull, the speaker gradually becomes aware of newly wedded couples boarding the train at each station stopped at. He gives details of the wedding parties left on the platforms, imagining their feelings, and of the reactions of the couples once aboard the train. As they approach London, the speaker feels a sense of the train being charged with the potential inherent in the couples, whose lives have been transformed this day.

Whit Sunday – originally 'White Sunday' – is better known in the Christian community as Pentecost Sunday. This feast takes place seven weeks after Easter, and commemorates the Apostles being infused with the Holy Spirit, which allowed them to speak in many tongues and gave them the courage to preach the Gospel, following Christ's 'ascension' to heaven. As well as being a religious feast, the 'Whitsun' weekend used to be a bank holiday and a time when there were parades in a number of towns, particularly in the north of Englan Whitsun is linked to that of Easter, which itself changes year by y replaced by the Spring Bank Holiday, which now takes place at th

Structure

- The poem consists of eight stanzas, each of ten lines.
- There are ten syllables in each line, except for the second line four.
- There is an iambic metre to the verse (iambic pentameter), al variations from the pattern.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each cas
- There are forty-six instances of enjambment in a poem of sixt the links between Stanzas 4 and 5, 5 and 6 and 6 and 7.
- The regularity in the stanza form, length of line, metre and rh narrative, whilst the frequent use of enjambment helps sugge the train journey.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The poem opens in a quite relaxed, anecdotal fashion, the speaker relating
hot, *sunlit Saturday.* The hyphens in the compound adjective in the third l
the image of carriages connected to each other or to the engine, whilst the
line emphasises the rather uncomfortable heat and the efforts made to mo
use of enjambment in this stanza help give the effect of looking out of the
changing urban view, before the long vowel sounds of the penultimate lin
massive entities of *sky and Lincolnshire and water* in the last line then create
extensive vista which presents itself as the track approaches the Humber e

Stanza 2

Again the heat and the ever changing scene viewed from the window forn
to the *tall heat that slept / For miles inland* conveys the impression of shimm
deter all forms of strenuous activity. The long vowel sounds and the sibil
the sense of the train's arcing route as it joins the main north-south line. A
used are important in creating the appropriate visual effect, the length of t
contrasting with the relative shortness of the same in *short-shadowed,* with
to suggest the brevity of both the shadows in the afternoon sun and of the
in the passing landscape. The onomatopoeic elements in the description c
provide a suitably discordant note, before we move on to 'see' the momen
glass of the hothouse. The enjambment between the sixth and seventh lin
onward motion which takes the train by hedges of varying height, whilst
as we imagine the smell of grass coming through the opened windows of
alternative to the sweat-laden *reek of buttoned carriage cloth.* Railway lines
back door, as it were, showing us such sights as *the acres of dismantled cars*
place appearing to be uniformly *nondescript.*

Stanza 3

It is only now, in this third stanza, that the 'human interest' takes over fro
passing urban and rural landscapes. The speaker confesses that his attent
parties only after the train had made a number of stops, the effort to disce
shade of the platforms before then proving too much. In the fifth line, Lar
sounds to suggest the length of the platform. He makes up his own onom
skirls – to give us some idea of the raucous noise which accompanies the b
newly-wedded couple. The speaker's powers of observation are now trai
parties left behind at each stop. The girls, *grinning and pomaded,* have tried
wedding outfits, with their *heels and veils,* though the speaker sees only *pa
irresolutely,* not quite knowing what to say or do as the train prepares to ta

Stanza 4

The opening of the stanza continues the description of the girls on the plat themselves are like the leftovers from the occasion, now separated from th celebrations. At each station, the scene repeats itself. The fathers look ill a combination of *broad belts under their suits,* their worrying reflected in the l The mothers are described dismissively as *loud and fat,* with uncles faring customary role as sources of embarrassment. The speaker turns his critica *girls,* unmarried relatives and friends of the bride, no doubt, and of a simil *perms* and the listing of their tawdry accessories again emphasise their lac the garish colours suggesting a brashness about those wearing them.

Stanza 5

The enjambment carries the last line of Stanza 4 through here, the girls bei *off...unreally from the rest* by the loud colours they are wearing. There is an Store', in which the speaker refers to the synthetic material and the colour display in the store – *Lemon, sapphire, moss-green, rose*. He sees this cheapn the provocative designs, as evidence of the *unreal wishes* of men for wome and promise which is quite detached from their dull working lives. His c Weddings', meanwhile, finds himself becoming imaginatively involved in preserving his stance of detached observer. He now recognises the contex to, the final stages of a succession of weddings and subsequent festivities. the mention of how *Fresh couples climbed aboard*, whilst, in contrast, those l passive bystanders. *The last confetti and advice are thrown* together, both be to the fore with the latter, no doubt. The facial expressions reflect the vari of those seeing off the couples. The children, understandably, are bored a young to be impressed by notions of love and romance.

Stanza 6

Again the enjambment continues the line begun in the previous stanza. T embarrassed to be part of this unique gathering, their private feelings of p children on the day they embark on married life being pushed aside as th public nature of the celebrations. The older women, including the mother *funeral*. They know, from experience, the *secret* of what lies ahead for the *happy* because the binding of the loving couple in marriage is a cause for r that it marks the end of a phase in all of their lives. The unmarried *girls*, v *religious wounding.* To appreciate this second example of oxymoron, we m the poem was written, 1958, the incidence of pre-marital sex was consider Many brides – and bridegrooms! – would be virgins on their wedding da same would be true of many of the girls in the poem who are on the platfo groom settle into their seats on the train. They are thinking of the night to virginity will be subject to the *wounding* act of sex, but as this takes place v religious or ritual context to lend it respectability and approval. Doubtles thinking also of their own participation in such activity when they becom

The latter phase of the stanza begins in the fifth line, with the speaker's fe
they were *Free at last.* It is evident that, by now, he considers himself to be
couples, if only during the time they are travelling to their destination. He
towards London, as if his role of observer were integral to the communal sit
the sum of all they saw suggests that the couples contain within them collect
derived from the range of attitudes and emotions of those members of the
seen them off. There is a sense of urgency in the final four lines, as the tra
uninterrupted way towards London, the effort being made by the engine
described as *shuffling gouts of steam.* The use of enjambment in four consec
impression of speedy motion, whilst the use of commas within each of the
the line in each case, simulates the constantly changing view from the win

Stanza 7

Only here, in this penultimate stanza, are the couples themselves able to s
hectic day they have each experienced, their sense of relief captured in the
speech. Whilst they are, naturally, caught up in their own individual situa
take an overview, noting that, during the course of this journey, *a dozen m*
not thinking of each other, the couples watch the same landscape go past,
able to portray the experience of rail travel through the urban and suburb
including such details as an *Odeon* (not just 'a cinema')...*a cooling tower / A*
the active nature of this latter reference being so much more evocative tha
have been. Only he, the detached observer, sees the common bond betwe
would all contain this hour. Whilst they would be thinking of their own par
he visualises the totality of the capital, the image of the *postal districts packe*
introducing the idea of natural growth and fertility.

Stanza 8

The word *aimed* in the opening line carries the connotation of definite purp
by its being placed at the end of the sentence. Once again a combination o
punctuation suggests the rapidity not only of the train's motion but of the
the carriage window. The speaker's apprehension of the temporary yokin
through the chance sharing of their early experiences of married life on th
reference to *this frail travelling coincidence.* The diction towards the end of
sense of potential inherent in the couples due to their new status and role,
all the power / That being changed can give. There is a perceived tension betw
train and the imminent forward movement of the couples as they prepare
Having each been transformed by the marriage ceremony and their becom
turn are seen to possess the power to transform and enrich the world.

The image in the conclusion to the poem – *there swelled / A sense of falling, l
sight, somewhere becoming rain* – was, as A T Tolley tells us (1), suggested b
Laurence Olivier 1944 film of *Henry V*, in which there is a prolonged shot
launched by the English bowmen. This image suggests the promise of bot
only will new life result from the marriages but in their commitment to ea
public, the couples uphold the dignity and worth of human existence mor

Extended Essay Answer Question

In a study of Larkin, Roger Day quotes John Wain's comments on 'The Whitsun Weddings':

> *Larkin stands back and looks. But to look for an artist of his receptiv contemplation – rapt, unwavering, emphatic – is a way of 'joining in that art knows. The poet contrasts the essentially self-preoccupied mo couples with his own sense of involvement in a moment of complicated experience...In a sense the poet's involvement is greater than theirs: he just what it is that each participant feels, and then puts them together experience, felt in its directness by no one, yet present in the atmosphe imaginative contemplation that makes 'art'. (2)*

Explore the relevance of perspective in this poem, alongside a po Duffy's *Mean Time*.

Notes

(1) A T Tolley, *Larkin at Work*

(2) John Wain, 'Engagement or Withdrawal: Some Notes on the Work of Philip Summer 1964, quoted in Roger Day, *Philip Larkin,* Open University Press, 19

'Self's the Man'

Summary

The speaker compares his own situation as a single man with tha
with children. The whole of the latter's life is focused on support
speaker to conclude that he himself leads a selfish existence. He i
question this assumption, asserting that, in making the choices th
future lifestyles, both of them were motivated by self-interest. Th
not, for the speaker, a question of selfishness, but of his knowing
for selfless giving.

Structure

- The poem comprises eight quatrains, stanzas each of four lin
- The number of syllables per line varies from five to thirteen.
stanzas have longer lines than the second four. The three exa
lines are all in the first three stanzas, whilst Stanza 2 also con
No line in the latter half of the poem contains more than nine
- There is no consistently applied metrical pattern.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are sixteen instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The poem consists of a first half which focuses on Arnold's h
half which essentially reflects upon the nature of choice as to
line length noted above underpins this division. The marked
overall, the lack of metrical pattern and frequent use of enjan
informal tone of the poem, particularly in the first half. The r
piece together, this very obvious rhyme scheme giving a jaun

Commentary

Stanzas 1 to 4

In this first half of the poem, the speaker examines the lifestyle of Arnold,
The opening line, with its exclamation, is a seemingly ready concession on
himself presumably a bachelor, that Arnold's lot provides firm evidence th
the two. Arnold's decision to marry seems to have been based on insecuri
losing now being an inescapable daily presence. It seems as if the speaker
undesirable extremes and would himself favour some intermediate situati
company (and bed?) of a female, but retaining precious time and space to
second stanza, the contrast between the thirteen-syllable line, referring to
money, and the five-syllable line which follows, detailing his wife's spend
highlights the implicit sense of injustice of the situation in the eyes of the s
the use of the colloquial *kiddies clobber* again reflect the speaker's obvious c
Arnold's time at home after work isn't his own, the quoted speech of his w
nature, while again the listing of duties waiting to be discharged in Stanza
never-ending succession of unpleasant demands on Arnold's time, capped
visit from his mother-in-law.

Stanzas 4 to 8

This second half of the poem is essentially a reflection upon these observa
what they might say, by way of comparison, about the speaker's own bacl
5, he appears ready to repeat the concession made at the opening of the pc
comparison between the two lives makes him *feel a swine*. He immediatel
however, claiming that Arnold's initial impulse to get married was itself b
recognised it then. If married life has subsequently shown this decision tc
cannot persist in seeing Arnold as fundamentally *unselfish* when all that h
been a by-product of this same, essentially selfish impulse. The speaker th
regarding himself and Arnold as moral equivalents, both having made de
interest. The only real difference, he claims with just a touch of smugness
of knowing just how much – or how little – self-sacrifice he is capable of w
Marriage for the likes of Arnold, it is implied, is a gradual descent into a fc

Debate Prompts

1. Discuss the significance of the closing line of the poem: *Or I s*
   speaker is really doubting his own argument, or is he simply

2. Janice Rossen reads the poem in the following way:

   > *What annoys him is the feeling of inferiority to Arnold as a hus*
   > *prove himself in the right, he must therefore overstate the probl*
   > *Arnold's marriage, having internalised a burden of guilt which*
   > *everyone. Significantly, he does not try to argue against marria*
   > *it excludes other things; the poet does not defend himself by say*
   > *solitude for creating art, or that individual identity which he pc*
   > *marriage is more important. The question centres on his innate*
   > *the poet seems so determined to convince himself and others tha*
   > *death as an excuse for not marrying. (1)*

   Discuss how far you agree or disagree with this view.

Note

(1) Janice Rossen, *Philip Larkin: His Life's Work*, University of Iowa Press / Harve

'Take One Home for the Kiddies'

Summary

A picture of a group of animals, of unspecified breed, in the comf
window is followed by the quoted plea from a child to a mother t
same child cheerfully telling the mother that the animal is being b
the exploitation of animals in the pet trade.

Structure

- The poem consists of two quatrains, stanzas each of four line
- There are eight syllables in each line, with the exception of th
which has seven.
- In Stanza 1, there is a basic iambic metre, though the second
with a trochaic foot (/ ~).
- In Stanza 2, there is a trochaic metrical pattern.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- The iambic metre of the first stanza and the simple rhyme scl
punctuated by the trochaic foot at the opening of the fourth l
child's demanding voice. The trochaic metre of the second st
imitating the sound of a childish chant.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The stanza pictures the scene in the window of a pet shop, the group of an
guinea pigs or puppy dogs, huddling together in conditions in which they
comforts. They are exposed to the sun, with no water in the bowls. The c
with its repetition of *no* and the monosyllabic diction, allied to the iambic
to this implicit indictment of the owners of the shop. The inclusion of *no d*
elements denied to the animals is a sharp reminder that these creatures ha
mere material conditions. The final line of the stanza, with identifiably no
speech, is shockingly incongruous, the child obviously delighted, rather th
or she sees in the window. The sudden demand on the mother suggests th
impulse, one of many that a child might express on any given day as the a
items on display during a shopping trip.

Stanza 2

The chanting rhythm carries a note of foreboding, as the speaker prepares
poem by making the generalisation about the short novelty value of *Living*
most children, a pet represents a source of distraction, rather than a being
respected, and needs which require constant attention. The repeated cons
stanza suggests the playing out of a game, with domestic items being com
children's entertainment. The cheerful tone of the child's speech in the fin
any tearful scene would have been, while the juxtaposition of *playing* and
in conveying the child's inability to appreciate the worth of the dead pet's

Active Learning Tasks

The irony of the title is only too apparent after reading the poem, t
pet shop owners being symptomatic of a wider exploitation of an
feels, too, that Larkin's concern here is not exclusively with anima
the child's attitude implies in a wider context. The selfish, thougl
of the youngster will, one feels, develop into more ingrained habi
adulthood. It presents a view of humanity flawed from its early y

Based on your reading of 'Take One Home for the Kiddies' and th
mind map suggesting some of Larkin's views about the flaws inh
may want to add ideas about other poems in the collection to you
broaden your perspective on Larkin's representation of modern s

Additionally, you may want to add notes from some of the poem
comparing how the two poets represent modern society.

Notes

(1) Philip Larkin, 'Myxomatosis', *Collected Poems*

(2) Philip Larkin, 'The Mower', *Collected Poems*

'Days'

Summary

The speaker asks the question *What are days for?* and goes on to portray days as forming a familiar environment in which we feel comfortable. Asking what might lie beyond this dimension of time is to invite the interventions of religion or science, in the shape of *the priest and the doctor*.

Structure

- The poem consists of one sestet, a six-line stanza, and one quatr
- The number of words per line varies between four and seven, ir
- There is a pattern of stressed syllables per line, as follows: 23232 unstressed syllables varies.
- There is no rhyme scheme.
- There are four instances of enjambment in the poem.
- Forty of the total of forty-six words in the poem are of one syllal
- The short grammatical units and monosyllables in the first stan attempt to answer the question posed in the first line. The short syllabic words, indicating a greater complexity to the expressior stressed syllables maintains a tone of stability, though the absen length allows for some element of spontaneity.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The poem opens with a question which is itself deceptive in its seeming simp question one might ask a child, but it is not obvious as to how one would repl they were a faithful parent or friend, who can be relied upon to call at the star to share in our enjoyment of their company. The rhetorical question in the fir that the answer to the original question is straightforward. Days – and the tir part – are all we know, so what more could be said? The monosyllabic dictior the speaker seems to wish to give: that the whole topic is clear-cut and uncom

Stanza 2

The muted exclamation at the opening of the second stanza immediately serv response. The very use of the word *solving* extends the scope of the subject ar complex question, and as such demands deep thought. The speaker, it seems these issues. The striking visual image of *the priest and the doctor / In their long* evokes a picture of these figures rushing to attend to a dying person. While tl passage of the soul to the afterlife, the doctor attempts to help stave off death implication is that any attempt to look beyond the finite temporal dimension necessarily take us into areas which are the preserve of religion and science, t entirely compatible. The relaxed, assured air of the first stanza is now seen to only by not delving too deeply into the initial question.

Active Learning Tasks

The poem can be read alongside others from the collection in which inevitability of death. In pairs or small groups, make a list of all the think could be usefully read alongside this one. Add to the list any p that might be relevant.

'MCMXIV'

Summary

The speaker is looking at a photograph of men queuing to enlist in the army on the occasion of the outbreak of war in 1914. He goes on to imagine other aspects of the society which existed at this time, before the radical changes which the coming conflict would bring. He considers the men and the other images as representing a state of innocence which would be lost forever.

Structure

- The form consists of four octaves, stanzas each of eight lines.
- The number of syllables per line varies between six and eight, in no particular pattern.
- There is an underlying iambic metre, though this is not appli of lines have three stressed syllables.
- In each stanza, the fourth and eighth lines rhyme.
- There are seventeen instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The poem comprises one extended grammatical unit, though ends with a semi-colon. There is no main verb, however.
- Only three of the lines include internal punctuation.
- The single extended sentence and the frequent use of enjamb impression that the speaker is, during the poem, musing upo going on to imagine a wider scene in town and country settin the length of lines, the pattern of stressed syllables and the li sense of order in this succession of images.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The title of the poem is the year 1914 in Roman numerals, such as we might memorial, suggesting a sinister tone to the poem before we even begin read the reader were by his side as he looks at a photograph of men queuing out summer of 1914, shortly after war had been declared against Germany on A enjambment helps to suggest the long, weaving line of men as they wait to e compared to crowds one might see queuing outside a sporting arena, who w being entertained by the clash of two teams in a game of skill and physical e clearly defined rules. Their hats and moustaches place them firmly within t poignantly betraying the naivety of their current perspective on what the w themselves as individuals or for wider society. The reference to their lookin *August Bank Holiday lark* suggests that they were there in search of exciteme workaday world, to which, they assumed, they would return soon enough.

Stanza 2

The speaker extends the scope of his reflections by going on to imagine th
that point in history. The shop awnings, as in real-life 1914, show the nam
inspiring trust and confidence in their customers. Meanwhile, the childre
colours – and, no doubt, the same heavy textures – their parents would ty
those of British monarchs (such as Edward and George, Victoria and Mary
open all day, as they would before the restrictive licensing laws were intro
these images and references emphasise just how distant this pre-war worl
reading the poem in the 1960s or after.

Stanza 3

The focus of the speaker's imagination is now the countryside, which is de
because rural society felt particularly remote from the political events lead
The place-names, many of which would have their origins in centuries-old
high summer, be covered by the *flowering grasses,* this detail giving a sense
mark in the growth cycle, before the inevitable decline and decay. The air
undermined by the mention of the *Domesday lines*. At a literal level, this re
settlements commissioned by William the Conqueror in the eleventh centu
the Domesday Book. There is, however, the unmistakeable connotation w
there is a slightly unsettling feeling arising from the *wheat's restless silence,*
nervously anticipating some major change. The stratified, upstairs-downs
1914 rural society is captured in the reference to the *differently-dressed serv*
huge houses owned by the gentry, whose limousines throw up dust on dirt

Stanza 4

The speaker seems almost overwhelmed by the poignancy of the situation
stands on the brink of such upheaval, and yet seems oblivious to the exten
soon to be wrought by the war. Viewed from the perspective of a differen
innocence of this world which is so striking. The men in the photograph w
recruiting office, return to their domestic situations for a short interim per
the horrors they would see and be part of. They were, perhaps, the last of
generations, including Larkin's, would know of the Somme and Passchen
Hiroshima, none of which could be envisaged by those who lived through

Debate Prompt

In 'MCMXIV', Larkin does not, of course, choose to depict the actua
in the poem would go on to fight in. As David Timms points out, *t*
the tension between what is said and what is left unsaid (1). David Lodg
omission of a main verb which *so powerfully and poignantly creates th*
poised between peace and war, arrested and held for inspection that is solem

How do you think this approach would compare to one where th
about war? Which style do you think is more effective, and do yo
publication date (1964) has anything to do with Larkin's choice o

Notes

(1) David Timms, *Philip Larkin*

(2) David Lodge, in 'Introduction', Stephen Regan (ed.), *Philip Larkin*

'Talking in Bed'

Summary

The speaker considers a situation whereby the physical closeness of being in bed with another does not necessarily lead to a similar closeness of mind or spirit. There remains a distance between the two individuals which is hard to bridge, making true intimacy difficult to achieve.

Structure

- The poem consists of four tercets, stanzas each of three lines.
- The majority of the lines contain ten syllables, though there are exceptions, including the shorter last two lines of the poem.
- There is no regular metrical pattern.
- The rhyme scheme is as follows: aba cac dcd eee. Thus the se first, the third to the second, whilst the final stanza stands alo three lines together.
- There are four instances of enjambment in the poem, includi and 4.
- The stanza form and rhyme scheme provide structure for the metrical regularity and use of enjambment allow for an impr natural thoughts.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The idea introduced in this first stanza is that the image of a couple being our culture, almost iconic, portraying a situation whereby we become as c physically possible. This archetypal *emblem* of intimacy *goes back so far* int and in more modern media, such as film. In bed, there are no barriers bet inhibit one's *being honest*. But the word *ought* in the first line of the stanza mark against this assumption, suggesting that such honesty and intimacy speaker.

Stanza 2

This hint of negativity is developed here, as *more and more time passes slowl* taking place between the pair. The *wind's incomplete unrest* and its continu the clouds observed through the window of the room complement the spe which looks for permanence and stability, but experiences or achieves onl of thoughts and emotions.

The gloomy picture of the external world is extended, the *dark towns* which projecting an alien aspect, the concerns of the individuals in the room being anyone or anything beyond it. The enjambment links the idea, begun in S final stanza, that it is in such situations – where one feels there **should** be – that we actually experience a particularly acute sense of loneliness. The yet communicating what we really feel might well involve hurting the oth challenge is to manage to say anything *not untrue and not unkind*. Instead release or exposition of previously hidden aspects of the self, it requires a of truthful expression.

Extended Essay Answer Question

Compare and contrast the representation of love in this poem and

Extension: Repeat the format of the question above, comparing 'T following Duffy poems: 'Valentine', 'Close', 'Moments of Grace'.

Note

(1) John Donne, 'The Good Morrow', *Songs and Sonnets*

'The Large Cool Store'

Summary

The speaker considers displays of clothing in a store, noticing the
for everyday use, all in dull colours, and the women's nightwear,
textures and provocative designs predominate. He speculates on
differences can be taken as symbols of male attitudes to and expe
women within our culture.

Structure

- The poem consists of four quintains, stanzas each of five line
- The number of syllables per line varies between seven and ni
- An iambic metre underpins the verse, but there are variation
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
sounds in Stanza 1 rhyme with their counterparts in Stanza 3
- There are eleven instances of enjambment in the poem, inclu
1 and 2 and between Stanzas 3 and 4.
- The various degrees of regularity in the stanza form, length o
the observations and speculations shape and structure, whils
enjambment and variations from the dominant metrical patte
the speaker's expression is spontaneous.

Commentary

Stanzas 1 and 2

The scene is set within what appears to be a department store, with variou
The speaker is struck first by the dull colours of most of the items, even th
clearly, there is a limit envisaged as to just how casual the people wearing
wish to be! These clothes, he suggests, mirror the rather circumscribed liv

The enjambment takes us straight through to the second stanza, continuin
colours of the clothes and the work-orientated lives of the working-class c
leave their terraced houses before the sun has risen and so never see much
week. The shirts and trousers are in *heaps*, suggesting that little care has g
attractive display. These are items of clothing for everyday use, bought la
little thought by producers or consumers as to aesthetic aspects. The cont
the nearby displays of *Modes for Night* – the language of the display sign h
ring – is what next impresses itself upon the speaker. These items of ladie
mass produced, the embroidery machine-stitched. The textures are *thin as*
both an attempt to give them a provocative allure and also the cheap quali

Stanzas 3 and 4

Continuing the description of the *Modes for Night*, the speaker highlights t
ironically, based on natural phenomena, whilst the materials are synthetic
name for one such fabric from the 1960s. He also alludes to the revealing
the name given to the kind of very short nightdress worn by the eponymo
controversial 1956 Hollywood film of that name. These nightdresses are s
they had a life of their own, indulging in a particularly feminine and prov

In the middle of Stanza 3, the speaker begins the process of reflection upo
will continue to the end of Stanza 4. He sees the contrast between the dull
sexes, on the one hand, and the flimsy, brightly coloured and revealing ni
other, as symbolic of fundamental aspects of attitudes to women and sex w
considers that they symbolise how *separate and unearthly love is*, though he
abstract generalisation. He moves on to the notion that they reveal the po
– *or what they do, / Or in our young unreal wishes / Seem to be.* The speaker, i
to be getting closer to what he feels is the real insight to be gained from hi
this quoted line must refer to the male dominated culture, the attitudes re
of men. They wish to create images of women which are *separate* from the
existences and, indeed, from any version of reality. These images portray
of desire, the nightwear merely one manifestation of the demand that they
available. This attitude, encouraged by commercial interests, is as *synthet*
nightdresses. It is *natureless in ecstasies*, in that it gives the gratification of
cannot be supported by any true understanding or experience of human n

Active Learning Tasks

'The Large Cool Store' can be read alongside 'Sunny Prestatyn' a
three poems the commercialisation of sex is a prominent theme.

Get into groups of three, and assign one of the three poems to eac
your designated poems for five minutes, and then come together
points:

1) The overall message of each poem, and how they compare
2) The authorial techniques used in each poem to achieve these

'A Study of Reading Habits'

Summary

The speaker relates how, in boyhood and adolescence, he used to enter imaginatively into the fictional world of his choice of reading, seeing the hero figures and, later, the anti-heroes, as embodiments of the person he would like to be. Now, however, he is disenchanted with reading, having come increasingly to identify with the 'losers' in the stories, the mediocre characters on the margins of the action.

Structure

- The poem consists of three sestets, stanzas each of six lines. I distinct phase in the speaker's overall statement.
- The number of syllables per line varies between six and eigh
- There is no fixed metrical pattern to the verse, there being a ' anapaestic feet (~ ~ /).
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are even instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The poem is held together by the regularity of the stanza for whilst the use of enjambment and, as we shall see below, the create a freer form of expression.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The diction in this and the other stanzas is noticeably colloquial, as the spe spirit and outlook of three different phases of his life. Here, in this first st young boy, he found reading to be a consolation for *most things short of sch* childhood, he took pleasure in identifying in his imagination with the tou characters who could be relied upon to use their physical strength to upho wrong.

Stanza 2

In adolescence, it is natural to want to rebel against the established order a parents, teachers and other authority figures. Fiction allowed the speaker the clean-cut guardians of virtue of his boyhood reading, it was the more fiction, horror stories and even pornography which excited his imaginatio development. The language used here with regard to women – *ripping...cl meringues* – suggests that his attitudes were not exactly enlightened, but w down to 'a phase'. He would certainly not have been the only teenager to questionable, imagination where these matters are concerned!

Stanza 3

After the heady excitement of the previous stanza, the tone in the first line subdued, the four monosyllables of the opening unit giving a downbeat fe the poem. In adulthood, the speaker has come to recognise himself not in or even anti-heroes, but in the mediocre 'also-rans' in the stories, the chara to the margins of the action and whose moral deficiencies are highlighted the clear superiority of the hero. Now alcohol, not fiction, is the consolatio on literature, after a lifetime's experience? *Books are a load of crap.* Certainly Larkin quotations.

Debate Prompts

1. Consider the importance of Larkin's comical, colloquial langu think the poem is intended to be genuinely amusing, or woul it?
2. Think about the language used in the closing line, which diffe typical poetic voice. Could this be read as something said by poet?

'As Bad as a Mile'

Summary

The title comes from the old adage 'A miss is as bad as a mile', m
something which misses its target by a small margin is still a miss
apple core thrown towards a waste basket just miss its target, the
goes on to speculate on the origins of failure in general. Where d
start?

Structure

- The poem consists of two tercets, stanzas each of three lines.
- The number of syllables per line varies, as in the following se
- There is no consistently applied metrical scheme.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are three instances of enjambment in the poem, includ
stanzas.
- The poem comprises one sentence.
- The regular rhyme scheme helps keep in check the expressio
line length, lack of regular metre and the use of enjambment,
such order. This tension can be seen to reflect the speaker's c
definition in his life.

Commentary

Stanzas 1 and 2

An apple core thrown towards a waste basket but falling short of its targe
speculating on the source of failed endeavours in general. Using images c
core and then holding the apple prior to eating it as visual symbols, he mu
other disappointments. As mentioned above, many of the structural featu
from the sense of order which only the rhyme provides. The single senten
result in the present to the start of the process, paralleling the idea of track
find the origins of inadequacy.

Debate Prompt

Literary critic Christopher Ricks makes the following judgement

> *'As Bad as a Mile'. Bad title, spot off, unlike the poem which is spo
> shying. Succinct, and asking succinctness of us, as readers and even
> commentators. One sentence, two rhymes, these in threes. An entire
> taking over, an admonitory wisdom that bites off not only exactly ho
> how much it can digest. Read, mark and inwardly digest. (1)*

Discuss how far you agree with this view.

Active Learning Tasks

Meanwhile, Ben Wilkinson sees the choice of fruit as having parti

> *'As Bad as a Mile' is a poem about failure. It takes, as is typical of everyday act of chance and invests within it an existential and revel poem also encourages the reader to go back...to the Fall of Man, the the apple that Eve picked from the Tree of Knowledge. In this respe message seems to centre on a bleak realisation: that all of life's failur or chance, and more to do with a chain of personal and human failur back to Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise. (2)*

Identify two other poems in the collection that use biblical image impact this has on them.

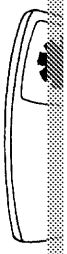
Notes

(1) Christopher Ricks, *Philip Larkin Society*, March 2004

(2) Ben Wilkinson, *Philip Larkin Society*, October 2007

'Ambulances'

Summary



The poem portrays the ambulances which call upon the sick and the dying as also acting as reminders to the bystanders of their own mortality, even as they express their sympathy for the person they see being taken to hospital. The speaker sees the process of dying in terms of the unravelling of bonds which have cohered in life. The certainty of death, the speaker suggests, reduces the significance of all we do.

Structure

- The poem consists of five sestets, stanzas each of six lines.
- Each line consists of eight syllables.
- There is an iambic metrical pattern to the verse.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are sixteen instances of enjambment in the poem, inclu 4 and 5.
- The regularity in the stanza form, length of line, metre and rl the poem's relatively formal tone, as the speaker reflects upo and presents a considered statement on what they represent. enjambment helps give a sense of the movement of the ambu whereby the sick person is taken off to hospital.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The first image compares the ambulances to *confessionals*, this being a refer of confessing one's sins to a priest in the dark, enclosed space of the confe would receive absolution and the opportunity to make a new start. The p an ambulance is much less certain, of course. The ambulances – the plura ubiquity – *thread* their way through built-up areas which are full of health everyday business. Though many look up at the sight and sound of these windows allow for no returning gazes. Neutrally coloured, and decorated the county, they bear an impersonal aspect as they go about their business statements at the end of the stanza extend this theme of detachment, the fa without emotion. The penultimate line suggests the random nature of acc emphasises the relentless, unavoidable nature of sickness and death. We r any time; eventually, that possibility will become a certainty.

Stanza 2

The speaker's observations now turn towards the bystanders who witness a s into one of the ambulances. The image of the *children strewn on steps* is unsett resemble that of victims of some accident or disaster. The women are getting passing *smells of different dinners*, which symbolise the daily rituals that we tak unable to continue them. The bystanders see the contrast between the pallor the stretcher blankets, blood being deficient in the first and yet, ironically, evo inanimate material. The mention of the sick person being *stowed* in the ambu impersonality of the process and carries with it the connotation of a dead boc of a mortuary.

Stanza 3

The onlookers, the speaker suggests, *sense the solving emptiness / That lies just* reference, the suggestion being that they are suddenly made aware of our c inevitability of death is the reality which underpins all human activity, the i ultimate answer to all questions as to the meaning of the lives we lead. The repeated *and* in the fourth line of the stanza create a sense of time being mo onlookers stare in recognition and acknowledgment of their own unavoidal sympathy directed at the sick person are, in reality, displaced manifestation

Stanzas 4 and 5

In these final two stanzas, linked by enjambment, we are, as it were, taken i negative diction in the early part of Stanza 4 – *deadened...loss...end* – has the c the end of a life, whilst other terms suggest the physical movements involv *away...shut...Round.* In the second part of the sentence, the grammatical stru enjambment and the complex nature of the diction – *cohere...unique random b* of human consciousness, before the relatively simple resolution of *At last be* dying in such circumstances is portrayed as an essentially lonely experience consolations of loving friends and family, being *Unreachable inside a room / T* normal everyday life did not wish to be touched by this mobile harbinger o

Active Learning Tasks

As David Timms points out, the poem *employs virtually no similes lucid and unencumbered: death seems to defy figurative expressions to c manipulation of language can have more impact than the fact itself (1).*

Identify the few uses of figurative imagery within the poem, and they either support or oppose Timms' argument.

Notes

(1) David Timms, *Philip Larkin*

'The Importance of Elsewhere'

Summary

The speaker relates how, when in Ireland, he gradually adjusted
general environment, accepting his identity as an outsider. Back
alienation from his own society are much less comfortable.

Structure

- The poem consists of three quatrains, stanzas each of four lin
- There are ten syllables in each line, with the exception of the
has twelve, and the third line of Stanza 2, which has nine.
- There is a basic iambic metrical pattern to the verse, though t
consistency.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
there are some half-rhymes, rather than full rhymes, as for in
went; establishments / existence.
- There are three instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The regularity provided by the stanza form, length of line, m
for a poem which provides a considered reflection upon an e
attempting to give the impression of spontaneous thought en

Commentary

Stanza 1

The speaker, in alluding to his former life in Ireland, makes the distinction
since it was not home and his awareness of being an outsider, which was na
In fact, the very fact of his speaking with a different accent, we learn, prov
process of being accepted by the locals.

Stanza 2

The focus in this stanza is on the speaker's recollection of how the distinct
the physical environment, its smells, its sounds – was not, in itself, a probl
status was *not unworkable*. We get the impression that this inevitable degr
adopted culture and surroundings was something he positively embraced

Stanza 3

A feeling of being an outsider in one's own native society and culture is a
speaker admits here. When in England, a sense of alienation cannot be ex
be a visitor from another part of the world. Such a sense of difference fro
own country has its basis in personal, rather than national, factors and iss
less comfortable to be in than that of an Englishman in Ireland. The dictio
quite formal – *customs and establishments...underwrites my existence* – and ca
a more cautious approach to life when back in England, after the paradoxi
being the outsider in Ireland.

Debate Prompts

1. What specific events in England do you think might have led
   from his nation at the time of writing?
2. How genuine do the speaker's memories of Ireland seem? M
   idealising the past as he finds the present so painful?

Note

(1) Terry Whalen, *The Antigonish Review, 107,* **http://www.antigonishreview.com**

'Sunny Prestatyn'

Summary

The main focus of the poem is a poster advertising the attractions of Prestatyn, in North Wales. The poster features an attractive gi in a swimsuit. Shortly after being pasted on its hoarding, the poster has been vandalised, the image of the girl defaced with obscene additions and hacked through with a knife. Later, the paper is ripped so that only parts of the original advertisement ar visible. Another poster takes its place, one publicising a cancer charity.

Structure

- The poem consists of three octaves, stanzas each of eight line
- The number of syllables per line varies between four and eight, in no particular pattern.
- There is no fixed metrical scheme.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are fifteen instances of enjambment in the poem, inclu 1 and 2.
- The sentence which begins in the second line of Stanza 2 is c fourth line of Stanza 3.
- The regularity of stanza form and rhyme gives shape to the e variation of line length, lack of metrical pattern and frequent to the colloquial diction), strains away from such order. This the tension between the violence done to the poster and the c measured observations.

Commentary

Stanza 1

In this opening stanza, the speaker describes the poster, which advertises Prestatyn as a holiday resort – in reality not the most exotic or sunny of lo the design is the photographic image of a girl kneeling upon a beach. The allure of her attitude and pose, as she *laughs* her invitation to join her at th *tautened white satin*, stretched tightly over her limbs, whilst even the backg of the erotic charge, the *hunk of coast* and *Hotel with palms* both appearing c *her thighs* and *breast lifting arms*, like two rather sleazy male admirers. Thr variation in the length of lines and the use of enjambment contribute to an movement and stretching, particularly in the latter half of the stanza.

Stanza 2

In contrast to the eroticism which suffuses the description of the poster in girl's image reflects the misogynistic violence of the troubled perpetrators the diction in the first line, where we are told that *she was slapped up one da* of the person who pasted up the poster can be seen as a mild forerunner o follow. This picturing of the delights of a summer holiday was put up in M by raw weather, winter's final flourish. The obscene additions to the imag evidence of adolescent immaturity but deliberate and repeated attempts t symbolic rape.

Stanza 3

The enjambment takes us to the detail of the signature of one of the perpet nickname contains, perhaps, a grimly ironic suggestion of his deficiency in attributes, which leads him to channel his self-consciousness and feelings actions. The stabbing of the image and the targeting of the girl's smile pro dimension of the seething anger which the image has aroused. The short, line expresses the speaker's considered verdict on and interpretation of th *good for this life*. The girl's physical perfection and the inherent suggestion attainable are too much to cope with for the males who view her. The ima desire, whilst, in reality, offering only an illusory promise of sexual satisfa poster represents a kind of male retribution on this sexual provocation.

Soon, the destruction of the idealised image is almost complete, with only visible in the tattered remains. The advertisement for the perfect holiday attractions of the female body so blatantly, has now been replaced by one a cancer charity. The ironic juxtaposition could not be clearer.

Active Learning Tasks

The language used in 'Sunny Prestatyn' ensured that it would be Larkin himself remarked that *some people think it was intended to be intended to be horrific. I think it was intended to be both* (1). The anon *Whitsun Weddings* collection in The Guardian newspaper in Febru enthusiastic about this poem:

> *Its subject matter is extremely crude (though not likely to shock in 19 the verbal juxtapositions, the rhythm, and the total structure, it has makes it superb minor art. Is it comic, tragic, erotic, cynical, sad, an sympathetic? – and how many ideas are suggested by its last line? (*

Certain reservations remain, however, about the attitudes implici following comments by Janice Rossen:

The defacing of the poster may only attack a poster, and not the girl s seeks to punish and humiliate her image in pointedly sexual terms...T sadistic, in asserting power over the woman, and grotesque – at the l intended to satisfy an urge for revenge. He [Larkin] seems to justify women by suggesting that access to the woman is something men ha deprived of; therefore, she is fair game. The viewers of the intended deface it partly as a means of revenge for deprivation (holidays, like and partly as a means of taking up the covert sexual invitation. The response to the photographic image of the woman is violent in part b unattainable in the flesh, and the men resent her attempts to use sex appears to mock them, their only defence is to use fantasies of rape a weapon against her, in order to destroy her beauty and thus negate t envy. (3)

Write a short explanation (no more than one paragraph) of which why. You should include evidence from the text in your respons

Notes

(1) Philip Larkin, Introduction to a reading of *The Whitsun Weddings* collection, T

(2) *Guardian*, 28.02.64

(3) Janice Rossen, *Philip Larkin: His Life's Work*

'First Sight'

Summary

Lambs which are born in early springtime, when there is still snow on the ground, are seen as vulnerable creatures encountering a hostile environment. The earth is, however, on the verge of its annual renewal and the imminent new season of growth will come as a shock and a revelation to them.

Structure

- The poem consists of two stanzas, each of seven lines.
- Each line contains seven syllables, with the exception of the seco each of which has eight. The third and fourth syllables in *immea* Stanza 2 would, in effect, be overlooked in reading, so making t
- The metrical situation is quite complex.
  Most of the lines – the first six lines of Stanza 1 and lines 1, 3 and contain four stressed syllables in a pattern of two trochaic feet (/ ~

  The second and fifth lines of Stanza 2 are made up of four iamb

  The fourth line (with its elided syllables in *immeasurable*) has a t (/ ~ ~) and an iamb:

  / ~ / ~ ~ ~ /

  Earth's immeasurable surprise

  The final line of Stanza 1 features an anapaest (~ ~ /), followed b

  ~ ~ / ~ / ~ /

  Is a wretched width of cold

  The final line of Stanza 2 has a dactyl, followed by two iambic fe

  / ~ ~ ~ / ~ /

  Utterly unlike the snow
- The rhyme scheme links the two stanzas in the following patter
- There are six examples of enjambment in the poem.
- Sixty-two of the poem's seventy-nine words are monosyllables.
- There is a tension within the poem between the insistent nature of t dominant pattern. Similarly, the pattern of each stanza – comprisin a three-line one – is undermined somewhat by the use of enjambme to reflect the opposition between the negative images of the lambs' promise of the imminent spring growth which will break the hold o

Commentary

Stanza 1

The vulnerability of the new-born lambs to the beginning of winter is emphasised and *stumbling* of the lambs is their response to the *snow*, the *sunless glare* and *a wre* in the number of stressed syllables (from four to three) in the final line of the stan this point. There is a suggestion of anthropomorphism in the portrayal of the situ the verbs *learn* and *know* are ascribed – were being betrayed by the *vast unwelcom* hostility, like child refugees in an unsympathetic, alien land. The predominance stanza complements both the child-like aspects of the lambs and the unvarying b

Stanza 2

The realistic detail of the lambs' gathering beside the ewe, searching for warmth followed by the image of *Earth's immeasurable surprise*. The image itself is a surpr predominantly monosyllabic diction, the syllables in *immeasurable* lending an imp power. The deviation in this line from the dominant metrical scheme sets it apar being challenged by this force. The isolated iambic tetrameter in line five allows image, its monosyllables spelling out the enormity of the imminent change, whic comprehension of creatures who have known only dreariness and cold. Again t line are followed by just three in the final line, enhancing the sense of wonder an of changing seasons. The rhyming couplets, with the repeated *a* rhyme, and the r contribute to a sense of finality about both the poem and winter itself.

Active Learning Tasks

Larkin's sympathy with animals has already been noted in the discuss Kiddies'.

Write some brief notes comparing Larkin's use of language and form in ' for the Kiddies'.

Note

(1) Philip Larkin, 'At Grass', *Collected Poems*

'Dockery and Son'

Summary

The speaker tells how, while visiting his old college, he learned from
contemporary, Dockery, was now a student there. On his return jou
reflects upon this information. He is struck by the contrast between
early age, to be a father and his own childless bachelor state. He goe
differences in the lives we lead come about. He dismisses the idea of
particular direction, believing that more random factors are at work.
that, however varied might be the lives individuals lead, old age and

Structure

- The poem consists of six octaves, stanzas each of eight lines.
- Most of the lines of the poem contain ten syllables, though so
fifth line of the final stanza, for example, has just seven syllab
comprising a complete sentence – to stand out.
- There is a basic iambic metre underpinning the verse (iambic
pattern is not applied with total consistency.
- The rhyme scheme is not uniform throughout the poem. The
each stanza taken separately:

  Stanza 1: ababcdcd

  Stanza 2: ababcddc

  Stanza 3: abbacdcd

  Stanza 4: abcaadcbd

  Stanzas 5 and 6: abbcaddc
- There are twenty-five instances of enjambment in the poem,
Stanzas 2 and 3; Stanzas 3 and 4; 4 and 5 and, finally, 5 and 6
- The regular stanza form and the iambic pentameter contribute
reflective tone, while the frequent use of enjambment, includi
the changing pattern of rhyme, allow for a sense of both physi
spontaneous thought. The repeated rhyme scheme in the fina
to a certain extent, from the rest of the poem, as the speaker's t
definite shape in this concluding phase of the poem.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The poem opens with the quoted speech of the Dean to the speaker, who i
old college. In his biography of Larkin (1), Richard Bradford writes that th
poet's visit to Oxford in March 1962 to attend a funeral. The passing refer
the light of the final stanza, be seen as an early introduction to its presence
statement. The Dean's revelation about Dockery's son occurs amidst some
into memories of drunken misdemeanours which led to the speaker and f
before, presumably, this same Dean, many years ago. The speaker's tone
remembering such youthful indiscretions. When he attempts to enter his
opening of the following stanza, that it is locked. One can only go so far o
past, it seems.

Stanza 2

The isolation of the word *Locked* at the start of this stanza gives it particula
mind the momentary gap between the action of trying the door and the re
long vowel sounds in the rest of the opening line suggest the expanse of la
at the start of the second line reproduce the chiming of the *known bell.* The
disappointment, as such visits to one's 'alma mater' often are, the speaker
Dean's reception wasn't as warm as it might have been. The alliteration a
line help give the sense of the train journey beginning, with the enjambme
enhancing this feeling of movement. Only now, as he is on his way back l
to reflect upon the Dean's mention of Dockery's son. The internal exclama
calculations as to dates and ages give the impression of the stream of the s
attempts to come to terms with what he has heard. The use of the word *g*
impersonal feel, the word carrying with it connotations of biblical referenc

Stanza 3

The enjambment continues the speaker's questioning as to the exact identi
a reference to another contemporary who was killed, presumably in the w
and the lapse into sleep in the middle of the stanza indicate that the speak
conclusion in his deliberations. The idea of the students from the same er
later life is then developed in the image at the end of the stanza, where the
Joining and parting lines of the railway track, with enjambment again playi
creation of the effect.

Stanza 4

Shining down on the railway lines is *a strong / Unhindered moon*, a symbol, pe
which exists beyond the dimensions of space and time, putting the question
of eternity. The speaker renews his reflections on Dockery, being made awar
life – *no son, no wife, / No house or land* – is to that of a man who now has an ad
his generation who have built firm ties based on home and family. He tries t
feels is the truth or lesson at the heart of such disparities. The grammar in the
reflects the stop/start nature of the speaker's thought processes at this junctur
himself, only to dismiss it before it has been articulated in full.

Stanza 5

The speaker's thoughts now focus on Dockery's becoming a father at such
he assumes signals a definite, confident choice on the part of the latter. Th
genuinely find it hard to understand this decision, seeing it as necessarily
Dockery's supposed notion of *increase.* A T Tolley suggests, Larkin may h
from his reading of Virginia Woolf:

> *The conception of marriage and an heir as dilution is an unusual one. It see
> and Son', a dilution of identity. The metaphor is encountered, in associatio
> contemplations, in a book that Larkin must certainly have known in his yo
> the Lighthouse'. Lily Briscoe, the artist who did not marry, reflects: 'she n
> not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution.' (2)*

This leads to the more general question of the origin of such *Innate assump*
decisions we make to take our lives in a particular direction. The speaker
what is involved is, in fact, a conscious choice, based upon self-knowledge

images of doors which *warp tight shut* to express the rapid closing down o to such rational thinking, the short monosyllables giving an onomatopoeic prefers the vaguer notions of *a style / Our lives bring with them* and *habit* to unconsidered manner in which we drift into a particular way of living wh and leave us with no further room for manoeuvre.

Stanza 6

Continuing this reflection on the illusion of choice, the speaker compares the on a particular shape or direction to, in retrospect, *sand-clouds, thick and close,* clarity in the pattern of choice. The process is more random than we like to i fatherhood to Dockery and an accusing absence of ties for the speaker. The form of general truths, the shorter length of the fifth line isolating and foregr *boredom, then fear.* It is as if the speaker is consoling himself with the idea tha little importance when viewed in the context of common and inescapable de pointlessness, and even helplessness, in the face of forces beyond our unders

Debate Prompts

1. Since the poem deals with a certain sense of personal failure, alongside the following poems from the collection:
   - 'Mr Bleaney'
   - 'Home is So Sad'
   - 'A Study of Reading Habits'
   - 'As Bad as a Mile'.
   - 'The Importance of Elsewhere'

   Choosing one of these poems, discuss as a group how it com 'Dockery and Son' with regard to the themes of failure and d

2. Steve Clark sees an important gender dimension to the poem term *dilution* when applied to fatherhood:

   > *Larkin is drawing on a venerable tradition here, dating back to expenditure as permanent loss or 'dilution'. One notices how pa the issue of reproduction is discussed in terms of father and son, and mother entirely elided...the question why there is no woman does not arise. (3)*

   Do you think that Larkin's poem, to any extent, reinforces th in a patriarchal society? Discuss with a partner.

Notes

(1) Richard Bradford, *First Boredom, Then Fear: The Life of Philip Larkin*
(2) A T Tolley, *Larkin at Work*
(3) Steve Clark, 'Larkin's Sexual Politics', in Stephen Regan (ed.), *Philip Larkin*

'Ignorance'

Summary

The speaker expresses a sense of puzzlement at the partial, incomplete nature of our grasp of the bigger issues in life, including the very purpose of existence, whilst the natural world, including our bodies, is driven by internal mechanisms through the various stages of life.

Structure

- The poem consists of three quintains, stanzas each of five lines.
- In terms of the number of syllables per line, the pattern within the poem is as follows: 10; 8; 10; 6; 4; 11; 8; 11; 6; 4; 9; 9; 11; 6; 4. Thus, in each stanza, three longer lines are followed by shorter fourth and fifth lines, with six and four syllables respectively. This pattern gives the final two lines in each stanza a somewhat anti-climactic feel.
- There is a basic iambic metre underpinning the poem, but th pattern.
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are just three instances of enjambment in the poem.
- As indicated above, the reduction in the length of the lines at tends to give a sense of 'tailing off' in each case, as if the spea to the observations made in the first three lines.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The use of ellipsis in the stanza – with the *It is* excluded so that there is no gives a degree of spontaneity to the speaker's observations, as if he were t absolute nature of the negative forms *nothing* and *never* and the abstract co combine to provide the widest possible scope to the speaker's reflections. make certain and definitive judgements on *what is true or right or real,* as ev accompanied by some moderating addition which acknowledges the limit most basic questions.

Stanza 2

The elliptical opening echoes that of the previous stanza, as if the thought
no answers being forthcoming. The phrase *the way things work* in the first
the context of the rest of the poem we can take it as referring to natural life
body. In contrast to the provisional and partial nature of human knowled
defined purpose and direction in the instinctive and genetically-programm
organisms. Finding sustenance, maximising physical traits, reproducing a
the punctual spread of seed – and the adaptation to the environment, are feat
world, which does not allow itself to be distracted by questions of purpos
four monosyllabic words, gives the impression that he is, for the moment,
this disparity between human consciousness and the rest of the natural w

Stanza 3

One particular irony of this situation is that our physical selves, our bodie
process. While we *spend all our life on imprecisions*, the flesh that encloses t
our being is always obeying pre-determined and precise instructions whic
physical existence, including our decline and eventual death. The reason
at all is, however, impossible for us to discover. Again, the shortened fina
diction, express only more of the pervasive mixture of wonder, bafflemen

Extended Essay Answer Question

Perhaps the poem in the collection that this most resembles is 'No
being almost overwhelmed by the contemplation of death being c

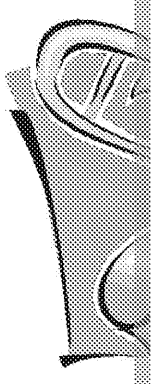
Compare and contrast the representation of life, death and morta

Extension: Repeat the question, this time using one of the poems
than another poem from *The Whitsun Weddings*.

'Reference Back'

Summary

The speaker is evidently spending time with a parent, more out of a sense of duty than anything. As he plays jazz records, the parent calls out to express his/her liking of a particular track. The remark is made as a way of trying to establish a rapport but, to the speaker, it merely emphasises the uneasy nature of the relationship between the pair. Looking back to the early stages of such a relationship can suggest that things might have been different, but such a perspective is only available when it is too late to change the situation.



Structure

- The poem consists of three stanzas, each of different length. six lines, the second has nine lines and the third seven.
- The number of syllables per line varies from seven to thirtee
- There is no regular metrical pattern.
- The rhyme scheme, based on couplets, is unusual for Larkin. couplet which bridges a stanza break and a number of half-rh thus: aabbcc ddeeffggi ijjkkll.
- There are fourteen instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The loose structure, including, for Larkin, the unusual featur length, complements the poem's expression of discord and d use of enjambment suggests both the flow of the chords of m time which are a major theme of the poem.

Commentary

Stanza 1

Given the context of the poem as a whole, we can assume that the words o opening line are those of a parent, probably a mother, to an adult offsprin outlook of the latter are quite complex. He is, by his own admission, *wasti* on a visit which he realises his mother *Looked so much forward to*. The repe *unsatisfactory* underlines the impression that, whatever the mother might f a sense of duty, rather than because he actively enjoys her company. His f general discontent extend to the house in general. The relationship is clea perspective, but the fact that he **does** visit suggests that he at least acknow himself and his mother, who might herself be only too conscious of the *un* between them. The problem would seem to be a lack of communication, r feeling as such. We can imagine that the mother's calling out to express h example of **his** music is an attempt on her part to initiate a conversation a exists between them.

Stanza 2

The speaker has a clear recollection of the moment, being able to recall the
a jazz classic recorded by Joe 'King' Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. The music
to represent a much-cherished imaginative outlet for this unhappy person
otherwise so joyless. He notes the irony of this music recorded in 1923 no
From your unsatisfactory age / To my unsatisfactory prime. Although the spea
efforts in trying to create some common ground between them, he appear
respond in kind, perhaps feeling that the gap between them is too large fo
their re-establishing a genuine rapport.

Stanza 3

The speaker now reflects upon his experience of a seemingly unbridgeable
another, a parent whom he undoubtedly loves, in his own way, but in wh
a mixture of awkwardness, guilt and resentment. His generalised comme
ability to look back over distances of time – *the long perspectives / Open at e*
sit comfortably with us. We are made aware of how different situations w
might have progressed in a more positive fashion had we behaved in a pa
is that, by the time we are able to recognise this potential for change, it is t

Debate Prompt
Based on your reading of the poem, do you expect the speaker to
to build a *sudden bridge* between them?

Active Learning Tasks
We can compare this poem to another in the collection, 'Talking i
map on the theme of love and separation in these poems, incorpo

Extension: Repeat the task, using one of the following poems fro
'Talking in Bed': 'Valentine', 'Close', 'Moments of Grace'.

'Wild Oats'

Summary

The speaker relates how, some twenty years ago, he met two girls, one of whom was particularly attractive. However, he embarked on a relationship with the other, plainer one – *her friend in specs* – with whom he felt comfortable. They met up in various locations over a seven-year period, whilst he saw the other, attractive girl only twice during that time. The relationship ended eventually, due, he acknowledges, to his own failings. He confesses that he still keeps two photographs of the attractive girl in his wallet – *Unlucky charms, perhaps*.

The title of the poem comes from the phrase *sowing one's wild oats* indulgence, particularly in the area of sex. It is clear that the title case.

Structure

- The poem consists of three octaves, stanzas each of eight line
- The number of syllables per line varies between six and ten,
- There is no fixed metrical scheme.
- There is no rhyme scheme in the poem.
- There are thirteen instances of enjambment.
- The sentence which begins in the fifth line of Stanza 1 is com of Stanza 2.
- The loose structuring of the poem, allied to the use of colloqu anecdotal tone.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The poem opens with the speaker in anecdotal mode, telling of the two gi ago. One of them, the *bosomy English rose*, is noticeably attractive, but he f *in specs*. He recalls that *Faces in those days sparked / The whole shooting-matc* the superficiality of the judgements made by men of his generation on wo a view of male-female relationships as a kind of sport, a pretty girl as muc shooting range. Despite the obvious attractions of the bosomy one, he opt a girlfriend/partner.

Stanza 2

In this stanza, the speaker moves on to give us details of the subsequent d relationship. He is quite precise as to the impressive number of letters wri impressive price of the engagement ring he bought, his evident relief at ge relationship not doing him a great deal of credit. They met in the pleasant *cathedral cities*, the remark that their visits were *Unknown to the clergy* being not only of their not being believers but that they slept together in those v speaker's self-deprecating nature and mood that he admits that, on the tw attractive girl after that, his presence provoked involuntary laughter from

Stanza 3

This turning of irony against himself is also evident in the account of the e girlfriend, he being all too ready to accept what we can imagine was large deficiencies. His calm acknowledgement that it was *useful to get that learnt* considerable hurt he still feels. The poem ends with his admission that he photographs of the *bosomy rose*, reminders of the girl he didn't approach, t perhaps, unattainable beauty preserved for ever. The fact that he refers to *charms* suggests that his later forays into the world of romance were not p

Debate Prompts

1. Why do you think the speaker opts for the second girl? Is he to approach the *beauty*?

2. In his biography of Larkin, Richard Bradford informs us tha poet's actual relationship with Ruth Bowman, whom he firs first post as a librarian in Wellington, Shropshire and she wa engaged in 1948 but the relationship broke up before they co commitment. The real life counterpart of the *bosomy rose* wa be the subject of semi-serious fantasies in Larkin's letters at t Kingsley Amis. Bradford finds the poem itself interesting fo speaker which, as in many of his poems, is based upon aspe outlook which emerged in his early adulthood, rather than c mature years:

> *The poem tells us much, principally that the figure he felt hi 1940s would soon be the abiding influence for its public, lite most celebrated poems he uses the artefact in much the same letters. There is the confident openness interweaved with m embarrassing personal detail, and then the focus will shift a general significance or, just as likely, prevailing insignifican*

Do you think it is important that the poem reflects an aspe personal life? Does this give the poem greater impact/rele

Notes

(1) Richard Bradford, *First Boredom, Then Fear: The Life of Philip Larkin*

'Essential Beauty'

Summary

The subject of the poem is advertising, specifically the huge hoardings which exist in towns and cities. The speaker sees them as presenting us with idealised images of life which are far removed from the street-level realities of the lives of the people they are aimed at. Our collective desires for material comfort and health are appealed to and exploited, as well as our nostalgic longings for the past. The final image featured is of a beautiful woman on an advertisement for a brand of cigarettes, her sexual allure contrasting with the dying smokers who look up to meet h gaze.

Structure

- The poem consists of two stanzas, each of sixteen lines.
- In most of the lines there are ten syllables, though a handful l The penultimate line in each stanza has just six syllables.
- The poem has a basic iambic metre (iambic pentameter), thou total consistency.
- The rhyme scheme in each of the stanzas, taken separately, is
- There are twenty-three instances of enjambment in the poem the stanzas.
- The long stanzas and the iambic pentameter give scope to an topic, the tone being measured and considered. The frequen a sense of movement and progression, reflecting the smooth advertisements themselves.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The long vowel sounds and the iambic metre contribute to an impression advertising hoardings in the first line. The use of the word *block* in the sec with *giant loaves,* gives an early hint at the power of these displays, which realities of everyday life, including *graves* and *slums,* with images and lang *be*. The use of the word *groves* in the fifth line is interesting, this being a te gardening to describe a tree-lined avenue which leads the eye to a focal po classical contexts, this focal point is usually the statue of a Greek or Roma commercialised culture, the eye of the potential consumer is led to the ima focus of worship in the new religion of consumerism. The use of enjambn smooth, relentlessly persuasive appeal of the images, whilst the rhyming c and 7 captures perfectly the incongruity between reality and ideal.

Not only is our desire for material possessions appealed to but a complete fantasy world, attributed to a single product. The word *stretches*, used in l of the family members in the advertisement for a beef cube, connotes the y the consumers towards some better, indeed perfect, way of living. The ad carefully constructed, the precise positions of each component of the vario calculated and applied for maximum impact and appeal. The cosy interio advertisements contrast with *the rained-on streets and squares* at ground lev

Stanza 2

The word *dominate* in the opening line of the stanza, as part of the sentence
Stanza 1, again suggests the power and influence of this material, in both p
terms. The repeated term *pure* in lines 2 and 3 has echoes of the work of tl
(c.428–c.348 BC), who saw the world and all we know of it, both in materi
imperfect embodiments of perfect counterparts which exist in another dim
images therefore portray a version of life which is at odds with the flawed

The closing phase of the poem presents us, in one long and grammatically co
ironic contrasts between this unattainable ideal and the bleakness of ordinar
the idyllic thatched pub, with its attractive, healthy clientele, and *the boy puki*
Larkin's skilful use of colloquial language being particularly effective here. T
surreal note in the title of *Granny Graveclothes' Tea,* a satirical allusion to the c
advertising people of our selective nostalgia for a sanitised version of the pa
real pensioner, whose life might well be very different from the sentimentali
the marketing of the product. The third and final contrast is that between a v
appears on an advertisement for a brand of cigarettes, and the dying smoker
ruined by indulging in their habit or addiction. The grammar and diction be
these concluding lines, as if to suggest the mesmerising appeal of the woma
towards them through some dappled park / As if on water. This goddess-like figu
even love, but will never, of course, step out of the unreal world she inhabits

Extended Essay Answer Question

The other poem in the collection which 'Essential Beauty' echoes
Prestatyn'. Both poems focus upon advertising material and the
versions of life portrayed in such material and the experiences of
Rossen makes interesting comparison between these images:

> *The women in 'Essential Beauty' and 'Sunny Prestatyn' represent a*
> *distanced version of femininity. Using their sexual powers for a spe*
> *promise themselves through the medium of the product they represent*
> *girls, because photography reproduces them faithfully, and yet unrea*
> *artfully glamorised and because they exist only in a photograph. The*
> *kind of metaphor for not being able to communicate with or touch a*
> *effect these women have on the men who behold them is, therefore, f*
> *fail to deliver on their promises, and never appear in the flesh. More*
> *Beauty' is decadent, beautiful harbinger of death...The description su*
> *situation, where the smokers and the girl in the advertisement both p*
> *unfulfilling relationship. She requires adoration from them, and is se*
> *deliver on her promises (offering a cigarette is a poor substitute for se*
> *to break from her. (1)*

Based on your own reading of these poems, and that of the critic
contrast Larkin's representation of illusion/reality in the two poe

Extension: Now compare the representation of illusion/reality in
poems above and a Duffy poem of your choice from the followin
'Crush', 'Nostalgia'.

Note

(1) Janice Rossen, *Philip Larkin: His Life's Work*

'Send No Money'

Summary

The speaker recalls that, as a young man, he asked the personifie
the patterns which underpin human life. He would prefer to hav
than participating in it as such. Impressed by his request, Time a
and why things happen. Now, in middle age, the speaker has, it
share of setbacks and disappointments. He sees no pattern or tru
occurrences. He feels his youthful desire to perceive a pattern in
concept of truth being dismissed as bogus and deceptive.

The title of the poem is derived from the wording found in maga
services or products for which exaggerated claims are often made
try out before purchasing.

Structure

- The poem consists of three octaves, stanzas each of eight line
- The number of syllables per line varies from five to nine, in n
- Though there is not a strict metrical scheme applied consiste
stressed syllables. The organisation of unstressed syllables v
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are nine instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The insistent effects of the stressed syllables in each line com
a poem which is essentially about learning from the hammer

Commentary

Stanza 1

Time is personified as a kind of rotund authority figure who wears a fob w
belly, complete, no doubt with a fob watch, in keeping with his identity an
him to show him the underlying truths and principles to life. Whilst he sa
to have a bash, wanting to experience life to the full themselves, he preferre
uninvolved observer, such as a writer might choose to take. Doing and ob
far as he was concerned. The words *bash* and *clash,* though used figurative
diction which has connotations of violence within the poem.

Stanza 2

The figure of Time was only too happy to accede to the speaker's request,
patronising fashion as *Boy* and urging him to observe the patterns made b
is violence in the injunction to *watch the hail / Of occurrence clobber life out to*
language should, perhaps, have alerted the speaker's younger self to the h
elements in what he was about to witness, but he was plainly too idealistic
to know better.

Now, in middle age, the speaker shows no such enthusiasm for finding ou
about life. He refers to his face as a *bestial visor, bent in / By the blows of wh*
violent diction continues, the image representing the effect on the speaker
has endured and which reveal no pattern or purpose. Life, it is now appa
series of quite random disappointments and failures, which leave their ma
of recompense. In retrospect, he regards his youthful self as having waste
secrets and patterns. The concept of truth is compared disparagingly as *th*
advertisement, something which, if it exists, cannot be handed on from one
truss, it is used to support a weakness and it may or may not live up to all

Debate Prompt

The young man in the first two stanzas of 'Send No Money' sees h
his contemporaries in his desire to achieve insights into life rathe

Discuss the representation of the theme of isolation in this and on

Notes

(1) Philip Larkin, 'Reasons for Attendance', *Collected Poems*

'Afternoons'

Summary

The speaker describes the young mothers who gather with their children at the recreation ground. He imagines aspects of their backgrounds – their homes and husbands. He sees them as having left behind the romance that went with courtship. Now they are no longer the focal point of their own lives.

Structure

- The poem consists of three octaves, stanzas each of eight lines.
- The number of syllables per line varies from five to eight, in no particular pattern.
- The verse comprises mostly iambic (~ /) and anapaestic (~ ~ /) feet, though there are some trochees (/ ~).
- There is no rhyme scheme.
- There are twelve instances of enjambment, including the link
- The sentence which starts in the first line of Stanza 2 conclud
- Only four of the lines include internal punctuation.
- The relatively unstructured nature of the verse, together with enjambment, contributes to a sense of movement within the p the relentless passage of time.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The setting is a recreation ground at the end of summer, the change in the autumn underpinning the theme of the cyclical nature of life, as the mothe and devote their energies to their offspring. The specific time is afternoon fill for the young mothers between preparing midday and evening meals f of the mothers allows *the setting free* of their children, almost as if they wer Overall, a sense of fatigue and passivity pervades the stanza.

Stanza 2

The speaker now imagines the backgrounds of these mothers. They migh working class, their husbands being engaged in skilled trades and thus ea home, the daily round of washing awaits, while their respective wedding remembered in the photographs in the album *lying near the television*, the l doubt, of entertainment for themselves and their husbands. The wind is b of their *courting-places,* as if to erase the memory of this youthful and, perh their lives.

There is a younger generation of young lovers who frequent the same plac
school. The women at the recreation ground themselves perhaps married
late teens or early twenties, marrying their first and only boyfriends. The
applied to the children capture their demanding nature, whilst the *acorns* t
though the fact that they are *unripe* suggests that things are happening too
natural rhythms of life. The physical beauty of the mothers is itself in decl
they are no longer the central focus of their lives, as was the case not so m
courtship seem so distant, though they may have been just a few short yea
a short time, the women seem to be caught up in a relentless and not parti
change which they are powerless to alter or arrest.

Active Learning Tasks

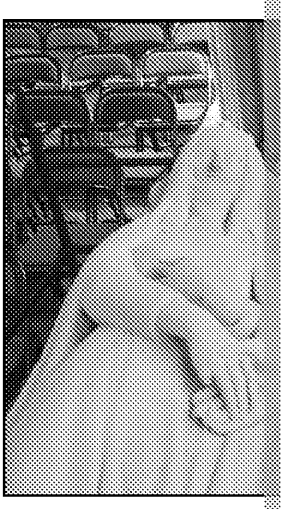
Both this poem and 'The Whitsun Weddings' focus on the differin
experience.

For each poem, construct a mind map about Larkin's presentatio
mind map some points about one of Duffy's poems from *Mean Ti*
include 'Havisham', 'Disgrace', and 'Never Go Back').

'An Arundel Tomb'

Summary

The subject and focus of the poem is the fourteenth-century tomb of the Earl and Countess of Arundel in Chichester Cathedral. The speaker notices a detail in the stone effigies of the pair – they are holding hands. Over the centuries, this stone gesture has come to symbolise for succeeding generations not only the faithfulness of the couple but the survival of love itself. Though the speaker is sympathetic to this urge to believe in the incorruptible nature of love, the conclusion of the poem suggests he believes this idea to be illusory.



The effigy in Chicheste
poem

Structure

- The poem consists of seven sestets, stanzas each of six lines.
- There are eight syllables in each line, with the exception of th
has just seven.
- There is an underlying iambic metrical pattern to the verse (i
tetrameter), though this is not applied consistently throughou
- Taking each stanza separately, the rhyme scheme in each is a
- There are twenty-four instances of enjambment in the poem.
- The regularity in terms of stanza form, metre and rhyme con
measured tone, whilst the frequent use of enjambment helps
and spontaneity to the speaker's observations.

Commentary

Stanza 1

The speaker addresses the reader as if both were there, looking at the four
Earl and Countess of Arundel. In the context of the poem as a whole the v
carry more than the more obvious meaning relating to their horizontal pos
misrepresentation of the truth. Following the somewhat archaic language
element of rigidity implicit in the references to *jointed armour* and *stiffened*
under their feet seems to come as a shock to the speaker, who can only desc
of the absurd. He appears unsure as to how to react to what he sees.

Stanza 2

The speaker's tone and language is quite academic and detached in the fir
before once more he is distracted, noticing, *with a sharp tender shock,* that th
effigy, holding hands. You may be interested to know that Larkin is actua
earl's **right-hand** gauntlet which is held in the left in the actual Arundel T
the right hand of the countess.

Stanza 3

A degree of irony implicit in this detail is evident to the speaker, who feels
would not have imagined that this gesture in stone would have survived s
assumes, it was originally an idea *thrown off* without undue thought. Onc
to the position of the earl and countess, juxtaposed with the phrase *faithfu*
the speaker is in the process of setting up an opposition between the imag
on the tomb, on the one hand, and the relevance of the concept to their act
the other.

Stanza 4

The speaker dwells further on the incongruity between the static, unchangi
and the social changes which have taken place since the fourteenth century,
after the era of the couple. The notion of stasis co-existing with change is ca
supine stationary voyage. Later visitors would come to look at the tomb, with
read the Latin inscriptions which surround it. For them, the clasped hands
detail of the tomb, not the information about the circumstances of the histor

Stanza 5

The enjambment links stanzas with the reference to the effigies which *Rig*
verb perhaps suggesting a conscious act of perseverance on the part of the
previously long sentences give way here to shorter units, there being four
five instances of enjambment in this stanza, as flowing movement is conti
vowel sounds of *Through lengths and breadths* in line 1 are juxtaposed with
first four words of the second line. It is as if a cultural vacuum has succee
the snow, *undated* and unrecorded, the diction – *Litter...strewed....Bone-ridd*
an absence of definition, harmony and order in the intervening years.

Stanza 6

Throughout the centuries, the tomb has drawn people to it, their touching c
washing of their identity as distinctly defined stone sculptures, just as the hist
countess fade ever more into obscurity. The diction in the stanza – *helpless..*
skeins – emphasises a sense of absence, a void, as the actual past, *their scrap* c
and we are left with *Only an attitude,* a representation in stone of what may
relationship between the couple. The use of alliteration and enjambment in
feeling of motion and repetition, like the slow unwinding of the years.

The speaker begins the stanza by stating quite baldly that *Time has transfigu* gesture of the clasped hands which was, he assumes, an afterthought of no and countess when they were planning their tomb has become, in our mod device. It is as though we have imposed upon the couple and their effigies for us. In a secular age in which fewer and fewer people believe in the Chri the existence of the soul after death, we appear to need to believe that love l survive their separation in death through the existence of such an artistic re faithfulness and mutual devotion. Such a popular impulse may be underst but the speaker's qualifications in his concluding lines indicate that he cons

Debate Prompt

'An Arundel Tomb' is one of Larkin's most admired poems but a John Saunders writes of the poem:

> *The tomb may not really mean what it seems to mean, that we would beautiful, comforting truth about love, is in fact a deception. (2)*

Other commentators have been more willing to live with the amb expression. Andrew McCullough argues that the speaker's ambi comments on is crucial to a full appreciation of the poem:

> *In the second and third stanzas Larkin seems to feel that the initial which might itself be a perfectly valid emotional response – can and intellectualised away. By the end of the poem, however, this explan satisfactory...the response of a more democratic age is likely to be aes conditioned by automatic deference to aristocratic privilege. And all speak directly to its audience rather than accepting that its sole purp statement about those who commissioned it, although possibly 'wron actually validates the poet's own initial reaction to it...Although the stanza insists on undermining the resounding rhetoric of the last line qualification...the poem's centre of gravity is allowed to move away as 'just a detail' to an acceptance that it represents what we all feel.*

Discuss how far you agree with these points.

Notes

(1) Richard Bradford, *First Boredom, Then Fear: The Life of Philip Larkin*

(2) John Saunders, in Linda Cookson and Bryan Loughrey (eds.), *Essays on Philip*

(3) Andrew McCullough, *The English Review*, Philip Allan Updates, November 2

Historical, Social and Cultural Contexts

The poems included in the collection were written between 1955 and 1963 period in British social history in the manner that the speaker in 'MCMXIV photograph and the country as it stood on the brink of war, we can see tha transitional period during which certain profound changes to the ways in thought about themselves were taking place.

In some regards, Britain during these years had an unchanging air, with mar World War II life still remaining. The traditional heavy industries of coal an thousands, with unemployment rates generally low. There was a thriving m The upper echelons of many professions, including the law, medicine, the ar service, were dominated by graduates of Oxford or Cambridge universities w backgrounds. In the state sector, the 11+ examination was used throughout determine at an early age which pupils would form the minority to benefit fr the grammar schools (such as King Henry VIII School in Coventry, which La only two television channels – BBC and ITV, both in black and white. Stage government censorship. Homosexuality was still illegal and discrimination o gender was not yet outlawed. This was a time before Radio 1 or commercial holidays and cheap foreign travel, feminism, millionaire footballers, privatis motorway network... and a whole host of other features and facilities which would take for granted.

And yet, major changes within British society were already taking place, wi On the wider political front, the nation's own self-image and its status withi being transformed as it shed its Empire in the early post-war era. Countries Caribbean which had long been subject to British rule were, one by one, gra to being a medium-sized nation, after having played a major role on the wo easy. Dean Acheson, a prominent American politician, declared that *Britain found a role*. For some, including the speaker in 'Naturally the Foundation W loss of imperial role and status was welcome. The nation's faith in the Cons the party of government since 1951, was beginning to waver and, in 1964, th collection was published, the Labour Party was elected to power, with Haro grammar school state education (like Larkin), becoming Prime Minister.

While the traditional industries would eventually be threatened and, indeed the world economy, there was increasing wealth within the country, some o who had previously not been able to afford luxury items. The 'consumer so with a range of clothing, cars and household products now within the mean the population. The advertising industry devised new and ever more ingen potential customers to part with their money. The contraceptive pill first bec though not for free – in 1961, a development which was to have a huge effec behaviour during the subsequent decade. Young people were becoming inc idea of having to defer to their so-called 'elders and betters'. Hollywood film in 1955 and John Osborne's ground-breaking British play *Look Back in Anger* frustration of the younger generation on both sides of the Atlantic. The eme expression of this youthful spirit of rebellion can be traced back to the mid 1 ridicule – of the teachings and practices of the various Christian denominati widespread, as could be witnessed in the satirical programme *That Was The* which ran in 1962 and 1963, outraging many older viewers.

Themes

Poems are complex organisms and do not necessarily lend themselves to pr
'themes'. Here are just some of the ideas and concerns which we can recogn
poems in the selection. Certain poems can be seen to deal with more than a

The headings and topics below are not meant to be seen as an exhaustive l
features you might want to consider in the collection as a whole.

Separateness

A sense of being outside the mainstream of society can be found at the hea
collection. In 'Here', there is the yearning for solitude, *unfenced existence*, a
life, whilst in 'Mr Bleaney' the solitary life is seen in a harsher light. In bo
'Dockery and Son', the unmarried state is defended, though in very differe
'The Importance of Elsewhere' compares feelings of separateness when liv
those which are experienced in one's own society. Even in a poem like 'Th
the focus is on the married couples boarding the train, the detached stance
element in the total experience of the poem. The speaker in 'Toads Revisit
becoming like those who are, for various reasons, detached from the work
spend their days in the local park.

Illusion and Reality

Larkin is very sensitive to the contrasts which exist between various ideali
of life and the realities experienced by not only the respective speakers in
general. 'Sunny Prestatyn' and 'Essential Beauty' are both poems which c
persuasive but deceptive visual images created by advertising, with sexua
feature in each case. The items of female nightwear described in 'The Larg
extension of this projection of a fantasy world, the glamour attached to sex
as the materials used to make the garments. The woman in 'Love Songs in
actual experience of marriage has failed to match the possibly unreal expe
in the sheet music she rediscovers in widowhood. The speaker in 'A Stud
he can no longer pretend to believe that his own life comes close to matchi
or anti-heroes with whom he used to identify in the fiction he encountered
No Money' suggests that the notion of *truth* as an absolute which can be d
life is essentially bogus, the only reality being *the blows of what happened to*

Consumerism

The period in which Larkin wrote most of the poems featured in *The Whits*
mid-1950s and the early 1960s, saw an increase in the general spending po
beginnings of the consumer society with which we are so familiar today, w
of items which do not so much answer basic needs but reflect yearnings ar
comfortable, stylish life. In 'Here', the speaker lists a number of items sou
their shopping expeditions in the city centre. The young mothers in 'After
poem was written in 1959, when these were not yet seen as a staple house
but are not depicted as being particularly content in their newly establishe
variety of clothing styles available in 'The Large Cool Store', including the
provocatively-styled *Modes for Night*. As alluded to above, the advertising
towards enticing potential consumers to spend their money on non-essent
presenting visions of *how life should be*, as we see in 'Sunny Prestatyn' and

Love and Marriage

It would be true to say that the picture which emerges from the collection a relationships is a fairly pessimistic one. Despite its ironic tone, 'Wild Oats' t relationship with one girl and the fruitless, silent admiration for another. In struggles to retain the image of the loved one as the music relayed on the ra his counterpart in 'Talking in Bed' confesses to the fact that the physical inti facilitated a comparable closeness in verbal communication. 'The Whitsun spontaneous joy and energy of the newly-weds, its final image seeming to p but the picture we receive of the young mothers in 'Afternoons' suggests th life and parenthood has left them unsatisfied. A sense of disappointment is Age', where the perusal of the sheet music of her youth is the catalyst for an woman that the reality of married life had not lived up to the heady expecta Finally, 'An Arundel Tomb' describes the effigies on the tomb of the fourtee in particular the touching detail of their holding hands. Whilst later ages m enduring nature of their love, the speaker is more inclined to regard this as

Parenthood

Parenthood itself involves a *dilution* of self, as far as the speaker in 'Docke the young mothers in 'Afternoons' are presented in such a way as to sugg demanding children being part of the process which is *pushing them / To th* in 'Self's the Man' has to work hard in order to be able to afford, amongst whilst, when at home, he has *the nippers to wheel round the houses.* The spea with such concerns is almost palpable. The relationship with a parent can the blood tie in 'Reference Back' not being an obvious source of comfort to ease of communication across the generational divide.

Personal Failure

We find a curiously fatalistic note in certain poems in the collection, an acc respective speakers of unhappiness and lack of fulfilment as natural states but of who they are. The speaker in 'Mr Bleaney' seems all too ready to be *better* than to rent his predecessor's old bedsit, whilst the visit to the old fa only confirms for the speaker here his awareness of how the hopes of earli Study of Reading Habits', despite its humour, expresses a similar acceptan inadequacy. The speaker in 'Dockery and Son' is in defensive mode in co childless state with the early experience of parenthood of his former conte *nothing, / Nothing with all a son's harsh patronage.* There is an apparent agre lovers in 'Wild Oats' that the male speaker is *too selfish, withdrawn / And ea* genuine sympathy and compassion for the women who present themselve evangelist in 'Faith Healing', their various physical and facial contortions their awakening to a particularly clear and acute sense of their chronic fail

England

If there is a degree of ambivalence in the attitude to his fellow citizens in s collection, Larkin's feelings for his native country and its people in more a unmistakably strong in both 'Naturally the Foundation Will Bear Your Ex former, the satirical portrait of the self-important, self-regarding academic perceived lack of maturity makes its point effectively, whilst the speaker i overwhelmed at the thought of the momentous changes which were immi airy dismissal of the Armistice Day memorial ceremony as *solemn-sinister* suspect when the two poems are read together.

The Search for the Transcendent

Though Larkin was an atheist with little sympathy for conventional religion constant concern with issues as all-embracing and fundamental as the purp of death but also a disposition towards the contemplation of states and dim of time and space. This is expressed in the final stanzas of both 'Here' and ' case remaining deliberately resistant to close definition. The claims of more presented in a more dubious light in 'Faith Healing', where the evangelist c the loneliness and repression endured by the succession of middle-aged wo receive, supposedly, God's healing power.

Interpreting the Past

In a number of poems in the collection, the past looms large in the present to its presence in individual poems. In 'MCMXIV', it is the sense of helple perspective of the knowing present what was about to befall a past genera poignantly. The unfulfilled potential of a situation as it existed in the past speakers in 'Home is So Sad' and 'Reference Back', whilst there is a sense 'Afternoons' and 'Send No Money' that the expectations of the future harb two cases focusing on marriage – are now perceived as having been exces college is initially a disappointment to the speaker in 'Dockery and Son', v room and leaves *ignored*. His subsequent reflections upon Dockery, his co attempt to understand when and how we come to make the choices which failure to achieve a lasting relationship with either of the two girls in 'Wilc portent for future disappointments in this field. In 'An Arundel Tomb', th embodied in the historical earl and countess, recedes into obscurity, whils appropriate aspects of history, such as the holding of the hands of the ston ideological purposes.

Music

In two of the poems in the collection, music is seen to have the power to take Sidney Bechet', the speaker is happy to be swept along by the healing and re his American jazz hero. In 'Broadcast', the speaker's attitude to the orchestra radio is initially sarcastic and dismissive, until, despite himself, he finds his s the *rabid storms of chording*. Jazz music is referred to again in 'Reference Back build a bridge with her son by making a comment on one of the records he is ploy is successful is uncertain. The discovery of the sheet music in 'Love Son memories of the days of her youth, including *the glare of that much-mentioned*

Animals

In both 'Take One Home for the Kiddies' and 'First Sight', Larkin displays a sy of, respectively, the pets in the shop window and the new-born lambs experie

Death and Dying

The glimpse of the sick person being taken to hospital in 'Ambulances' all momentarily to *sense the solving emptiness / That lies just under all we do.* Th nature of life and a perception of the consequent negation of meaning are poetry throughout his career, including *The Whitsun Weddings* collection. the speaker in 'Nothing to be Said', possibly the bleakest and most austere terms of both thought and expression. The word *strange* is used three time contemplates the inability of the human consciousness to make sense of its of the natural world is programmed for definite ends and purposes. The f end of all human life is a kind of negative consolation to the speaker in 'D with ideas as to how and why individual paths can diverge to such an ext the notion that the *stone fidelity* represents some kind of triumph over deat though gently, being dismissed as illusory.

Stylistic Traits and Approaches

Formal Structures

It is clear from a reading of the poems in the collection that the use of form
regular stanza forms, length of line, metre and rhyme, is an important elem
the writing of verse. With the exception of 'Days', none of the thirty-two p
controlling influence of at least one of these features and, in many cases, th
four. Larkin does not, however, adhere slavishly to the principle of using
Within the collection there is a wide variety of uses of structural features,
given degrees of prominence according to the desired overall effect. Thus
pattern of iambic pentameter in a poem like 'Essential Beauty' is appropri
tone adopted by the speaker, whilst the rhyme scheme is relatively unobtr
Habits', on the other hand, the colloquial tone does not lend itself to a regu
the rhyme scheme gives the expression a necessary degree of order. Each
represents a distinct phase in the narrative in the otherwise loosely-structu
poems in the collection show comparable variations in the use of these str

Use of Enjambment

Larkin uses enjambment in all of the poems in the collection. In some case
than half the lines of the poem are not end-stopped but follow through to
used in the poems in which the overall tone is measured and considered, l
those like 'Self's the Man' which have a more relaxed feel. The use of enja
flow more naturally, sometimes providing an element of movement and p
Weddings', and often working in a kind of opposition to the restraining ef
such as stanza form and metre, as in 'Ambulances'.

Colloquial Diction

Larkin includes examples of colloquial words and expressions in a number
comic effect, though this does not necessarily mean that the poems in quest
seriously. Examples such as *perk, kiddies' clobber* and *nippers* in 'Self's the Ma
existence of Arnold, whilst, more controversially, the sexually explicit langu
be justified for its evocation of the disturbed mindsets of those who deface t
nature of the youthful engagement with the various types of reading mater
Habits' is made apparent through the use of terms such as *dirty dogs* and *jus*

Hyphenated Words

Larkin often links words together to form original compound adjectives.
striking in their impact, the brevity of expression carrying a particular forc
collection include:

harsh-named halt ('Here')
grain-scattered streets ('Here')
barge-crowded water ('Here')
head-scarfed wives ('Here')
cobble-close families ('Nothing to be Said')
spring-woken tree ('Love Songs in Age')
Sunday-full and organ-frowned-on spaces ('Broadcast')
Hare-eyed clerks ('Toads Revisited')
Waxed-fleshed out-patients ('Toads Revisited')
loaf-haired secretary ('Toads Revisited')
short-shadowed cattle ('The Whitsun Weddings')
breast-lifting arms ('Sunny Prestatyn')

Memorable Endings

It is common to find that, in a Larkin poem, the observations which are m middle-sections lead on to a more generalised statement in the concluding phase contains particularly thought-provoking uses of language. In some deliberately vague or qualified, conveying the respective speakers` sense beings, to forces and influences beyond our comprehension and control. endings from the collection are:

Give me your arm, old toad;
Help me down Cemetery Road. ('Toads Revisited')

Never such innocence again. ('MCMXIV')

We slowed again,
And as the tightening brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain. ('The Whitsun Weddings')

Books are a load of crap. ('A Study of Reading Habits')

Life is first boredom, then fear.
Whether or not we use it, it goes,
And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
And age, and then the only end of age. ('Dockery and Son')

Something is pushing them
To the sides of their own lives. ('Afternoons')

....and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love. ('An Arundel Tomb')

Images from the Natural World

It is interesting to note how often Larkin, himself a city-born person who s environments, uses images and references derived from the natural world *Whitsun Weddings* collection. The speaker in the title poem imagines *Lond postal districts packed like squares of wheat*. In 'Here' the landscape of the H Yorkshire is used to embody the kind of environment in which it is possib the confines of here and now:

Here is unfenced existence:
Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

As the woman peruses the sheet music in 'Love Songs in Age' with *the unfa out like a spring-woken tree*, whilst in 'Broadcast' the speaker's mental image begins to *lose / All but the outline of the still and withering / Leaves on half-empti* the women's experience of the evangelist's *spring rain of loving care*, an *imme thawing, the rigid landscape weeps, / Spreads slowly through them*. The landscap be caught up in a midsummer sleep before the cataclysmic events to come. serves as an externalisation of the speaker's mental turmoil in 'Talking in B wind which is *ruining their courting-places* can be seen as an aspect of the rel seasons which is pushing the young mothers further and further away from fulfilment. The speaker in 'Wild Oats', meanwhile, preserves his photograp whose image is destined never to fade, as long as he does not meet her agai

Talking Points

a. Based on your reading of *The Whitsun Weddings* collection, w
do you think are most responsible for his popularity as a wri

b. Do you think the explicit language in 'Sunny Prestatyn' can b

c. Writing of Larkin's poetry, one critic, Colin Falck, remarks: *F
majority of people in our present society, it is not futile in principle*
(1), whilst David Timms argues that *Larkin's whole poetic outp
face truth* (2).

Which of these two viewpoints more closely represents your
The Whitsun Weddings collection?

d. Larkin's poetical output has been criticised by some for its pe
supposedly based too much on ***personal*** experience and lack
philosophical frameworks. Do you feel this criticism is justifi
reading of the poems in the collection?

e. What picture of women and sexual relationships emerges fro
collection?

f. How would you describe the attitude towards working-class
speakers in 'Here', 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'Ambulances', '
Beauty'?

g. Larkin once remarked: *I don't decide what I think about life: life*
outlook reflected in *The Whitsun Weddings* collection?

h. Is a reading of any of the poems in the collection altered at al
biographical background to its composition?

i. Do any of the poems in the collection strike you as having qu
widest sense, be described as 'religious'?

j. Do any individual poems stand out as surprising or incongru
of the collection as a whole?

k. How do you reconcile Larkin's humorous approach in many
with what is often thought to be his bleak outlook on life gen

Notes

(1) Colin Falck, *Twentieth Century Poetry Course Reader*, Open University Press, 1

(2) David Timms, *Philip Larkin*

(3) Philip Larkin, *Further Requirements: Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews*, e
and Faber, 2001

Eduqas and WJEC Comparative Text: *M*

This section will provide you with some ideas about how to compare poe
with those in its partner text, Carol Ann Duffy's *Mean Time*.

Author Biography

Carol Ann Duffy was born in the Gorbals, a residential district of Glasgow
was the daughter of Frank Duffy and his Irish wife May. When Carol An
family relocated to Stafford, England. Here, she was educated at Roman C
schools, before attending Stafford Girls' High in her teenage years.

From an early age Duffy was fascinated with reading and writing, and be
Adrian Henri at the age of 16. She would live with Henri until 1982.

Carol Ann Duffy graduated with a degree in Philosophy from Liverpool U
not long after this that she began to receive great critical acclaim for her po
famous poetry collections were published in the 1980s, starting with *Stana*
Shortly after this came *Selling Manhattan* (1987) and *The Other Country* (19

Mean Time was published in 1993, and won the Forward Prize, the Whitbr
Scottish Arts Council award.

Since then, Duffy has had a child, Ella (1995), and in 2009 officially becam
the first female, Scottish poet in the history of the position.

Key Themes

Below, we will look at some of the key themes in *Mean Time*, and how they
Whitsun Weddings. Along with suggestions of which Duffy poems to asso
have also provided potential Larkin poems to pair them with in your anal

Love

Duffy writes about love with great intensity in this collection, and often w
negative aspects of it as the positive. In this regard, we can compare her o
Larkin – think particularly about 'The Whitsun Weddings', and the percei
expectation and reality.

Poems to read in this collection: 'Valentine', 'Close', 'Moments of Grace'
Larkin texts for comparison: 'Love Songs in Age', 'Broadcast', 'The Whitsun Wed

Lust

In Duffy's poetry, there is some ambiguity between what constitutes love
identified the poems below within this collection, since she seems to use p
physical intimacy in these. You might want to consider the extent to whic
– is Larkin's approach, for instance, more implicit than Duffy's? And does
personal?

Poems to read in this collection: 'Sleeping', 'Steam'
Larkin texts for comparison: 'Sunny Prestatyn', 'Wild Oats'

Family
Both poets explore the relationship between familial love and the passing
Mine', for instance, the speaker imagines her mother in her younger years
child. This poem could be closely compared to Larkin's 'Reference Back',
understand how his relationship with his mother has disintegrated over ti

Poems to read in this collection: 'Before You Were Mine', 'Brothers'
Larkin texts for comparison: 'Home is So Sad', 'Reference Back'

Memory
Carol Ann Duffy places great emphasis on the importance of memory, not
memories themselves, but for how they shape the present – the poet is inte
of remembrance affects individuals. You might want to consider how bot
regret, and how things might have been different if other choices had beer

Poems to read in this collection: 'First Love', 'Crush', 'Nostalgia'
Larkin texts for comparison: 'Home is So Sad', 'The Importance of Elsewhere', 'R
Son', 'Wild Oats'

Disappointment and Failure
As suggested under the 'Love' heading above, one of the key themes of D
failed relationships. Think particularly about 'Havisham', and the hauntir
the female speaker. By way of comparison with Duffy's poetry, you could
speakers compare themselves with friends and associates in consideration

Poems to read in this collection: 'Havisham', 'Disgrace', 'Never Go Back'
Larkin texts for comparison: 'Talking in Bed', 'Wild Oats', 'Self's the Man'

Guidance for Examinations

WJEC AS English Literature Unit 2

The WJEC AS English Literature Unit 2 examination consists of **two** sections, A and B. The exam lasts for a total of two hours, and is worth 120 marks – 50% of the total marks for the AS qualification. Section A and Section B are **weighted equally** at 60 marks each, so students should aim to spend one hour on each section.

Sections A and B are structured as follows:

Section A
Here, students will be asked to answer **one** question out of a **choice of two** write a critical analysis of **one** of your set texts.

Section B
Again, students will be asked to answer **one** question from a **choice of two** you with a thematic quotation about your two set texts, *The Whitsun Weddi* then be asked to compare the texts in relation to this theme. In your answ **two** poems from **each** collection.

WJEC Eduqas A Level English Literature Component 1

The WJEC Eduqas A Level English Literature Component 1 examination c B. The exam lasts for a total of two hours, and is worth 120 marks – 30% o Level qualification. You will only be writing about *The Whitsun Weddings* **(Poetry post-1900)**.

In **Section B**, students will be asked to answer **one** question from a **choice** provide you with a thematic quotation about your two set texts, *The Whits* You will then be asked to compare the texts in relation to this theme. In y **at least two** poems from **each** collection.

A Glossary of Literary Terms

Alliteration	where successive words begin with the same letter
Anapaest/ic	a metrical foot comprising two unstressed syllables follo
Couplet	a stanza or part of a stanza consisting of two lines
Cretic	a metrical foot comprising a stressed syllable followed by another stressed syllable (/ ~ /)
Dactyl/ic	a metrical foot comprising a stressed syllable followed by
Diction	the choice of words in a poem
Elide/Elision	where two syllables are merged in pronunciation to mak
Ellipsis	the omission of a word or words from a grammatically c not obscure the meaning
End-stopped	when a line of verse is punctuated at the end, e.g. with a
Enjambment	where a line is not end-stopped (by punctuation) but runs
Iamb/ic	a metrical foot comprising an unstressed syllable followe
Image	literally, a picture, presented as something to be seen or i metaphor
Imagery	the pattern of images in a poem
Internal Punctuation	the use of punctuation within a line of verse
Juxtaposition	where one word or image is placed next to another
Metaphor	a comparison which does not use 'like' or 'as'
Metre/Metrical	the pattern of stresses in a line, stanza or poem
Metrical Foot	a unit of metre
Octave	a stanza or part of a stanza consisting of eight lines
Onomatopoeia	where the sound of a word suggests and reflects the mea
Oxymoron	the juxtaposing of two seemingly contradictory words or
Pentameter	a line of verse consisting of five metrical feet
Quadrameter	a line of verse consisting of four metrical feet
Quatrain	a stanza or part of a stanza consisting of four lines
Quintain	a stanza or part of a stanza consisting of five lines
Rhyme scheme	the pattern of rhyme within a stanza or a whole poem
Sestet	a stanza or part of a stanza consisting of six lines
Sibilance	literally 'a hissing sound', it refers to alliteration where s letter 's'
Simile	a comparison using 'like' or 'as'
Stanza	lines of verse organised into a unit, like a paragraph in p
Stress/Stressed	where a syllable is pronounced with relative emphasis
Tercet	a stanza or part of a stanza consisting of three lines
Tetrameter	same as Quadrameter
Trochee/Trochaic	a metrical foot comprising a stressed syllable followed by

Suggested Further Reading

Booth, James, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)

Cookson, Linda, *Critical Essays on Philip Larkin: The Poems* (London: Longm

Corcoran, Neil, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poet* UP, 2007)

Hassan, Salem K, *Philip Larkin and his Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan,

Osborne, John, *Radical Larkin: Seven Types of Technical Mastery* (London: M

Answers / Indicative Content

Poem Analyses

'Here'

Debate Prompts:

1. For instance:
   - Given the many references to mass-produced products, it would seem t nature of consumerism in a broader context.
   - However, students might also point out the urban imagery of the poem Hull.
2. The speaker describes *hidden weeds* and *neglected flowers*, adding a negative u particular.

Active Learning Tasks:

For instance:

- 'Large Cool Store'
  - Reflects on hollow nature of consumerism
  - Use of symbolic contrast – in this case between the bright colours on dis monotonous lifestyles of the consumers
  - Appears less ambiguous in its criticisms
- 'Mr Bleaney'
  - Theme of limited, monotonous lifestyles
  - Differs in its use of a speaker who is present
  - Use of quatrains separates the ideas of the poem more distinctly
- *Students should select a Duffy poem that is sufficiently relatable to 'Here' in terms o points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidence from all te*

'Mr Bleaney'

Extended Essay Answer Question:

Points might include:

- Larkin's minimalist imagery in describing the room maintains a negative ton
- When imagining Bleaney's lifestyle, the speaker seems to focus only on the n
- The last two stanzas suggest a pessimistic view of life on the part of the spea the *frigid wind*.
- However, the poem does not necessarily suggest isolation; perhaps the speal other human lives.
- Equally, the penultimate stanza would seem to suggest that the speaker is in but perhaps feels constrained by circumstance.
- *Students should select a Duffy poem that is sufficiently relatable to 'Mr Bleaney' in t key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidence from al*

'Nothing to be Said'

Active Learning Tasks:

1. For instance:

   'Nothing to be Said'
   - Repetition of *slow dying* and *nothing* to reflect pessimistic view on life an
   - Language represents the lives of ordinary working people

   Both
   - No clear and sustained rhyme scheme
   - Contrast between the images of youth and death

   'Ambulances'
   - Contrast of colour with grey setting
   - Sensual imagery – particularly smell – adds to authenticity of setting

2. For instance:
   - Both of these stanzas briefly outline some of the stages of life, before co
     the context of inevitable death.
   - However, 'Dockery and Son' takes the concept a step further, using con
     life and that of his friend Dockery to demonstrate the universality of m
3. *Students should select a Duffy poem that is sufficiently relatable to 'Nothing to be S
   several key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidenc*

'Love Songs in Age'

Debate Prompt:

- The idea that *the covers pleased her* suggests a superficial view of romantic ide
  modern movies and songs.
- The notion of love *promising to solve, and satisfy* contrasts with the tone of mo
  suggesting that Larkin is perhaps using this idea ironically.

'Naturally the Foundation Will Bear Your Expenses'

Debate Prompt:

- The speaker does indeed seem to take a particularly superficial view.
- His arrogance is seen in the suggestion of his own difference from the comm
- It is hard to dispute the suggestion that Larkin wants us to dislike the speake

'Broadcast'

Active Learning Tasks:

1. For instance:
   - *I lose all but the outline* – use of natural imagery here might be a wider re
     between partners
   - *A snivel on the violins* – distaste for orchestral music might indicate some
     relationship
2. For instance:

   Similar
   - Suggestion of distance between partners
   - Contrast between intimacy and isolation

   Different
   - 'Talking in Bed' is more about physical proximity and emotional distan
   - The overall tone of 'Broadcast' appears to be more positive

'Faith Healing'

Extended Essay Answer Question:

Points might include:

- The poems differ in who they focus on – while 'Faith Healing' is concerned v
  evangelist, 'Water' focuses on the speaker himself.
- Religion is not necessarily the main focus of 'Faith Healing' – it is more abou
  and the hardship they suffer.
- Both poems seem to present a negative view of religion; the evangelist in 'Fa
  and false, while the use of metaphor in 'Water' suggests that religion is shall
- Both poems use direct religious imagery such as praying and *liturgy*.
- *Students should select two Duffy poems that are sufficiently relatable in terms of the
  of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidence from all texts use*

'For Sidney Bechet'

Active Learning Tasks

For instance:

- Larkin admitted that jazz got him through some of his darkest times.
- It was over jazz that he bonded with his close friend Kingsley Amis.
- As a jazz critic, some people accused Larkin of racism in his reviews

'Home is So Sad'

Debate Prompts:

1. The sustained rhyme scheme and metre seems to suggest that this poem is m
   relaying the natural thought of his mother.
2. The poem finishes by focusing on material objects; perhaps the suggestion is
   these objects will remain.

'Toads Revisited'

Debate Prompt:

- 'Toads Revisited' begins and ends with the focus on the speaker.
- It is as though the speaker is trying to reassure himself that his life is the righ

'Water'

Debate Prompts:

1. An alternative reading might suggest instead that religions share ubiquitous
   considered as entirely separate entities.
2. 'Ambulances', for instance, uses ambulance vehicles as a *memento mori* – a re

'The Whitsun Weddings'

Extended Essay Answer Question:

Points might include:

- The speaker's positioning – on a train – makes him seem more detached thar
  does not even notice the noise of the weddings, since he is so absorbed in his
- The noise and glamour of the marriages, however, seem wholly superficial, a
  undermining of this makes a valid point; reality often does not meet expecta
- While arguably the poem pits experience against youthful naivety, this woul
  are individual – the speaker cannot be so assured that he is right.
- Perhaps the poem sees the speaker (and even Larkin) projecting his own disa
  others.
- *Students should select a Duffy poem that is sufficiently relatable to 'The Whitsun W
  brings up several key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigoro*

'Self's the Man'

Debate Prompts:

1. For instance:
   - The closing line seems to summarise the poem overall; the speaker is ur
     assessments are right, and he seems to merely be speculating.
   - Alternatively, perhaps he is suggesting that he only knows what he 'sup
     has not had the experiences with women to test this.
2. For instance:
   - Rossen is correct in suggesting that the argument is very one-sided; for
     the chaos caused by Arnold's children, while overlooking the fact that e
     positive and beautiful thing.
   - He also completely overlooks the romantic relationship Arnold might sh
     this relationship might be at the heart of the matter.
   - However, students might also point out the context of the life of a poet -
     able to write such a poem if his life was as hectic as Arnold's seems to b
     speaker does have a point after all.

'Take One Home for the Kiddies'

Active Learning Tasks:

Points might include:

- Suggestion that people expect immediate gratification – the result of a consu
- Lack of appreciation for animals and the natural landscape
- The expectation of individuals that all their problems will be resolved witho
- The idea of fads or crazes – such as the ownership of pets in 'Take One Hom

'Days'

Active Learning Tasks:

For instance:

- 'Nothing to be Said'
- 'Home is So Sad'
- 'First Sight'
- 'Ignorance'
- *Duffy poems might include: 'Never Go Back', 'Litany'*

'MCMXIV'

Debate Prompt:

- Larkin was born after the war, so can only speculate on what life was like ba
- A recurring theme in his work is the idea that things left unsaid can be more spoken.
- The recounting of ordinary lives at home arguably has a greater impact, as tl relatable to the reader.

'Talking in Bed'

Extended Essay Answer Question:

For instance:

- Larkin uses the passing of time as a key theme in relation to love.
- He only uses tercets in the poem, reflecting the pessimism of the speaker.
- Larkin contrasts physical intimacy with emotional separation, making the sp
- In the end, the poem appears somewhat open-ended.
- *Students should identify thematic points of similarity between Larkin's poem and th several key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidenc*

'The Large Cool Store'

Active Learning Tasks:

For instance:

'The Large Cool Store'

- Represents the idea that honest working people are abused by mass corpora
- Uses contrasting imagery of colour and greyness to emphasise point.

'Sunny Prestatyn'

- Again, there is an interest in the difference between illusion and reality whe furthermore, the poem presents a wider message about younger working me themselves other than destruction.
- Here Larkin uses violent imagery to reflect the lives of those who deface the

'Essential Beauty'

- Very similar message to 'The Large Cool Store'; dissonance between real wo images of advertising.
- Uses minimalist imagery of food and drink to reflect the lives of individuals.

'A Study of Reading Habits'

Debate Prompts:

1. Arguably, the reason the poem is comical is because there are definite eleme
2. The difference in Larkin's language here – *Get stewed: / Books are a load of crap* viewpoint rather than his own. This could be a reflection on some of the pec working-class upbringing.

'As Bad as a Mile'

Debate Prompt:

- As Ricks points out, Larkin economises in his use of language in the poem, w
- Larkin indicates as much in what is left unsaid as what is said – particularly s of Adam and Eve.
- However, some might argue that the poem is too short to deal comprehensiv failure.

Active Learning Tasks:

- 'Faith Healing' – considers the exploitation of working-class women by evan
- 'Ambulances' – image of the vehicles *closed like confessionals* suggests how mu ordinary lives; even in death the association is there.

'Ambulances'

Active Learning Tasks:

- *Closed like confessionals* – while Timms suggests that Larkin avoids manipulat alliteration here is striking. The simile implies that everyone has their flaws
- *Borne away in deadened air* – the use of pathetic fallacy here adds to the morbi
- *The children strewn on steps or road* – the connotation of dead bodies in the roa and death, reminding us that death comes to all.

'The Importance of Elsewhere'

Debate Prompts:

1. The 1960s were seen as a time of decreasing morality and increasing sexual l once again be reflecting on the nature of modern consumerism and a society advertising.
2. Larkin uses stereotypical imagery of the natural landscape to represent Irela perfect that we may begin to doubt how closely it matches reality.

'Sunny Prestatyn'

Active Learning Tasks:

For instance:

Both critics recognise that the damage done to the poster reflects actual physical v to overlook the fact that this is a reflection on society, rather than an account of La for instance, the name *Titch Thomas* belittles those who deface the poster, and sug on their insecurities than their actions. Equally, in the crude descriptions of the g language – particularly the reference to her *huge tits* –appears to reflect the speech own viewpoint. The anonymous reviewer, then, seems to give a fairer account of beauty of the poem is its ability to capture real life.

'First Sight'

Active Learning Tasks:

For instance:

- In both poems, animals are depicted as innocent and vulnerable individuals.
- Collectively, they depict a world that is unforgiving for the young animals, refl
- They both begin with an a-b-a-b rhyme scheme – however, in 'First Sight' Lar couplet to the end of each stanza.
- 'First Sight' forms a more direct criticism of society and the nature of consum

'Dockery and Son'

Debate Prompts:

For instance:

'A Study of Reading Habits'

- Both poems compare the ease and joy of youth with the harsh realities that c
- 'A Study of Reading Habits' focuses on one small aspect of human life, while broader themes such as marriage and children.
- The message of 'A Study of Reading Habits' is more to do with disillusionme have been – which seems to be the primary concept of 'Dockery and Son'.

'Ignorance'

Extended Essay Answer Question:

Points might include:

- Both poems take an unambiguous approach, stating bluntly the irrelevance o
- 'Ignorance' seems to suggest that we die, to some extent, incomplete as peop presented by 'Nothing to be Said'.
- Both poems use three stanza arguments, without enjambment between stanz structured arguments than we see in many of Larkin's poems.
- 'Nothing to be Said' focuses on life as a *slow dying*, while the other poem alm don't have time to complete ourselves as human beings before we die.
- *Students should select a Duffy poem that is sufficiently relatable to 'Ignorance' in te key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidence from a*

'Reference Back'

Debate Prompt:

- The speaker seems to suggest the impossibility of building a bridge in their r things that cannot be restored.
- The separation between the *unsatisfactory hall* and *unsatisfactory room* reinforc between mother and son.

Active Learning Tasks:

Points might include:

- While 'Talking in Bed' juxtaposes physical and emotional distance, 'Referenc emotional distance almost synonymously at times.
- The mother-son relationship appears to be something that has diminished, w though the ideal in the couple's romantic relationship can never truly be atta
- Larkin, overall, seems to suggest that the passing of time only reinforces our
- The poet ironically suggests that, more often than not, words fail to have the together.
- *Students should identify thematic points of similarity between Larkin's poem and th several key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidenc*

'Wild Oats'

Debate Prompts:

1. The speaker describes the second girl as the *friend in specs I could talk to*; the u that he is too shy or embarrassed to talk to the *bosomy English rose*.
2. This context adds value to the sense of failure in the poem, reflecting Larkin' However, as Bradford suggests, his use of personal failings applies to the un well.

'Essential Beauty'

Extended Essay Answer Question:

Points might include:

- In 'Sunny Prestatyn', the girl on the poster reflects an unattainable goal – and the reason why the young men deface the poster.
- In 'Sunny Prestatyn', reality is represented by the damage done to the poster; illusion and reality are set side by side.
- 'Essential Beauty' consists of two stanzas, which we could read as being representing 'reality'; the crossover in these themes between the two stanzas shows how r everyday experience.
- The small details in this poem symbolise how limited and monotonous every
- In both poems the perfection of illusions is juxtaposed by the many flaws of
- *Students should identify thematic points of similarity between Larkin's poem and th several key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidenc*

'Send No Money'

Debate Prompt:

- 'Send No Money' explores the relationship between youth and experience w isolation.
- Comes to the conclusion that many social aspects of life are irrelevant in the
- 'Wild Oats' offers a similar view of isolation, and reflection on the regrets of
- In both poems, the speaker is painfully aware of their own past mistakes.

'Afternoons'

Active Learning Tasks:

Points might include:

'Afternoons'

- Larkin seems to create a contrast between the freedom of youth and the cons
- The images of summer fading can be related to the concept of ageing.
- *Something is pushing them to the side of their own lives* – the poet suggests that p things they love as they grow older.

'The Whitsun Weddings'

- Larkin uses colour and vibrancy to reflect the optimism that comes with you
- Experience suggests that ambitions remain unfulfilled, and that reality does
- Larkin's separation from the young marriage partners in the train reflects the of youth and the knowledge that comes with experience.
- *Students should identify thematic points of similarity between Larkin's poem and th several key points of contrast. Responses should be supported with rigorous evidenc*

'An Arundel Tomb'

Debate Prompt:

- Both critics demonstrate that the message of the poem is not entirely clear, b interested in the ambiguity of the poem itself – rather than trying to come to it 'means'.
- Given the ambiguity of many of Larkin's poems, it would seem to be a valid reach a definite conclusion in this poem.

The Whitsun Weddings: An Overview

Talking Points

a. Points might include:
   - Larkin's poetry is often very realist in approach, making his ideas
   - The poet deals with big themes such as love, loss and mortality.
   - These poems are not only applicable to one time period or social c situations to deal with broader themes.

b. Students should consider the fact that these words do not necessarily could even be argued that he is reflecting on the fact that such explicit modern times.

c. While this is subject to individual opinions, the second assessment fee these poems – very few of the poems seem to offer much hope.

d. Again, answers are subject to personal opinion, but students should c personal situations and settings to reflect upon wider themes.

e. Women do not seem to have much authority within the collection, an to be limited in the emotional satisfaction they provide.

f. Ambivalent in 'Here' and 'Essential Beauty'; perhaps somewhat degr Weddings'; sympathetic in 'Ambulances' and 'Afternoons'.

g. Larkin reflects on the broad themes of death and mortality throughou time and again that we have no control over them. His inconsistent u natural thought and speech.

h. Most poems in the collection that use biographical context use it relati

i. 'Water', 'Ambulances', and 'Faith Healing'

j. 'Naturally the Foundation Will Bear Your Expenses'; most of the poer lives, whereas the speaker here is a seemingly snobbish academic.

k. Arguably Larkin uses dark humour to reflect his notion that there are control; why, he suggests, should we try to resist them?